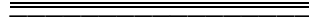


**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Developing a Multi-Agency Child Abduction Response Team**



**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Developing a multi-agency Child Abduction Response Team (CART) is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because many law enforcement agencies do not have the resources or manpower to adequately investigate a child abduction or critical missing child case. Agencies can request help from the Department of Public Safety (DPS) or the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), but critical time is lost waiting for either agency to respond. The position of this researcher is that several law enforcement agencies in a given area should come together and form a regional or multi-agency child abduction response team. This can be accomplished by the agency heads meeting together and developing a plan for implementation of the team. The plan development should include team structure and determine what resources are available.

The types of information used to support the researcher's position is the review of articles written on child abduction response teams and internet sites of law enforcement entities. Information in law enforcement journals pertaining to the creation of child abduction teams was also used. The conclusion drawn from this position paper is that developing a regional child abduction response team is important to the safe recovery of a missing child especially in a jurisdiction with limited resources. The problems that may arise in the development of the team are insignificant compared to the benefits that each agency would receive in the event of a child abduction.

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout modern history in the United States, child abduction has been a horrific crime that gets tremendous attention from the public, media, and the police. Once a child is feared missing due to stranger abduction or under suspicious circumstances, all one has to do is turn on the television and a majority of all news channels will be reporting the incident. Even though most law enforcement agencies may have policies and procedures in place to deal with missing children and abductions, a more proactive and structured effort is needed to bring more children home safely.

Many smaller and rural law enforcement agencies do not have the resources available for a missing child investigation that could span several counties, or even cross state lines, and could last for several days or weeks. When dealing with a possible child abduction or missing child, the same agencies may not have enough personnel to immediately respond at the onset of the incident, when time is of the essence. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has implemented Child Abduction Rapid Deployment Teams (CART) in which several agents can be deployed to the scene of a possible child abduction to provide assistance in the investigation. The FBI “deploys 4 to 6 experienced agents to provide investigative, technical and resource assistance after a child is abducted” (Fox Valley Technical College, 2008, para. 2). Several states and cities have followed suit and have developed child abduction response teams (CART). It is extremely important for smaller agencies to team up with other agencies and entities in their area in order to develop their own child abduction response teams. A team can have an unlimited number of people or entities involved and can not only

consist of investigators, but it can also include members of Child Protective Services (CPS), attorneys, victim services, and chaplains, etc. The team needs structure and organization, so it can be controlled and everyone is aware of their duties during the investigation.

As an example, if a child abduction occurred in the City of Lancaster, the Lancaster Police Department, which consists of 60 sworn personnel, could respond with a maximum of five detectives. This number would be affected if the detectives were on vacation, out sick, or in training. Five investigators would not be able to adequately investigate a child abduction case and would have to call for help from neighboring agencies, state agencies, and/or the federal government. These resources could possibly take several hours to respond. Once help responded, it would take time to determine who would be responsible for what duties and delegate everyone's responsibilities. In May 2009, Kansas Attorney General Steve Six announced the creation of the Kansas CART program. Six said "In many cases, agencies and communities may not have dealt with child abduction before. Assessing resources and planning a course of action can take valuable time" (as cited in "Attorney General creates child abduction response team program," 2009, para. 4). This could be detrimental because statistics show that of the "abducted children who are ultimately murdered, 74% are dead within three hours of the abduction" (as cited in Fighting Chance, 2007, para.11). A child abduction response team should be developed in areas where single law enforcement agencies lack the resources to adequately conduct critical missing children investigations and child abduction cases. A team provides extra resources, knowledge, and expertise.

## POSITION

A Child Abduction Response Team (CART) should be developed because child abductions are prevalent and a quick response is vital. The Department of Justice (2002) estimated that that “every 40 seconds in the United States, a child is reported missing or abducted” (as cited in Fighting Chance, 2007, para. 1). This means that on average, there are 2,000 children missing or abducted every day or 800,000 annually (as cited in Fighting Chance, 2007). These are staggering figures. To combat those figures, it is necessary for law enforcement agencies to quickly and adequately respond to a reported missing or abducted child. Other areas of the nation understand this critical need and have taken the necessary steps to have a response plan in place should a child become abducted in their jurisdictions, so they have developed child abduction response teams. The first CART (Child Abduction Response Team) began in Florida in late 2004 (Ohio Law Enforcement Foundation, 2009). This Florida CART was created as a result of the abduction of 11-year-old Carlie Brachia of Sarasota in February 2004. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Orlando Regional Operations Center stated that there was a “need for trained experts in the field of child abduction investigation and response that could respond to a missing child case immediately” (as cited in City of Colleyville, 2009, para. 4). The purpose of the Florida CART program was to “help assist the lead local law enforcement agency and bring additional regional resources to the recovery effort” (DOJ, 2005, para. 4).

The FDLE is just one example of an agency that recognizes the need to be prepared on the front end. The FDLE understands that time is critical as it pertains to a missing or abducted child case, and a quick and organized response is paramount to

the safe recovery of a child. According to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) (n.d.), “CART is a new approach to conducting child abduction investigations that can save precious time in the first few hours following the incident” (para. 1). A child abduction response team is already trained and organized prior to the incident and should be prepared to go into action the minute a call goes out. When the CART responds to an incident, they will already have protocols in place, and the resources that they need are available at a moment’s notice. The FDLE’s approach to CART has been a model for other agencies hoping to get ahead of the game, so “As of 2006, Florida’s CART program had been activated 14 times, resulting in the safe recovery of 12 children. The program has since been modified for implementation nationwide” (City of Colleyville, 2009, para. 4).

Another, more local area that has followed FDLE’s model is a group of Texas police agencies in Northeast Tarrant and Denton Counties. The City of Colleyville, Texas joined forces with 11 other local agencies to form a CART in their region. Colleyville Police Chief Tommy Ingram expounded on the necessity of a CART when interviewed about its inception. He stated, “Time is critical in solving any crime, but in the case of a missing child, it is especially critical. We need to move quickly and in coordination with each other (as cited in City of Colleyville, 2009, para. 2). Furthermore, Chief Ingram emphasized that the “CART program, with its specialized team of trained officers, will allow for faster response time and optimal use of personnel, to give us the best chance of bringing a missing child home” (as cited in City of Colleyville, 2009, para. 2).

In line with a rapid response, it is critical that appropriate resources be used to find a missing child. Often the resources of a single law enforcement agency are quickly expended when an abducted child is reported. CART recognizes and addresses the enhancement of the single law enforcement agency response. In the Northeast Tarrant and Denton County CART, each of the 12 involved agencies have dedicated one investigator to the unit and provided that investigator with specialized training in the investigation and resolution of child abductions (City of Colleyville, 2009). An individual agency, much like that of Colleyville in the above example, is without the resources to dedicate 12 investigators to a single incident of any nature, much less that of child abduction.

### **COUNTER POSITION**

When bringing multiple law enforcement agencies together to form a child abduction response team, several problems might arise. One issue is who will be in command of the team. There will need to be an overall commander of the team, and this may be an issue when the incident occurs in a jurisdiction in which the team commander may not be employed. If a team chooses to have a lieutenant as the overall team commander and the incident occurs in a jurisdiction in which a captain or someone of higher rank is the first responder, the captain may not want to relinquish control to an officer of lower rank and who is not an officer in that jurisdiction. The captain may feel that he is ultimately the one responsible for the outcome of the incident, so he would not trust another to assume the command.

This issue should be addressed during the formation of the multi-jurisdictional response team. The heads of all the participating agencies need to meet during the



formation of the team and collectively determine who will be the overall team commander. This choice might be based on the amount of resources an agency may be able to provide, but more importantly the commander should be chosen based on knowledge and experience in dealing with high profile cases and/or violent crime.

As an example, in 2006, several police departments in Dallas and Ellis counties joined together and formed the Southern Regional Response Group (SRRG). The methodology behind SRRG was to create specific law enforcement capabilities to respond to all hazards through joint planning, training and mutual aid agreements according to a strategy memo (Southern Regional Response Group, personal communication, April, 2006). A SRRG board was developed and comprised of the chiefs of each participating law enforcement agency. After the formation of SRRG, a regional special response team was created under the SRRG umbrella. The SRRG board met and collectively decided who would be the overall team commander and how the team would be structured. The team commander then developed guidelines for each position comprising the team, which was then approved by the board and put in place.

Another issue that might arise using the multiple agency team concept is the cost of overtime that is incurred during the incident. When dealing with an incident that might last an extended amount of time, the cost of overtime for the members could be significant. An agency head may not want to pay overtime or not be able to pay overtime out of his/her budget for an incident that occurs in another jurisdiction.

If a police agency has a high profile missing child case or abduction in their jurisdiction, the agency will have to respond whether they are prepared or not. The

agency will have to pay their personnel overtime to investigate the case so this cost is incurred anyway. When the multi-jurisdictional CART is developed, each participating agency head needs to agree that they will pay the cost of their employees that respond. An agency may be spending money on an incident that occurs in another jurisdiction, but it will reap the rewards when an incident occurs in their jurisdiction and they receive the extra help from other agencies.

Agency heads may consider training and equipment costs as an obstacle when developing a CART. Larger agencies usually have a larger training and equipment budget, while smaller agencies resources are very limited. The equipment needed to do this type of investigation is no different than what detectives use every day to investigate crimes against persons. Each agency with a criminal investigation division should already have the equipment necessary to perform this task. In regards to the cost of training, on November 30, 2005, the US Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs announced an initiative to train regional child abduction response teams nationwide to respond quickly to incidents of missing and abducted children (DOJ, 2005). As a result of the initiative, in 2006, regional trainings were offered throughout the nation and were developed and conducted by Fox Valley Technical College (Ohio Law Enforcement Foundation, 2009). Fox Valley Technical College is located in Tennessee, but it provides training in several different states a year. The training involves investigative and interviewing techniques and response procedures that are related to missing children. The training also provides the opportunity for a newly selected team to work together as a unit.

The Fox Valley Technical College partners with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program (Girouard, 2001). The cost of training, lodging, and airfare is free for non-federal employees. The cost of training can also be offset by conducting the training “in-house” and using certified instructors from within the agencies participating in the CART. The cost of overtime related to the training can be offset by flexing the hours of the employees if agency policy allows.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

A child abduction is a crime in which response time is of the essence. A child abduction necessitates a quick response by highly trained law enforcement personnel with the equipment to properly conduct the investigation. It is imperative that the detectives and volunteers that respond know what their roles and responsibilities are in the event of an abduction. With this in mind, smaller police agencies should develop a child abduction response team in their region. The heads of police agencies in an area need to meet and determine which local agencies want to be involved with the CART and how large an area is to be included. Once it has been determined which agencies will be involved, discussion needs to take place to determine what types of resources and the amount of personnel that is available from each agency. Naturally, larger agencies will be able to provide more resources and personnel. Discussion should also include how the team will be structured. This should include the positions of operational commander, coordinator, and investigators, etc., and the responsibility of each. Once the structure of the team is developed, the decision makers need to agree upon who will

staff the teams' positions. The CART needs to be staffed with the most talented and motivated personnel from each agency.

In addition to manpower, a CART can provide additional expertise and knowledge. The police agencies that are participating in the CART should assign their most knowledgeable and experienced detectives to the team. Preferably, detectives that have extensive experience in crimes against persons and/or violent crimes should be assigned to the team. Detectives with computer crime experience and cell phone tracking would also be a major asset. Child Protective Service investigators should also be assigned to the CART to determine if the child's family is currently under investigation or has been involved with CPS in the past. More than one chaplain should be involved with the CART, so any issues with the family's ethnicity can be addressed. An example of this would be a victim's family only speaking Spanish or Korean. Chaplains that represent the demographics in the area of the CART's responsibility would be a great benefit. They can comfort the abducted or missing child's family and act as a liaison between the family and all of the organizations involved in the recovery. Another integral part of the CART would be a trained public information officer (PIO) to release information to the media in a structured and timely manner. This PIO would coordinate press releases and media events, freeing up the law enforcement officers to investigate the crime. If possible, a very important addition to the team would be an attorney. This attorney could provide legal guidance in relation to search warrants, court orders and subpoenas.

Once a team is developed, the team will need to train together. Initial training can be done utilizing the training available from the DOJ, but the team will also need to

train together on a regular basis. This training could result in overtime for the members of the team, which could lead to budget issues. One way to offset this is to adjust the individuals schedule so that he/she is training during their regularly scheduled hours, or they can flex their time. The cost of the overtime can also be addressed during the preparation of the department's budget.

Equipment needs, such as laptop computers, cell phones, radios, and a command post will need to be determined. Each participating agency may not be able to provide their individual member with a computer, phone, and radio, so research needs to be done to determine if there is a grant available to provide this equipment. One such grant is the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG). This grant "supports state and local law enforcement agencies addressing violent crime- including drug enforcement and criminal enterprise. Additionally, supports statistically supported strategies of enforcement at the local level" (Byrne Justice Assistance Grants n.d., para 1). If a large agency that is a member of the team does not have a command post available, other agencies in the area need to be contacted to see if one is available to use during incidents. Another good resource is the local Council of Governments or a grant.

It is imperative that this plan is developed and agreed upon by all of the agency heads before the team is established to address any problems that might arise. An interagency agreement or memorandum of understanding needs to be drafted and signed by all participating agency heads. The agreement and plan should be discussed with the employees of each participating department, so everyone is familiar with what will take place in the event of a CART activation. This should help alleviate any

problems that may arise during an incident, such as who is in command and what each member's responsibility is. Once the CART is established, the members need to regularly train on mock exercises, so they get used to working together. This will also help identify any training or equipment need that was overlooked during the development phase.

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