

Missing and Endangered Persons Information  
Clearinghouse Advisory Board

# MISSING & ENDANGERED

Spring 2020  
Issue 1

*Missing and Endangered Persons Information  
Clearinghouse Advisory Board  
2331 Phillips Road  
Tallahassee, FL 32308*

[www.fdle.state.fl.us/mcicsearch/AdvisoryBoard.asp](http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/mcicsearch/AdvisoryBoard.asp)

**IN FLORIDA IN 2019  
THERE WERE:**

**13**

**AMBER Alerts**

**24**

**Missing Child Alerts**

**273**

**Silver Alerts**

## What is MEPICAB?

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board (MEPICAB) was created in 1996 to address issues dealing with Florida's missing children. The MEPICAB is a diverse mix of law enforcement officials, victim parents, government agencies, missing children non-profit organizations and members of the business community with interest in missing children issues.

The mission of the Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board is to support awareness, education, and training for the prevention, response, and recovery of missing and endangered persons.

The Advisory Board meets quarterly to discuss and implement plans and policies to combat and create an awareness of the large number of children that go missing every year. Board members are chosen by FDLE's Commissioner from around the state, to provide balanced representation of the state of Florida.

## Want to support Florida Missing Children's Day?

Florida Missing Children's Day (FMCD) is an annual ceremony held on the second Monday of September to honor the families of missing children as well as law enforcement officers and citizens who have made great contributions protecting Florida's citizens.

Any person, business, or agency interested in making a donation to the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation can visit the [FMCD Foundation website](#).

## Board Member Spotlight – Don Ryce

In 1995 Jimmy Ryce, son of Don and Claudine Ryce, was abducted and murdered in Redland, Florida. Don and Claudine dedicated their lives to Jimmy's memory, creating and supporting legislation to protect kids across the country. Don and Claudine were there when President Bill Clinton signed the Jimmy Ryce Act in 1999 and they created the Jimmy Ryce Foundation which donates scent evidence bloodhounds—integral components to the recovery of missing children—to law enforcement agencies.

Both Don and Claudine joined the MEPIC Advisory Board upon its creation in 1996. Claudine served on the Advisory Board until her death in 2009. Don Ryce continues to sit on the Advisory Board as President Emeritus.



Don Ryce (L) receives the Commissioner's Medal from FDLE Commissioner Rick Swearingen (R).

## What are Autism Spectrum Disorders?

*By Dr. Kimberly Spence*

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a condition defined by abnormal or impaired development in social interaction and communication and the presence of repetitive behaviors and restricted interests. ASD is considered a "spectrum disorder," because the severity of impairment varies from person to person and can change over time as a result of intervention. For example, one child may struggle to learn to use words to communicate while another may be capable of carrying on a long conversation, but will only care to talk about certain topics. ASD is recognized by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Missing Endangered Persons Clearinghouse Information (MEPIC) Advisory Board as a group in need of specific supports by law enforcement officials and is dedicated to preventing individuals with ASD from elopement or being exposed to harmful situations within their communities.

Recent research indicates nearly half (49%) of parents reported that a child with ASD had attempted to wander or run away at least once after age 4. Over half of these wandering children (53%) went missing long enough to cause worry. In addition, 65 percent of these incidents involved a close call with traffic, and nearly a quarter (24%) involved a close call with drowning. Because individuals with ASD often have difficulty using and understanding eye contact, facial expressions, and social rules, and can be unaware of the perspectives of other people or danger within their environment, special caution should be taken by families, care providers, and schools. Because communication may be absent for some on the spectrum, dedicated safety planning is critical at home and at school. It is important to keep in mind persons with autism may engage in repetitive behavior, like switching a light on and off, spinning, or rocking, and some may play with or use toys or objects in an unusual manner. If you need information about Autism or assistance in supporting an individual on the spectrum anywhere in the state of Florida, please contact Dr. Kim Spence at the University of Central Florida's Center for Autism & Related Disabilities at (407) 823-6011 or [Kimberly.Spence@ucf.edu](mailto:Kimberly.Spence@ucf.edu).

## A Parent's Perspective

By Dan Campbell, Chairperson of the MEPIC Advisory Board

Parenting with its numerous rewards is not without challenges. Every parent will celebrate fantastic joys and suffer painful woes. Fortunately, for most the scales are weighted toward the positive. For a parent who has "lost" their child this is often not the case. Having a child "disappear" without a trace brings a special kind of pain that I pray few will ever endure.

Twenty-one years ago, Wendy snuck out of the house to go to a party and was never seen again. The police chased every lead possible, expending all resources at their disposal. Friends and family are supportive. The media keeps the story "alive" as long as they can but soon their level of interest wanes. The phrase "life goes on" takes on a new meaning.



Wendy Hudakoc, Missing since 1998

How does one simply move on when their child is still missing? In some twisted way, the fact that she is missing is like a wound that never truly heals. No one is held responsible, closure does not take place yet life does not have a pause button. Somehow, life takes on new meaning and leads in a direction you never thought possible. Being able to channel one's experiences and focus on safety and security for others is one way to keep the pain at bay.

The loss of a child creates an emptiness most will never experience. For that, I am truly thankful. Please take a moment to reflect on your relationships with family and friends. Think about how we treat each other and what we say to each other. I will never forget the last words I shared with Wendy as it was a phrase we would often say. Wendy: "Miss me", Me: "Terribly". A lighthearted tradition of sorts turned prophetic that weekend.

## 2020 Florida Missing Children's Day

The Florida Missing Children's Day 2020 Ceremony will be held on Monday, September 14<sup>th</sup>. The ceremony recognizes law enforcement and citizens who have made great strides in protecting Florida's children.



All information on FMCD nominations—as well as the nomination forms—can be found on the [MEPIC website](#).

In **2019** more than **29,000 children** were reported **missing** in the United States, **665** were in Florida.

## FMCD Award Winners

The MEPIC Advisory Board is proud to announce the 2019 Florida Missing Children's Day Awards winners:

### Commissioner's Award

Agent Mike Spadafora, Brevard County Sheriff

### Evelyn Williams Memorial Award

Ms. Michelle Johnson, Office of the Attorney General

### Essay Contest Winner

Mr. Gabriel Obando, Punta Gorda, FL

### Poster Contest Winner

Ms. Ava Tamayo, Ponte Vedra, FL

### Local LE Officer Winner

Detective Scott Hanley, Boca Raton Police Department

### State LE Officer Winner

Trooper Joseph Angelicchi, Florida Highway Patrol



*Detective Christina Kenney (2<sup>nd</sup> from Right) of the St. Petersburg PD) receives her Combatting Human Trafficking Award from (L-R) Attorney General Ashley Moody, First Lady Casey DeSantis, and FDLE Commissioner Richard Swearingen*



*The family of one of Florida's missing children places a rose next to their loved ones picture during the Time of Remembrance*

### Team or Task Force of the Year

Orlando Cybercrime Task Force

### Combatting Human Trafficking Award

Detective Christina Kenney, St. Petersburg Police Department

### Jimmy Ryce K-9 Trailing Team of the Year

Deputy Michael Guerra and K-9 Jolene, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office

### Citizen of the Year

Mr. Anthony Butrym and Mrs. Dawn Butrym, Flagler County, FL

### Presentation of the Commissioner's Medal

Mr. Don Ryce