



Florida Missing Endangered Persons Information
Clearinghouse Advisory Board

MISSING &
ENDANGERED

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2025 / ISSUE 16

FLORIDA MISSING CHILDREN'S DAY EDITION



WHAT IS THE

Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board?

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board (MEPICAB) was established in 1996 to address issues regarding Florida's missing children. It later expanded to include missing endangered adults and seniors. The MEPICAB's mission is to support awareness, education, and training for the prevention, response and recovery of missing and endangered persons.

Board members represent a diverse group of law enforcement officials, government agencies, impacted families, non-profit organizations, private sector partners, and community members interested in missing person issues. The MEPICAB works with the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation (FMCDF) to present Florida Missing Children's Day. For more information regarding the MEPICAB, Florida Missing Children's Day, or FMCDF, visit www.fmcdf.org.

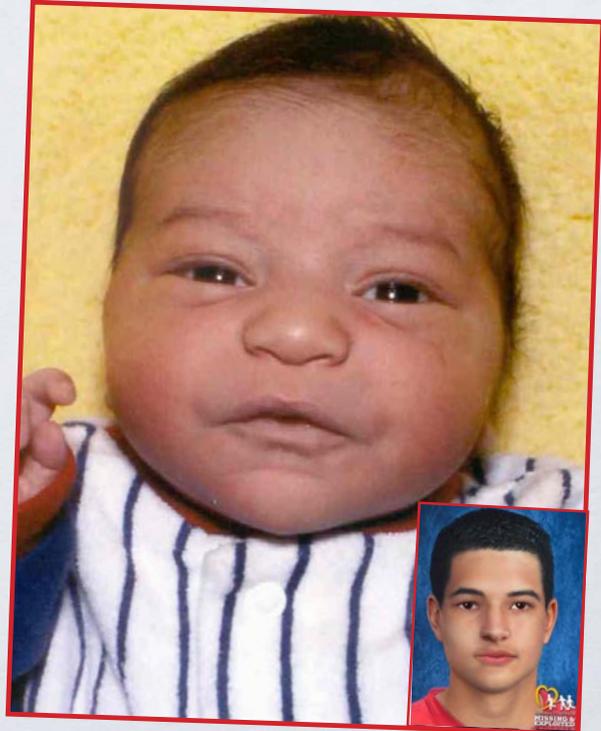
Missing & Endangered



Bryan was last seen in Fort Myers, Florida on December 1, 2006. He was three weeks old at the time. Investigators believe he was abducted by a heavysset white/Hispanic female, who was approximately 28-30 years old at the time. They may be traveling in a two-door black Ford Explorer SUV. It is possible the kidnapper may have a connection to Griffin Industries/Shaw Irrigation in Fort Myers. Bryan's photo has been age-progressed to 18 years old.

If you have any information about this case, please contact the Fort Myers Police Department at 877-667-1296 or the Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse hotline at 1-888-FL-Missing (1-888-356-4774).

MISSING BRYAN DOSSANTOS-GOMES



MISSING WENDY HUGGY



Wendy was last seen in Clearwater, Florida on April 7, 1982, when she left from a relative's home to spend the day at the beach with some friends. Wendy was due to return home later that night, but she did not, and has not been seen or heard from since. She has a circular scar in the middle of her left thigh, and may use the last name Freeman. Wendy's photo has been age-progressed to 52 years old (current age: 60).

If you have any information about this case, please contact the Pasco County Sheriff's Office at 727-847-5878 or the Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse hotline at 1-888-FL-Missing (1-888-356-4774).



The Florida Alert System Saves Lives

Between January 1, 2025, and September 30, 2025, the Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse (MEPIC) issued:

- 7 AMBER Alerts issued, with 7 recovered
- 62 Missing Child Alerts issued, with 61 recovered
- 144 State Silver Alerts issued, with 144 recovered
- 29 State Purple Alerts issued, with 28 recovered



CART Update

There are 98 active Child Abduction Response Teams (CART) nationwide. As of June 2025, only 45 of them have received certification from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Today, Florida maintains 9 of those certified teams. Florida's Child Abduction Response Teams account for approximately 20% of the nation's total certified teams, making our state a model for rapid response to critical emergency search activations that save lives.



Sign Up to Receive Alerts

Sign up to receive Florida alerts by using the QR code below.





REMEMBERING JIMMY RYCE 30 years later

On Monday, September 11, 1995, 9-year-old Samuel James "Jimmy" Ryce was on his way home from school when he was abducted, and later raped and murdered.

Jimmy was an incredibly intelligent child with an IQ over 130. He was compassionate and sensitive, and loved to read. He wanted to be a major league baseball player when he grew up, or be a scientist who found cures for diseases.

On December 9, 1995, after a three-month-long search led by Jimmy's parents, Don and Claudine Ryce, Juan Carlos Chavez was arrested and confessed to the crime. In 1998, Chavez was convicted of kidnapping, sexual battery, and capital murder, and was later executed on January 2, 2014.

After months of mourning, Don and Claudine founded the Jimmy Ryce Center for Victims of Predatory Abduction, a nonprofit organization that works to raise public awareness about the plight of missing children, victims' rights, and violence. Through their efforts, they brought about changes in legislation on local, state, and national levels to keep children safe.

Their advocacy played a pivotal role in the unanimous passing of the Jimmy Ryce Act in 1998. Under the Jimmy Ryce Act, individuals convicted of certain sexually motivated offenses may be subject to civil commitment proceedings before their release from prison. If the state determines that the individual meets the criteria of a sexually violent predator, they are committed to a secure treatment facility for indefinite confinement.

Don and Claudine believed that Jimmy would be alive today if a bloodhound had been brought in immediately to search for their son. Because of this, the Jimmy Ryce Center works to provide AKC bloodhounds for law enforcement agencies.

Although Don and Claudine have both passed, the Jimmy Ryce Center lives on, continuing to provide bloodhounds and increase awareness on missing children and victimization. More information may be found by visiting their website at www.jimmyryce.org.





2025 Florida Missing Children's Day AWARD WINNERS

During this year's formal ceremony, FDLE Commissioner Mark Glass recognized citizens, K9 teams, and law enforcement officers for their exemplary efforts in the protection of children. This year saw the largest number of award winners in FMCD history. For a detailed summary of each award, please visit www.fmcd.org/2025-award-winners.

Commissioner's Award

Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office Missing Persons Unit

Lieutenant Michael Batista, Lieutenant Jeffrey Lugo, Lieutenant Aviel Sanchez, Sergeant Raul Cabrera, Jr., Sergeant Carl Jeannot, Deputy Marjorie Eloi, Deputy Kimberly Fernandez-Roblin, Deputy Suzanne Gowdie, Deputy Yasel Hernandez, Deputy Fabian Owens, Deputy Roberto Palmer, Deputy Michael Ritch, Jr., Deputy Octavio Tellez, Deputy Madelin Webb



From January 1, 2024, to April 24, 2025, the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office (MDSO) Missing Persons Unit was assigned 1,769 missing person cases, recovering 1,653 endangered juveniles and adults. That's an incredible 93% recovery rate. Examples of their dedication include the successful location and recovery of endangered children, individuals with dementia, and suicidal individuals. The MDSO Missing Persons Unit has worked above and beyond the call of duty to investigate, locate, and recover missing persons, and the aforementioned examples are just a brief synopsis of the incredible work they have done this year.

John and Revé Walsh Award

Escambia County Sheriff's Office Missing Persons Unit

Lieutenant Brandon Beech, Sergeant Jason Comans, Sergeant Burt Craft, Investigator Timothy Fox, Investigator Karen Shreves, Deputy Bernice Andre, Administrative Assistant Karen Sztukowski, Victim Advocate Ola Wolff



From September 2021 to May 2025, the Escambia County Sheriff's Office (ECSO) Missing Persons Unit, along with the agency's victim advocate, identified over 193 missing juveniles classified as habitual runaways (three or more missing person reports in one year). After identifying habitual runaways, they coordinate with their victim advocate and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to provide financial, educational, and counseling services. The ECSO Missing Persons Unit analyzes the list of habitual runaways to identify high-risk victims who may have drug dependency issues or be involved in sexual victimization, and works to provide prevention and recovery services to those individuals.



Evelyn Williams Memorial Award
Ms. Kayla Read | Florida Highway Patrol

In September of 2024, a juvenile was reported missing to the Florida Highway Patrol Jacksonville Regional Communication Center (JRCC). The juvenile was in a vehicle traveling with her boyfriend on I-75, and State Law Enforcement Officer (SLED) Kayla Read dispatched Tampa district troopers to the reported area. She maintained contact with the child's mother and kept up with GPS location updates. She also communicated with the troopers and other local law enforcement agencies to provide updates, and obtained permission to track the boyfriend's cell phone. Ultimately, SLED Read provided an exact location, and the missing juvenile was safely recovered.



Local Law Enforcement Officer of the Year
Detective Lashante Whitaker | Jacksonville Sheriff's Office

In April of 2025, Detective Lashante Whitaker was assigned to locate and recover three endangered children taken out of state by their biological mother without the permission of their biological father. Through interviews and investigation, Detective Whitaker obtained a location and possible phone number for the mother in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She was able to contact the mother, and, after hours of gaining rapport, convinced her to cooperate with the investigation. She obtained an exact location for the mother and three children and directed local authorities to take custody of the children until they were safely returned to their father in Florida.



State Law Enforcement Officer of the Year
Trooper Jordan Watson (not pictured)
Florida Highway Patrol

In June of 2024, Trooper Jordan Watson responded to a request for assistance from Madison County Sheriff's Office regarding a vehicle they were pursuing. The driver was alleged to have made statements that she was intending to harm herself and her 3-year-old child. Trooper Watson responded to the location and was able to stop the vehicle using the Precision Immobilization Technique (PIT) Maneuver, resulting in the safe recovery of the child and adult.



Combatting Human Trafficking Award
Detective Jarrod Foster | Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office

In September of 2024, Detective Jarrod Foster was assigned the case of two missing juveniles. He conducted investigative inquiries and conducted forty hours of direct surveillance, locating a residence where the missing juveniles had been spotted. He identified an adult male who frequented the residence and behaved in a manner consistent with sexual activity, and suspected the juveniles were victims of human trafficking. After more surveillance, an organized traffic stop led to both of the missing juveniles being recovered. Both disclosed they were victims of human trafficking, and the two adult perpetrators were arrested and are now imprisoned.



Law Enforcement Task Force/Team of the Year

Tampa Police Department: Sergeant Joseph Sustek, Detective Tony Aguiar, Detective Amanda Baranowski, Detective Michael Drayton, Detective Erica Gardner, Detective Jonathan Ruiz, Detective Chrystal Shiver, Detective Julio Tagliani, Analyst Christina Hitchman

Suwannee County Sheriff's Office: Sergeant Brian Barrs, Sergeant Michael Landis, Corporal Jonathan Bonk, SVU Investigator Kim Lane, Investigator Jacob Williamson, Deputy Ali Law, Deputy Pete Merola

In May of 2024, officers from Tampa Police Department were dispatched in response to a missing 9-year-old child and her adult mother. It was discovered that the child's mother had left the home with her live-in boyfriend that morning, and that later that day, the boyfriend returned home without the mother and left with the 9-year-old child.

The Tampa Police Department Special Victims Unit was able to track his work cell phone, which pinged at a motel in Suwannee County. Suwannee County Sheriff's Office was contacted, and deputies responded to the motel, where they were able to confirm the room number the boyfriend had checked in to. An AMBER Alert was also issued for the child by FDLE.

Officers heard a child yelling outside of the motel room, and the missing 9-year-old child eventually opened the door and appeared to be crying. She was taken to a patrol vehicle a safe distance away. The mother's boyfriend was discovered in the bathtub with a firearm pointed at his own head. Negotiations went on for several hours, but he ended up taking his own life.

The child was later transported safely to Gainesville and interviewed. Her mother's boyfriend had picked her up that day, alone, bought her clothing and makeup, and brought her to the motel room where she was given cocaine and alcohol right before deputies responded to the scene. A search of the room revealed several items that he may have been planning to assault the child with. The mother's body was found a few days later in Hillsborough County. While this tragic discovery was not what anyone hoped for, the cooperation and quick action on the part of Tampa Police Department and Suwannee County Sheriff's Office very likely saved the child's life.



Jimmy Ryce K9 Trailing Team of the Year Deputy Roberth Mata and K9 Indy Sumter County Sheriff's Office

In May of 2024, a 16-year-old nonverbal juvenile with autism was reported missing after dark. Deputy Mata deployed K9 Indy, and trailed through heavy vegetation for almost a mile into a densely wooded and swampy area. The juvenile had been missing for over 18 hours, and was located by Deputy Mata and K9 Indy in neck deep water, shivering and covered in bug and snake bites. Deputy Mata gave him his shirt, and helped him out of the water where he was safely recovered. Deputy Mata and K9 Indy's persistence and tracking skills were an integral part in the location and safe recovery of the juvenile.



Citizen of the Year

Mr. Victor Gillis | City of St. Petersburg Sanitation Dept.

In February of 2025, Mr. Victor Gillis, a Sanitation Specialist with the City of St. Petersburg Sanitation Department, observed a 2-year-old child walking alone in the road without any visible parental supervision. Recognizing the immediate danger the child was in, Mr. Gillis acted swiftly and decisively. He stopped his sanitation vehicle and took hold of the child, moving him out of the road to ensure his safety. He remained with the child until law enforcement arrived at the scene. Thanks to Mr. Gillis' alertness and quick response, the child was returned home safe and unharmed. The child's mother was not aware that the child had exited their residence. Mr. Gillis' actions not only prevented a potentially tragic accident but also demonstrated an exceptional level of civic duty and personal responsibility.



School Bus Operator of the Year

Ms. Evonne Eicher | Martin County School District

This year, Ms. Eicher, a school bus driver in Martin County, was at a bus stop with elementary students on board when a vehicle attempted to pass the bus on the left. She immediately stopped the student from crossing over in front of the bus and prevented a possible accident from occurring. Ms. Ruth Spires, the Director of Transportation for Martin County Schools, calls Ms. Eicher a "caring and loving driver that treats the students on her bus as her own children." The parents of her student bus riders even have her personal number in case of emergencies. Ms. Spires states, "If a driver is delayed, she (Ms. Eicher) is the first to volunteer."



Maple's Everyday Hero Award

Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office Detention K9 Unit

Sergeant Robert Lenzo & K9 Ozi, Deputy Donald Carter & K9 Ash, Deputy Joshua Chandler & K9 Doc, Deputy Corey Johnson & K9 Mac, Deputy David Robinett & K9 Jake

Over the past year, the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office (SRCSO) Detention K9 Unit has played a critical role in the location and recovery of missing and endangered persons. They safely located 3 missing elderly individuals, tracked and recovered 2 juvenile runaways, found and assisted a suicidal subject in crisis, and were deployed on 25 separate occasions to assist patrol in locating suspects who fled from law enforcement. The unit includes a narcotics detection K9 assigned to the detention facility, regularly used to search housing areas and cells for illegal drugs. The team also includes an electronics detection K9, used not only to locate hidden electronic devices inside the jail but also to support FDLE with search warrants during child sexual abuse material investigations.



Florida Missing Children's Day Student Contest Winners

Poster Contest Winner | Cali

Cali is the 2025 Florida state winner for the U.S. Department of Justice's annual poster contest. In her words: "My poster shows a young boy who is trapped in a terrible situation. He was kidnapped, and is now being physically and emotionally abused. I drew him getting a glimpse of the outside world. All he can think about is his home and his family. Even though he is going through the worst thing imaginable, he still has hope. This symbolizes the terrible reality for countless children gone missing. If we help to bring awareness, maybe we can give them hope, and bring them home." Cali's artwork was featured on this year's Florida Missing Children's Day billboard and banner.

Essay Contest Winner | Jack

Jack is the 2025 Florida state winner for the annual "This Is How I Stay Safe All Day" essay contest. In Jack's essay, he explains several ways kids can stay safe all day. He provides safety tips every child should know, and explains how to stay safe online and prevent abduction. In his words, "You can prevent child abduction by teaching safety tips, online safety, and what to do if your child runs away or gets abducted. These are essential for your child's safety." The essay contest is held each year and is sponsored by the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and the Florida Department of Education.

National Anthem Contest Winner | Camila

Camila was selected as the 2025 state National Anthem contest winner, and performed an excellent rendition of the National Anthem during this year's Florida Missing Children's Day ceremony. All children in 1st through 8th grade are invited to participate in this contest each year.

If you have a student or child interested in participating in next year's contests, please use the QR code below to see the related requirements and deadlines. Submissions will open in December 2025.



www.fmcdf.org/student-contests



FLORIDA REMEMBERS

— 2025 Florida Missing Children's Day —
Attending Families



In Remembrance Of...
THOSE LOST TO US



Jimmy Ryce in 1995
Amanda Brown in 1998
Coralrose Fullwood in 2006
Somerset Thompson in 2009
Morgan Martin in 2012

Felecia Williams in 2014
Sanchez Hughes in 2020
Tristyn Bailey in 2021
Demiah Appling in 2022

THOSE STILL MISSING

Jonathan Hagans, 1968
Alicia Guzman Padilla, 1985
Tiffany Sessions, 1989
Lurline Bergeron, 1991
Bonnie Dages, 1993
Jeremy Dages, 1993

Wendy Hudakoc, 1998
Zachary Bernhardt, 2000
Mark Degner, 2005
Bryan Hayes, 2005
Trenton Duckett, 2006
HaLeigh Cummings, 2009



Florida Missing Children's Day FOUNDATION

Bringing Our Missing Children Home



What is the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation?



Visit the Foundation's website for more information on Florida Missing Children's Day, missing persons issues, and safety resources.

www.FMCDF.org

The Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation is a (501)(c)(3), non-profit organization that was established in order to provide support for Florida Missing Children's Day and spread information and awareness of missing persons issues in Florida.

Florida Missing Children's Day is an annual event held on the second Monday of each September in remembrance of Florida's children who are still missing and those who will never come home again. The objective of this day is to raise awareness of Florida's current missing children, to educate the public on child safety and abduction prevention, and to recognize those individuals who have made outstanding contributions in missing child issues.

In partnership with FDLE, the Foundation supports the education of the public through safety fairs around the state. FDLE staff attend safety fairs upon request to promote missing person issues, child safety practices, education and safety resources, and education about sexual offenders/predators. The Foundation incurs the cost for some of the safety information and materials distributed to the public for education.

The Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation relies on its sponsors and donations to fund Florida Missing Children's Day each year. It is not a state or federally funded event.