



TOOL KIT FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF MISSING AND SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN



Tool #1: Assessing the Need to Start a Nonprofit Organization

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Overview

Are you considering the establishment of a new nonprofit organization (NPO) to assist missing and/or sexually exploited children and their families? Perhaps you are

- A parent/guardian, other family member, or friend directly impacted by a missing or sexually exploited child
- A member of a community in which a child became missing or was sexually exploited
- An individual concerned about the victimization of children who feels compelled to take action

Whatever the motivation for considering development of a new organization addressing the problem of missing and sexually exploited children, this *Tool* should help you make a decision and offer guidance for your efforts.

Many lives are touched each time a child is missing or the victim of sexual exploitation. Family members, friends, and others whose lives have been impacted by the tragedy may look for ways to memorialize the child, take actions to prevent future incidents, improve the response when such incidents occur, or seek to support others experiencing similar circumstances. At times a media report concerning a missing or sexually exploited child or even general coverage of the issues serves as catalysts for action by concerned individuals.

This *Tool* discusses some of the pros and cons of starting such an NPO and suggests ways to assess if a new organization is an appropriate way to resolve community concerns. Other *Tools* in the series address ways to build an organization — if that path is chosen — with a strong foundation capable of supporting long-term stability and mission achievement.

Alternatives to Forming a New Organization

Factored into the decision to start a new organization should be the consideration of other ways to achieve your desired goal without having to go through the arduous process of establishing and sustaining an NPO. The suggestions noted below are adapted from discussions held at a meeting with family members of missing children and other concerned individuals.¹

- Try to form bonds with other families whose children have been abducted or sexually exploited. Team HOPE (Help Offering Parents Empowerment) provides assistance to families with missing and sexually exploited children by offering peer support, resources, and empowerment from trained volunteers. These volunteers are mothers, fathers, siblings, and extended family members who have experienced or are currently living with the pain of a missing or sexually exploited child. If you or someone you know could benefit from Team HOPE's assistance, call 1-866-305-HOPE (4673). In addition the Association of Missing and Exploited Children's Organizations Inc. (AMECO) is a resource with information about organizations able to assist families. For more information and to learn about the services provided by AMECO member organizations visit www.amecoinc.org.
- Plan/coordinate Missing Children's Day events and ceremonies in your local community or jurisdiction. National Missing Children's Day is traditionally observed on May 25.
- Participate in Take 25 activities. Take 25 is a program of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC). The goal of Take 25 is to heighten awareness of personal-safety issues by focusing on prevention. To find or register Take 25 events in your community, visit www.take25.org.
- Work with law-enforcement agencies to improve training and help enforce existing laws.
- Participate in training programs for dispatchers and first responders to help improve their response to the needs of victims and their families.
- Learn about NCMEC's resources, including training courses, programs, and materials, and tell your local law-enforcement agency about these resources.
- Identify organizations where you may volunteer.
- Learn about and tell others of existing laws regarding missing and sexually exploited children.
- Encourage local law-enforcement academies to teach trainees about laws and best practices related to missing and sexually exploited children.

¹The Association of Missing and Exploited Children's Organizations Inc. (AMECO) facilitated a focus group meeting at the 2010 "Responding to Missing and Unidentified Persons National Conference" in Appleton, Wisconsin, on February 24, 2010. Eighteen family members, representatives of missing persons' organizations, and missing persons' advocates participated.

- Learn about and inform authorized persons of NCMEC's Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Registration Program, a partnership with the University of North Texas Health Science Center, which offers parents and family members of missing children an opportunity to have their DNA samples profiled and uploaded to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) where once a week the DNA of their loved one is scanned against the DNA profiles of unidentified persons. To learn more about how families may submit DNA samples contact NCMEC at 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678). For more information about CODIS visit www.fbi.gov, and from the home page respectively click on the "Laboratory Services" and "CODIS" links.
- Learn about, utilize, and educate others about the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs). This program, created by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), contains databases storing detailed information about missing persons and unidentified remains. It may be searched by the public, law-enforcement officials, medical examiners, and coroners to help solve these types of cases. For more information about NamUs visit www.namus.gov.
- Offer to share your victim-impact story with law enforcement and during any legal proceedings.

Additional Considerations

It is not unusual for family members and others concerned about the need for an improved community response to consider establishing a new NPO. A new organization may be the best way to address the needs of the community. Establishing an organization may be a rewarding experience and may also pave the way for lasting improvements in the protection of children within that community and beyond.

The decision to start an NPO should not be made lightly and should only be made after numerous factors are considered — including alternatives that may offer better ways to attach meaning to a specific child's life and victimization or to foster improvements in prevention and response. Not everyone is able to make the commitment necessary to organize and operate a successful organization addressing the problem of missing and/or sexually exploited children. As stated by one of the participants in the previously mentioned meeting, "Don't assume an NPO will be a part-time job — it takes much more time and energy than one can imagine."

Establishing an NPO is not the same as organizing a group of concerned individuals to assist with the search for a missing child. Starting an NPO entails assuming legally binding duties for the operations of the organization — including governance, financial management, and service delivery. Successful efforts to organize an NPO require going through a process to examine the need for the organization, and, as discussed in *Tool #2*, defining its mission and obtaining the resources, from monetary to in-kind to staffing, to accomplish and sustain the organization's mission.

NPOs Addressing the Problem of Missing and Sexually Exploited Children

AMECO requires their members have a primary mission of one or more of the categories noted below.

- Assisting law enforcement and/or searching family members in the recovery of missing children
- Helping missing and sexually exploited children and their families gain access to services
- Preventing children from becoming missing or sexually exploited through prevention and education services for families, law enforcement, or other appropriate entities²

If the organization seeks support from the public, it must be classified as an exempt NPO by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) before the contributions it receives may be tax deductible by the donor. For more information about applying for this classification, visit www.irs.gov. From the home page click on the “Charities & Non-Profits” link.

Addressing the Needs of a Community

Forming an organization should be a response to longer-term, identifiable needs within the community for which starting an organization would offer the optimum resolution. Community needs often surface during the search for a missing child or the investigation of child sexual exploitation. These cases may be complex and weaknesses in the community’s response often reveal previously unidentified needs that should be addressed in future cases. It is important, however, to differentiate between the need to improve the community’s response and a need for a new organization. Not having an organization is only a problem if there are no better means of delivering necessary services to solve the problem. Identify problems before posing solutions — a new organization could create new problems without improving the community’s response capability.

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Caution should be exercised when deciding to start an NPO addressing these issues in the heat of a search for a missing child. The focus of attention during the search needs to be maintained on locating the missing child and supporting the child’s family. Forming an organization as a vehicle to search for the missing child requires the diversion of attention and energy that are better spent in locating and recovering the missing child.

Family members of missing and sexually exploited children should also ask themselves several questions to determine their own emotional well being and preparedness before seeking to start their own NPO. Family members should spend time answering such questions as

²“Membership Qualifications,” accessed July 29, 2010, at www.amecoinc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=77.

- What is my goal in starting an NPO?
- What possible options exist to help me meet my goals and needs, such as volunteering with one of the many already-existing NPOs providing services to missing and sexually exploited children, their families, and the professionals who support them?
- What will the NPO provide in return for the energy I put into it?
- What percentage of my life am I willing to give to the NPO?
- What is the best way to ensure this initiative does not interfere with the search for my missing child?
- What do I feel is the best way to continue to support family members at times when this initiative could redirect my attention away from them?
- What would I do, if after beginning an NPO, I no longer have the same drive I originally did?
- How do I feel about potentially spending a large amount of time in fund-raising administration?

Alternative Methods for Mobilizing a Community

The best way to mobilize a community depends on the specific objectives the community needs to achieve. In other words, “Mobilized to do what?” AMECO may help to determine if a new organization would be helpful for this purpose. Another alternative is to join forces with an existing organization. Doing the latter may be the best way to support the recovery of a missing child or the family during their time of trauma. To view a list of currently established organizations visit www.amecoinc.org. Also NCMEC offers assistance in identifying existing community resources and may offer additional assistance to the law-enforcement agencies investigating these cases. For more information call NCMEC at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

Mobilizing the community during the early days of a search for a missing child is usually not difficult. Often more volunteers than are manageable come forward in an effort to support the family and resolve the case. Early media attention may make it easier to respond to the fears of the community and implement new educational, prevention programs. It is a far more difficult challenge to sustain the public’s attention regarding the issues of missing and sexually exploited children after the case is resolved or when a child is missing for a longer period of time.

Community mobilization may involve calling upon existing community organizations for assistance. Some organizations have responsibility for assisting in cases of missing and/or sexually exploited children. For example law-enforcement agencies, child-protective-services agencies, and other organizations such as civic and faith-based organizations are often looking for opportunities to improve the quality of life in their communities and may be able to offer volunteers or financial support. When seeking organizational support, there is an opportunity to educate the members of the organization about the issues and need for community involvement.

Determining the Best Way to Honor or Memorialize a Child Victim

NPOs face many challenges in their attempt to sustain in the long-term. There may be more lasting alternatives to forming an organization in honor of a child victimized by abduction or sexual exploitation.

As previously mentioned working through existing organizations is one way to mobilize the community. It is also a way to add meaning to what was an unspeakable event in the life of a child. In selecting an organization with which to form an alliance, it's important to select one with a compatible mission. The first logical place to look may be searching the Internet to see if any existing organizations are able to help. AMECO's website, www.amecoinc.org, is a good place to begin this search. Other organizations to consider are victim-service organizations, mental-health agencies, faith-based organizations, and social-service organizations.

When approaching an organization for support services, be specific about what you would like to accomplish. Organizations are committed to offering programs they have already developed as a way to meet their mission and may be concerned about their limited capacity to support additional services. One way to meet the needs of the organization and the need to honor a specific child is to organize an annual fundraising activity on or near a significant date in the child's life. Funds raised could be placed by the organization in a memorial fund in the name of the child and used to support related services.

Community-Needs Assessments

In simple terms a community-needs assessment is a process of identifying gaps in services addressing the prevention of and response to cases of missing and sexually exploited children. Community-needs assessments may occur in the aftermath of a child being missing or sexually exploited. In a proactive manner community-needs assessments may occur anytime, but often they are a product of media reports about cases of missing and sexually exploited children. A community-needs assessment includes

- Identifying problems
- Suggesting solutions

Identifying Problems

Accurate problem identification is probably the most important step in performing an assessment to determine if a new organization is needed in the community. In this section we discuss some of the parameters of a problem statement, but first a warning. Problem statements should not begin with, "We need an organization to..." This kind of statement presupposes a solution and does not address the underlying problem.

Unfortunately many problems surface only as a result of a child's victimization and should have, would have, could have, are scant comfort to those whose lives have been impacted. If the unfortunate circumstances of a child's victimization are to be of value, it's important to assess how the incident could have been prevented or if alternative courses of action may have improved the

outcome. The questions below may help pinpoint the problems and help you create problem statements.

- What happened to create your concerns?
- When did the problems emerge?
- How did the problems become evident?
- Have others identified similar problems?
- What are the components of the problems (*i.e.*, time, human resources, funds, communication)?

Researching Options

After identifying the problem those seeking to create an NPO should research that problem in their community. Research includes determining which, if any, other organizations in the community address this problem or have the capacity and interest in doing so. Those organizations could include other NPOs, governmental agencies, law-enforcement branches, or for-profit organizations. If other organizations offer solutions to the identified problem, a new NPO may take resources away from the existing organizations.

In addition those seeking to create an NPO should assess if they have the time, human resources, knowledge, funds, and connections necessary to create an NPO and sustain it over time. If there is hesitation an alternative solution to beginning an NPO should be sought.

Suggesting Solutions

A new organization may or may not be relevant to the improvement of the community's services related to missing and sexually exploited children. The suggested solutions should demonstrate a direct relationship to the problems identified. Some solutions may include better use of existing services and agencies within the community. In some cases creating a new organization may be the optimum solution. Again it is important to define how the organization becomes a solution and avoids creating additional problems.

Tool 2: How to Start a Nonprofit Organization offers guidance for those who have determined the most effective strategies for improving their community's response to the problem of missing and sexually exploited children includes establishing a new NPO.

Useful Resources

The resources noted below may be useful as you seek information about services for missing and sexually exploited children and their families.

Organizations

Association of Missing and Exploited Children's Organizations Inc. (AMECO)

1-877-263-2620

www.amecoinc.org

Combined DNA Index System (CODIS)

703-632-8315

Go to www.fbi.gov and from the home page respectively click on the “Laboratory Services” and “CODIS” links.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)

1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)

www.missingkids.com

- **Take 25**
1-877-446-2632, extension 3391
www.take25.org
- **Team HOPE**
1-866-305-HOPE (4673)
www.teamhope.org

National Center for Victims of Crime

202-467-8700

www.ncvc.org

National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)

www.namus.gov

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs

- **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**
202-307-5911
www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov
- **Office for Victims of Crime**
202-307-5983
www.ovc.gov

Publications

Bowers, Duane T. *A Child is Missing: Providing Support for Families of Missing Children*. Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2007.

Fox Valley Technical College. *You're Not Alone: The Journey From Abduction to Empowerment*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 2008.

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