



Division of Criminal Justice Services

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New York State's First-Ever Missing Child Rescue Operation Results in Successful Location of 47 Children Reported Missing in Western New York

***State Division of Criminal Justice Services, the National Child Protection Task Force, and
Law Enforcement Professionals from 22 Public and Private Entities Partner to Provide
Investigative Support to the Amherst and Buffalo Police Departments***

Support and Services Provided to Recovered Children at the Scott Bieler Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf in Buffalo

The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) today announced that 47 children who were reported missing in Western New York have been located through a first-of-its-kind Missing Child Rescue Operation in the state. The cases, which involved children who had been reported missing to the Amherst and Buffalo police departments, were solved through a unique collaboration among the Missing Persons Clearinghouse at DCJS, the National Child Protection Task Force, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and law enforcement professionals and private sector partners who convened to review cases at the Scott Bieler Child Advocacy Center at BestHelp in Buffalo.

“Every day, staff of our Missing Persons Clearinghouse provide critical investigative support to local police agencies handling missing persons cases,” **DCJS Commissioner Rossana Rosado said**. “Working with the National Child Protection Task Force, they convened professionals from the public and private sector, and leveraged their expertise to locate and assist these children. I’m so proud of their work, which was supported by staff from our Erie Crime Analysis Center and other local, state and federal partners.”

The operation brought together law enforcement professionals from across Erie County and beyond, as well as representatives from nonprofit organizations and private-sector business to take a fresh look at the cases, exploring new leads, reviewing case notes and leveraging technology to assist with the investigations. A total of 56 experts were divided among teams with an initial goal to review 25 cases. Their efforts proved so successful that another 25 cases were presented for review. In all, 40 children were located during the operation and seven more children, whose cases were examined during the joint exercise, were found last week. The three other cases remain under investigation by the Buffalo Police Department.

National Child Protection Task Force Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer Kevin Branzetti said, “I have thirty years of doing this and this week has been the proudest and most impactful moment of my career.”

The newly opened Scott Bieler Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf provided secure space for investigative teams that consisted of members of the Amherst, Buffalo and Cheektowaga police

departments, the National Child Protection Task Force, the Erie County Sheriff's Office, the New York State Police, the FBI, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the National Cyber-Forensics and Training Alliance, the New York State Intelligence Center, Erie Crime Analysis Center, the U.S. Marshal's Service, and staff from the Missing Persons Clearinghouse and members of its Cold Case Panel. The Child Advocacy Center also worked in partnership with the Erie County Department of Social Services and the state Office of Children and Family Services to provide services and support for children who were recovered during the operation.

BestSelf Behavioral Health President and CEO Elizabeth Woike said, "BestSelf was honored to host the Missing Child Rescue Operation at our new, secure Child Advocacy Center facility and to support the incredible work these local, state, and national agencies do every day. The impact of their combined efforts is truly remarkable and makes a significant difference for families in our communities across Western New York."

Private sector partners, including LexisNexis Risk Solutions, Penlink, AT&T, Snap Inc. (SnapChat), Clearview AI, CashApp and Square lent their technological expertise to help gather clues about the children's locations. Judges issued subpoenas when necessary and prosecutors from the Erie County District Attorney's Office and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of New York provided legal guidance to the investigative teams.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph A. Gramaglia said, "This successful operation is a result of our ongoing collaboration with the New York State Missing Persons Clearinghouse and the Scott Bieler Child Advocacy Center to improve our response to missing children. The National Child Protection Task Force brought resources in to assist local detectives, and by working together on cases, professional relationships were formed that will strengthen our response in the future. I would like to thank New York State's Division of Criminal Justice Services and the Missing Persons Clearinghouse for bringing all of the partners together in order to make this operation such a success."

Cheektowaga Police Chief Brian Coons said, "Ongoing collaboration with our law enforcement partners is a cornerstone of the Cheektowaga Police Department and the larger criminal justice system throughout western New York. Connecting experts to work as a group allows the exchange of new ideas and the generation of new methods of investigation. Few things are more important to police officers than safeguarding children. We are very grateful to the New York State Missing Persons Clearinghouse for inviting us to be a part of this operation and look forward to the chance to participate again in the future."

Erie County Sheriff John Garcia said, "Each passing minute that a child is missing, a parent's agony grows," said Erie County Sheriff John Garcia. "While the Erie County Sheriff's Office has no open missing child cases, it was our duty to lend our detectives' expertise to this effort. We are honored to have played a part in bringing answers and assistance to dozens of children. Collaboration is important, and the Division of Criminal Justice Services and National Child Protection Task Force have done a great service to the youth of Erie County and New York State in pooling these resources. We look forward to working together again in the future."

Acting Erie County District Attorney Mike Keane said, "While the Erie County District Attorney's Office has always worked collaboratively on cases involving missing children, this operation was an incredible opportunity for our prosecutors and our local partners to work alongside leading investigative experts on these cases. In addition to successfully locating more than 40 missing children, the skills obtained and professional relationships created through this unique operation are invaluable and will further enhance our ability to find missing persons."

DCJS Missing Persons Clearinghouse staff plan to replicate the Missing Child Rescue Operation in other regions of the state within the year. Any details about the resolved missing children cases should be directed to the police department that handled the cases.

The [Division of Criminal Justice Services](#) is home to the [Missing Persons Clearinghouse](#) and provides critical support to all facets of the state's criminal justice system, including, but not limited to: training law enforcement and other criminal justice professionals; overseeing a law enforcement accreditation program; ensuring Breathalyzer and speed enforcement equipment used by local law enforcement operate correctly; managing criminal justice grant funding; analyzing statewide crime and program data; providing research support; overseeing county probation departments and alternatives to incarceration programs; and coordinating youth justice policy. Follow DCJS on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

The [Scott Bieler Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf](#) is an innovative, comprehensive center offering safety, support and a healing place for children and families affected by trauma and abuse in Erie County. The Center's partner organizations include law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, child protective services, medical professionals, mental health counselors and victim advocates. When first established in 1994, the Center was one of the first two Child Advocacy Centers to open in New York State and it served as a model for other centers in the state and Canada. [BestSelf Behavioral Health](#) is the largest community-based behavioral health organization serving children and adults of all ages in Western New York.

The [National Child Protection Task Force](#) is a nonprofit organization that unites elite investigators and experts from law enforcement and the private sector to tackle cases of missing, exploited, and trafficked children. From rapid-response support when a child disappears to in-depth case analysis and advanced rescue operations, the Task Force works tirelessly alongside law enforcement to bring vulnerable children home swiftly. With a mission to create better outcomes for missing kids across the nation, the National Child Protection Task Force's focus is simple yet transformative: find just one more child, every single day.