

KLAAS ACTION REVIEW

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MARC KLAAS FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN

A MESSAGE FROM MARC

There are many battles to be fought in the war to make America safe for all children. However, America's current focus on stronger sentencing is really nothing more than a skirmish. We are also kidding ourselves if we think we can declare victory through full implementation of Neighborhood Watch programs and proactive partnerships to fight crime.

These solutions, as important as they are, only address the current generation of criminals. If other families are to be spared the pain mine has endured, policymakers need to look beyond the death penalty or prison sentences. Instead they must focus on the critical steps our communities and nation can take to protect all children. This is the battlefield that will protect future generations from an epidemic of crime.

In America today, we can save thousands of children and adults if we invest now in proven programs that help kids get the right start and prevent them from becoming criminals in the first place.

The plain truth is that we ignore the most powerful weapons we have against crime. Programs like Head Start, parenting education, mentoring, job training, good schools, and after-school programs can dramatically reduce crime by helping kids become

productive citizens instead of brutal criminals. For example:

- High Scope Educational Research Foundation's Perry Preschool study, which took place over two decades ago, combined a high-quality Head Start-style program for three- and four-year-olds with weekly home visits to coach their parents. High Scope randomly chose half the children who applied. Twenty-three years later, its researchers found that kids who took part in these programs were five times less likely to be chronic lawbreakers.
- A Syracuse University Family Development Research Program showed that comprehensive early childhood services sharply cut subsequent delinquency. Kids in a comparison group that did not receive those services were ten times more likely to have a record of delinquency.

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METER SLEUTHS SEEK MISSING KIDS

By Joe Klaas

A child is missing! Volunteers without search warrants watch for the lost child inside every piece of private property for miles around. They enter backyards, basements, fruit groves, livestock ranches, industrial sites, places of business, and other offbeat locations which might hide a lost, runaway, or kidnapped child. Hundreds armed with photographs and a description of the vanished child fan out with impunity to keep an eye on every piece of private property in the state.

Sound too good to be true? It's happening right now.

Scott A. Sankey of Port Charlotte, Florida, came up with an idea which has these volunteers operating between Homestead, Florida, and Jacksonville, south of Tampa to Naples, throughout the West Palm Beach area, and north to the Ocala region. Scott is a meter reader with Florida Power and Light, and he has 450 other meter

readers looking for Florida's missing children.

"If these criminals know that we are out there watching them house to house, motel to motel, building to building, trailer park to campground, it may help us stop abductions in the first place."

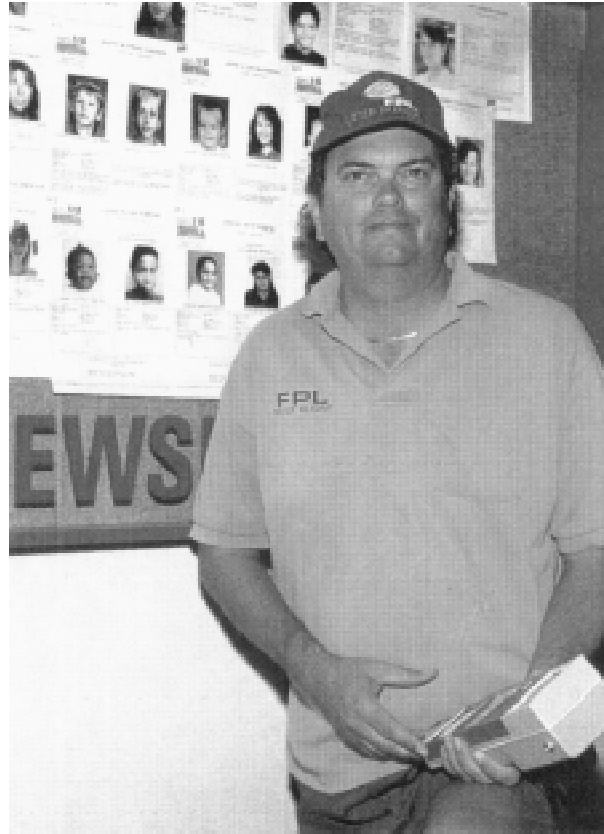
Combining Work and Community Service

"I was thrilled when Scott came to me with the idea," said his supervisor Sherri Fields of the Punta Gorda office. "We can all do our jobs and some community service at the same time."

Scott receives photographs and data on missing Florida children from the National Center for

Missing and Exploited Children in Washington, D.C. They are posted in the meter reader office and company lunchroom. Florida Power and Light's special consumer services department distributes updated posters to 31 meter-reading locations companywide.

"Since we are out there every day, the posters will enable us to provide another set of eyes that maybe can help locate a missing child," Scott said. "It also will hopefully act as a deterrent to this tragic crime. If these criminals know that we are out there watching them house to house, motel to motel, building to building, and trailer park to campground, it may help us stop a child abduction in the first place."



Florida Power and Light's Scott Sankey helped organize the utility's meter readers to search for missing children.

Utilities Working Together for Children

"Scott was the first person from a utility company to call us for our support," said Lee Steinwick, a spokesperson at the National Center. "We're happy to help, because it opens a new avenue for getting out the word on missing and exploited children."

"I'd love to answer questions from any other meter readers or utility companies that would like to spread the house-to-house search for missing kids from coast to coast," said Scott. "They can reach me for more at information at 941/624-0438, or by e-mail at sej137mp@sunline.net." ■

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AUTO DEALERS REV UP FOR CHILD SAFETY CAMPAIGN

The Klaas Foundation's effort to spread information on child safety has gotten a boost in the South and Midwest, as regional auto dealerships rally to co-sponsor a series of child safety events.

The new campaign supports town hall meetings; "KlaasRoom" programs for children; and Child Safety Days, held on auto dealership lots with fingerprinting and distribution of the Child ID Safety Kit.

The new campaign is organized by Mark J. Bott of Automotive 100 in Springfield, IL, who helped to kick off the campaign in Green Bay, WI.

"Ninety-nine percent of the people in this country are wonderful," Bott said. "We are controlled by the one percent who have no regard for human life. As we go from city to city, I will convince



Marc Klaas leads a "KlaasRoom" to teach kids how to stay safe.

business leaders to put the full court press on our politicians to legislate change."

Events during the next few months include: Syracuse, NY, Fulton Dealer Assn., April 11-12; Scottsdale,

AZ, Van Chevrolet Geo, April 25-26; Lawrence, KS, Crown Auto, May 9-10; Columbus, OH, Key Olds Co., May 16-17; Middlebury, CT, County Line Auto, May 20-21; Green Brooks, New Jersey, Crystal Motors, June 3-4. ■

A MESSAGE FROM MARC (CONT.)

- Other studies show that help for older kids can also significantly improve their—and our—chances. For example, when the Quantum Opportunities Program had high school kids participate in community service and gave them counseling, academic help, and financial incentives, it cut the risk of arrest by 50 percent.

If you do not trust the studies, ask America's police force. In a recent survey by criminologist Jack McDevitt, nine out of ten police chiefs said, "America could sharply reduce crime" if government invested in more of these Right Start programs. Asked which strategies would have the greatest long-term impact in reducing crime, police chiefs picked increasing investments

in kids by a three-to-one margin over trying more juveniles as adults or even hiring more police officers.

Ultimately, programs like these actually save tax dollars while they save lives and property. For example, High Scope's Perry Preschool saved \$148,000 in crime costs for every child served. Unfortunately, Right Start investments are so under-funded that they cannot begin to serve more than a small portion of the kids who need them. Vanderbilt University criminologist Mark Cohen estimates America would save \$1.5 million for each high-risk youngster diverted from a life of crime.

Don't get me wrong—we do need to get dangerous criminals off the street and behind bars. However,

if we do not invest in programs that help children become caring citizens instead of brutal criminals, we will all pay an unfathomable cost in broken lives and broken hearts.

We cannot win the war against crime solely by focusing on prison construction and punishment. We will win the war on crime when we are ready to invest our time, energy, and tax dollars in America's most vulnerable children, so that they never become America's most wanted adults. Anything else is too little, too late.

By ignoring proven solutions, our policymakers are ignoring our most effective weapons in the war against crime. The way I see it, that is being soft on crime. ■

A NEW AGENDA FOR OUR CHILDREN'S SAFETY

By Mark Green, Wisconsin State Representative

We've all heard the sad stories. They're on television, in the paper, and—for the most unfortunate of us—written on the faces of our family members or friends. Tragically, every community in America has its own Polly Klaas, and too many have more than one.



Mark Green, author of Wisconsin's Klaas Agenda

Here in Northeast Wisconsin, we have Cora Jones. Cora was a wonderful 12-year-old girl who went out for a bike ride on a country road and never came back. Her murderer was an individual named David Spanbauer, who, prior to taking Cora's life, had been in and out of prison for numerous sex offenses. If you're thinking that David Spanbauer sounds a lot like Polly's killer, Richard Allen Davis, you're right. Not only does every community have a Polly or a Cora, but unfortunately, it may have a Davis or a Spanbauer as well.

What can be done to protect our children? First, there are countless precautionary habits we can adopt and teach to our children which promote safety. The Klaas Foundation for Children has compiled an excellent Child Identification Package full of tips and ideas on how to keep our kids out of harm's way (see the accompanying article on talking to your kids about safety, page 6). Neighborhood Watch organizations are also great. They promote community involvement and get everyone in the habit of watching out for their neighbors' best interests.

Of course, these actions alone cannot guarantee the prevention of the next Polly or the next Cora. There is only one sure way to do that—we must change our laws to keep monsters like Richard Allen Davis and David Spanbauer off the street and away from our children.

The Klaas Agenda Initiatives

With that in mind, I recently worked with Marc Klaas to formulate a Klaas Agenda for Wisconsin. This agenda consists of four initiatives which are applicable to any state.

Two Strikes for Child Molesters: Any criminal convicted twice for violent sexual offenses against a child will be sentenced to prison for life without the possibility of parole.

Children's Privacy Protection: This legislation will prohibit the sale of personal information about children without parental consent. It also empowers parents to request from list brokers the source of their information and the entities which request data on their child. Amazingly, nearly anyone can now call a list broker and obtain personal information about our children—where they live, their names, gender, etc. This is unacceptable.

Lifetime Monitoring of Sexual Offenders: This measure gives judges the option to sentence most sex offenders to some kind of state monitoring for the rest of their lives. We want to send a clear message to these criminals—we are watching and you had better not slip up.

Death Penalty for Child Murders: If you intentionally take the life of a child, you deserve to die. It is as simple as that.

Each of these proposals have at their core one simple objective: keeping criminals away from our children. Both Richard Allen Davis and David Spanbauer had previously committed crimes which should have had them serving time instead of out committing murders. In other words, Polly and Cora's deaths could have been prevented.

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Green Bay Effort Rallies Support

With the help of local businessman Jim Prast, Marc Klaas was able to come to Green Bay, Wisconsin, and help us announce this agenda. We dedicated our work to the memory of his daughter and the thousands of other victims like Polly and Cora. The response has been overwhelming. I have received a great deal of support



Mark Green (right) and Marc Klaas launch the Klaas Agenda campaign effort in Green Bay, WI.

from colleagues in the legislature and numerous citizens who want to help me pass this agenda into law.

Our legal system has evolved to the point where it values the rights of the criminal over the rights of the victim. It was not supposed to be this way, and we need to change it back. The Klaas Agenda is a good start.

In the constant struggle of good versus evil in our society today, it seems that evil is too often the victor. Marc Klaas taught me that. He also taught me that the good guys are fed up, and it's time we fought back. We can do that by forming Neighborhood Watch groups, working with the Klaas Foundation for Children to fingerprint and photo-ID the kids in your community, and teaching our own kids to stay away from strangers. However, we mustn't forget that the most effective way to keep our kids safe is to keep criminals off the street, and our laws need to reflect that goal.

In preparation for Marc Klaas' visit to Green Bay, I had my office search the Internet for old press clippings on the Polly Klaas story. I have to admit that I had trouble reading through the articles. I was disturbed by the saga of Polly's abduction and murder. I was angered by

Richard Allen Davis' callous actions and hateful attitude toward Marc. However, with all due respect, those facts, as horrible as they are, were not my biggest concern. I have three children. I now know that any one of them could be the next Polly or the next Cora. That scares me, and as a legislator I intend to make it my mission to keep the next Davis or the next Spanbauer away from my children and yours.

What You Can Do

While in Green Bay, a report asked Marc Klaas a question I myself wondered, "Why you?" I will never forget Marc's response or the stern look on his face when he said, "They picked on the wrong guy this time."

We all should have that fire in our belly—your daughter or son could be the next Polly. I encourage you to contact your local legislator and find out what the laws are in your state. Then, ask them to introduce the points of this agenda which are not already in the law. If they have questions, have them contact me at by phone at 608/261-9474 or by writing to the Office of State Representative Mark Green, P.O. Box 8952, Madison, WI, 53708-8952. I will gladly send them a copy of these proposals. ■

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FEAR IS NOT THE ANSWER: TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT SAFETY

By Robert Stuber, Founder of Kid Watch and author of "Missing"

Over the years I have participated in more television, radio, and newspaper interviews than I can count. At some point during each interview, an old and familiar question recurs: "How do you teach children to be safe without scaring them?" My answer is always the same, "Fear is not the enemy. Denial is!"

The subject of child safety scares parents more than it does children. Children have a tremendous capacity to learn and draw conclusions from information that they receive. It is wrong to withhold information designed to enhance a child's life because we are afraid of scaring the child. If you do not sensationalize, but speak from a position of compassion and love, fear will not be the end result.

What may easily frighten your children, however, is seeing and hearing fragments of tragic stories about other children unfold in the media. If no one follows up by talking about it, they are left with only the frightening atmosphere of the story. Missing children in the news too often become the only catalyst for opening a dialogue between adult and child on the subject. At times like these, adults may be so horrified by the event that they pass on more fear to their child than they do instruction.

Raising Safety-Minded Children

To raise safety minded children, you must talk to them regularly, not just when there is a breaking news story. You must be willing to take on some pretty unsavory subjects, such as

child predators, drugs, and violence. But, if you deny these realities, they will come back to haunt you in one form or another. When it comes to teaching your child the important lessons in life, there is no one more qualified than you. Don't be afraid to trust your parental instincts.

In my travels I have had the wonderful opportunity of meeting and talking with parents around the country. Two main issues continue to surface.

1. What can we do to help change our communities and the country to make them safer for children?
2. What is the best way to start teaching our children about safety issues?

To these questions I suggest the following.

First, develop a productive and intimate relationship with an organization dedicated to changing the laws in this country on behalf of child safety: an organization that understands and advocates on behalf of children, and fights to stay on the cutting edge of research, information, and change. The Klaas Foundation for Children is leading the way for child advocates across America. Remember, fear is the enemy. The only way to defeat it is through good solid information.

Second, do the following exercise with your child to get the ball rolling.

An Exercise for Your Children: Action I.D.

Teaching a child how to recognize a good action, as opposed to a bad one, is far more productive than trying to identify the difference between a

good and or a bad person by appearance. Most adults cannot even do this, so what makes us think a child can? An action, however, can be seen and discerned before a person can get close enough to the child to become a danger. There are two steps to the exercise listed below.

Step 1: Find out how your child identifies "strangers." Give your child some paper and crayons and ask him or her to draw a good stranger and a bad one. Many times the child will draw the good stranger as someone that looks friendly and the bad one as someone that looks dirty and frightening. In reality, the predators that pose the greatest danger to children are masters at appearing friendly. This is how they disarm children for the first contact.

Step 2: Now you can gently and clearly show your child that they can't really tell what a person's motives are by how they look; but that they can by how they act. Define good actions and bad ones and begin to point them out to your child on a regular basis—an action a week is a good pace. Where do you find the information you need to define good and bad actions? In your daily life, in information gathered from your child safety organization, and so on. Examples are all around you.

Examples of Good and Bad Actions

For instance, you and your child are standing together at the grocery store. An elderly gentleman walks up, pats your child on the head and says, "My, what a fine looking youngster." After talking to you for a moment, he walks away. Was he a

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stranger? Yes. Was he a bad stranger? No.

It's OK to pay compliments, but what's not OK is if, instead of walking up to you, the man tries to get your child's attention and lure him away from you. Was he a stranger? Yes. Was he a bad stranger? Yes! Not because of his appearance, but because of his action.

Another example: Your teenager is waiting for you in the shopping mall parking lot when a man in a leg cast, carrying several heavy packages, approaches her. The man asks your daughter to help him take the packages to his car. Is this an appropriate action? No! The man should seek assistance from a mall merchant, not a young girl waiting for a ride. Parking lots are big and there is no telling what will happen when you reach the vehicle. We are taught to assist those in need, but mass murderer Ted Bundy used this classic assistance lure during his infamous crime spree.

And one more: Little Billy loves to go online and enter Internet chat rooms. He gets into conversation with 12-year-old Mary. Soon Billy and Mary have told each other all about themselves, including where they live and go to school. This behavior is totally inappropriate—the possibility exists that 12-year-old Mary is really 45-year-old Chester the Molester.

There are many action examples that you can share with your children to teach how to keep themselves safer. Just remember: Keep it simple, be creative, and don't be scared. Get smart! ■

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To join the Klaas Foundation for Children, please fill out this form and return it to the address below. Your tax-deductible membership costs just \$15.00 per year, and includes a subscription to the quarterly *Klaas Action Review*, with news and information, practical tips, events, and more.

For no charge, members may also receive:

- Information on starting a National Community Empowerment program.
- Safety information for your children.
- Information about how to support legislation against crime in your state.
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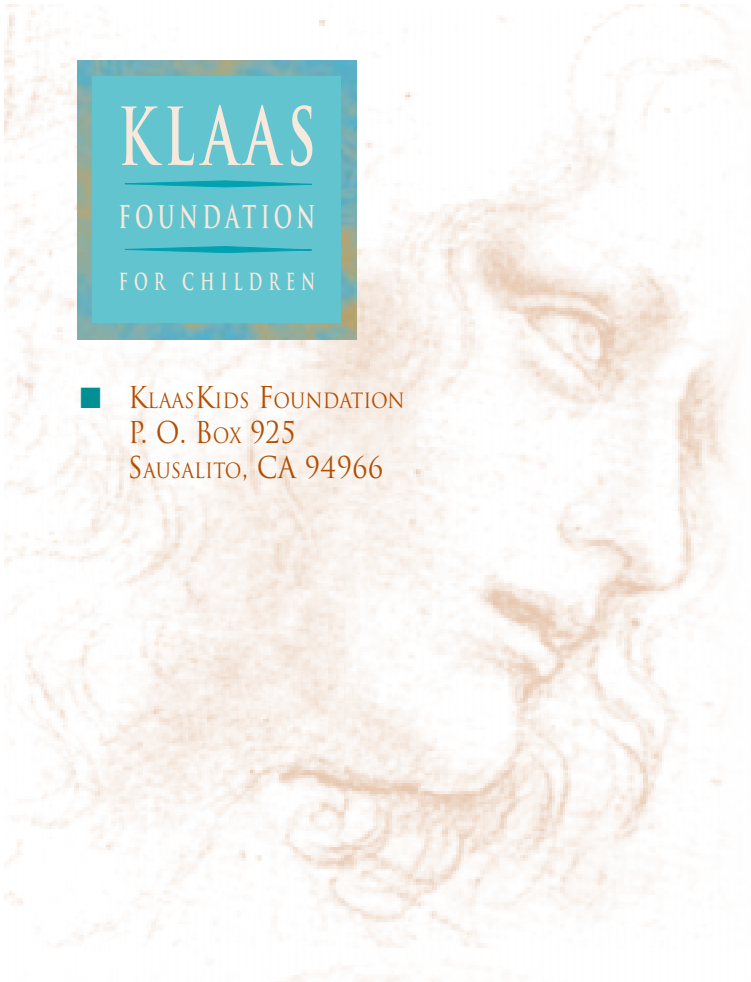
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