



Florida Missing Endangered Persons Information  
Clearinghouse Advisory Board

## MISSING & ENDANGERED

# NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025 / ISSUE 15



# 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, which will be held Monday, September 8, 2025. For more information regarding the MEPICAB, Florida Missing Children's Day or FMCDF, visit [www.fmcdf.org](http://www.fmcdf.org).

Missing & Endangered





# SUMMER SAFETY

## *Preventing Drowning in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

By: Jennifer Cicia, M.Ed., BCBA, Autism Disorders Specialist

UCF Center for Autism and Related Disabilities | College of Health Professions and Sciences

In 2024, a tragic total of 105 children drowned in Florida, with 28 of these children having autism. This statistic is particularly alarming as it highlights a disproportionate risk for children with autism compared to their neurotypical peers. While most children typically drown in their own backyard pools, children with autism often drown after wandering to nearby lakes, ponds, neighbors' pools, or other bodies of water.

The key to preventing drowning in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is to ensure they cannot access water without parental supervision and permission. The University of Central Florida Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (UCF CARD) has developed a comprehensive "layers of protection" approach to address this issue. This approach includes:

- **ADDRESSING WATER SAFETY ISSUES WITHIN THE HOME:** Ensuring that all potential water hazards are identified and mitigated.
- **LOCKS AND DOOR ALARMS:** Installing locks and alarms on all exterior doors and windows to alert caregivers if a child attempts to leave the home without supervision.
- **FENCING:** Erecting barriers around pools and other bodies of water to prevent unsupervised access. Also fencing property to put another barrier between a child and water when possible.
- **CONTACT WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT:** Establishing a communication plan with local law enforcement to quickly respond if a child with autism goes missing. Parents are encouraged to participate in any special needs registry programs that local law enforcement offer to cut down on the time required to share information when an emergency happens. Parents should always call 911 IMMEDIATELY after realizing that their child is missing.
- **NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNICATION PLAN:** Informing trusted neighbors about the child's tendency to wander and having a plan to contact them so that they can check water immediately if a child goes missing.
- **TRACKING DEVICES:** Using GPS tracking devices to locate the child quickly during an emergency.
- **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:** UCF CARD has developed programming to assist parents with teaching children with autism the importance of not entering water without permission.
- **SWIMMING LESSONS:** Participating in high quality swimming lessons tailored to children with autism to enhance their water safety skills.

Taking a layered approach ensures that even if one layer fails, there are still multiple safeguards in place to prevent a tragedy. By implementing these strategies, we can significantly reduce the risk of drowning among children with autism and create a safer environment for all children. Parents and professionals can reach out to UCF CARD at (407) 823-6011 for more information about how to keep autistic children safe from wandering and drowning. UCF CARD's [training video](#) on drowning prevention can also be accessed by scanning the QR code.





# Florida Missing Children's Day

This year, Florida Missing Children's Day (FMCD) will be held on Monday, September 8, 2025 at the Tallahassee Automobile Museum, from 10:00am to 11:00am, and the public is invited to attend. Details of the event are posted on the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation website. You may RSVP by scanning the QR code on the invitation below, or by visiting [www.FMCDF.org](http://www.FMCDF.org). Please RSVP by August 15, 2025.

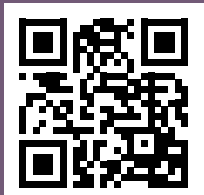


## The Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation

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

FMCD is not a state or federally funded event - it is hosted and funded by the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Foundation is tasked with providing funding and promotional support for FMCD, as well as promoting education in remembrance of Florida's past and present missing children and in recognition of the state's efforts to protect the safety of children through prevention, education and community involvement.

The Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation relies solely on its sponsors and donors to fund FMCD. Any person, business, or agency interested in donating to the Foundation can visit their website at [www.FMCDF.org](http://www.FMCDF.org) or scan the QR code to the right.







# *In Loving Memory*



## TERRI LYNN

*Cherished Advisory Board Member*

Please join us in remembrance of longtime MEPICAB member, Terri Lynn. Terri worked as a successful publicist, and after the tragic murder of Jimmy Ryce in 1995, she became the publicist and close friend of Jimmy's parents, Don and Claudine Ryce, helping them to manage the constant calls and requests for interviews from the media. In 1995, Terri became a part of the Jimmy Ryce Center for Victims of Predatory Abduction, created by Don and Claudine to raise awareness about the plight of missing children and victims' rights. After Don and Claudine's passing, Terri, along with fellow MEPICAB member Mark Young, became codirector of the Jimmy Ryce Center, continuing the important work done to honor Jimmy's memory and protect other children from abduction and violence.



Terri was a recipient of the distinguished Daily Point of Light Award for her work at the Jimmy Ryce Center. Parts of her interview with Points of Light can be found on the two next pages.



# TERRI LYNN'S STORY

Please join us in remembering Terri Lynn, a longtime member of the MEPIC Advisory Board, on receiving a Daily Point of Light Award for her work with the Jimmy Ryce Center. Below, see part of her [interview with Points of Light](#).

## DESCRIBE YOUR VOLUNTEER ROLE WITH THE JIMMY RYCE CENTER.

My whole life profession was being a publicist, which entailed representing unique businesses, people, authors, lawyers and doctors. My job was to arrange interviews, television appearances and articles in newspapers and magazines. It's a passion of mine, and I've been doing it most of my life. But on September 11, 1995, a little boy by the name of Jimmy Ryce was abducted and murdered after getting off of the school bus on his way home.

His parents were constantly getting phone calls from the media while they were distraught, as anybody could be. They started asking around if anyone knew how to handle the media, someone who could help them handle calls and requests for interviews. Next thing you know, my name came up. I was very flattered. There's no handbook for what to do when there's a missing child. It was uncharted territory for me. I've been told that I was the first person in history as a publicist to ever help a family with a missing child. From the get-go, my mission and intention was to work for their family as a volunteer to help. The first call I had with Jimmy's dad on the phone was a life changing moment for me. We had to keep Jimmy's name in the news. Two days after that phone call it would be Jimmy's birthday, and we let the media know that. I've been a part of the Jimmy Ryce Center ever since 1995.

## DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RYCE FAMILY AND HOW THE CENTER WAS CREATED.

I've really been a pro bono volunteer from that first day. My relationship with the Ryce family grew from a working relationship to a dear friendship. We prayed that he was still alive somehow, someday. Sadly, that was not the case. I've been told by people in law enforcement from the FBI that, in cases such as Jimmy's, the parents literally curled up into a ball [in grief] and were really never heard from again. Jimmy's parents were exceptionally smart people who were both attorneys. They wanted to memorialize their son, so that his life would not be in vain.

One thing that stood out in their mind is that, when Jimmy was abducted, law enforcement agencies didn't have a bloodhound. And that was the official start to the Jimmy Ryce Center. I've been with the family as the volunteer spokesperson and media coordinator setting up conferences across the U.S. whenever they were going to present a bloodhound to law enforcement.



*Continued on next page.*





## TERRI LYNN'S STORY *Continued*

### WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED THROUGH YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A VOLUNTEER?

Managing this organization is one of the most rewarding parts of my life. Jimmy's parents once met President Clinton when he was signing an act after Jimmy was abducted. If you had a poster of a missing child, you couldn't post it in a federal building. President Clinton signed an executive order allowing the posting of pictures of missing children. They were also invited to the White House to meet with President George W. Bush. They met with him in the White House and said it was really a very powerful and memorable meeting. So, my mission in life, now that Jimmy's parents are gone, is to keep this organization going in perpetuity.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR OTHERS TO GIVE BACK?

Because it changes lives in ways you will never even know. It's really something that comes from within. I think everybody has something to give in some form, and its life changing. To be able to take your skills or your energy and use them toward something that can change the world. The fact that our bloodhounds help find missing children and adults — I just can't put that into words.

### WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO VOLUNTEER?

Jimmy's parents have both passed away, so we try to continue building the legacy. It's big shoes to fill. But people are still very moved by the story to this day. Awareness is key. I'm not a professional fundraiser, but we do whatever we can to help get the word out. Whenever there's something on the news, such as a milestone regarding the anniversary of Jimmy's passing, donations come in. We keep the legacy going.

### WHAT VALUE DO BLOODHOUNDS BRING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT?

A bloodhound has 60 times the scent power of a German shepherd. It's the only dog that can follow a human trail for more than a few hours. They're the single best bet for bringing a child abducted by a predator home alive. We believe that Jimmy would be alive today if a bloodhound would have been immediately brought in to help.

To date, the Jimmy Ryce Center has donated more than 700 bloodhounds to law enforcement agencies around the world.



*Terri Lynn (right) pictured with Mark Young, co-director of the Jimmy Ryce Center, and Claudine and Don Ryce, parents of Jimmy Ryce.*



# DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

## Types of K9s Used in Missing Persons Cases



### Trailing and Tracking Dogs

Trailing and tracking dogs are both used to locate missing persons. While definitions vary, trailing dogs typically follow an individual scent, and tracking dogs follow disturbances left on the ground. Bloodhounds are the most common breed of dog used for tracking and trailing, but other commonly used breeds include Basset Hounds, Beagles, and German Shepherds.



### Search and Rescue Dogs

Search and rescue (SAR) dogs are trained to respond to crime scenes, missing persons events, accidents, and natural or man-made disasters. They, like trailing and tracking K9s, detect human scent to find humans, whether they are alive or deceased. In many cases, SAR dogs have located people in snow, underwater, under collapsed buildings, and underground.



### Cadaver Dogs

Cadaver dogs, also known as Human Remains Detection (HRD) dogs, are a type of search and rescue K9 uniquely trained to locate the scent of human decomposition and are able to differentiate this scent from other odors. They are utilized in various situations including searching for missing persons, searching for buried or concealed bodies, and locating remains in disaster zones.

## Neglected Pup Becomes a Hero

### *Meet K9 Penny, Indian River County Sheriff's Office's new recruit!*

Penny, a 1-year-old bloodhound, was rescued from a neglectful living situation in North Florida by All Hound Rescue of Florida and was adopted by the Indian River County Sheriff's Office, where she began training for her new role as a K9 Deputy. In February of 2025, she and her handler, Deputy Lewis, graduated from a four-week K9 tracking school hosted by Brevard County Sheriff's Office. Penny passed her national certification test and is now working to save lives in the Search and Rescue Department with Deputy Lewis at Indian River County Sheriff's Office.

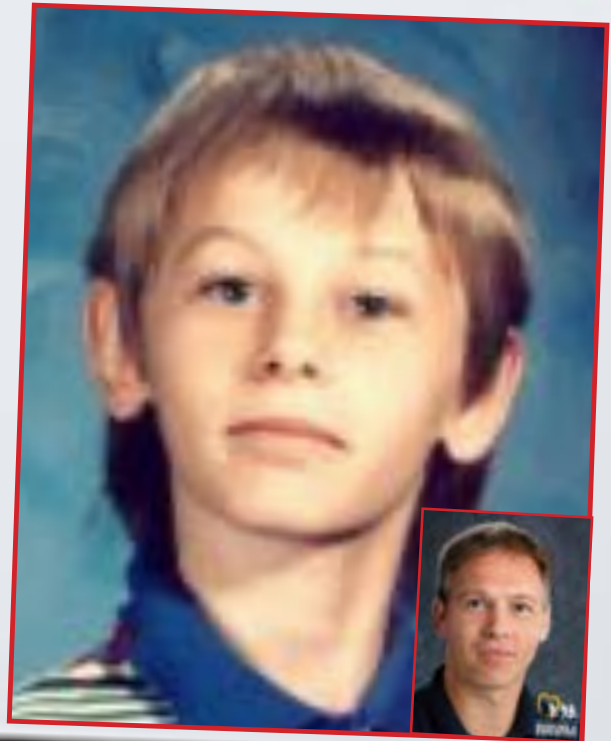




Danny was last seen in the Gainesville, Florida area on August 24, 1989, at the age of 12. He may be in the company of two white males who may have been traveling in a 1978-79 brown 4-door Chevrolet Impala. Danny's photo (bottom right corner) has been age-progressed to 43 years old.

If you have any information about this case, please contact the Gainesville Police Department at 352-334-2411 or the Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse hotline at 1-888-FL-Missing (1-888-356-4774).

## **MISSING** **DANNY JACKSON**



## **MISSING** **KEYONNA COLE**



Keyonna was last seen in the Brooksville, Florida area on February 8, 2019, at the age of 27. She has a tattoo on her right arm inscribed with the word "live".

If you have any information about this case, please contact the Hernando County Sheriff's Office at 352-754-6830 or the Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse hotline at 1-888-FL-Missing (1-888-356-4774).





# Free Online Training Modules for **FIRST RESPONDERS**



By: Torica Exume, Ph.D., Clinical Researcher

Florida Atlantic University (FAU) Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

After years of development and collaboration with advisory board members and active-duty first responders, we are proud to announce the launch of our new online training modules—created to equip first responders with the skills and knowledge needed to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), especially those with co-occurring mental health conditions.

Funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) and developed by FAU CARD, this statewide training initiative is part of our mission to ensure more inclusive, safe, and informed interactions between emergency personnel and the I/DD community.

## **The training course covers essential topics such as:**

- Recognizing signs and characteristics of ASD/I/DD and co-occurring conditions.
- Communication strategies tailored to individuals with varied needs.
- De-escalation techniques to minimize conflicts and promote safety.
- Legal and ethical considerations in responding to individuals with ASD/I/DD.
- Case studies and role-playing scenarios to build practical experience.

## **Module key features:**

- Flexible, self-paced format to fit any schedule.
- Real-life scenarios featuring individuals with lived experience.
- Practical strategies for de-escalation, communication, and recognizing mental health challenges.
- Train-the-trainer materials for long-term, scalable implementation.

These dynamic modules are designed for law enforcement, EMS, firefighters, 911 operators, and other emergency responders who want to approach every encounter with empathy, clarity, and confidence. Best of all, they can be completed in just one day! By completing this training, first responders will gain critical skills to foster more inclusive and supportive community responses, enhancing outcomes for individuals with I/DD during emergencies.

## **Ready to Enroll?**

Access the training now via Canvas, and join us in creating a more prepared and responsive system for individuals with I/DD across Florida.

For enrollment or to schedule a department-wide rollout, contact:

Dr. Torica Exume  
[texume@fau.edu](mailto:texume@fau.edu)

Let's continue building a safer, more inclusive Florida - one responder at a time.

