



In Los Angeles County and elsewhere, few things mobilize communities like an Amber Alert. The child abduction notification system – with its piercing, emergency broadcast alarm and digital freeway alerts – is a surefire way to put everyone on notice that a child is in danger.

While Amber Alerts may prompt mental images of strangers abducting unsuspecting, panic-stricken children, Peter Ngo with the Child Abduction Unit (CAU) of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) says there are times when a child’s safety may be put at risk by someone closer to home.

Abductions by family members sometimes occur in the child welfare system. Thus, social workers must be ready to assist investigators at a moment’s notice. Because, in these instances, minutes matter and readily available information may prove most valuable, the department recently unveiled its own web-based application for social workers facing the abduction of a DCFS-supervised child.

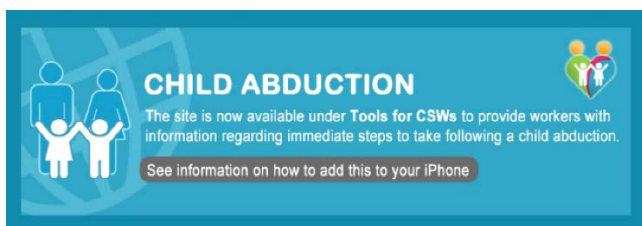


The Child Abduction Unit pictured left to right: Alexandra Ronces, Leticia Ozaeta, Jeanette Mateos and Peter Ngo.

The new app gives these workers a step-by-step guide to facilitate the process with basic information like how to file a police report and what to bring to a police station.

Peter, a supervising children’s social worker whose Monterey Park-based team is comprised of three others who serve as advisers to colleagues in the field, said the app will enhance their ability to provide timely guidance to field staff as they navigate the pressing circumstances surrounding a child abduction.

The CAU supports investigative efforts by summarizing existing case histories, identifying potential leads and coordinating with law enforcement as needed. The unit monitors about 200 cases at any given time, working closely with county attorneys, prosecutors, mental health advocates and nonprofit agencies that specialize in missing children.



These cross-sector partnerships allow the CAU to provide more holistic support to colleagues and, most importantly, increase the accessibility of resources that can significantly improve chances for the safe return of a child.

“This work is tough and there generally is no instant gratification or resolution,” Peter said. “Despite that, my team and I care deeply about doing everything we can to help vulnerable children who have lost their entire support system through no fault of their own.”

The app was developed over a seven-month span by the CAU, Business Information Systems and Child Protection Hotline in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Office of County Counsel.

Report Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect to 800-540-4000

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