

Resource Guide

Lost Among The Homeless: Locating Missing Persons with Mental Illness



OutpostforHope

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Introduction

This booklet defines the social problem of missing persons with mental illness who are often lost among the homeless. It also provides guidance for families and caregivers in the critical steps of filing a missing persons report and having the lost person listed in the appropriate local and national databases.

Additionally, this guide offers important information to assist in creating a Recovery Plan *prior* to a lost loved one being located.

Additional information regarding coping strategies, The Missing Link Registry Project, and other helpful resources can be found through out.

The booklet is divided into the following sections:

- Missing Checklist
- Now What? Recovery Plan Guidelines
- Cope With Hope (How to Take Care of Yourself)
- The Missing Link Registry Project
- NCIC and NamUs databases

To begin, fill out the Missing checklist and follow the steps listed. Then move on to the Recovery Plan Guidelines and complete that section as best you can. It may be helpful to get a three-hole punch notebook binder with folders/pockets so that you can keep track of all information, copies of reports, missing person flyers and additional notes to reference quickly when needed.

Lost Among The Homeless:

Missing Persons with Mental Illness often fall into gaps of chronic homelessness, exploitation and harm.

Nearly 110,000 **reported** missing persons are in the National Crime Information Center database. Yet, **thousands of missing persons are not accounted for in this database.**

Many have mental illness. For 11 years, Outpost for Hope has trained police officers, mental health advocates and others to work together to help locate and recover the most vulnerable people.

Some Facts:

Approximately 50% of homeless people suffer from mental health issues. 25% have serious mental illness such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and chronic depression.

National Alliance to End Homelessness

About 50% of individuals with severe mental disorders are affected by substance abuse.

Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)

Approximately 200,000 individuals with schizophrenia or manic-depressive illness are homeless. *Treatment Advocacy Center*

More people with untreated psychiatric illnesses live on America's streets than are receiving care in hospitals.

Treatment Advocacy Center

Some Facts Continued:

Approximately 110,000 missing adults and children reported (official missing person reports) in the National Crime Information Database.

- Approximately 1/3 of those are categorized as endangered mentally or physically disabled.
- In 2006, 31,000 mentally or physically disabled adults were reported missing in the U.S.

Outpost for Hope research points to at least **1 million unreported as missing persons** (“the missing, missing”) who may be lost among the homeless.

- Many of these may be missing and/or otherwise unaccounted for with mental illness.

Why Are Some Lost People Unreported As Missing?

- ❖ Lost/Missing Person may be estranged from family/friends and no missing persons report is filed.
- ❖ Family/Caregiver of Missing Person may not be successful in filing a missing persons report with a Law Enforcement agency.
- ❖ Lost/Missing Person is an undocumented person. (Such as an unknown immigrant from another country)
- ❖ Lost/Missing Person is an unknown and unaccounted for dependent child who may be with an unreported as missing adult or teenage runaway for example.



Missing Person Checklist

- ❖ Contact the local, county, or state law enforcement agency to make a missing person report. You do not have to contact all three if one opens an investigation.

Missing Person Report Filed with this Agency:

- ❖ Obtain the local case number, ask for a copy of the report and check it for accuracy. Write down the detective or investigator's name, telephone number, and extension. Keep notes and dates of each conversation. Case # _____
- ❖ Immediately create a bullet point list in chronological order of your loved one's medical, mental health and/or substance abuse history to present day. Include known diagnoses, behavioral issues, prescription medications, past arrests, voluntary/involuntary commitments to treatment facilities, etc. Inform police of any known

issues that would classify your loved one as being endangered, or as missing with mental illness.

- ❖ Request the police enter the missing person's information into the National Crime Information Center's (NCIC) database and obtain the NCIC number. (Starts with "M" followed by nine numeric digits, M-123456789). Ask for a copy of the NCIC report and check it for accuracy.

NCIC # _____

- ❖ Ask if the investigators need DNA, fingerprints, and dental records. Get duplicates made of any dental records and keep your original set in a safe place. In California, law enforcement is required to ask the missing person's family to voluntarily submit a DNA sample. (Section 14250 of the California Penal Code) Find out the law in your state.
- ❖ Once you have a missing persons report filed with a law enforcement agency; you can enter your loved ones' information in the National Missing and

Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) located at <https://www.findthemissing.org>

- ❖ Prepare a one-page flyer that includes one or more recent pictures of the missing person, along with his or her vital statistics (age, height, weight, hair color, eye color, clothes last seen wearing, last known location, etc.).

- ❖ Ask the police to issue a press release from their department to local media asking the public for assistance to search for the missing person.

- ❖ Circulate missing person posters except in locations prohibited by city codes. Ask the managers or owners of convenience stores, malls, businesses, and other high traffic areas to post a flyer of the missing person. Distribute flyers to hospitals, jails, homeless shelters, county mental health facilities, bus stations, rest stops, train stations, and medical examiners/coroners. Keep the missing person flyer up to date with the correct law enforcement contact. Never put your own contact

information on a flyer as it may put you in a vulnerable position.

- ❖ Be proactive and ask how you can support the efforts of law enforcement. Check in periodically, be polite in your requests and say thank you often. Notify the law enforcement agency of any tips, leads, or if the missing person is located. Update any advocacy organizations that are assisting you of any developments in the case.

Visit Outpost for Hope at www.outpostforhope.org and NAMI at www.nami.org for additional tips and resources for persons who are missing with mental illness and/or are homeless.

NOTES:

Now What? Recovery Plan

These guidelines are designed to support the reunification process of a missing person with his/her family and/or caregivers. It is essential to have a Recovery Plan in place prior to locating your loved one, especially if he or she has mental illness issues and/or has been homeless. This information is based on the collective education of our founder's experience, numerous families in crisis, and our advisory team of mental health, substance abuse, and crisis intervention professionals. It is imperative that families of loved ones with mental illness and/or co-occurring substance abuse educate themselves on how to obtain help for themselves and a lost family member when possible.

Please note that when missing persons with mental illness over age 21 are located, the police and other agencies cannot hold or ask that they be held against their will if they have not committed a crime. No one has the authority to force the person to seek aid or medical care against his or her will unless there is a medical guardianship or court order specifying what action to take when the individual is found.

Begin the process by creating a bullet point list in chronological order of his/her medical, mental health and/or substance abuse history to present day. Include known

diagnoses, behavioral issues, prescription medications, past arrests, voluntary/involuntary commitments to treatment facilities, etc. Make several copies available in the event you need to share with a medical/psychiatric professional, law enforcement officer, crisis interventionist, etc. Include any previous signed consent forms if you have them.

Begin to answer the following questions on paper as best you can to formulate an action plan. Use the space provided or additional paper if needed.

1. What are his/her known medical and/or mental health problems that may warrant immediate care of a knowledgeable physician/psychiatric professional?
2. Who is familiar with his/her medical and/or mental health history that may help you obtain treatment when he/she is found?
3. At the time he/she is found - you may need to determine if psychiatric treatment is needed and what the laws are in your state for voluntary or involuntary care. You can find an up to date list of psychiatric treatment laws by state regarding involuntary and voluntary commitment at the www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org Be prepared to research

the treatment laws and options for care if he/she is found in a city/state that is different than where you reside and/or from where the person went missing from.

4. Familiarize yourself with guardianship/conservatorship laws in your state (visit NAMI at www.nami.org). Keep in mind you may need to research conservatorship options in the city/state where he/she is found.

5. Once you know the city and state where he/she is located, make a list of local crisis emergency support agencies to contact and begin to do so immediately so that you will know what services are available and how to obtain them. County Mental Health Departments and local NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) affiliate groups are good places to start. Ask the local law enforcement agency if they have a CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) or PERT (Psychiatric Emergency Response Team) that can help get the person to community services such as mental health treatment if necessary.

6. Does he/she have any dependent children who may need to be placed in the care of a relative or foster care

placement? Research the options for keeping children safe and in a consistent care routine. If you are a grandparent raising grandchildren, there may be a support group in your area.

7. Has he/she been living a life on the streets? What is your plan for where he/she can live now? You may need to seek the advice of a social service professional that can assist you in a transitional living/housing plan.

8. If your loved one has a substance abuse problem – what is your plan to get him or her substance abuse treatment? What is your plan if he/she refuses help for treatment? Visit www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org for a list of resources in your community.

9. What is your plan for your personal coping process and other family members? Will you need counseling, NAMI Family to Family classes, or Al-Anon/Nar-Anon support? The next section, “Cope with Hope”, is a good place to start.

NOTES:

Cope With Hope

It is critical to take care of yourself during a time of crisis. Our Cope with Hope Checklist can help you fill in the blanks about what do next.

Create a Support Team of Recovery Allies during Crisis

- ❖ Designate friend/family member to help you review and delegate to do lists and to help you implement the Now What Recovery Plan to support reunification once your loved one is found.
- ❖ Designate someone who can be the family spokesperson/media contact.
- ❖ Contact your local NAMI office to locate mental health family support for yourself and to educate yourself about mental health issues concerning your lost loved one.
- ❖ Become educated about the disease of drug and alcohol addiction and what recovery options are available. Visit www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org for more information and helpful links.
- ❖ Consider what other support you may have in friends, family, neighbors, and your spiritual community.

Take Care of Yourself

- ❖ Try to eat consistent meals and limit or avoid consumption of sugar and junk food.
- ❖ Avoid excess alcoholic beverages and other self-medicating substances. You need to stay clear and focused to help yourself and your loved one.
- ❖ Research stress relief techniques such as guided visualization and meditation.
- ❖ Prioritize your daily routine to organize your tasks, work, and household responsibilities.
- ❖ Schedule 10-20 minutes per day for mild to moderate walking and/or exercise.

Consider Advocacy Work

Advocacy and volunteer work can be a wonderful way to help you deal with your stress, as well as helping others who may benefit from your experience. Do you have a gift for creativity, writing, researching, or speaking? There are many great volunteer organizations that can benefit from your experience when you are ready and this can be one way to help re-direct your focus into something positive.

The Missing Link Registry Project

If you have (or have had) an unreported as missing loved one, help us create solutions by taking part in our landmark research survey: **The Missing Link Registry Project**.



Unreported Missing means the missing person is not listed as missing with any law enforcement agency and is not part of the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database of missing persons. People can be unreported missing for a variety of reasons, including: • the lost/missing person may be estranged from family or friends. • law enforcement may not take a “missing” report • the lost/missing person may be in this country illegally • the person may be an unknown dependent child of an unreported missing adult or runaway. The information you send us will be used for **research that will help shed light on this problem and offer insight to better solutions**. We will not use your story publicly without your express permission. Visit www.outpostforhope.org to participate online.

What is NCIC?

NCIC is a computerized index of criminal justice information (criminal record history information, fugitives, stolen properties, missing and unidentified persons). It is available to Federal, state, and local law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies and is operational 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

What is the purpose of NCIC?

The purpose for maintaining the NCIC system is to provide a computerized database for ready access by a criminal justice agency making an inquiry and for prompt disclosure of information in the system from other criminal justice agencies about crimes and criminals. This information assists authorized agencies in criminal justice and related law enforcement objectives, such as apprehending fugitives, locating missing persons, locating and returning stolen property, as well as in the protection of the law enforcement officers encountering the individuals described in the system.

Why should a missing person be listed in NCIC?

The system checks for 'potential matches' between unidentified persons and missing persons. If a person is located in a separate state such as California but he/she disappeared from Florida, if both the missing and unidentified reports are in the NCIC system it increases the odds of an accurate identification vs. each state agencies unaware of the other's potential match cases.

How can a missing person be added to the NCIC database?

Only the law enforcement agency handling a missing persons case can enter their local case into the National Crime Information Center. You should get a copy of the local case report and also inquire if a report has been made into the NCIC system. Check both the reports for accuracy as the system automatically checks vital details for any potential matches with unidentified remains.

How does the system make a match between a missing person and an unidentified person?

The system can only make a match if all unidentified body reports and all missing person reports are entered into the system. The current number of unidentified persons in the NCIC system is approximately 6,000 nationwide. However, Outpost for Hope and other forensic experts estimate the true number of unreported unidentified cases to be over 40,000. If a person is not reported as missing in the NCIC database- no match can be made.

What is NamUs?

The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) is a clearinghouse for missing persons and unidentified decedent records. NamUs is a free online system that can be searched by medical examiners, coroners, law enforcement officials and the general public to solve these cases.

The Unidentified Decedents Database contains information entered by medical examiners and coroners. Unidentified decedents are people who have died and whose bodies have not been identified. Anyone can search this database using characteristics such as sex, race, distinct body features and even dental information. The Missing Persons Database contains information about missing persons that can be entered by anyone; before it appears as a case on NamUs, the information is verified.

NamUs provides the ability to print missing persons posters and even map out possible travel routes in a search for a missing person. Other resources include links to state clearinghouses, medical examiner and coroner offices, law enforcement agencies, victim assistance groups and pertinent legislation.

When a new missing persons or unidentified decedent case is entered into NamUs, the system automatically performs

cross-matching comparisons between the databases, searching for matches or similarities between cases. NamUs also provides free DNA testing and other forensic services, such as anthropology and odontology assistance.

NOTES:

About the Author

Libba Phillips, Founder of Outpost For Hope

www.outpostforhope.org

Libba is a social activist, public speaker, and writer bringing awareness to 'the missing, missing' and 'the kids off the grid'; phrases she coined to describe the invisible population of unreported as missing children and adults. These unaccounted for lost ones often end up as silent victims of exploitation, human trafficking and harm.

Libba, a self-described 'Hopeful Navigator of the Lost Highway', is a graduate of Sacramento County Child Protective Services Citizen's Academy, a member of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and has a Certificate of Training with the State of CA Dept. of Justice on Missing and Unidentified Persons. She has been an invited speaker at several community events and a workshop presenter at the National Crisis Intervention Team Conference and National NAMI Convention. Her mission to bring awareness about 'the missing, missing' has been mentioned in several national publications including People magazine and Reader's Digest. As an independent artist, Libba has exhibited her work in galleries across the U.S. and is the creator of The Lost Highway Project. Libba founded Outpost for Hope in 1999 after her sister Ashley, who was struggling with bipolar disorder and drug addiction, disappeared. For speaking and media inquiries, please visit: www.libbaphillips.com



OutpostforHope

Be informed. Take action. Have hope.

www.outpostforhope.org