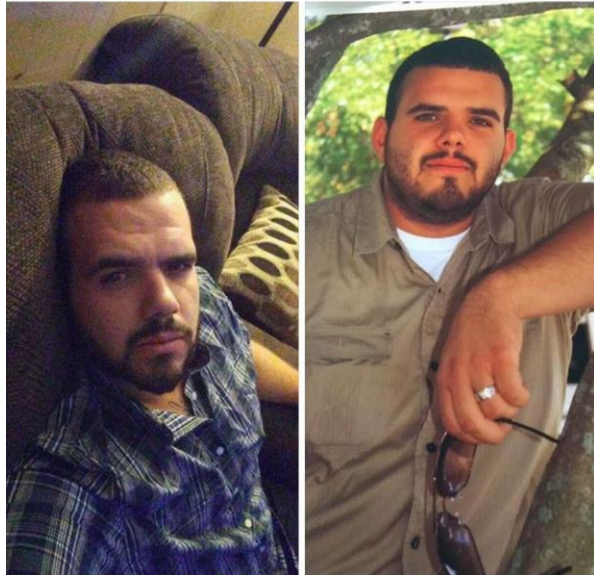


Families turn out for help finding their missing loved ones

Cindy George, Houston Chronicle

June 10, 2017 Updated: June 10, 2017 8:46 p.m.



NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

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MISSING

HELP BRING ME HOME NCMEC: 1288380

Misael Salas Baldit



Missing Since: **Feb 7, 2017**
Missing From: **Channelview, TX**
DOB: **Aug 26, 2000**
Age Now: **16**
Sex: **Male**
Race: **Hispanic**
Hair Color: **Brown**
Eye Color: **Brown**
Height: **5'5"**
Weight: **210 lbs**

Misael was last seen on February 7, 2017.

DON'T HESITATE!
ANYONE HAVING INFORMATION SHOULD CONTACT

CALL 911 or
1-800-843-5678 (1-800-THE-LOST®)
Harris County Sheriff's Office (Texas) 1-713-221-6000


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MISSING

HELP BRING ME HOME NCMEC: 1279023


Paula Medrano



Missing Since: **Sep 3, 2016**
Missing From: **Houston, TX**
DOB: **Jul 26, 2001**
Age Now: **15**
Sex: **Female**
Race: **Hispanic**
Hair Color: **Black**
Eye Color: **Brown**
Height: **5'2"**
Weight: **80 lbs**

Jennifer and Paula were last seen on September 3, 2016. When Paula was last seen, her hair was dyed auburn.

associated children



Jennifer Medrano
Missing Since: **Sep 3, 2016**
Missing From: **Houston, TX**
Age Now: **12**

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MISSING

HELP BRING ME HOME NCMEC: 1293014

Nicholas Rios



Missing Since: **Mar 31, 2017**
Missing From: **Houston, TX**
DOB: **Nov 27, 1999**
Age Now: **17**
Sex: **Male**
Race: **Hispanic**
Hair Color: **Black**
Eye Color: **Brown**
Height: **5'10"**
Weight: **200 lbs**

Nicholas was last seen on March 31, 2017.

DON'T HESITATE!
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CALL 911 or
1-800-843-5678 (1-800-THE-LOST®)
Harris County Sheriff's Office (Texas) 1-713-221-6000

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children recent posters of Houston-area children as of June 9, 2017.
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

They came from as far away as New Braunfels and Bastrop, sharing their DNA, their photos and their anguish over missing loved ones.

By the end of the third annual Missing in Harris County Day, 10 families had submitted DNA samples and dozens more learned about the safekeeping of people with dementia.

Among those seeking answers Saturday were the relatives of Rodrigo Jorge De la Garza Jr., 28, who was last seen in Houston on Jan. 18 following a family dinner at Chili's the night before.

He is the father of a little girl who turns 4 Sunday.

"We've been looking for him for all this time and we don't have any answers about where he's gone or who took him," said his father, Rodrigo De la Garza Sr.

The pair worked together in excavation, digging holes for swimming pools.

"I saw him every day," De la Garza Sr. said. "There has to be something. He always calls. This time? No call at all. ... We don't know if he's still alive."

Two family members submitted DNA samples and relatives shared photos from their cellphones.

About 100 people representing 30 missing persons turned out for the event at the Houston Food Bank Conference Center on the city's east side. Some were seeking relatives missing for years; others were new to the journey of living without answers.

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences held the first event in 2015 to help people connect with resources and organizations that could assist them in finding their missing, abducted or exploited loved one.

Attendees were asked to bring photos of the missing person and other documents that might be helpful, including dental records, X-rays or police reports. Since its inception, the program has resulted in the identification of 12 deceased individuals and the location of one living person, an institute spokeswoman said.

Jo Ann Lowitzer, from Spring, wore a memorial T-shirt with photographs of her daughter, Alexandria Lowitzer – known as "Ali" – who was 16 when she disappeared on April 26, 2010. Ali boarded the bus at Spring High School and exited at the usual stop in her neighborhood.

Surveillance video shows her leaving the bus and witnesses corroborated that evidence.

"That's how we know what she was wearing," her mother said.

Ali never showed up to her job at the Burger Barn. Never came home. And never called.

It's been more than seven years. She would be 23 now.

"We think somebody took her for human trafficking," her mother said.

The family's private investigator has collected clues that strengthen the trafficking theory, including evidence of Ali's email being accessed over the years from Las Vegas and other out-of-state locations. Jo Ann Lowitzer said she'd like the Harris County Sheriff's Office to work more closely with her to solve the case.

The crusade for her daughter has blossomed into efforts that assist other families. She was the catalyst for state recognizing April 26 as Texas Missing Person Day, and she brought along copies of the resolution to share with others.

The Houston Police Department also offered tips for caregivers struggling to keep up with family members who have Alzheimer's or other types of dementia.

Houston Officer Darrin Buse described one case in which an older man was accused of lewdness in a store after he emerged from the restroom, approached a woman and repeatedly motioned to his crotch. Police were called.

But the man did not commit a crime, Buse said. He had dementia and approached someone who resembled his caregiver for help fastening his pants.

That man had impaired motor skills, one of the effects of brain deterioration that cause people with dementia to be misunderstood.

Wandering can also be a problem for caregivers. Depending on the circumstances, law enforcement agencies will issue a "Silver Alert" for a missing older person much like the "Amber Alert" for a missing child.

Buse, who works in HPD's missing persons unit, offered suggestions for limiting wandering. A curtain shielding a door can be a simple way to deter someone from an exit. A black mat at a doorway may be interpreted as a deep pit and avoided.

Disconnecting the battery to a loved one's car is a tried-and-true way to avoid drive-offs and sidestep confrontations about confiscating keys.

There is no need to wait 24 hours to report someone missing.

"A missing person with Alzheimer's is an emergency," Buse said. The same applies to missing children.

Two-thirds of the 566 lost and missing people reported to HPD in April were children, according to a Chronicle review of missing persons reports. The month's cases included 157 missing juveniles, 231 runaway minors and 178 missing adults. Read about how Houston police handle these cases and what prompted the "Missing in Harris County Day" campaign on HoustonChronicle.com.

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~End~