

# Families of missing seek clarity for what happens, how they can help

Michael Slaten, Houston Chronicle | April 27, 2019



*Yentl Brooks, 33, gets emotional during a Missing in Harris County Day butterfly release ceremony on Saturday, April 27, 2019, in Houston. Brooks' aunt Veronda Kay Sanders, 61, has been missing since October 17th, 2018.*

Marie D. De Jesús, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer

Relatives of missing 60-year-old Veronda Kay Sanders feel detached in the process of finding their aunt. In the six months she's been missing, they said rarely do they get updates on what's being done to find her.

"We just feel like she's in a pile," said Sander's niece, LoRinda Roy.

Dozens of families came Saturday to the Children's Assessment Center for Missing in Harris County Day to update their missing loved one's files and get clarity on the search process. DNA swabs also were taken that were to be sent to the University of North Texas for examination and entered into a database.

Sanders went missing on Oct. 17, 2018 while riding her bike in South Park.

Roy said she's one of four women in to have gone missing in the neighborhood recently. The family said they are frustrated in how they don't know what happened after they reported Sanders missing, and how there was no follow-up.

"Something is broken in the system," Roy, 45, said.

Yentle Brooks, another niece of Sanders, said Saturday she entered her missing aunt into NamUs, a national database of records for missing people.

Law enforcement officials explained their process when they get a missing persons case, and what the families should be doing.

"We don't know the families of the missing," said Houston Police Detective Darrin Buse, a 22-year veteran the missing persons unit. "But we have to get to know that family really fast."

Police need to know about difficulties the person might have, including medical issues, he said. Buse also advised families to contact their neighborhood hospitals, even though HPD contacts several larger Houston hospitals such as Ben Taub.

The Harris County medical examiner's office had notebooks containing pictures and descriptions of around 350 unidentified remains. Some of the remains date back to the mid-1950s, said Dr. Deborah Pinto, identification manager with the medical examiner.

A panel of people who have had missing loved ones for a long time gave advice for handling emotions, law enforcement and the media. There was also a roundtable discussion for families of missing loved ones to console each other.

Buse said they get 25 new cases a day, about half of which are classified as runaways.

A record number of people attended the fifth such Missing in Harris County Day, signaling that people are trying to help find their loved ones but also that more have gone missing.

"I wish we weren't here," said founder and Director of Texas EquuSearch Tim Miller. "Every year the rooms get bigger."