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Kansas Internet Crime Initiative

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TECHNOLOGY TALK

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ith the advent of the Internet there has been increasing pressure on law enforcement to investigate computer-related crime. Such investigations typically cross jurisdictional boundaries and require the cooperation of multiple police agencies. To meet the challenges of today's technology, the Kansas Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, comprising one detective from the Wichita, Kansas, Police Department and one detective from the Sedgwick County, Kansas, Sheriff's Office, takes a multifaceted approach to address computer-related crimes against children.

Task Force Pursues Criminals, Educates Adults and At-Risk Children

The Kansas Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, a 2006 winner of the IACP-iXP Excellence in Technology Award, has three primary functions.

Identify and apprehend persons using electronic means to victimize children. The task force's two detectives have worked more than 250 cases of computer-related crimes against children, resulting in 146 cases charged or forwarded to other agencies for further investigation. They have worked 45 so-called traveler cases involving suspects who agreed to travel to meet children with whom they have established contact with on the Internet. All 45 traveler cases resulted in felony convictions. The detectives conducted two investigations of crimes involving AOL (America Online) chat rooms, and these investigations led to the identification of 120 suspects in 30 states and two countries. The task force also participates in a wide variety of criminal investigations conducted by local, state, and federal agencies.

Assist other law enforcement agencies in investigations and training. Since 2002 the Kansas Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force has been training investigators in Kansas and Missouri. It helped develop the Protect our Children Conference hosted by the U.S. attorneys' offices in the Districts of Kansas, Western Missouri, Eastern Missouri, Nebraska, and Southern Illinois. The task force has also committed funds to several agencies to help create cybercrime units.

Educate the community in the dangers associated with the use of the Internet. The detectives have visited schools, churches, community groups, and other organizations and presented information about computer safety for children. Since 2002 more than 10,000 children and adults have received this important information as a direct result of the detectives' efforts.

Task Force Teams with College Athletes to Reach Kids

The task force has developed two successful model programs that bring law enforcement officials, athletes, educators, and at-risk children together at a college campus for a day of sports and learning. One, called Shocks, Cops, and Kids, is held annually at Wichita State University. The other, called Hawks, Cops, and Kids, is held at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Together the events are known as College, Cops, and Kids.

Typically held on a Saturday, College, Cops, and Kids programs feature instruction and contests in basketball, volleyball, and track and field events, among other sports. They also include sessions designed to teach children how to stay safe on the Internet, stay away from drugs, and stay healthy by eating well and getting exercise. Participants receive a free T-shirt and interact with college athletes and coaches who volunteer to work with the kids during the day.

The cost of the College, Cops, and Kids program is paid primarily through private donations raised by Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Kansas, one of the task force's partners. Other partner organizations, including the Wichita Children's Home and the Salvation Army Adoption Foundation, help give at-risk children an opportunity to interact with law enforcement in a positive manner.

During the three years of developing and implementing the programs, there have been some unexpected outcomes. During the College, Cops, and Kids events, bonds have formed between student athletes and local law enforcement that did not exist before. Kansas Big Brothers and Big Sisters now actively recruit mentors and volunteers both at Wichita State and the University of Kansas. Wichita State University has adopted the College, Cops, and Kids as a community event to be continued indefinitely.

Support of Police Leadership Is Key to Success

The Kansas Internet Crimes Against Children's Task Force is committed to protecting children. The task force takes all aspects of community relations and good law enforcement and combines them to establish a professional, effective, community-oriented task force that is committed to protecting children. Without the support of Sedgwick County Sheriff's Office and the Wichita, Kansas, Police Department's command staff and personnel, this program would have not been possible. ■

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