YOU can help support search and rescue efforts

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hristmas Eve: when most people think of this holiday, we imagine time spent with family—warmth, comfort, happiness. For members of Central North Carolina Search and Rescue (CNCSAR), Christmas Eve 2014 was spent searching for a lost child. The three-year-old was believed to have walked off from his Raleigh home while his parents slept. Once CNCSAR was approved to mobilize by the Raleigh Police Department and Wake County Emergency Management, the child had been missing for at least eight hours.

Five members of CNCSAR assembled at the child’s home just as the last light of day was fading. Although it was unusually warm for December, it had been raining hard all day, and a creek behind the home was roiling in its banks. This was where the first team started their search.

Thanks to extensive training in Lost Person Behavior, our team members knew that if a three-year-old walks off from his home, he is likely being attracted by someone or something. When he realizes he’s lost, he is most likely to become scared and hide, making it more difficult for searchers to find him.

CNCSAR is an all-volunteer organization based in the Triangle. Our members all have full-time jobs in many different areas. We purchase all of our equipment and fund all of our training out of our own pockets. We never charge for our services.

Our equipment consists of 24-hour backpacks (so we can be self-sufficient in the woods), compasses/mapping tools, specialized clothing for all elements, flashlights, ropes, and medical supplies. We train continuously—in 2014, our seven-member team logged over 1200 training hours. Training may consist of classroom time, conferences, or field training. We often train with other search-and-rescue teams in the area, including Wake Canine Search and Rescue, who we called out for assistance on Christmas Eve.

In a missing-person situation, we have to be called out by law enforcement or emergency management, so we spend a lot of time fostering those relationships and training with them as well.

Unfortunately, the Christmas Eve case did not have a good outcome, but in situations like that, we can help provide some closure for the family.

We are a 501(c)(3) and are able to accept tax-deductible donations. We also welcome new members. For more information, visit us online at cncsr.org.

Samantha Royster, MA, and her husband Jay have more than 25 years of combined experience in wilderness search and rescue. When not volunteering their time, Samantha works in the emergency management field, and Jay is an electrical engineer and paramedic. CNCSAR is a 501(c)(3) volunteer organization, able to accept tax-deductible donations to support its members’ work. For more information: www.cncsr.org.

Introducing children to the wonder of the wilderness is fun, and exposes them to the beauty of the natural world. When heading out on a family hike, taking just a few minutes to discuss what happens if someone gets lost could mean the difference between life and death. Here are a few tips to make your hike as safe as possible:

- Before you leave the car, have each child step on a piece of aluminum foil and leave it in the car. If your child does become lost, searchers will appreciate having an impression of the sole of your child’s shoe.
- Take a picture of your child with your cell phone before you head out. This will show exactly what your child looks like that day, as well as what clothes they are wearing.
- Equip each child with a backpack carrying a couple of bottles of water, some protein bars, a flashlight, a whistle, and a lightweight emergency blanket (sometimes called a space blanket).
- Instruct your child that if they realize they are separated from the rest of the group, they should hug a tree and periodically blow three blasts on their whistle. The National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR) instituted the Hug-A-Tree Program to teach children to stay in one place if lost, instead of continuing to wander. It is much easier to find someone who is not moving!
- If you realize a child is missing, immediately call 911. It is better if you stay by your vehicle instead of heading to search for the child yourself—we don’t want to have two missing persons. If you are in a state or national park, alert the park rangers as well.

Ideally, of course, your children should not be out of your sight on a hiking trip. Don’t be afraid to take your kids hiking, camping or biking in the woods, but do teach them how to help themselves if they have to.

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO BE SAFE