

MAY 26 1999

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PHOTO BY GLEN COOPER

ex Feeney, 6, opens wide to allow dentist John Fiore of Dedham to make a tooth print at the Child ID program last weekend.

A new way to identify missing children

Child ID program provides parents with tools in case of disappearance

by Agnes Peillet
STAFF WRITER

Last Saturday, Dinesh McGinty of West Roxbury had the time of his life. Not only was he allowed to dip his fingers in ink and leave marks on a piece of paper, but he got to be interviewed and videotaped and to see himself on TV afterwards.

But all the fun was for the sake of serious business: the Child Identification Program, which took place at the Roslindale/West Roxbury YMCA. An estimated 300 children accompanied by their parents were fingerprinted, videotaped and had their tooth prints taken just in case such identifiable records could help out in future law enforcement investigations.

"It's one of these things parents don't want to think about, but you hear so many horror stories about child abduction that it's good to have key information about children on hand for identification purpose just in case," said Dinesh's father, Kevin McGinty. "We have good pictures at home but the fingerprinting and the tooth print are very helpful. I just think it's a terrific service they are providing."

The program was started by the Massachusetts Freemasons in 1996, and is now carried out in collaboration with the Massachusetts Dental Society, the

investigators, said Dave Hart, a dentist with a practice in Milton who is a member of the MDS and a Freemason.

"In the U.S. right now, 2,200 children are reported missing per day to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children," said Hart. "This gives parents a better chance to recover their child because it doesn't waste time."

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 932,190 persons were reported missing in 1998. The FBI estimated that between 85 and 90 percent of those going missing are juveniles, according to the NCIC report.

Under the CHIP program, 45,000 Massachusetts children have already been identified. Parents who took advantage of the program at the YMCA said they would keep the videotape, fingerprint card and tooth print in a safe place.

"We live in the city, and I don't like to think about bad things happening, but there is a possibility," said Bronwen Feeney of Roslindale, who brought her 6-year-old son, Alexander, to be identified Saturday.

The CHIP program is one of the most comprehensive child identification methods, said Herb Kinney, chairman for the CHIP for the Freemasons of Massachusetts.

"The program as a videotape program has been going on for two years. Now it involves the Massachusetts Dental Society and the Massachusetts Crime Prevention Officers Association," said Kinney. "Each of these groups bring to the table something very special together."

Nowadays, because 70 percent of children don't have any fillings, most child's dental records wouldn't help to

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Child Safety tips from the Massachusetts Freemasons

- Keep a telephone in reach of children. Teach them to dial "0" for the operator or dial 911 and ask for the police.
- Make sure children know their full name, street address, city, state and phone number with area code.
- Sew I.D. labels in clothes.
- Teach children to be cautious and not to trust strangers. Tell them to never take a ride from strangers or get close to a stranger's car.
- Teach children never to open the door to let strangers into the home.
- Teach children not to be afraid of police officers and to look for them if they are separated or lost.

Teenage girls, who are most likely to become victims of abduction and exploitation, should be advised to practice the following precautions:

• ... plan ahead to take a friend.