CHILD FIND of AMERICA
BRINGING KIDS HOME • KEEPING THEM SAFE

FALL 2026



# CHILD FIND FOCUS

Welcome to *Child Find Focus*, a quarterly publication from Child Find of America dedicated to advancing our mission to prevent child abduction and abuse. In each issue, we offer program updates, information, and resources that support professionals, families, and communities in safeguarding children and resolving family conflict.



## AGAINST ALL ODDS: REUNITING ALYSSA & LEVI

Alyssa contacted Child Find of America when her 3-year-old son, Levi, was abducted by his father, Donald, and Levi's paternal grandmother, Florence. Alyssa and Donald had been in an on-and-off relationship marked by domestic violence in North Carolina. When Levi was born, Florence became closely involved in his care, often traveling from her home in Florida to Donald's residence in North Carolina, while Alyssa attended school and sought employment. Grateful for Florence's support, Alyssa found it difficult to leave Donald.

Everything changed when Alyssa was arrested and placed in jail for a month on a charge related to Donald's substance abuse. During this time, Levi remained in Florence's care, and Alyssa began making concrete plans to establish a separate home for herself and her son.

After resolving her legal difficulties and securing her own residence, Alyssa contacted Florence with the intent to bring Levi to their new home. Instead, Florence insisted on keeping Levi and pressured Alyssa to sign over her parental rights so Florence could assume guardianship. When Alyssa refused, Florence cut off all communication.

Fearing Donald might react violently if she tried to retrieve Levi on her own, Alyssa contacted the local police department in North Carolina, but without a custody order in place, police couldn't step in while Levi was with his father. Alyssa connected with an attorney through a local domestic violence agency and a judge granted her a protective order and custody of Levi. The court ordered Donald to return Levi, but it was soon discovered that Levi was no longer with his father. Florence had left with Levi and had brought him to her undisclosed Florida residence.

Donald refused to cooperate with the court to provide Levi's location, which eventually led to the court ordering his incarceration until he provided information that would help Alyssa secure Levi's return. After months of not knowing Levi's location, Alyssa's attorney discovered that Florence had filed for guardianship in Florida. Although the court initially denied the petition because Florence had not provided her address, a hearing was scheduled for the following month.

Child Find of America worked with Alyssa to help her navigate the challenges of recovering Levi across state lines.

Our case manager located Florence and Levi, provided procedural information on how to register and enforce the North Carolina court order through coordination with local police in Florida, contacted Florida law enforcement to gather information, and served as a liaison between Alyssa and her North Carolina-based attorney.

The pending guardianship hearing presented a significant obstacle. Alyssa's North Carolina attorney was not licensed to practice in Florida, and her limited income made hiring another attorney financially impossible. Because she was not a Florida resident, she was also ineligible for the free legal assistance she sought there. Determined to bring Levi home, Alyssa traveled to Florida to address the matter herself.

Once there, Alyssa contacted the local police department to ask them to enforce the out-of-state guardianship petition. When law enforcement made contact with Florence, she evaded their questions and denied having Levi. Alyssa was determined - she attended the guardianship hearing scheduled in Florida and after informing the court of the North Carolina order, Florence's custody petition was dismissed.

Despite the ruling, Florence refused to return Levi, claiming he was no longer in her custody. The Sheriff's Department stepped in to help enforce the custody order and told Florence they were considering charging her criminally. Realizing she might be arrested, Florence conceded and brought Levi to the police station, where he was reunited with his mother.

Alyssa was overjoyed to have Levi back after being apart with no communication with her son for several months. As is often the case, however, the fallout of the abduction soon began to unfold. Alyssa was concerned with some of Levi's new behaviors and Levi later confided in his mom that he had suffered sexual abuse by a family member while he was in the care of his grandmother. Our case manager has continued to provide support, information, and referrals for local trauma-informed services.

Although Levi's safe return brought the immediate search to an end, the effects of his abduction and subsequent experiences may take much longer to address. Alyssa and Levi's case will remain open, ensuring that Alyssa can continue to seek guidance, resources, and support as she helps her son recover, rebuild a sense of security, and bring peace to their lives.

## INTRODUCING: BEYOND MISSING: A CHILD FIND PODCAST




With over 45 years of experience helping locate missing children, Child Find of America is launching Beyond Missing, a podcast that explores the stories, resources, and truths behind missing and abducted children. We will spotlight the voices of survivors and experts in the subject of parental abduction, offering listeners firsthand perspectives and valuable insights. Through compelling conversations, Beyond Missing brings together wisdom, lived experience, and actionable information.

Subscribe to our YouTube channel now and turn on notifications so you don't miss the first episode drop coming soon!



## CHANGEMAKER SPOTLIGHT: DR. MIMI GRAHAM

November is National Child Safety and Protection Month, and this month we turn out spotlight on Dr. Mimi Graham, whose work has helped transform how courts and child welfare systems respond to infants and young children who have experienced abuse, neglect, and trauma.

For more than three decades, Dr. Graham has been a leader in infant mental health and early childhood development. As director of Florida State University's Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, she has worked to bring research about childhood trauma into the systems responsible for protecting vulnerable children. Among her most significant contributions is her leadership in advancing efforts to institute Florida's Early Childhood Courts, often called "baby courts." (Continued in page 4)

## CO-PARENTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS: RESOURCES & RELIEF FROM CHILD FIND OF AMERICA

With the holidays just around the corner, we understand that stress levels are high, and they can be even higher for mothers and fathers parenting apart. Keep the following tips in mind as you start to navigate the season.

1. **Create a holiday schedule early and communicate any changes with your co-parent.**
   If you don't have a parenting plan, Child Find can help. Our case managers can help parents create workable parenting plans for custody and visitation, build communication and parenting skills, reduce conflict, and focus on their children's well-being.

2. **Agree on a gift budget.**
   Setting a gift budget can prevent financial stress and avoid a "gift-giving competition" while keeping your child at the center of the celebrations.

3. **Avoid putting kids in the middle.**
   Your children's best interests should come first. Communicate directly with your co-parent instead of using your children to relay messages and shield them from adult disagreements.

4. **Take time for yourself when you can.**
   The holidays can be hectic for parents, so practice self-care when you can.




## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER ALLIANCE

We're excited to attend the 26th Annual International Family Justice Center Conference this November! The Family Justice Center Alliance (FJCA) is dedicated to creating communities of safety, hope, and healing through helping communities develop, establish, and operate Family Justice Centers.

We look forward to connecting with colleagues, partners, and new friends dedicated to supporting families and advancing justice.

## SAVE THE DATE: GIVING TUESDAY IS DECEMBER 1ST!

GIVING TUESDAY

This special day is an opportunity to support our goals of finding missing kids and keeping them safe. Your generosity helps us continue our vital work and ensures that every child has a chance to be reunited with their loved ones. Please consider making a difference this Giving Tuesday.

Call us:
**1-800-I-AM-LOST (426-5678)**



## UPDATE YOUR CONTACT LIST

We're streamlining our support! Child Find now uses a single toll-free number: 1-800-I-AM-LOST. Please use this number to contact us for help or to share information. We're here to help keep kids safe.

## CHANGEMAKER SPOTLIGHT: MIMI GRAHAM (CONTINUED)

Don't worry. Baby courts are not courtrooms where babies appear before judges. They are specialized programs within a court system that recognize that even the youngest children can be deeply affected by trauma, separation, and disruptions in their relationships with caregivers.

Research shows that the period from birth to age three is one of the most critical stages of human development. According to Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, more than one million new neural connections form every second during the first few years of life. During this time, children's experiences and relationships help shape the foundations for future learning, emotional well-being, behavior, and health.

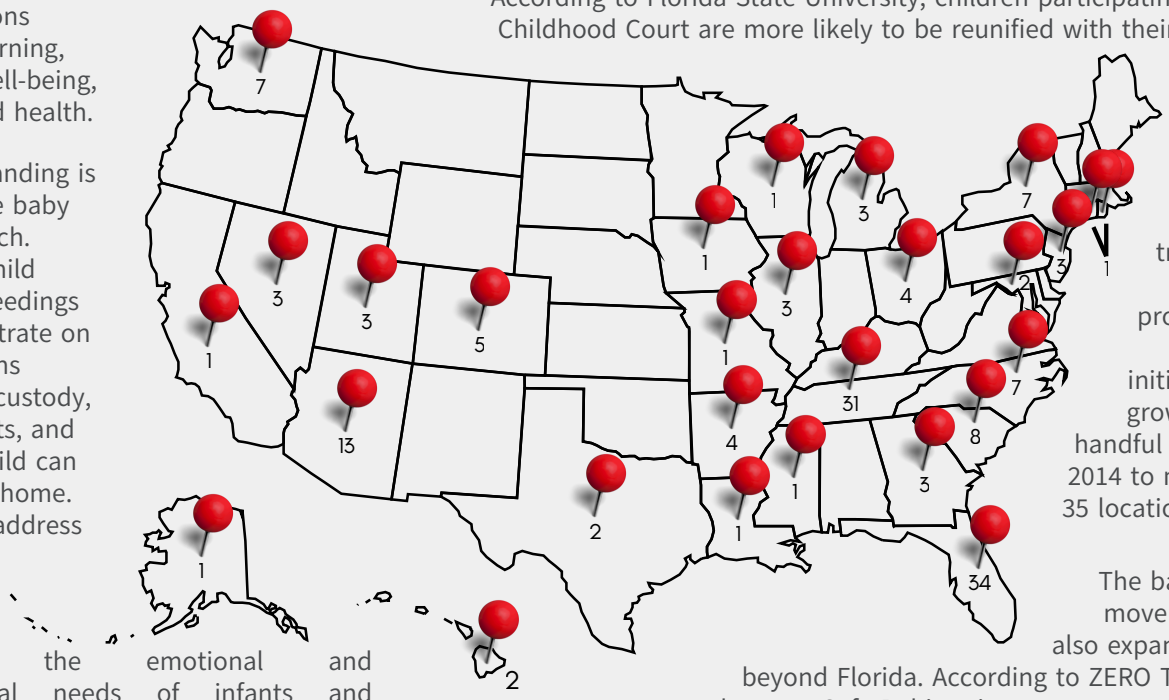
This understanding is central to the baby court approach. Traditional child welfare proceedings often concentrate on legal questions surrounding custody, parental rights, and whether a child can safely return home. Baby courts address these issues while also considering the emotional and developmental needs of infants and toddlers. Judges work with teams of mental health professionals, child welfare specialists, attorneys, and community organizations to help families address the circumstances that brought them into the system. For example, instead of assigning an offender who is a parent of a young child with generic community service hours, a baby court judge might offer the offending parent participation in Child Parent Therapy to address the two-generational trauma.

A central goal is to strengthen the relationship between young children and their parents or caregivers whenever it is safe to do so.

Families may receive specialized mental health treatment, parenting support, and other services designed to address trauma and create safer, more stable homes. Cases are reviewed frequently, allowing the court and service providers to respond to the family's progress and changing needs. Special outreach is provided to engage fathers to connect with their young child.

Dr. Graham and her colleagues at Florida State University have been instrumental in bringing this approach to courts throughout Florida. Their work has included educating judges and child welfare professionals about early childhood development, developing training programs, and helping court teams incorporate trauma-informed practices into their decisions.

According to Florida State University, children participating in Early Childhood Court are more likely to be reunified with their families than children whose cases are handled through traditional court proceedings. Florida's initiative has grown from a handful of sites in 2014 to more than 35 locations across the state.




The baby court movement has also expanded well beyond Florida. According to ZERO TO THREE, more than 150 Safe Babies sites were operating across 31 states in 2025, reflecting growing recognition that infants and toddlers involved in the child welfare system need specialized, trauma-informed support (see our map). Florida has been an important part of that expansion, with Dr. Graham helping to advance the approach throughout the state.

Dr. Graham's contributions extend beyond the courtroom. She has helped develop the widely used Partners for a Healthy Baby curriculum, which supports professionals working with expectant parents and families with young children. She also co-founded the Florida Association for Infant Mental Health and has championed programs that help professionals recognize and respond to the effects of childhood trauma. Her latest work supports trauma responsive court practices through an online trauma course for the entire judicial workforce (https://www.cpeip.org/trauma-resilience-court).

Dr. Graham's work is particularly meaningful to us here at Child Find of America because she recognizes that protecting children involves more than removing them from immediate danger. She understands how early experiences shapes development and that supporting healthy relationships and helping families address the underlying circumstances that place children at risk are key to long-lasting success.

At Child Find of America, we see the lasting effects that family conflict, abduction, and trauma can have on children. Dr. Graham's work reinforces an important principle that guides our own services: ensuring a child's immediate safety is essential and helping that child and family achieve lasting stability and well-being is equally important.

During National Child Safety and Protection Month, we are pleased to recognize Dr. Mimi Graham for her decades of leadership and her commitment to ensuring that even our youngest and most vulnerable children receive the protection, understanding, and support they deserve.

Every connection we make – every call answered, family supported, and child kept safe – is made possible through your belief in our mission. From all of us at Child Find of America, thank you for standing with families in crisis and helping bring stability, safety, and hope nationwide. Your support ensures that parents find guidance, children find protection, and families find their way forward.

**HELP US CONTINUE THIS WORK**

Your gift allows Child Find of America to answer calls, support families, and protect children across the nation.

- To donate online visit: childfindofamerica.org/donate/
- Give by mail: PO Box 277, New Paltz, NY 12561

# THANK YOU

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