



George Wolf/Reporter-Telegram

Charlotte Beard is organizing fund-raising activities to benefit the American Association of Lost Children, which reunited her with her daughter Bailey, now 3, just more than a year ago.

## Child-find agency needs to find funds

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For Charlotte Beard no price was too much to pay for getting her 18-month-old daughter back.

But the American Association for Lost Children — the group that reunited her with Bailey — was the only one of 15 child-find agencies she turned to for help that didn't charge some type of processing fees or other costs.

"It's my turn now to help find the funds to keep them going," said the energetic mother of two in the clubroom of the Andalusian Apartment complex which she manages.

The "them" is really more of a "he," AALC founder Mark Miller, who conducts virtually all of the organization's investigation, surveillance and fund-raising.

A licensed private investigator, Miller has to balance detective work with money-making activities, from peddling M&Ms and lemonade in front of Houston supermarkets to soliciting major corporate sponsors, like Continental Airlines.

Miller, who is in Midland this week to attend a benefit ga-

rage sale organized by Ms. Beard and a committee of concerned citizens for Friday and Saturday, is in desperate need of funds, the grateful mother said.

Money is so tight for the Houston-based agency that Miller has been unable to draw even his modest \$150 weekly salary.

Depending solely on tax-deductible donations for its funding, Miller's association "fills a gap between parents and law enforcement agencies," he explained.

AALC specializes in cases like Bailey and her mother's — abduction by divorced or separated parents. In the two and a half years since it was chartered, AALC has returned 26 children to their families.

Publicity from those 26 happy reunions from Pennsylvania to California has done much to swell Miller's case load of concerned parents, but done little to stock the coffers.

Miller currently has about 60 pursuable cases from all over the country in his files, with more than a hundred others "on the back burner."

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He requires that a parent seeking to enlist his services have proof of an open police file on the case, an NCIC case number and a felony arrest warrant for the kidnapping parent.

With those three things in hand, Miller is able to launch an investigation, using a variety of tracking, interviewing and surveillance methods. The six weeks it took Miller to track Beard's ex-husband's trail from Odessa through Houston to Berkeley Springs, W.Va., is less than the typical two to three months consumed in a search.

The six months that elapsed from Bailey's disappearance in June 1988 until the reunion just more than a year ago also was much less than usual and children located by AALC have been missing as long as eight years.

Once "all the dirty work in locating" a missing child and abducting parent has been done, Miller contacts local law enforcement officials

to make the arrest and "rescue" the child.

"Whether there is molestation involved or not, parental abduction is abuse," Miller said. Children are often kept out of school, restricted to apartments and forced to use aliases.

"Parents claim they (kidnap) out of love, but it's usually vindictiveness," Ms. Beard said. As proof, she points to the fact that few of the parents, who like her ex-husband are granted visitation rights, rarely exercise them.

Bailey's father was granted visiting privileges because Ector County officials did not prosecute him after he was extradited from West Virginia on third degree felony charges.

"With all the other crime going on, police can't give a high priority to these kinds of cases which they of-

ten see as 'domestic, marital problems,'" Miller explained. "We can. We're the only agency that actively searches for missing children."

Other groups are active putting up flyers and getting missing children's pictures on milk cartons, but don't do investigations, he said.

The two-day garage sale in the former SKQ Clothiers building owned by Midshell Corp., will feature appliances, furniture, clothing and miscellaneous items — both new and used — donated by corporate sponsors and individual supporters.

Miller also will operate a basketball toss and sell stuffed animals, as well as his standard M&Ms and lemonade. Santa is expected to visit during the 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. sale as well.

Donations of cash and goods for sale will be accepted.

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