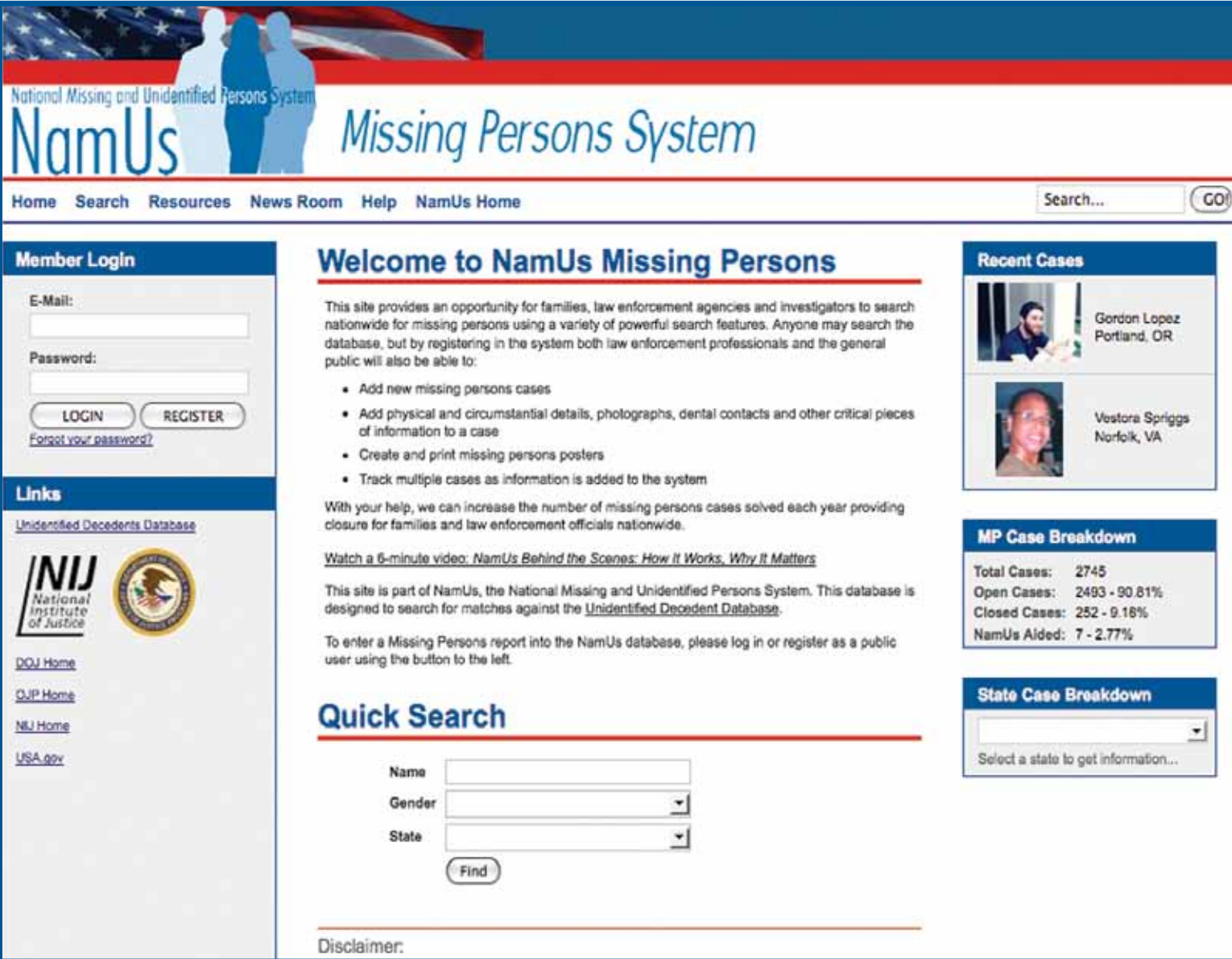


Abstract

The National Institute of Justice's National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) fills an overwhelming need for a centralized reporting system that contains records for both missing persons (MP) and unidentified persons (UP). NamUs consists of two databases that are searchable by both law enforcement and the general public, allowing them to share information and work together across all boundaries and jurisdictions to more effectively solve these heartbreaking cases.

The system has shown significant growth since the MP database went online in January of 2009. In its first year, missing persons records have more than doubled and the system has gained acceptance by law enforcement in many jurisdictions as a viable and useful tool.

Missing Persons Database



Screenshot of Missing Persons database Home page

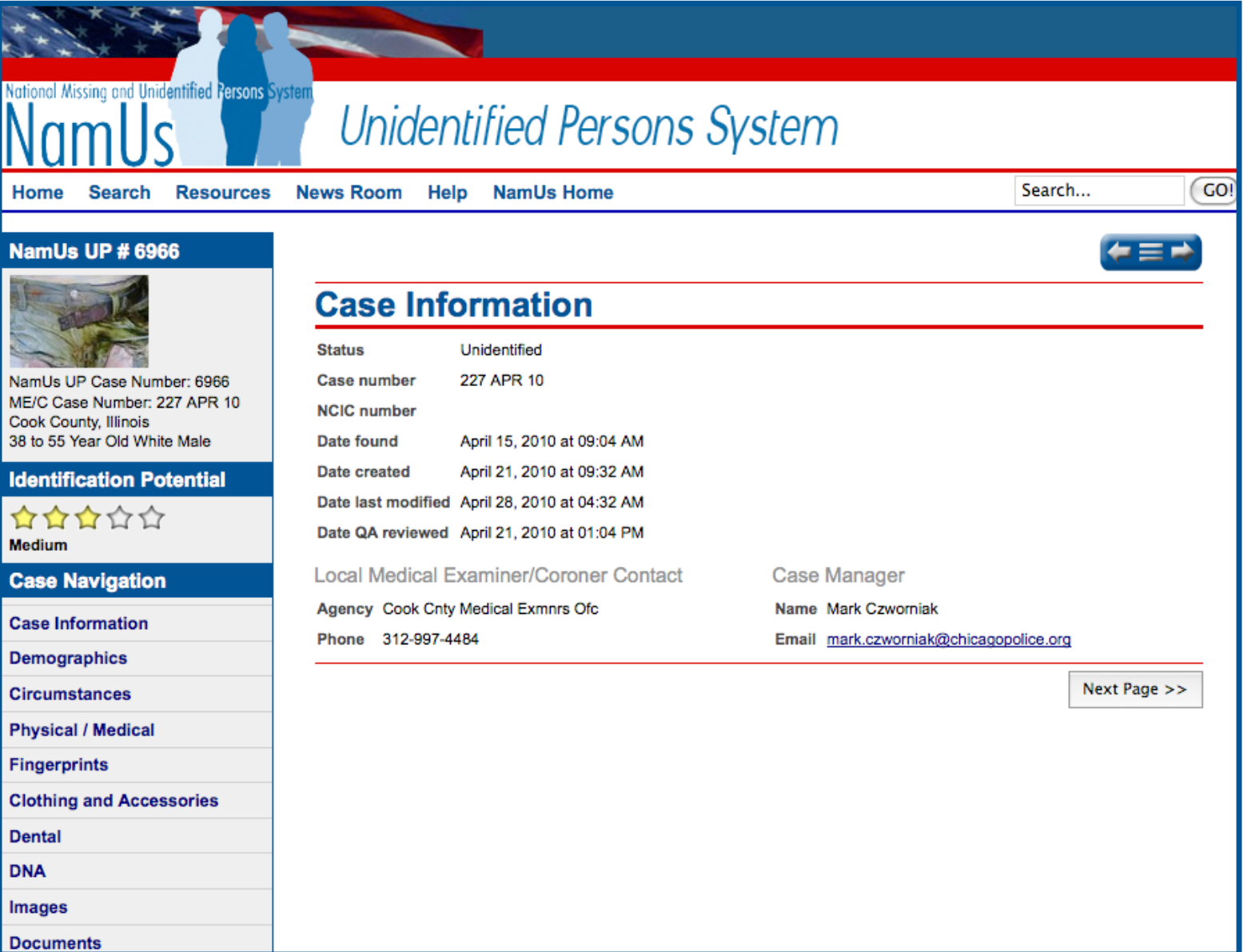
- The MP database improves the quality and quantity of missing persons data and simplifies reporting and management of missing persons cases.
- Records are entered by law enforcement and the general public. Cases are validated prior to publication and then they are accessible to anyone searching the system, although the level of access to information varies by user permission level.
- Resources available to everyone include links to State missing persons clearinghouses, State and Federal law enforcement, Attorneys General offices, FBI offices and information about legislation related to missing persons in a particular state.
- The system incorporates geo-mapping technology to make it easy to locate law enforcement and medical examiner/coroner agencies in an area or along a particular travel route.
- The MP database contains nearly 4,000 cases, with more added by law enforcement and concerned citizens every day.

Introduction

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) estimates that medical examiners and coroners handle approximately 4,400 unidentified persons cases annually, 1,000 of which remain unidentified after one year.³ Experts estimate there may be as many as 100,000 missing persons and 40,000 unidentified persons nationwide, a crisis that has been called our nation's "silent mass disaster."⁴

A free online database at www.nam.us.gov, NamUs is the one place where everyone interested in solving missing and unidentified persons cases – law enforcement, medical examiners and coroners, missing persons clearinghouses, victims advocates and families, and the general public – can share information to help solve these devastating cases.

Unidentified Persons Database



Screenshot of Unidentified Persons database with case information

- Unidentified records are automatically searched against missing persons records and potential matches are presented to investigators for further review.
- The system is searchable by anyone, although only law enforcement can view sensitive case data.
- Searches can be performed using a wide variety of identifiers, including physical features, dental records, DNA, scars, tattoos, jewelry, clothing, prosthetics and even mode of transportation.
- The UP database contains more than 6,600 cases, with more added by medical examiners and coroners every day.

Benefits to Families of the Missing

When a person goes missing, NamUs offers useful tools and professional resources to family members desperate to find their loved one. Families can enter case information directly, or they can work with law enforcement to ensure that records are complete.

“NamUs is an invaluable asset to all. Our homicide ‘cold case’ unit uses this resource on a regular basis.”

Ken Betz
Montgomery County Coroner's Office
Dayton, OH

Specific details of every record are searchable, including tattoos, jewelry, clothing, vehicles, demographics and physical features, and comprehensive case reports can be printed right from the system. Through NamUs, family members and friends can create missing persons posters that can be printed or e-mailed to spread the word about the missing. Additionally, free family-reference DNA testing is available through NamUs.

Benefits to Law Enforcement

NamUs provides law enforcement with a powerful, publicly accessible system for investigation of missing and unidentified persons cases. NamUs automatically cross-matches records for missing persons against those for unidentified persons, allowing investigators to quickly make side-by-side case comparisons. The system's extensive search capabilities allow investigators to modify search parameters based on case-specific information, such as date last seen, demographics, dental information and distinct body features. While the system is available for the public to enter MP case information and to search both databases, sensitive case information is restricted from public view.

Through NamUs, law enforcement also has access to subject matter experts, including anthropologists, odontologists and fingerprint experts, as well as free DNA testing, at no cost to their department or agency.

Implications for Policy and Practice

By bringing together the two searchable databases, NamUs has the potential to revolutionize the investigation and management of missing and unidentified persons cases. The system provides state-of-the-art technology for law enforcement to investigate these cases, especially MP cases that have gone cold. Similarly, it can provide resolution for families with missing loved ones across the country. In addition to helping solve cases, this powerful, cutting-edge resource provides forensic support that maximizes the use of technology and collects case information that can be uploaded into other federal databases. Furthermore, NamUs knows no borders: information about a case can be seen by citizens and investigators across town and around the country.

NamUs Forensic Services

NIJ offers continuing support to agencies through NamUs by providing a team of forensic specialists who provide technical assistance with anthropology, odontology and DNA collection services. This team provides direct assistance by gathering additional relevant information to improve case strength. Some examples of forensic services include:

- Creation of post-mortem dental records from the remains of unidentified persons
- Charting, coding and uploading this dental information into NamUs
- Review of X-rays of missing persons to detect prior injuries and/or disease processes
- Evaluation and uploading of existing fingerprint records to compare a known set of prints to an unknown set from a decedent
- Extraction of DNA samples from unidentified persons for comparison with family members of missing persons

Partner Organizations

NamUs is forging partnerships with several organizations that share the NamUs goals. For expertise in DNA analysis, NamUs works closely with the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification (UNTCHH). NamUs has also developed partnerships for sharing data with the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP), and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) database. NCMEC is partnering with NamUs to enter, exchange and maintain missing person cases for individuals age 17 and under at the time they went missing.

Outreach

Through conferences, workshops and presentations, the NamUs team reaches out to national organizations such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), International Association for Identification (IAI), the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME), the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), the American Society of Crime Lab Directors (ASCLD) and the International Homicide Investigators Association (IHIA). These efforts drive awareness and facilitate in-person introductions to the system.

Online training is available for law enforcement users via a web-based portal accessible at <http://projects.nfstc.org/namus>. The NamUs team provides information sessions and training at a variety of missing and unidentified persons events, as well as periodic webinars to NamUs stakeholders.

Due to increased public interest, NamUs has been featured in a variety of national media outlets including the CBS *Early Show*, *USA Today*, the Associated Press, CNN, *The Washington Post* and many local markets.

Recognition

For its innovative approach to solving the nationwide missing and unidentified persons crisis, NamUs received the annual IACP-IXP Excellence in Technology Award at the 2009 Law Enforcement Information Management (LEIM) conference. It has been featured in industry trade publications such as *Police Chief* magazine, *TechBeat*, *Forensic Magazine* and *PoliceOne.com*, among others.

Growing Use of the System

Registered Users

The number of NamUs registered users has increased significantly since January of 2009, with increasing registrations among all user types. As of late May 2010, the system users included:

REGISTERED USERS BY TYPE — UP	
73	Case Manager
23	Forensic Odontologist
9	Forensic Anthropologist
37	Medical Examiner / Coroner
177	Medicolegal Death Investigator
448	Law Enforcement
2,039	Public User
7	MP/UP Clearinghouse
3	NamUs Staff
4	Forensic Pathologist
3	DNA Specialist
2,817	Total Registered Users

Case Records

The increase in registered users brings growth in the number of cases in the system. As of May 2010, nearly 4,000 missing persons and more than 6,600 unidentified persons cases have been entered, with an average of 100 new cases being added to each side every month. This growth is critical to the success of the system, as the probability of potential matches increases as the size of the database increases.

REGISTERED USERS BY TYPE — MP	
851	Law Enforcement
43	Medical Examiner / Coroner
72	Case Mangager
48	Odontologist
6	Anthropologist
3,219	Public User
4,239	Total Registered Users



Success Stories

Since the full system went live in January 2009, NamUs has been credited with assisting in 18 case resolutions.

Name: Sonia Lente
Person Missing: October 03, 2002
Body Found: 2004
Body Identified: June 2009
Location: Albuquerque, NM

In June, a citizen searching NamUs noticed remarkable similarities between a woman who had been missing since 2002 and an unidentified body found near Albuquerque two years later. Although authorities initially thought the cases might be the same person, a DNA test was not close enough to make a definitive match and the case grew cold. When the citizen cyber-sleuth saw a potential match in NamUs, she alerted the NamUs contact. A forensic odontologist, available through NamUs to assist jurisdictions free of charge, assisted in the identification of remains. Two days later, the family of Sonia Lente, the woman who had been missing for more than six years, was notified that their loved one's remains had finally been identified.

Name: Jody King
Person Missing: April 20, 2009
Body Found: June 18, 2009
Body Identified: June 19, 2009
Location: Connecticut

In April 2009, a man disappeared following a car accident in Connecticut. Police and dogs searched the area, finding the man's wallet and some clothing, but not the driver himself. A few weeks later, the man's aunt entered very thorough information into NamUs, including dental records and images of tattoos and a wedding band. The following month, a body was found near the accident scene and in June 2009, with the help of the dental records that were readily accessible in NamUs, the body was identified as Jody King, the man who had disappeared following the car accident.

Name: Paula Beverly Davis
Person Missing: August 9, 1987
Body Found: August 10, 1987
Body Identified: December 11, 2009
Location: Englewood, Ohio (Montgomery County)

On August 9, 1987, Paula Beverly Davis went missing from Kansas City, Missouri. Her body was found in Montgomery County, Ohio 14 hours after she was reported missing. In October 2009, Davis' sister, Stephanie Clark, was watching an episode of *The Forgotten* and saw the NamUs public service announcement and web site. She went to NamUs.gov and searched the UP database with the information she had about her sister's case. After looking at a number of records, she was able to identify her sister by descriptions of her unique tattoos – a unicorn and a red rose – that the NamUs record contained. Family DNA reference samples were taken from Davis' father. On December 11, 2009, Paula Davis was positively identified.

NamUs User Feedback

NamUs has become a "mandatory tool in the law enforcement toolbox."

Special Agent Danny Warren
Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE)

"NamUs is an invaluable asset to all. Our homicide 'cold case' unit uses this resource on a regular basis."

Ken Betz
Montgomery County Coroner's Office
Dayton, OH

"The bottom line is that I think the web site is GREAT.... The ability to build a USEFUL profile – one that includes data on dental, DNA, circumstances, clothing, physical descriptions, and photos – is simply fantastic.... I also really like the ability to review cases side-by-side and to 'exclude' the suggested matches because of objective criteria (like a mismatch of the dental records), as well as the ability to set the auto search parameters."

Trooper David J. Aiello
Criminal Investigation Assessment
Troop G, Pennsylvania State Police

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(727) 549-6067
www.nfstc.org

²U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report, *Medical Examiners and Coroners' Offices*, 2004.

³Nancy Ritter, "Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains: The Nation's Silent Mass Disaster," *NIJ Journal* 256 (2007): 2-7.