

Protecting Childhood: UCCS to Host National Voices on Preventing Exploitation Through Awareness and Education

Elizabeth Smart, Alicia Kozakiewicz and NCMEC Experts to speak at July 1 event at the Ent Center for the Arts

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO, UNITED STATES, June 23, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The University of Colorado Colorado Springs will host Protecting Childhood: Preventing Exploitation Through Awareness and Education, a free, public event on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, from 1 to 5 p.m. at the Ent Center for the Arts. The afternoon will feature keynote speakers Alicia “Kozak” Kozakiewicz and Elizabeth Smart, along with experts from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), all sharing insights on how to prevent child exploitation through education, awareness, and community involvement.

While the internet remains an essential tool for education, connection, and entertainment, it's also important to recognize that the same platforms we rely on — including social media, online gaming, and email — can sometimes be used to exploit, manipulate, or harm. By increasing awareness and promoting safe practices, families and communities can take proactive steps to protect children and foster healthy online habits.

“Bringing these courageous voices to our campus is about more than raising awareness,” said Janet Van Kampen, Program Director of the Public Safety Initiative (PSI), in the College of Public Service at UCCS. “It’s about equipping our community — from families and educators to first responders and civic leaders — with the tools and knowledge to protect our children in a constantly changing digital world.”

The event will begin with a presentation from NCMEC, a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping find missing children, reduce child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization. Hannah Wilk, NCMEC’s ESP Liaison for the CyberTipline, will share current trends in online safety and provide an overview of the resources available to families, educators, and law enforcement.

Attendees will then hear from Alicia “Kozak” Kozakiewicz, an internationally recognized internet safety expert and advocate. In 2002, at the age of 13, Alicia was abducted outside her Pittsburgh home after being groomed online. Her story was one of the first widely reported internet-related child abductions. Since her recovery, Alicia has dedicated her life to advocacy, public education,

and legislative change. A major focus of her work is the nationwide passage of Alicia's Law, which creates a dedicated, state-based funding stream for Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces.

After a short break, the program will conclude with keynote remarks from Elizabeth Smart. In 2002, Smart's abduction at age 14 and subsequent recovery became one of the most followed child safety cases of our time. Since then, she has become a powerful advocate for child protection, founding the Elizabeth Smart Foundation and working on national legislation, including support for the AMBER Alert and the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act.

The event will take place in the Shockley-Zalabak Theater at the Ent Center for the Arts, located at 5225 North Nevada Avenue in Colorado Springs. It is open to the public and intended for a broad audience, including educators, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, emergency personnel, judicial leaders, nonprofit and business leaders, academics, and concerned community members. Attendees will leave with not only inspiration but practical tools to help prevent and respond to online threats against children.

For more information, contact Janet Van Kampen at jvankamp@uccs.edu or Chris Valentine at cvalent2@uccs.edu.

To register, visit the [event registration page](#).

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