

## **Missing People's response to the Metropolitan Police Service's 2020 consultation, April 2015**

### **Summary**

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and feed into the future priorities of the Metropolitan Police Service.

We appreciate that the Metropolitan Police Service is under severe financial pressures and needs to make some tough decisions about providing a service to keep London safe in 2020.

We already work in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Service to safeguard and reconnect vulnerable missing people and to support the families left behind. Our role in this partnership helps to reduce demands on the Metropolitan Police Service. We believe we could do even more work in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Service to reduce demand on finite resources.

The links between people going missing and crime are so strong that preventing and responding to missing incidents must continue to be essential elements of the police's strategy to prevent and reduce crime. Some of the most serious risks include Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), gang exploitation and violent crime, and sometimes these risks are not known when someone is reported missing. The police must therefore fully investigate and respond to every missing incident in order to safeguard missing people. Focusing on investigating and safeguarding missing young people has had proven results - bringing organised crime groups and perpetrators of sexual exploitation to justice through Operation Bullfinch, Operation Retriever and MPS Operation Makesafe.

### **About Missing people and reasons for submitting evidence**

Missing People is a UK charity which offers a lifeline to children and adults reported missing to the police and other agencies. We listen in confidence, and support missing people and their families to explore their options and, where possible, to reconnect. For those left behind we provide specialised support to ease the heartache and confusion, and help search for their missing loved ones. We provide our services through partnership working, including with the police and social services, as well as other charities and professionals, and also undertake research and policy work.

In London we work with the Metropolitan Police Service to support their work to safeguard and reconnect missing people and support their loved ones left behind. We have also delivered Return Home Interviews to children who have been missing in London. Within this document there is information to indicate work we have done with the Metropolitan Police Service over the last twelve months.

This response draws on our expertise providing support to missing people and their families and our work specifically in London. It outlines our views and recommendations for the Metropolitan Police Service to keep London safe in 2020.

## Response to the consultation

*Q1- How can the Metropolitan Police Service ensure it has a trusted relationship with all stakeholders and the general public?*

According to a recent survey crime prevention remains the public's top priority for the Metropolitan Police Service.<sup>1</sup> By committing to preventing crime and putting this into practice the Metropolitan Police Service will be able to develop a trusted relationship with the general public and all stakeholders. Crime can be a key factor in the reason adult, children and young people go missing either in response to a crime threatened or committed against them, or as a result of crimes which influence a person to go missing from home or care.<sup>2</sup> Indeed all of the crime types listed within the consultation have links to the missing population. Links to terrorist organisations, online exploitation, domestic violence and mental health issues are all reasons why people go missing.<sup>3</sup> Finding and safeguarding missing people is a vital way of preventing crime, as they are especially vulnerable to violent crime and to sexual and gang exploitation and in some cases, their missing episodes will be as a direct result of their victimisation. Prioritising missing is therefore crucial to ensuring London's safety.

Going missing is recognised as a risk factor for sexual exploitation within successive research and evaluation studies, both as a cause, and consequence of going missing.<sup>4</sup> An Office of the Children's Commissioner for England report published in 2012 stated that 70% of victims of CSE had also gone missing.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, a Serious Case Review Report into victims of sexual exploitation in Oxford, published in March 2015 found that 6 of the victims had been missing 500 times.<sup>6</sup>

There is evidence to suggest gang involvement and exploitation in a proportion of cases where children and young people go missing. A report prepared for the Metropolitan Police Service in 2013 found that 261 children were reported missing to the charity Missing People from London boroughs or who had investigatory links to the area between January 2012 and August 2013. Analysis of the missing children cases demonstrated 26 of them made reference to gang involvement, of which 12 children were identified as being sexually exploited or at risk of sexual exploitation.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the Office of the Children's Commissioner Inquiry into child sexual exploitation and gangs and groups presented evidence of children being abducted and held with limited access to food, water and washing facilities.<sup>8</sup> Finally, The Department for Education's *Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care* (2014) highlights that missing children may

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in the consultation document *Background to the Met 2020 consultation process*, RSA Action and Research Centre

<sup>2</sup> For more information please read Missing People's information sheet on Missing and Crime:

<http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/about-us/about-the-issue/information-statistics/77-relatedissues2.html>

<sup>3</sup> Missing People has been working with the National Crime Agency, Missing Person's Bureau and the Metropolitan Counter Terrorist Squad around children and young adults who go missing and travel to Syria.

<sup>4</sup> Sharp, N. (2012). *Still Hidden? Going missing as an indicator of child sexual exploitation*.

<sup>5</sup> Berelowitz, S. et al. (2012). *"I thought I was the only one. The only one in the world."* *The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups*.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.oscb.org.uk/case-reviews/>

<sup>7</sup> Missing children in London; scoping the landscape, (2013). Findings from a review of 261 missing and reported to the charity Missing People between January 2012 and August 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Berelowitz, S. et al. 2013 *"If only someone had listened."* *The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups*

be vulnerable to sexual exploitation, violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol misuse.<sup>9</sup>

There is a strong link between human trafficking, missing and exploitation. An individual may go missing because they have been taken or kidnapped for purposes of human trafficking. Victims may also go missing to avoid being trafficked or escape from their traffickers. However, fear of reprisals may cause them to go missing again and return to the perpetrators. Indeed where child victims of trafficking are identified and placed in local authority care, 60 per cent subsequently go missing, nearly a third of whom disappear within a week of being placed in care, and most are never found again and highly likely to be returning to exploitation.<sup>10</sup>

We think that all missing person incidents need to be investigated as the risk of harm is not always known. In 2012/13 of the 40,000 missing person incidents reported in London there were 157 fatal outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Research by Missing People has highlighted that even when people who go missing are not assessed to be at high risk of harm the incident can result in a fatal outcome.<sup>12</sup> Going missing is often an indicator of greater problems such as mental health issues and can increase a person's likelihood of them becoming a victim of crime.

By prioritising missing, which helps to prevent crime, the Metropolitan Police Service can reach its goal of keeping London safe in 2020, which will build trust among the general public and all stakeholders.

Prioritising finding and safeguarding missing people would help address recent criticism of the police for not listening to and treating vulnerable children and young people and adults with respect.<sup>13</sup> For example, this includes children and young people reporting crimes such as sexual exploitation, which we have outlined has a strong link to missing. Furthermore, a recent report by the charity Mind outlined that victims of crime with severe mental illness did report their experience of crime to the police but were much less satisfied with the police than the general public and also less likely to report fair or respectful treatment.<sup>14</sup> This is relevant because up to 80% of missing adults have mental health problems and as outlined already being missing can increase a person's vulnerability to experiencing crime.

*Q2 – How can the Metropolitan Police Service better work with partners and stakeholders to ensure London's safety?*

We believe that the Metropolitan Police Service can work well with partners like Missing People to ensure London's safety by continuing to prevent and tackle crime through consolidating its focus on missing and maintaining its positive approach to missing incidents.

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<sup>9</sup> Department for Education, (2014). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care.*

<sup>10</sup> Centre for Social Justice (CSJ). (2013) *It Happens Here: Equipping the United Kingdom to fight modern slavery* (London: CSJ)

ECPAT UK. (2007) *Missing Out: A Study of Child Trafficking in the North-West, North-East and West Midlands* (London: ECPAT UK).

<sup>11</sup> NCA and UK Missing Person's Bureau (2014). *Missing Persons Data and analysis, missing incidents reported to the police in England 2012/13.*

<sup>12</sup> Newiss, G, (2011). *Learning from fatal disappearances*

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/rotherham-child-abuse-scandal-police-watchdog-to-investigate-10-officers-over-handling-of-exploitation-complaints-9868598.html>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-25307687>

<sup>14</sup> Pettitt, B. et al., (2013). *At risk, yet dismissed. The criminal victimisation of people with mental health problems.*

We think that the Metropolitan Police Service has a positive approach to responding to missing incidents supported by great leadership from Commander Alison Newcomb and a committed, effective team reporting to her. To ensure this continues there needs to be a long-term commitment to effective prevention and response to missing incidents within the Metropolitan Police Service.

We believe that consolidating the existing focus on missing within the Metropolitan Police Service could significantly help improve London's safety. Every year there are approximately 40,000 missing incidents reported to the police, which represent a significant area of policing.<sup>15</sup> Investigating each and every missing person incident is crucial to keeping London safe since almost all missing people are vulnerable, and going missing makes them more vulnerable and at risk of harm from violent crime and gang and sexual exploitation.

Missing People works in close partnership with the Metropolitan Police Service to find and safeguard missing people and support families in a number of ways:

- We provide a publicity appeals service, where we work with the police and family to develop and disseminate a tailored publicity appeal for a missing person. We send appeals out through our network of national and local media partners, our 100,000 social media followers and through the national network of digital advertising billboards. In the past year, we have produced and disseminated 439 new publicity appeals for missing adults and children in London.
- We provide a TextSafe® service where, on the request of a police officer, we send a text message to a missing person offering our 24/7, free and confidential support service. Last year, we sent 373 TextSafe® messages to vulnerable missing adults and children on the request of the Metropolitan Police Service.
- We provide a Child Rescue Alert Service in partnership with the National Crime Agency and Groupcall. This service involves issuing a local, regional or national alert when a child has been abducted or is believed to be at immediate risk of harm.
- We provide families who have reported a missing person to the police with free, confidential round the clock emotional and practical support, including helping them to understand the police's role. Last year, we supported 620 family members in London going through the trauma of having a missing loved one.
- Missing People has been working with the National Crime Agency, Missing Person's Bureau and the Metropolitan Police Service Counter Terrorist Squad around children and young adults who go missing and travel to Syria.
- We have run a pilot Return Home Interview (RHI) service for the Metropolitan Police Service, where we were commissioned to undertake one to one interviews with young people who had returned from a missing incident. These RHIs aimed to find out from young people why they went missing, what happened while they were missing and what help they need to prevent them going missing again. Therefore, as

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<sup>15</sup> The Metropolitan Police Service reported 38, 904 missing incidents in 2012/13. NCA and UK Missing Person's Bureau (2014). *Missing Persons Data and analysis, missing incidents reported to the police in England 2012/13.*

well as providing a supportive space for the young person these RHIs also provide an opportunity to gather information about crimes committed against a young person. RHIs are an effective way of reducing demands on police resources they prevent people going missing again – with effective services leading to reductions of up to 30% in missing incidents.<sup>16</sup>

- We work nationally with the police on the National Working Group's campaigns designed to tackle CSE called Say Something if you Know Something and Say Something if you See Something. As already outlined there are clear links between missing and CSE and this work includes providing CSE intelligence to the police.
- We have provided advice to the Metropolitan Police Service over the past year about the development of their new policy and procedures for implementing the missing and absent categories for adults and children, in line with ACPO guidance.

Through this work, in 2014/15 we have supported the Metropolitan Police Service to close 540 missing person investigations. As well as enhancing the police's role in finding and safeguarding missing people, these services also reduce resource demands on the police from responding to missing incidents.

We could potentially develop our partnership with the police further, extending our safeguarding role and further reducing resource demands. We would be interested in further discussions about the potential for automatic sharing of all Metropolitan Police Service appeals for missing people through Missing People's networks, and in including our helpline number on all Metropolitan Police Service missing appeals. We would be happy to consider automating TextSafe®, so that a message could be sent to every missing or absent child and adult offering our support. We will issue a Child Rescue Alert with speed if the Metropolitan Police Service deals with a particularly high risk missing or abducted child. We could also investigate the possibility of using our tracing and lost contact search partners to help resolve longer-term missing incidents as well as our partners who can provide emotional support and services for victims of trafficking.

### *Q3 – How is the Metropolitan Police Service better able to meet and manage demand?*

In a recent speech by the Metropolitan Police Service Commissioner he suggested reducing the focus of resources on some missing incidents. He said "We need to make more transparent some of those choices we make now, and will make a more of in the future. For example, we estimate that we spend more than 50 million pounds every year in dealing with missing person cases. Very few ever become a crime. A child recovered before they get into trouble doesn't feature in any crime statistics that I know of. And yet we pursue 42,000 cases a year to minimise the risk of a child being harmed or worse."<sup>17</sup>

We believe that the police's vital role in finding and safeguarding missing people must continue. Not only are missing people vulnerable, they are highly likely to become victims of crime, including physical violence and sexual offences. Going missing is often the first sign that a person has been the victim of crime or is at serious risk of crime, and therefore we believe that every incident must be fully investigated, even when there is no known risk.

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<sup>16</sup> Ofsted (2013). Missing Children

<sup>17</sup> <http://content.met.police.uk/News/Commissioner-Transform-British-policing-to-keep-the-public-safe/1400030449171/1257246745756>

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