Returning missing adults
The need for intervention and prevention

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Introduction

In 2016 two events, in London and in Cardiff¹, brought together multi-sector representatives came together to discuss the return of missing adults as an opportunity for learning, intervention and prevention. These events have started a national conversation about returned missing adults in which table-top delegate work called for a multi-agency response to returning adults.

The events presented evidence about return and included calls for further action to complement and extend the 2011 Cross Government Strategy on Missing Children and Adults (Home Office, 2011). This briefing paper emerges from these events and calls for:

1. **Return Home Interviews (RHIs) for missing adults.** Missing People’s [Manifesto for Missing People](https://www.missingpeople.org.uk) (Missing People, 2014a) is also calling on the government to ensure that every adult who returns from being missing is offered a return interview to find out what help they need, and then support to access that help.

2. **An evaluated trial of RHIs for adults** and, in particular, economic evaluation of the intervention. Missing People is open to expressions of interest from multi-agency groups who may be able to assist with such a trial. Please contact partners@missingpeople.org.uk

3. **Enhanced knowledge and evidence** about the costs of missing incidents for all stakeholders.

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¹ www.missingpeople.org.uk/returningadultsevent or follow the conversation on Twitter using #ReturnedMissing
Evidence of need 1: incidence

In 2014-15 the National Crime Agency (NCA) UK Missing Persons Bureau (UKMPB) recorded 210,632 missing person incidents, relating to 129,046 individuals. Police Scotland received 39,926 missing person-related calls, an increase of 9% compared with the year 2013/14 (NCA, 2016).

In 2014/15 just over one third of all incidents (39%) were repeat incidents. This demonstrates an increase in repeat incidents in line with the previous year. In 2014/15 for England and Wales, there were 83,208 missing incidents recorded for adults relating to 68,389 individuals, comprising an 18% adult repeat incident rate, which is increasing (NCA, 2016).

Evidence of need 2: hearing from returned missing people

The ESRC-funded Geographies of Missing People research team interviewed 45 adults who had returned from a missing episode:

“You want people to understand and the coming home bit, it’s quite hard. Why you went in the first place is major, so I think any follow-up really needs to be with the individual about why it happened and how they’re feeling now for it not to happen again which I don’t think is the police’s responsibility.”

(Jackie, returned missing person interviewed for Geographies of Missing People)

These returned missing people called for:

- Effective and empathetic police response
- Professional support on return
- Opportunities to talk with non-police professionals
- Support to overcome the social legacies of having been reported as missing
- Support to re-establish family and community relations and trust
- Support to address the drivers of the missing episode to prevent future incidents.

Evidence of need 3: families of missing people speak out

“I would say both [missing incidents] have had a derogatory effect. I still find it quite hard to communicate with my friends. I don’t know if they actually trust me yet you know.”

(Trish, returned missing person interviewed for Geographies of Missing People)

“My friends they don’t really talk about it. They know about it, but they haven’t really spoken about it. [My mum] She knows about it. She doesn’t talk about it because these kind of things are really frowned upon and you don’t talk about these things.”

(Angela, returned missing person interviewed for Geographies of Missing People)

“I would say both [missing incidents] have had a derogatory effect. I still find it quite hard to communicate with my friends. I don’t know if they actually trust me yet you know.”

(Missing People family survey respondent, 2013)

“People go missing for a reason so I think it is about knowing who is there to help you after you’ve found the person.”

(Missing People family survey respondent, 2014)

Missing People conducts regular surveys of family members who have used the charity’s services. There is consistent demand for enhanced support after return; more than half of respondents in 2014 said they would have been likely to use such service (Missing People, 2014b).

In the ESRC research (Parr and Stevenson, 2014) families of missing people called for:

- An end to the lack of professional support and guidance on how to handle a return and prevent a new disappearance.
- Professional recognition of the difficulties about speaking of return on return with family and community settings.
- Professional help to deal with the anger which surfaces in families as well as other overwhelming emotions.
• Solutions to the problems caused by repeated missing events
• Help for families facing stigma and rejection from friends, family and local communities.

“‘My family and some friends have distanced themselves and even some neighbours’

(Gail, mother of returned missing daughter, interviewed for Geographies of Missing People)

‘Would be nice if there was something there [...] to bridge the gap. When somebody’s been missing, even if for a short time, there’s a gap there’

(Grandparent of a formerly missing person, interviewed for Holmes, 2014)

Evidence of need 4: the statutory position and calls for adult provisions

• National police guidance suggests that return interviews are “relevant to all missing persons” regardless of age (NPIA, 2010: 55).

• Most returned missing adults do not receive any professional guidance or support after a missing incident, although the existing research and evidence suggests would this be beneficial to their wellbeing. (Parr and Stevenson, 2013). Research has shown that RHIs for children contribute to a reduction in overall incidents (Ofsted, 2013). There is no equivalent evidence about the potential impact of RHIs for adults.

• The key benefits of return interviews are to identify people at risk; understand the risks and issues faced whilst missing; reduce the risks of future episodes of being missing; and equip people with the resources and knowledge of how to stay safe if they do choose to go missing again (DfE, 2014: 15-16).

• While statutory guidance on children who go missing has been available for many years (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2014) there is no equivalent guidance on missing adults. Scotland is currently leading the way in committing to providing guidance on return interviews in the national strategy

‘Consultation on working together for people who go missing in Scotland’ (Scottish Government, 2015). Prevention work in Police Scotland includes the expectation that return interviews take place (Police Scotland, 2015) and the development of return protocols between different agencies for particular missing people.

• Government guidance on adults who go missing from home and care would provide much needed clarity on different agencies’ responsibilities for responding to a missing adult incident and for providing support when people return.

Conclusion: Intervention is an act of prevention

This call for action argues for the Cross Government Strategy on Missing People (Home Office, 2011) to extend and further co-ordinate with Scotland’s Consultation on working together for people who go missing in Scotland’ (Scottish Government, 2015). New strategy should be in place to ensure:

1. Return Home Interviews (RHI) for adults. The Manifesto for Missing People (Missing People 2014a) is also calling on the government to ensure that every adult who returns from being missing is offered a return interview to find out what help they need, and then support to access that help.

2. Provision to trial and evaluate RHIs for missing adults and, in particular, to conduct economic evaluation of the intervention. This evidence will be vital to understanding the impact of adult RHIs on all stakeholders, including returned adults, family members, RHI providers, police, local authorities and health services. Missing People is open to expressions of interest from multiagency groups who may be able to assist with such a trial. Please contact partners@missingpeople.org.uk

3. The need for additional knowledge and evidence about the costs of missing incidents for all stakeholders.
References

• Department for Education (DfE) (2014) Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care (London: The Department for Education)

• Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2009) Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care (London: DCSF)


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