

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP  
FOR RUNAWAY AND MISSING CHILDREN AND ADULTS

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SESSION ONE  
SUPPORTING FAMILIES OF MISSING PEOPLE:  
EXISTING PROVISIONS AND THE MISSING PERSONS TASKFORCE  
RECOMMENDATIONS

held in

Boothroyd Room in Portcullis House

on

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2011

11:00 - 13:00

Panellists

Ann Coffey MP, Lead Chair

Nigel Adams, MP

Annette Brooke, MP

Robert Buckland, MP

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**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** My name is Ann Coffey, and I am the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults, and my colleagues are also members of the APPG: Annette Brooke, MP, Robert Buckland, MP, and Nigel Adams, MP, and we are absolutely delighted at the amount of support you are giving to this very important Parliamentary Inquiry. Earlier this year we heard from families of missing people in distress, and the barriers in law, and in practical terms what happens to families when a member goes missing, and I think it is very important that the evidence we give is acted upon.

We are planning to produce a set of recommendations where changes are required, and I think this is going to be a very important part of demonstrating the amount of widespread public support there is for those changes to be made. Can I particularly thank the three families who have come to talk to us today. It is a hard thing for you to do and we very much appreciate it. I wonder if, to start, each of you in turn could give a little introduction; say what you hope this Inquiry will achieve.

**Kate McCann:** I am Kate McCann, my daughter, Madeleine, was stolen from us while we were on holiday in Portugal in May 2007, nine days short of her fourth birthday. We still don't know where Madeleine is or who took her. Investigations to find Madeleine were closed by the Portuguese authorities in July 2008 - unsolved, and there has been no police force looking for her since, although ongoing - albeit limited - search driven by us, her parents, along with the general public. To this day I still don't believe this should be the role of the grieving parents. Thankfully, most people will only be able to imagine the pain and anxiety and fear and sense of helplessness that results from this kind of crime; but what compounds this suffering further is a lack of communication and information void. As a parent of a missing child or adult, you need to know that everything that can reasonably be done for your child is being done. We have been very fortunate that we have had so much amazing support from the general public, but we have had to fight - and really fight - to get the help that we feel Madeleine needs most to make a difference: that is the Government and the authorities. I know we are not alone in facing that kind of battle as I am sure Nicki and Sarah will agree. I think it is fair to say that many people could have been worn down by this process, because it is absolutely

relentless and exhausting. It is only now, four years on, with the recent agreement by the Government and the Metropolitan Police to review Madeleine's case that we feel that Madeleine's chances of being found are improving, and it goes without saying we are incredibly grateful for that help. I am very conscious that stranger abductions, like Madeleine's, are incredibly rare and, not least, it occurred out of the UK and in another country. Having said that, I do believe that there are some fundamental requirements that all families of missing people need. I mentioned earlier about the detrimental effect of information void, and I feel it is critical that all families have constant, continuous lines of communication, and a point of contact with the police who they can exchange information with, because to be left in the dark when your child is missing is unbearable and bordering on inhumane. Secondly, as human beings, we are not equipped to deal with such profound and extreme, devastating emotion, and neither are our friends or family. The ramifications of an event like this are huge. Finally, to improve the help and support given to the families who find themselves thrown into this awful nightmare, and the additional suffering and destruction that can ensue - I think it is worth every minute - and thank you for your time.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you.

**Nicki Durbin:** My name is Nicki Durbin, and my son, Luke, went out in Ipswich, Suffolk on 11 May 2006. Luke got separated from his friends, it was established that Luke was trying to get home, but he never made it. Living with a missing child is the most devastating experience any parent could ever live through. I live in a constant state of grief. I am unable to mourn, because I don't know for sure whether my son is alive or dead. Everything in my life is classified by either before Luke went missing or after Luke went missing. Five years on, I still have to push the thought that I may never be able to see or touch or talk to my eldest child to the back of my mind, even though I am intelligent enough to know what the reality probably is. Not only do I feel that Luke has been cheated of growing into a man and having lots of wonderful experiences, I feel he may have been cheated in his death. Luke wanted to be an organ donor. Personally, I have become an intolerant, cynical and distrusting person.

There is no preparation, no luxury of hindsight for dealing with the loss of a loved one. You are thrown into an alien world. The only support available for the families left behind is the charity Missing People. Due to their overstretched resources this support is limited. Over the last five years I have built up close friendships with many families who have lost a loved one. Many face the same battles. In my opinion Luke was let down by the police for the last four and a half years. When I first reported Luke missing the police responded quickly. In the first few weeks they carried out air and land searches. However, the searches were not as comprehensive as I first thought. It was not until January of this year that British Transport Police were brought in to search the railway line where he had been seen.

Two weeks after Luke's disappearance a police sergeant turned up at my house unannounced, and accused my son of wasting police time, and that when Luke came home he would tell him about the police resources he was wasting. That sergeant made false assumptions about my son, despite us telling the police that this was totally out of character. At this point, I realised the only way to get the police to take Luke's disappearance seriously was by putting pressure on them. The police scaled up the investigation but it was scaled down again in 2006, due to a major inquiry happening in Ipswich. I was assured the team working on this case would be reinstated in January. This never happened. I continued creating publicity to generate possible leads, continued putting theories to the police and questioning them. On numerous occasions different police officers told me they did not believe he was alive. However, they would not put in any more resources. At the end of November 2010, a police officer phoned me to invite me to come and speak to him. In this meeting he told me that the Norfolk and Suffolk team had taken over his case. The relief was overwhelming. The way the case has been handled has been so different. They have worked diligently and professionally. In the first few weeks since Luke's disappearance I gave a 45 minute statement about my child. Last December, I gave a seven hour statement about my child. In February of this year I was asked to positively ID over thirty images. The police had been sitting on these tapes for nearly five years. As far as I am aware these images were never found. In April of this year Forensics spent several hours at my home nearly five years after Luke disappearance. They update me

regularly about what has happened and I now have direct numbers to contact them if I need to.

Finally justice is being sought for Luke. If I had not fought for four and a half years I do not believe this would have happened. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of families out there who have got so worn down that they do not have any fight left in them. No family should have to fight to ensure their loved one gets the service they deserve. I hope the Parliamentary Inquiry has the ability to change the way that families are treated, and that:

- 1) new legislation is introduced under which police officers are properly trained to deal with the families of missing people;
- 2) they are given a single point of contact in the police force;
- 3) it is standard practice that all families are immediately signposted to the charity Missing People.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Sarah Godwin:** Good morning, my name is Sarah Godwin. My son Quentin went missing in May 1992 when he was eighteen years old; we were living in New Zealand. He left home as a normal procedure to go to an after-school job, and that was the last we saw of him. Subsequently, we did find a note that could be interpreted as a suicide note, so the police became involved very quickly, and they were very thorough searching surrounding areas and places he might have gone. However, after the first initial rush to look, things died down, and as the weeks and months ticked by, less and less happened because there is only so much searching you can do. So as a family you are left in this void, and I think you have heard from Nicki and Kate the anguish, and the pain, and the emotional turmoil you are in, makes ordinary life very difficult, but you have to pick up the pieces, and you have to try and work out how you can best carry on looking for your child, how you can stimulate interest in the disappearance of your child, and how you sort out this terrible confusion. In my case I moved away from New Zealand, came back to England after three years because nothing had changed, and I am originally from England. So I do feel very, very strongly that there is this terrible need for the points of contact, for the professional help, for the interconnectedness of all the services that would be involved in this. It is about mental health. It is

about addiction. It is about homelessness. It is about missing people. It is about police. It is about the families that are left behind, and about the legal and financial mess they might be in, and, somehow, I very much hope the work of Missing People and this Parliamentary Inquiry can mesh those essential things together, to a point where people do feel reassured, even in the midst of their personal agony, that everything is being done to connect all those points of information so that nothing is missed, no stone is left unturned, because as Nicki has said, because as Kate has said, we all feel stones have been left unturned, and having to find them and turn them over yourself is nearly impossible. It is a path that is beyond people's capability in many cases. So for me it is in the interconnectedness of all the service provision, and the real feeling of reassurance that everyone is doing the best for you whatever the circumstances of the disappearance is. Thank you for your time.

**Ann Coffey MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you very much. Can I thank all of you for telling us in some detail of your personal experiences, and I can feel the difficulty and the pain in your voices. I wonder if I can ask you, Kate, what emotional support do you think agencies could offer families, and should be offering families, in a way which perhaps is not happening at the moment?

**Kate McCann:** I think professional psychological support is required and I think it needs to be somebody who is experienced in dealing with crisis cases like this, the loss of a family member. We were very lucky, our tour operator, Mark Warner, funded, and flew over, a trauma counsellor to see Gerry and I, and I cannot emphasise enough what a difference that made. We are medically trained and we could not function. The effect was remarkable, and, I think I mentioned before, that close family is also terribly affected. Certainly it helps you to function, to talk, challenge our fears, and the sense of helplessness is overwhelming; an incredibly unpleasant sensation, really hard to describe. Our counsellor helped, started taking control of things we couldn't control. It is probably the first time in my life that I felt totally out of control. I think it is of paramount importance that psychological support is offered to the family.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you very much. Annette?

**Annette Brooke, MP:** Thank you. Nicki, thank you very much for sharing your story with us today and you have come up with very clear recommendations which was very helpful. Obviously for you, until very recently, the police was a huge stumbling block, and I wanted you to expand a little on what you think the needs of families might be in terms of information and communication from the police, and should you have had that named police officer from day one?

**Nicki Durbin:** Yes, I certainly think I should have had a named police officer. I will just give you one example of a situation that occurred. I think it was two weeks after his disappearance. I had just put the radio on, and there were reports of a male body that had been decapitated, about an hour and a half drive from where we live, and I am sure you can imagine the terror this put in me. I tried to 'phone the switchboard, I didn't even know who I was asking for, I was screaming down my 'phone saying "is it my son?" and half of me thinking just get in the car and drive, I would recognise him by his toes. It was just so traumatic. Had I immediately got a number, and a name of someone to contact, it would have been immediate rather than five minutes waiting while the police tried to put me through. The other thing is listening to families. I had lived with him for nineteen years, I knew his character, obviously there were bits of his life that were a bit up and down, but the one thing he always did was 'phone me to let me know where he was. So I think it is just very basic stuff – listening to families – when families are in complete trauma.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** Thank you. Sarah, thank you for sharing your experiences with us. I want to focus on the same issues we have been looking at with the other witnesses about what you think should be done in order to encourage and increase support for families. I know you mentioned independent services. I was wondering if you could develop that theme or any other theme relating to that element of support for families.

**Sarah Godwin:** Yes, I would like to endorse both the points that Kate and Nicki have brought up, both emotional support, and contact through the police. I think this is a tremendously isolating experience. It sort of sets you in a little world of your own, which people are very sympathetic to, but they can't actually really relate to, because it is so different from anything that is

normally experienced in your life. That feeling of isolation, it's very disabling. You feel you can't - the helplessness, the hopelessness, all of that - so to actually be able to be signposted; they would be able to put you in touch with counsellors in your area who were specialised because then, like Kate said, someone who knows how to deal with this particular form of bereavement trauma is invaluable. I haven't had that benefit. To be able to talk to someone who knows what you are talking about, rather than having to explain what you are talking about would be invaluable. It is the social cost, it is like a stone is thrown into a pond, and you get all these ripples going out, and out, and out, and they keep going as long as a person is missing, in my case eighteen years. It is a hell of a long time and in many cases it fractures a family. Families fall apart because they can't cope with the strain. So to be able to have good professional counselling, to have immediate contact with someone within the police force, and to be reassured through that contact point that all avenues were being explored, to know that Missing People existed and what their services are, and the support they can offer - and that is increasing rapidly - those three points would be incredibly valuable. Obviously the other practical issues behind the emotional ones are the legislated ones for the presumption of death, and for easing the financial struggle that some families end up in, if a wage earner has gone missing, or something happens that puts you at risk financially. I think that would be enormously important too. It is trying to ease the areas that can be eased, because the area that is not going to be eased is that the person is missing; but there are things that can be done that will make your path a little easier while you are dealing with that.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** Thank you. I would be interested to know from all three of you how long it was before you came into contact with Missing People, in fact how you came into contact with them? How you were flagged to the charity?

**Sarah Godwin:** No charity of similar work in New Zealand at that time, not sure now. When I came to England in 1995 I looked up to see what charities did exist, and I 'phoned them, and because I was an overseas case, they took my name and details, and I was put on their database - they said they would do whatever they could to help at any time, but it wasn't really an

issue they could get terribly involved with - so I found out myself when I came to live in England.

**Nicki Durbin:** I contacted Missing People quite soon after Luke went missing, not sure how long, maybe two weeks, and I had never heard of them until a colleague at work told me about the charity. It was never suggested to me by police, it was through a colleague, and I personally feel that they are a different charity today than they were five years ago. I didn't really know what they do, I thought it was publicising on their website – didn't actually know what they were about – to be fair.

**Kate McCann:** Likewise, I had never heard of Missing People prior to Madeleine's abduction. They are the UK's biggest charity for missing people and their families, but I didn't know about them. Obviously we were in Portugal, and I can't remember which way round it was, but it was Gerry's brother, Johnny, who had contact first with Missing People while we were in Portugal. It was only after we returned and things had calmed down a little bit that we established a relationship and worked together.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** It is interesting that neither of you had heard about the charity from the police at any stage.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you. I think what we have taken from this, is the importance of having a named person as a point of contact, someone you feel you can 'phone up and have a communication with, and also the importance of emotional support, signposted people who can help and an understanding by the wider agencies. Do you agree that would be the major recommendation you would wish to make?

**Nicki Durbin:** Yes

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Is there anything else you want to add?

**Kate McCann:** Just thank everyone here today.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Can we thank you for coming because it is a hard thing to do. It is very difficult, continuing painful memories for you, and we are very grateful you have come because you want to help other families to whom it has not yet happened to - but it might happen to in the future - so

that perhaps when a family member goes missing, they get the kind of support and help that you perhaps would have welcomed at the time, so thank you very much, we are very grateful to you.

Thank you very much, Minister, for coming to our Inquiry, and on behalf of the APPG and the many charities working in this area, we would like to thank the Coalition Government for formally incorporating responsibility for missing persons into a Ministerial post, and for the very clear leadership that you have shown in ensuring that the work that has been done under the previous Government has not just found a home in the Coalition, but a basis for effective policy development, and making a difference to the police and community of families affected by missing people.

I would just like to ask you where we are up to with the Missing Persons Taskforce Report, which I believe made a number of recommendations.

**James Brokenshire, Minister for Crime and Security:** Of course, and can I at the outset, thank you and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for conducting this Inquiry, which I think will be very helpful and very beneficial to shine a light on a number of the issues that do relate to missing incidents, and I hope that this will help form the Government's policy round this area, and certainly it is difficult not to be affected by the evidence we have just heard, and really underlining the huge impact it has on families when someone does go missing.

On the issue of the Taskforce, we have gone forward on the recommendations that were made, and eight of the recommendations have been implemented, and work is ongoing in relation to the remainder. What I would say to this Committee, is that the Government is perhaps expanding its view, certainly for me, having been engaged in this policy arena for around twelve months now, and that missing elements is touching upon a number of different policy strands, whether that be vulnerable adults, whether that be mental health issues, whether that be child sexual exploitation. So what we are doing is seeking to analyse those policy areas where there may be a missing element, and seeking to draw those together. So I think the Taskforce recommendations and the report has been very valuable, very helpful, but I think the work is now broadening, and hence the reason why I think this Inquiry is very timely in providing further evidence for consideration.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** Given what is happening with the police restructuring nationally, and the evidence we have heard this morning from Kate, Nicki and Sarah, what plans do you have to ensure that the support needs of the families of missing people are factored into decisions about the provisions of services nationally?

**James Brokenshire, Minister for Crime and Security:** I think there are a number of different strands that are relevant here. Obviously the Government does support the really incredible work Missing People undertakes in providing the helpline, providing various different services to support families where someone has gone missing. There is also work we have been engaged in around missing children, the responsibility for missing children has been given to CEOP, (The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre), and I think that will allow CEOP to bring their real expertise in child safeguarding, child protection issues, and they are already considering the Child Rescue Alert system, how that might operate better, why that hasn't been utilised as much as it may have been in the past. There is also the work, for example, safeguarding adults. Again I think this highlights some of the issues, the fact there are several thousand people that go missing from NHS care each year, and getting a better link up, join up, on NHS systems, and actually the handling of those cases as well. I think there is quite a lot of work that is ongoing, hence the reason I made my initial comments on perhaps looking at 'missing' in a slightly broader context than perhaps has been undertaken thus far. Obviously, there are decisions we still need to take in relation to the functions of the NPIA (the National Policing Improvement Agency) Missing Persons Bureau; the missing persons database and where that may best reside. We are considering these very, very, carefully, because we want to get this right, we want to ensure this does support the overall changes that we are taking in relation to missing people, and missing children.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** Thank you. Just looking at the role of the police, in particular, for a lot of families their first port of call will be the police, and I was wondering what reassurances you can provide to ensure that the police will continue to be the lead agency for missing persons, so that the sort of

evidence we have heard this morning, the support, can become more of a reality?

**James Brokenshire, Minister for Crime and Security:** I think you are absolutely right; the police are the primary local agency who are likely to come into contact with these issues first and foremost. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has provided guidance as well as practical information on their online resources, to ensure that the police responding to these incidents are better aware, and knowledgeable, about how to deal with this. I think the evidence you have just heard underlines that there is more work to do, the Association of Chief Police Officers themselves, have got certain practical guidance, but there are more police forces that might engage with that and adopt them. Also the need for looking at where specialist expertise may be. Of course, you have the local response, and you have heard from the cases this morning they can be very, very different in their complexity and their nature. Having a national resource for children, which is what the CEOP will provide, where there are cases perhaps involving an international element, that there is a central agency that is able to better join up, better co-ordinate the response, in so doing will enhance the response and the support the families receive as a consequence of this.

**Annette Brooke, MP:** Are there lessons to be drawn from the systems used in the United States?

**James Brokenshire, Minister for Crime and Security:** I think CEOP, taking on the responsibilities on 1 July 2011, will be looking very closely and very carefully as to how it can best support the activities. I know you are receiving evidence from Peter Davies later on in this investigation, and I am sure he will want to talk about that in further detail. What we have been clear about in relation to the future of CEOP, and I know that there has been some speculation as to what will happen when it moves into the National Crime Agency, we have been absolutely clear that all the very special assets of CEOP, the ability to engage with the private and charitable sector, its operation, we want to protect and enhance that as we move to the National Crime Agency. Clearly if there are practical examples of an expertise that may help forward the progression of work, this is something I am sure will be examined and considered, because we clearly want to improve the work in this area. CEOP

will work with charities like Missing People, PACT and a number of other organisations as well, which I think will ensure we do move this on and improve the response.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** What roles do you see NGOs as having in the delivery of support services for missing persons?

**James Brokenshire, Minister for Crime and Security:** Well, clearly Missing People, as I have already said, has a huge role to play, and that is the reason why the Home Office, the Department of Education has supported its work, and I think that there is a balance that needs to be struck between the statutory and voluntary organisations, which is why I think Missing People has a really crucial role to play, why I really enjoyed working with them over the last year, and we will continue to look for the support and the expertise in the charitable and voluntary sector as well, because I think we need to look where there is expertise and resources and see how best we can harness them.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** We have something like forty three police forces in England and Wales, and something like a hundred and fifty two local authorities, and I think people's experience is different depending on what local authority or police force they were in, and I was wondering if you might find it good to develop a guideline for policy practice which you could bring together with best practice for guidance for police forces, so that families do not think it is a lottery depending where they live.

**James Brokenshire, Minister for Crime and Security:** As I have already indicated, there is guidance that has already been published by the Association of Chief Police Officers, and the number of police forces that are meeting that standard is increasing. Obviously it is a question of moving forward, seeing, for example, a standard database, COMPACT, which is used for handling missing people incidents. I think you make a very important point around the relationship with the local authorities and the local Children's Safeguarding Board, which is a point that has come through very clearly in other work, the Munro Review of Child Protection, where missing elements were highlighted very clearly in that, as well as the Government indicating it will be responding on child sexual exploitation, the Barnet report, and my colleague at the Department for Education is leading that work, so we are very much doing that

in a joined up way across Government. So we are focused on safeguarding issues, and equally - not forgetting the adult side of this as well, vulnerable adults - why we think that it is important to have safeguarding adults on a statutory basis. So we are looking at better ways to promote good practice, to promote where there are good ideas, sharing that practice, and I think what I will certainly take away from this morning's first session, is to ensure the families in this terrible position are better directed to support and advice and care, and I think that is something we will look at quite closely, and I will be very interested to see the response that you give us from the evidence that has been heard, because I am sure there are things we, in Government, should be looking at more, while I am genuinely supportive of the work you are doing.

**Annette Brooke, MP:** Just listening to the stories, the fact that Luke was 19, I am concerned of gaps in the children's services and adult services. Can you just give us some reassurance there?

**James Brokenshire, Minister for Crime and Security:** No, hence the reason why I made my last point, in ensuring that cases where adults have gone missing are given sufficient weight, given that at times there may be serious crimes, serious offences involved, which is why they need to be treated accordingly, but also looking at the broader issues of adults that go missing. There are around 360,000 incidents that are reported of people going missing each year, and yes, two thirds of those are related to children, and the highest proportion is in the age range of between fifteen and seventeen, but we must have and will retain a focus on responding to adult incidents as much as children. We are working with the police on how best to deal with responses on missing incidents that are reported. There is the need of further work around this area.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you very much for replying, for your very positive response to our questions, and your enthusiasm and commitment, which will be very much appreciated by the families of missing people.

**James Brokenshire, Minister for Crime and Security:** Thank you very much.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Could you introduce yourself?

**Martin Houghton-Brown, Chief Executive, Missing People:** I have had the huge privilege of working in a policy area that is very close to my heart. I have spent the last six years focusing on families of missing people, firstly with children, and now with adults, and one of the things I want to emphasise is, having focused enormously on young runaways for five years previously to arriving at Missing People, I now recognise that, sadly, some of the greatest vulnerability lies with adults, and when you look at fatal outcomes, it is sadly adults who are more likely to have died as a result of this incident, and so I can't applaud the Minister enough in his final comments about joining up adult responses. While it is wonderful for CEOP to join forces to make this work happen, we do need equivalence across the spectrum.

**Jo Youle, Director of Services, Missing People:** I have been in the privileged position of leading a service which provides support to families and also provides confidential support to people missing themselves, so I have heard both sides of the story. I think what sticks in my mind most is the desperation of families who find themselves in this position. So, of the dad who attempted to take his own life, such was the desperation that he found himself in, of the mother who I spoke to just last week - her son has been missing for over four years - and struggled at 3am in the morning when her mind travels to very dark corners, and desperately needs to speak to someone at that time, and of the wife whose husband - after two and a half years - has just got in contact with her, and she has been at home looking after her three children. Those are the things that stick in my mind.

**Elise Noblet, Support Worker, The Children's Society:** I work one-to-one with children and young people who run away from home and care centres, working directly with those people, and I come into contact with families and carers of people who run away, which can be for a short period of time but often that is repeated on a regular occasion. It is not necessarily just a short period of time; sometimes a runaway can be gone for days, for weeks at a time. From my experience with the families we work with, the service that we offer to young people, the one-to-one support seems to be vital for the families, for them to have that emotional support, to look at their needs.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** Could you tell us specifically the services you offer the families of missing people, and give us some indication of your current workload?

**Martin Houghton-Brown, Chief Executive, Missing People:** The charity was founded as the National Missing Persons Helpline, eighteen years ago, in fact the founders are sitting behind me here – we are very proud of that legacy – and, since that time, twenty four hours a day, a helpline has been available to help both the families of missing people, and the missing people themselves. One of the unique services we provide is to mediate between those parties when a missing adult or child themselves contact us for help, either to find somewhere safe to go, or indeed to reconnect - as Jo was saying, this adult has been missing for nearly two years and wants to reconnect with his family. In addition to those helpline services, we have a national publicity function, certainly the largest publicity of its kind. Most people here would have seen the newspaper adverts, the Metro, the Big Issue and so on. We have a partnership with the BBC and we help present the BBC ‘missing’ documentary each spring.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** How many partners are there?

**Jo Youle, Director of Services, Missing People:** About three thousand.

**Martin Houghton-Brown, Chief Executive, Missing Persons:** These are individual organisations that are set up to take posters and, of course, now we are harnessing the power of the web to ensure the internet helps us with the publicity function too. We took about 114,000 calls last year into our helpline, but they really do come around the clock. I remember very early on sitting at 2 o’clock in the morning listening to a very crucial call safeguarding a vulnerable adult with mental health problems, who literally did not know where he was. With our support he was willing to connect with the police, and I remember him simply wanting to know that his bike was going to be safe. “I don’t want to tell you where I am unless you can get my bike home”. He was in an inner city area, extremely vulnerable, and there was a great copper on the beat who said “Yes I’ll bring the van round”, and he literally took the ‘phone off the chap, and said “Yes I’m here now, I’ve got his bike and oh yes I have got him”. Those

are great occasions where we connect people up. We are holding about a thousand cases at any one time. The reality is that we are entirely reliant on the pro bono support we have from John Lewis Partnership, about six and a half thousand square feet of accommodation. We are entirely reliant on the one hundred volunteers who provide us with support around the clock giving four to ten hour shifts at a time, in their spare time investing their time. Without that we would be unable to do our work.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** If I develop that point, I was wondering; in your professional view, what is the potential scale of need for support services for the families of missing people?

**Jo Youle, Director of Services, Missing People:** I think there are two aspects to that question. One is about the very specific nature of coping as a family with having a loved one missing, families that are struggling day-to-day, to hold down jobs to pay mortgages, just to keep going and just to keep functioning. The emotional support needs to be very specific to that issue. I think families deserve a very specialised service to help them with the unique and devastating situation that they find themselves in. Devastating for them, and for the siblings and for the wider family and wider friends. We currently support about a thousand families each year, but we believe that actually twenty thousand families should be supported by the charity, and that is a huge shortfall, and that is enough to keep us all awake at night; concern about those families, a huge unmet need, families that may not even know there is somewhere to turn to 24/7.

**Annette Brooke, MP:** I am delighted to see The Children's Society represented here today, and I have attended a meeting of your Society in Dorset. Can you tell us a bit more about the support and needs of the families?

**Elise Noblet, The Children's Society:** We have contact regularly with families. The emotional support that the families request is about having someone they can talk to, who will listen to them, who can understand what they are going through. Families tell us through the night they feel in limbo, and even though they have reported them missing to the police, they want to actively go looking for their children, but that is not always possible because if

they have other children to look after they can't leave the house. They need someone with them, to talk with them and understand what it is like. I met with a parent who says you feel like tearing your hair out, you are in the house at night, you can't leave, you don't know where your child is, so having the support there for the parents, having that one-to-one help, also on a family level as well, mediation for the parent and the child as well, to bring back together families. There are many, many reasons why a young person runs away, but family breakdown is a quite a key one. If you can look at what is involved when a young person does return, and continuing to support and try and bring a family back together to prevent further running away. Also, on a practical level with families we work with, there is often the reality of having to attend meetings, contact with the police, having to take time off work, (both attending meetings and going looking for your child), but also the stress it causes many parents and families, and that I don't think is always recognised, for example, when families are off work with stress because their children have run away. I don't know how understanding many employers are of a family in that situation, recognising that support is needed as well. The practicalities for families who would go out looking for their child, they may not have much of an income, or transport, and they have to go out and do those searches on their own. I think that regular communication with families, and primarily police - they are obviously the people who lead on searches - but having that regular feedback. Parents report their children are missing to the police, and if they don't feel they are getting that regular feedback, communication about the investigation - parents often say that they don't feel anything gets done - so therefore they will sometimes not make a report to the police and go out and look for their children themselves. Also an issue that arises, they sometimes feel they are a nuisance, and feel like they are wasting police time, so we should look at police being key and support for the families, and appropriate training for officers to deal with families and runaways themselves.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** For both of you working in the area of young runaways and missing people, what do you think are the barriers, what would you like to see come out of this Parliamentary Inquiry in terms of change?

**Martin Houghton-Brown, Chief Executive, Missing People:** It is very clear to me that the fact that if your house is burgled you will get automatic support under the victim support scheme, but you are excluded from that scheme if your child goes missing or someone you love goes missing, because there are different issues around missing to being a victim of crime, it is not simply a replication or extending of the victim of crime scheme, but it is a similar scenario, and right now police forces have systems in place to notify families of people who are victims of crime, and I think a similar system should exist. The current policy is there is no mandate for police forces to deliver, there is soft guidance out there, and as we heard from the Minister, some police forces are adhering to that guidance, but as we hear from families, the experience on the ground is a long way from that guidance.

We have all been involved in social policy for a long time, and we know that guidance has its benefits and its limits, and there are times when a very sharp policy on something like signposting - it is relatively cost neutral - very cheap, cost of a stamp to send a letter to a family, or simply an email, and, yes, it will create an enormous demand on the services of Missing People, and of course that is a challenge in the current resource climate, but I would rather face the reality of 20,000 families at least knowing the support is there and available, and face that demand, and come back to the Minister in due course, than to know what happens at present is the scenario we have heard this morning where families don't even know that support exists and they are in isolation.

**Elise Noblet, The Children's Society:** I think what I really would like to see is a service that is there for young people but duplicated for families, so referrals; services in, albeit, voluntary organisations, to offer that support to parents. I also think we need to see a change with how families are treated and dealt with by police, so they do feel their case is being taken seriously, and there is empathy and understanding from an officer that comes to their house at 3am in the morning to do a missing report. If their child has been missing ten times in the past few months, it doesn't take away the nature of it, it just means it is happening more and more, and that needs to be recognised nationally. As you said earlier, the response you get in every police division

across the country should be the same for a parent when they report someone missing.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you very much. I thank all of you for giving me this interesting insight and your great experience of dealing with families, and it is a very valuable insight you have given us, so thank you very much.

Thank you and welcome, perhaps you would like to introduce yourselves?

**Major Graham Kinsley, Director of Family Tracing Services, Salvation Army:** My name is Major Graham Kinsley. I am the Director of Family Tracing Services at the Salvation Army.

**Dr Helen Cameron, Head of Public Affairs, Salvation Army:** I am Dr Helen Cameron, Head of Public Affairs at the Salvation Army, and envisage that Graham will be able to answer most of your questions. I am here in case the questions are broader than his remit.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Welcome to both of you. Many people think of the Salvation Army as the missing people's charity, could you perhaps let us know what services you offer?

**Major Graham Kinsley, Director of Family Tracing Services, Salvation Army:** To be fair we operate on a slightly different platform to Missing People. The people we help are mainly people who have lost contact over the years.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** What are the impacts of your work and what scale of need is there?

**Major Graham Kinsley, Director of Family Tracing Services, Salvation Army:** In recent years, the number of enquiries we have had has diminished slightly. Probably that is due to the fact that most people can go on the internet and do a lot of research themselves. Whereas say forty years ago the average enquiry was about 4,500, it is now about 3,000. That is still quite a lot of people who need to make that connection, and we feel that it is necessary the Salvation Army is still involved in this kind of work. We don't have any limit on any length of time of separation, we have had brothers and sisters who

have been missing for eighty one years, that is probably the upper limit at the moment, but we tend not to take anyone on until they have been missing for about six months. What happens then is if a person rings up a with a case such as someone has run away or just gone missing, we would refer them to Missing People, or if we thought someone was vulnerable or at risk then we would encourage them to contact the police.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** What do you think should be done to ensure that every family gets the support they need?

**Major Graham Kinsley, Director of Family Tracing Services, Salvation Army:** I think many people don't know that services like ours, like Missing People exist, and possibly we are at fault that we haven't publicised our work as much as we should have done, and Missing People have done a fair bit of publicity but probably feel they can do more, and we definitely feel that we can do more. For the Salvation Army to give a broader hand of help if you like when they come to us for this help. The Salvation Army, as well as the Family Tracing Services, has many other counselling services, for example, alcohol, housing service. When our caseworkers are talking to people who have rung up, or even the person we have just located, we ask them if there is anything we can do to help, and if they express they would like to have some help in making this connection, we would refer them to our counselling service and they would do everything they could to help them through that transition period.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** You said normally you would deal with situations that have been ongoing more than six months, so you are in a good position to comment on situations families find themselves in, perhaps the initial response has come and gone with agencies, but they are still seeking a missing person, and I wonder if you could let us know some of the difficulties they face.

**Major Graham Kinsley, Director of Family Tracing Services, Salvation Army:** We refer them to Missing People if it is less than six months, even if they come to us after that period, we would say we would prefer not to be involved at that stage, but when the police say they have done everything they can, we would try and take over from that, recognising that the resources at

our finger tips have equally been at the fingertips of the police, so if the police have already tried those avenues we would only be repeating what the police have already done, but we would be quite happy to do that, because in some cases the first sweep through may come up with nothing, but if you try a few months later, it might.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** I am interested to know what levels of success you have had when you do trace missing people.

**Major Graham Kinsley, Director of Family Tracing Services, Salvation Army:** 2010 statistics show an 88% success rate of those that we have been asked to look for. That does not necessarily mean 88% have all been reunited. They have been located, some have passed away, sometimes that is very helpful to the enquirer, if they can draw a line underneath the problem, or we contact people and they may say they don't want to have contact. Although it is a success, it might not be a reconciliation.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you very much, thank you for coming and for the very valuable work you do, the Salvation Army continues to do in this area.

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** Good afternoon, I am Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive of the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA).

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** I wonder whether you could let us know what the role of the NPIA is in missing persons?

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** Yes, we host the national Missing Persons Bureau (the 'Bureau') at our site in Hampshire, as part of our Operations Directorate, and it is a bureau of fifteen people, with an annual budget this year of around £625,000, and it exists to help national and international reconciliation of missing and found people through our database, and enables us to provide advice and support to police investigations, specialist access to the DNA Database, the National Fingerprint Database, the Police National Computer, and we also have a national database to drive intelligence and pictures of missing people.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** Can you, as lead police agency for missing persons, provide us with an idea of the scale of the need for missing people and their families who are in need of support?

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** Yes, the police receive around 356,000 reports of missing people each year, which relates to around 200,000 different people, because of course some people will be reported missing repeatedly, so that is a report coming in every 90 seconds. Up to 80% of those people return home within 24 hours, and we find, sadly, between eight and thirty five people will be found dead each week. They are broadly equally in proportion, men and women 52% to 48%, and two thirds of those who go missing are young people aged under eighteen years.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** Given the scale of what you have just mentioned, how do you factor the needs of the families left behind?

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** Of course from within those figures there are some very different stories, and the stories that we have heard this morning are very much at one end of the scale. I have operational experience from several years back of police viewing missing person investigations as a nuisance, an irritation, but of course the needs of families are hugely important, not always met, and not always a matter for the police. We have a responsibility, I am sure you will hear more from my colleague, Phil Thompson, about the role of ACPO in this, in an operational sense, but many of the things we have been hearing about today, are quite properly not a matter for the police, but our role should really be to signpost people on towards those better equipped than us to provide support.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** Yes I am just looking at that particular point of support for families and the inter-relationship between national and local policing. What do you see the relative roles of national policing and local policing in relation to the support for families of missing people?

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** I think greater emphasis on local delivery of policing. I think at a national level ACPO has a responsibility to set standards, about the work of ACPO - you will hear more in a few moments. We have a responsibility, as a technical agency, to provide technical support. Quite often we do have occasional 'phone calls directed to

the Bureau, people looking for help, and when those calls come in we are happy to provide help. We also help set standards around our family liaison officers, and, of course, the standard of family liaison is extremely important. People in this time in their lives will remember, it will leave a massive imprint on them, but we should steer well clear of moving into the realms of counselling, simply because others are better placed than the police to deliver that kind of support.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** Do you see NGOs as being in a better position to offer support services for families?

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** Yes, my colleagues at the Bureau think extremely highly of the calibre of the people, and the determination to provide an excellent service from the NGOs that are being discussed today.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Of course, the first person the family will see will be a police officer, and it is difficult to know when counselling starts, and often they will look to the police for information and communication, so I am not sure you can say that counselling has got nothing to do with the police, I would imagine they have done a lot of it?

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** Of course it is not by accident that the police are referred to as the “the Social Service of last resort”, as we are the first people the family will see, and indeed we are the only people who are around at two, three or four o’clock in the morning – the time these calls are likely to come in. It is an ongoing issue and very much a preoccupation of our time, to shift the operational end of the police service a little bit away from being as taken, as it is, with procedures and filling in forms, and making sure things are being done in a procedurally correct manner, into a place where officers show greater discretion, but do so in a manner where empathy and communication skills are suitably valued.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Do you think there is a case for perhaps improving awareness among police officers generally about the specific problems families may face which we heard from families giving evidence earlier on?

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** I may stray into my colleague's territory, but I was reflecting when I was listening earlier to the evidence, there wouldn't be a police officer in this country who wouldn't change the way they deal with families of missing persons had they listened to the evidence of the families that I had just listened to.

**Annette Brooke, MP:** Carrying on from that point - you probably won't be providing core services of support to families - but do you think the tool kit your Bureau has is adequate for signposting; do you have enough information?

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** My colleagues in the Bureau have been working on the products they make available, they make available a police online knowledge area as a means of getting information and good practice, the generality of good policing, out to police forces. Specifically in relation to the Bureau, my colleagues held a consultation event with families of missing people, and we had some very helpful feedback which made it clear that the majority of participants were not satisfied with the service they had received from the police, and one of the biggest complaints was a lack of communication, so from that event recommendations around national consistency, around single points of contact, improvements in communication, and information on police resources such as these NGOs. We are now producing a series of information factsheets for families which will explain what they can expect from police, and how they can help police. Factsheets also provide advice on details of helpful agencies and organisations as well as case specific information, what to do when people go missing abroad, for example. We are working with Missing People but the Bureau intends to incorporate further details on NGOs in that guidance. So good work being done, but we are not there yet, although it is improving.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** As I understand it, you continue to receive all reports of missing people, whether those are adults or children, how do you see yourself working together with CEOP in the future because of the changes taking place?

**Nick Gargan, Chief Constable and Chief Executive, NPIA:** That is work in progress, but the relationship between CEOP and NPIA are generally very good, and only last week I was at CEOP for their CEOP awards, and Peter

Davies will be joining us at the launch of the Police National Database, which will be taking place next week. At an officer level too, a tactical level too, those relationships are very good. It is important that they remain very good, because irrespective of where responsibility for missing children and Child Rescue Alert sits, there will always be the two sides of this team to work together. I am very confident both in the calibre of the individuals doing this work and in their attitude towards co-operation will ensure we move forward, we will see, if anything, an improvement in the services provided, not a deterioration.

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** Good afternoon, my name is Phil Thompson, and I am Assistant Chief Constable of Cheshire Constabulary, and I am the ACPO lead for Missing Adults. Can I just say before I face the Panel's questions, I would like to acknowledge the trauma and devastation that missing people causes to those families that are left behind, and appreciate the words of Kate, Nicki and Sarah, and their courage in coming to this hearing this morning, and raising the issues mainly which are for my organisation to face.

**Ann Coffey MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you. I wonder whether you can tell us what the local police remit is within missing persons?

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** Yes, quite simply, when a 'missing' report is taken, it is for the local police area, the area under the command of the Chief Constable, to make an assessment, and to respond to that need. In actual fact, our understanding of that is developing very quickly, because as you have already heard, there are in the region of 360,000 events a year, that is around a thousand a day, or as Nick Gargan told you, one every 90 seconds, so in order for us to be able to deal effectively and identify those areas, we need to take a very sensible and pragmatic assessment of the risks of each case.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** I think there needs to be some way of assessment when you are getting a lot of missing people reports, do you think there is yet in place an evidence-based risk assessment framework, which can be used by police when they are making that assessment?

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** Yes there is a risk assessment framework in place. One of the fundamental challenges the police service has, that challenge set to us by Kate, Nicki and Sarah, what is it that they, as people who have lost others require of us, not how do we as an organisation descend into a process-based activity which is in itself self-fulfilling, but does not actually address the needs of the family or of the missing person. So the fundamental challenge is to understand each of these elements, the outcomes, not servicing a process.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** Is there any process for signposting to other services as a standard process, looking at the seriousness of each case. Is there any system there?

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** Yes, this is the guidance manual which has been referred to already. It is in excess of 90 pages, and in itself, there is much in there that is worthwhile, however, there is a fair bit of stuff in there which is not that easily accessible to officers who want something that will guide them in a particular circumstance. That does make the point, and has made it since around 2005, in the case of missing cases, that the case should be signposted to the Missing People charity, and has the contact details in there. Quite clearly one of the fundamental challenges I face on behalf of the Service is that this is not working well enough, and we have to do better.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** Are you planning to streamline those pages to make it more user friendly?

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** I have had this portfolio since September, and what is quite apparent to me, is there is a significant amount of clutter in this world, an analysis will show you that there are seventy stakeholders, all of whom have a voice, all of whom are highly motivated, all of whom are undertaking very virtuous efforts, but what there isn't, is something which actually combines that effort in the way it should. My view is that this is crying out for a national strategy for missing people, with clear signposts to each organisation of what their responsibility is, and what their service standards are in a very pragmatic sense, not with each of us developing huge manuals of guidance or huge documents or huge risk

assessment tools, which in itself sounds very shallow when you listen to the words of Kate, Nicki and Sarah.

**Annette Brooke, MP:** Can you tell us about the current use of a named police officer or family liaison officer?

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** Yes, currently, when there are suspicious circumstances around a missing event, then that will be treated as a criminal inquiry from the outset, and a senior investigating officer will be appointed at the outset. As part of that investigation, there will be a family liaison officer who would normally stick to the case throughout, and become very close to the family. Also in cases where there is a significant amount of press interest, I would expect a dedicated nominated person would also take specific responsibility for supporting the family. That is the way we would normally do it. What we have in some areas, are defined missing people co-ordinators. I think there is probably a significant rationale to make sure that role is widened, because as we start to understand more the complexity around missing events, I have to say the way the public sector is currently configured, and the way it deals with issues of vulnerability, particularly with young people in care, it is an inevitability that a large number of children will go missing, because that is the way we are configured, and there is a disjoint between agencies and that is a fundamental challenge which has to be taken on.

**Annette Brooke, MP:** If we end up with a national strategy, that is still not going to ensure equality of treatment across the different police forces? What could be done to ensure that families get the service that it is intended they should get?

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** What can be done is, that first and foremost, when we as a service take a report of a missing person, that we adopt precisely the professional and enquiring attitudes that the public expect of us. We empathise, and we are led by the needs and wishes of that family. That is number one. The stories that I have heard from Nicki, particularly about something a police sergeant said, I can, and will, apologise for that type of approach, but I shouldn't need to. That happened I think in 2006. Maybe I flatter myself by thinking that we are a more emotionally

intelligent organisation now, than we were then, but the fact is, we need to focus more on delivering this service. What we also need to do, is to make sure, particularly in the cases of children in care, that the placements that are taking place, are done so with a proper risk assessment of where they are going, compared to where they have left. For example, 60% of the children in care in Cheshire are not children from Cheshire. Social workers are based back in the area they came from, and naturally children want to gravitate back to the areas they are familiar with. In making themselves missing on a number of occasions, they raise their risk of being subject to exploitation and criminality, and we are all complicit in what we currently have. It needs to be done differently, and we need to have a different system, and ensure that the process works better.

**Annette Brooke, MP:** I would like to ask you one further question. I have just registered that Luke was 19. Your remit is adult, and taking the situation of children in care, just generally speaking I am really concerned that when someone has gone missing that the appropriate services are brought together, the children and adult services?

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** I think that is a role for the Adult Safeguarding Board, which are still in their relative infancy - although they are growing in stature and maturity - and any push this Inquiry can give them to do so would be hugely beneficial, but by bringing together all the agencies that have that responsibility and addressing the issue that made the person go missing in the first place, surely that is what safeguarding is about, it is about preventing repeat events.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** What do you feel needs to be done to ensure that families get the support they need, and what could be done to ensure that every family who needs support receives it?

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** What needs to be done is the standard set out in the ACPO guidance is actually carried out, and it is one of the actions I am taking away today. Martin has already highlighted the possibility, or indeed the probability, that were we to do that better, there would be a significant pressure on his organisation in terms of his resources. It is curious that offenders in the criminal justice system are subject to

professional interventions, and across the victim care world, and including the 'missing' world, the care we give families is by and large down to voluntary, charitable and third sector effort, and that to me is a fundamental misconnection in a modern society.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** The issue of children in care, we could probably do another Parliamentary Inquiry on that area. I was very interested in what you were saying was within the existing guidance; do you think there is anything more that can be done in helping police officers be aware of the particular difficulties that families face when they come to report a family member missing?

**Phil Thompson, ACPO Lead for Missing Adults:** Yes, I think that challenge was nicely summarised by what Nick Gargan said, when he said generally missing events were regarded as an irritation to police officers. It is that sort of mindset we need to overcome. The way we need to overcome that is to clear the clutter that is there from a number of repeat events; that should be preventable by all the agencies working together. This is a key challenge for partnership working in the UK today, and there is no reason why we can't overcome it. All we need to do is remove some of the barriers that are there, not with manuals and protocols, because they don't work, it is relationships and talking together, and that is what gets the job done, and we need to take responsibility for.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you.

**Peter Davies, Chief Executive Officer, CEOP:** Good afternoon, my name is Peter Davies, I am the Chief Executive Officer, CEOP, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, and I am also the Lead on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers, on matters relating to missing children, so I work very closely with Phil Thompson on all those issues.

**Annette Brooke, MP:** Now that CEOP has a widened remit to include missing children, can you tell us what this will translate in practice?

**Peter Davies, Chief Executive Officer, CEOP:** The decision to give CEOP responsibility for missing children was made under the previous Government, and it has just been implemented now as you have just heard. We will take on

responsibility with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011. We have been given additional resource to do certain things. We have the hugely valuable roles of people already working in this area and seek to add value. So, for example, we don't seek to supplant the absolutely critical role of the police forces in dealing with 'missing' events, but what we do seek to do, is reduce the occasions where it happens. We seek to reduce the risk to children and young people when they are missing, because the evidence is that 25% suffer some kind of abuse, and we also seek to play a role in developing a national knowledge and understanding that will help to ensure that when children return, there is a greater likelihood that the experiences which led them to go missing, and the experience they suffer when they are missing, are more likely to be disclosed and understood and rectified, and you have heard from previous witnesses how the police force, as the only means of doing that, is a flawed plan. We will, from time to time, take some co-ordination role where there is an exceptional missing persons event, where, for example, a number of different law enforcement agencies need national co-operation, and we have access to some particular specialist operational facilities that we can make available to any police force who request it. That is how we are aiming to add value to what is already there, but we don't seek to replace anything.

**Robert Buckland, MP:** What role do you see the provision of case publicity playing in supporting families, and who should provide national case publicity for all missing persons?

**Peter Davies, Chief Executive Officer, CEOP:** I am not entirely the right person to ask, because we are not seeking to take on responsibility of missing adults, in respect of children, but we do intend to take on the operation of the Missing Kids website, and the operation of the Child Rescue Alert system to be activated in certain circumstances. I think a lot more can be done in terms of communication, and one of the terrific things about CEOP, is that we are very good at communicating with the public, target groups such as children, young people, teachers, carers. We are positioned well to conduct the orchestra of different players, all of whom are trying to achieve the same thing: make children and young people safe. In terms of communication, I don't see there being one single approach to that. I wouldn't suggest we replace the poster campaigns of Missing People, for example. What we need to do is make sure

the right level of communication is done as a matter of course, and websites have a part to play in that.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** You talked earlier about partnering with other agencies, can you give us some examples of collaboration CEOP has with other agencies involved with missing children?

**Peter Davies, Chief Executive Officer, CEOP:** Certainly, less so with missing children because we are just starting up our relationship, but I think we already have a very strong relationship with people which applies to this area of work. We have strong relationship with academia, research, partnerships with major corporations such as Microsoft and Visa, and others, and they are very keen to provide assistance and support any way they can to promote the right kind of messages about child safety, whether it is child sexual exploitation, online grooming or issues of children going missing. We have a strong relationship with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, who provide a specialist child protection advice service. We never get diverted from our core mission to seek every opportunity to protect and safeguard children. Last year, taxpayers supplemented to the tune of about 30% these partnerships, and it is my intention to grow the extent of what we do. Everyone wants to help to prevent harm to children.

**Nigel Adams, MP:** Will you factor the families left behind into your policy and practice?

**Peter Davies, Chief Executive Officer, CEOP:** We will. It is clear from the testimony of the families that the service has not got it right every time, and it should be got right every time. No question about that at all. There is already a good understanding in many ways of what can be done, and that is embodied in the guidance that is already issued to police forces, and I do agree with my colleagues when they say that the approach of creating another checklist and making sure people have complied with the checklist has a limited useful life. We need to reposition police officers, police staff and other people to have respect for people and make personal judgements to do the right thing. The evidence is more of the right thing will happen, if we take this approach. What we need to seek to do, is to train the police to deal with this. Of course we have 60,000 teachers who deliver at schools, we have a massive

network of people, not just training police officers. A piece of work I commissioned earlier this year, which is due to be reported at the end of this month, is a report of young girls being groomed and exploited sexually. One of the things that working on that has taught me, is thus far we need to understand that children going missing is not in a separate category from children being sexually exploited, or children being trafficked. These things are different symptoms of the same disease, and it is only by understanding the links between them that we can realise the importance of 'missing', to realise that how we deal with missing children events has to be done with an understanding of the other risk factors of the other issues; all of that work, we are well-positioned to take it on. One of the things CEOP does well, I think, I know, is we take cases from round the country, and convert it very rapidly, and then get it out through effective networks to people. That is the kind of contribution we can make.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** You are in a very good position because of the work you do in forty three different police forces. You have probably heard that point of contact was very important, and talked about the importance of having a named police officer. Do you think, if that was standard practice, you yourself would know who to disseminate information to, and in turn that would be a very valuable, helpful network?

**Peter Davies, Chief Executive Officer, CEOP:** I will make two points if I may. I absolutely sign up to, along with my colleagues, the fact that victims must be properly supported, and get a first rate service from whichever police force they happen to be dealing with. I am not sure that over-specifying the service is necessarily the way to achieve that. I think there is room for local discretion and proportionality, for those cases which deserve the extra attention. We are entirely signed up to the outcome of the Inquiry. It turns on having points of contact in forces. There already is a network of these missing people's officers, and it is really the preserve of the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau. So there are policy means within the police force and there are networks already in existence, and provided they are working, we can make channels to influence policy and to make sure best practice is rolled out across the country.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** I think for the members of the public it is not just a telephone, it is to have someone the other end they know they can contact, and I think that is what the families are saying.

**Peter Davies, Chief Executive Officer, CEOP:** In most cases that is good practice. Notwithstanding, there are appalling stories where that kind of service has not been given, and I think there are many occasions when very good service has been given. I have ended up talking about something I didn't mean to. I make the observation it is absolutely right that people have the best possible service, but making that happen is more complex. For example, family liaison officers are highly specialised people, and when dealing with a bereaved family in respect of a homicide or a road traffic accident - they are pretty much there for them 24 hours a day. They are there when you need them, and that makes a big demand on family liaison officers. I have worked with them - they are superb people - but it may be that on occasions when there is a short space of time when a person is missing, what is more important is to contact the person who is on duty in the control room. I am not dismissing the idea, if that is what people really want, we should do our best to provide it; they want to feel supported, informed. All of those could well be delivered by a single point of contact, my anxiety is we should give forces a little bit of leeway in their own particular circumstances to find a best fit and give people a little freedom.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** I can completely understand that, but families should be able to feel that they can ask a simple question "have you found out anything"?

**Peter Davies, Chief Executive Officer, CEOP:** I am not seeking to deny that is what should be provided.

**Ann Coffey, MP, Lead Chair:** Thank you very much, CEOP is a fantastic organisation, and we are very pleased you have taken on the work of missing children, with the challenge of continuing to work with existing organisations, and become a much improved service to families of children and people that go missing in the first place.

I think we have had some really excellent witnesses in this Inquiry, and we are very pleased to have heard such wide-ranging evidence, and we are going to explore other areas in the other Parliamentary sessions that we are

having, particularly in relation to the practical and legal problems that families face when an adult member goes missing, and, I said at the beginning, we will be presenting a set of recommendations, very much focused on what families are saying to us. I am very pleased the Home Office Minister with responsibility for missing people has taken the trouble to come, and obviously has a very clear commitment to it, and I take the combination of that and the excellent work the Missing People charity has done over the years, and the contact they have with families at the end of it, and I hope we will have a set of recommendations which we can then use as a basis of trying to get the changes that we and families want to see.

You very much have been part of that, because so many of you have been interested, this is a very clear message that this is an area that should be taken very seriously, and should have a high priority within the Government.

Thank you.

(From the Shorthand Notes of  
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