

Missing People's response to the Residential Care Review consultation

December 2015

This response concerns the issue of looked after children who run away or go missing from care, and addresses the following topics:

1. About Missing People
2. The number of children who run away or go missing from care
3. The risks of running away
4. Responding to missing incidents
5. Cross-boundary children in care
6. Educating children about running away

1. About Missing People

- 1.1. Missing People¹ is a lifeline when someone goes missing. Through our Runaway Helpline² we listen in confidence and support missing children to explore their options and, where possible, to reconnect to family or a place of safety. We are here around the clock, for free, by phone or text to 116000 and by email to 116000@runawayhelpline.org.uk. We are commissioned to provide return home interviews for young people in two areas, and provide an After Missing support service to children in Wales, funded by the Big Lottery Fund in Wales.
- 1.2. We hold the vice chair of the English Coalition for Runaway Children, and provide joint Secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Missing Children and Adults.
- 1.3. This response draws on our expertise providing support to missing and returned children and conducting research into the complex issues around children who run away or go missing from care. Our response cites a number of documents, including Statutory Guidance, Inquiry reports and research studies, all of which are referenced - along with other useful resources on the topic - in section 8.

2. The number of children who run away or go missing from care

- 2.1. In 2014-15 police forces in England and Wales responded to 127,762 missing incidents relating to 66,806 children, plus a further 27,374 absent episodes relating to 10,510 children³.
- 2.2. Children in care are three times as likely to go missing as all children⁴. Using data from police forces and local authorities, the 2012 Joint APPG Inquiry on Children Missing from Care estimates that as many as 10,000 children go missing from a care placement each year, 5,000 of these for at least 24 hours⁵.
- 2.3. A 2013 report from Ofsted noted that *"it is likely that the true extent of the issue is not fully understood. A Community Care investigation in 2011 found that councils are still failing to accurately record the number of*

¹ www.missingpeople.org.uk

² www.runawayhelpline.org.uk

³ National Crime Agency Missing Persons Bureau (2015) Missing Persons High Level Data Report 2014/15

⁴ Rees and Lee (2005) Still Running 2

⁵ The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012) Report from the Joint Inquiry into Children who go Missing from Care

*children who go missing from care, despite local authorities' statutory duty to record the number of looked after children missing for over 24 hours"*⁶.

- 2.4. In 2014 London Assembly Member Caroline Pidgeon released findings of a Freedom of Information Request of London Boroughs about the numbers of looked after children who had been missing⁷. This level of detail is not readily available for other areas.

3. The risks of running away

- 3.1. Children who go missing face significant risks, including grooming and sexual exploitation, criminal victimisation or offending, substance use and sleeping rough. A national survey of young runaways in 2005 found that seventeen per cent of children who had run away had slept rough or with someone they had just met, twelve per cent had stolen, begged or done other things to survive, eight per cent had been hurt whilst away. Overall a quarter of young runaways had experienced one of these things whilst missing⁸.
- 3.2. The 2012 Joint APPG Inquiry noted that there is a strong link between children in care going missing and them being groomed or sexually exploited⁹. This was followed in 2013 by the Office of the Children's Commissioner Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Groups and Gangs, which highlighted going missing as a key indicator of risk of CSE, and emphasised the benefits for local services of linking work on missing children and CSE. The inquiry also recognised that living in residential care makes a child more vulnerable to abuse¹⁰.
- 3.3. Trafficked children in care are at significant risk of going missing. The 2012 Joint APPG Inquiry heard that as many of 60 per cent of suspected child victims of trafficking in local authority care go missing, and two-thirds are never found¹¹.
- 3.4. Children who run away from care may not have access to any other safe places to stay. There is now just one refuge in Britain that provides confidential emergency accommodation for children under the age of 16 who have run away and are at risk of harm: the Safeplace Refuge in Yorkshire run by Safe@Last. For young people aged 16-25 some other options are available, however in most areas of the country demand for emergency accommodation for young people significantly outstrips supply¹².

We are calling for the government to ensure that every missing child or young person who is unable to return home safely can access suitable emergency accommodation to keep them safe.

4. Responding to missing incidents

- 4.1. Not all children who go missing are given follow up support. A 2013 report from Ofsted identified that *"some inconsistency and gaps in practice meant that professionals were not always fully attuned to the needs of children who went missing. [...] More in-depth interviews with children by an independent person to explore the reasons why they had run away and to identify any support needs were rarely evident. Updated risk management plans that identified specific actions to be taken to prevent children from running away and to keep them safe were rarely evident in the cases seen by inspectors"*¹³.
- 4.2. The 2014 updated Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care states that: *"When a child is found, they must be offered an independent return interview. [...] The interview should*

⁶ Ofsted (2013) Missing Children p7

⁷ Caroline Pidgeon AM (2014) Looked After Children: Missing from Care

⁸ Rees and Lee (2005)

⁹ The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012)

¹⁰ Office of the Children's Commissioner (2013) If Only Someone Had Listened: Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups

¹¹ The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012)

¹² Missing People (2014) Manifesto for Missing People

¹³ Ofsted (2013) pp4-5

be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting. This should be an in-depth interview and is normally best carried out by an independent person (i.e. not someone involved in caring for the child) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge”¹⁴.

Although there is scope for interpretation, this guidance is the minimum expected level of support that any missing child should receive. As noted in section 5 below, not all looked after children receive this minimum level of support after a missing incident.

- 4.3. Recent research by Railway Children, in partnership with Missing People, NSPCC, Action for Children and Safe@Last, found that young people who had received a Return Interview and follow-up support work reported reduced running away and a range of positive outcomes, including reduced risk¹⁵. Social Return on Investment analysis concluded that the support provided by Return Interview providers achieves between £3.00 and £7.00 of social value for every £1 invested in their service with a ‘headline figure’ (using best assumptions) of £5.27¹⁶.

We believe that all children who go missing from care must be offered an independent return interview, and that this interview would be best provided by an independent provider.

5. Cross-boundary children in care

- 5.1. According to the 2012 joint APPG inquiry report into children missing from care, in 2011 nearly a third (22,000) of the 65,000 children living in local authority care were placed in a different local authority area, of which almost 8,000 were more than 20 miles away from their home authority. Children may be placed out of area for many reasons, perhaps in order to break the bonds between the child and their abuser, trafficker or gang associates, but sometimes simply because of scarcity of placements in their home area, or because of economic considerations¹⁷.
- 5.2. The APPG inquiry noted that children placed in out of area placements may be more vulnerable, harder to keep track of and at risk of ‘drifting’ within the support systems. Placing authorities may have little intelligence about the host authority area (including knowledge of localised risks), and the child’s social worker may be geographically distant¹⁸.
- 5.3. Being placed in a different area is a key factor that causes young people to run away from care¹⁹.
- 5.4. The Joint APPG report had a number of recommendations about out of area placements²⁰:
- For the government to use the phrase ‘cross-boundary children in care’, and to recognise this group as particularly vulnerable.
 - For the Children’s Improvement Board to lead on sharing best practice on safeguarding cross-boundary children in care.
 - For Health and Wellbeing Boards to assess whether they have a suitable number of care placements to meet local need, as part of Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.
 - For LSCBs to request annual statements from local authorities about the numbers and characteristics of cross-boundary children in care placed outside their area.
- 5.5. 2014 Statutory Guidance²¹ states that:

¹⁴ Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care p14

¹⁵ Railway Children (2015) The Value of Return Home Interviews

¹⁶ Ibid, p39.

¹⁷ The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012)

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, p20

- “When a child is placed out of their local authority area, the responsible authority must make sure that the child has access to the services they need. Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority and other specified services.
 - “If children placed out of their local authority run away, the local RMFHC protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the responsible local authority. It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and co-ordinated. A notification process for missing and away from placement without authorisation episodes should be agreed between responsible and host local authorities.”
- 5.6. A 2015 research study, jointly conducted by Missing People and Catch 22 Dawes Unit, about the links between gang-involvement and young people going missing, found evidence of gang-involved children and young people being placed across boundaries with little care planning or support. In some cases young people were placed into areas with local gang activity, and in others being placed out of area failed to break the young person’s connection to the gang but they continued with gang activity both in the new area and by going missing to travel elsewhere²².
- 5.7. A professional Runaways worker who participated in this research said: *“They can still make associations, they can still end up in the same situation as where they would be in their home authority, so you can’t always just say ‘let’s pick them up and drop them somewhere else’. It doesn’t always necessarily work. Another thing as well is, if you’re moving a young person out of area because of gang association, move them to an area where there aren’t more gangs. We’ve had young people from Liverpool, Birmingham, London, that have been moved to Manchester and you think ‘where is the logic in that?’ If they’ve been moved because of gangs, you’re moving them to one of the big cities where there are gangs. I know gangs are popping up more and more, but let’s not take them to the epicentre!”*²³
- 5.8. A police officer interviewed said: *“We went to a London borough and we had a face-to-face meeting with this local authority and we were saying, ‘you are sending a child to this place you haven’t even researched. They’ve got all these issues, sexualised behaviour, drugs etc, and you are putting them right in the middle of [our town] and it’s a problem’. Within an hour they had phoned and taken them back.”*²⁴
- 5.9. This research report makes a number of recommendations about relocation and the care system²⁵:
- The Home Office and the Department for Education should fund a joint, national research project into care placements and relocation of gang-involved children and young people. This should assess the rate of breakdown in placements for gang-involved young people located out of area and explore whether, and in what circumstances, this is an effective way to support those affected.
 - The Department for Education should work with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector to develop a pilot project launching specialist foster placements for gang-involved children and young people on the same basis as those piloted for those involved in CSE.
 - Ofsted inspections increasingly focus on whether return interviews are being offered to all children and young people. However, there should be a focus on whether looked-after children placed out of area are receiving return interviews.
 - Local authorities should ensure that looked-after children are not placed out of area without extensive care planning beforehand. Where gang involvement is an issue, children and young people should not be placed into areas where gangs are a local problem.
 - Where children and young people are relocated with their family to a different area but do not reach the threshold for care, their home local authority should have an obligation to share information with their host local authority.

²² Sturrock and Holmes (2015) Running the Risks: The links between gang-involvement and young people going missing (London: Catch 22)

²³ Ibid. p49

²⁴ Ibid. p50

²⁵ Ibid. p69

We believe that, while cross-boundary placements may be appropriate in some circumstances, there must be extensive care planning and communication between the placing and host authorities. Children must not be placed in cross-boundary placements without thorough risk assessment of and research into the host area.

6. Educating young people about running away

- 6.1. Section 3 of this response outlined some of the risks young people face whilst missing. We know that young people are not always aware of the dangers of running away, or what help they can call on to get support before they feel they have to escape, or to stay safe if they do. Children must be informed about how to get the help they need.
- 6.2. Best practice case study – Missing People and Ownfone. Missing People is currently evaluating a 12 month pilot of a new project which involves giving young people who have been repeatedly missing an Ownfone²⁶ - a simple mobile phone pre-programmed with up to six numbers, including Missing People's 24/7 Runaway Helpline. In one pilot area, the partner police force gave an Ownfone to a children's home, for use with any resident who was at risk of going missing. Local partners felt that this was a helpful way of keeping young people safer whilst away from the placement, and of making young people aware of the Runaway Helpline.

We believe that all children in care should be told about Missing People's 24/7 confidential Runaway Helpline. We are calling on the government to ensure that all children are educated about the risks of running away, and what help they can access to stay safe.

7. References and useful links

- National Crime Agency Missing Persons Bureau (2015) Missing Persons High Level Data report 2014-15 <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/654-missing-persons-high-level-data-report-2014-2015/file>
- Rees and Lee (2005) Still Running 2: Findings from the Second National Survey of Young Runaways (London: The Children's Society)
- The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012) Report of the Joint Inquiry into Children who go Missing from Care www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work/appg-inquiry-children-who-go-missing-or-run-away-c
- Ofsted (2013) Missing Children www.gov.uk/government/publications/missing-children
- Caroline Pidgeon AM (2014) Looked After Children: Missing from Care www.carolinepidgeon.org/node/1080
- Office of the Children's Commissioner (2013) Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/inquiry-child-sexual-exploitation-gangs-and-groups
- Missing People Manifesto (2014) www.missingpeople.org.uk/manifesto
- Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (2014) Department for Education www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care
- Railway Children (2015) The Value of Return Home Interviews <https://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/media/38047/the-value-of-return-home-interviews-full-report.pdf>

²⁶ <http://www.ownfone.com/children>

- Sturrock, R. and Holmes, L. (2015) Running the Risks: The links between gang-involvement and young people going missing (London: catch 22) www.missingpeople.org.uk/runningtherisks
- Missing Children and Adults: A cross government strategy (2011) Home Office <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/missing-children-and-adults-strategy>
- NSPCC participatory research project about children who go missing from care https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/children-missing-from-care-report.pdf? t_id=1B2M2Y8AsgTpgAmY7PhCfg%3d%3d& t_q=missing+form+care& t_tags=language%3aen%2csiteid%3a7f1b9313-bf5e-4415-abf6-aaf87298c667& t_ip=217.79.127.155& t_hit.id=Nspcc_Web_Models_Media_GenericMedia/ a99bf538-a835-401b-935e-e8cf56df52a1& t_hit.pos=1
- NSPCC response about trafficked children who go missing from care to the APPG https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/consultation-responses/nspcc-response-missing-children-inquiry.pdf? t_id=1B2M2Y8AsgTpgAmY7PhCfg%3d%3d& t_q=missing+form+care& t_tags=language%3aen%2csiteid%3a7f1b9313-bf5e-4415-abf6-aaf87298c667& t_ip=217.79.127.155& t_hit.id=Nspcc_Web_Models_Media_GenericMedia/ 42dd60d9-ca68-4cb2-9970-7eda1979dac5& t_hit.pos=3