

Missing People's response to the Scottish Government's consultation on working together for people who go missing in Scotland

About Missing People and our role in developing the Strategy

Missing People is the UK charity that provides a lifeline to missing people and their families.

We have played a role in developing the Strategy advising on an early draft, sitting on the steering group for the Strategy development, and playing a key role in the launch event.

Summary

We think that the Strategy contains important objectives, commitments and actions that will ultimately improve the lives of missing people and their families. We feel this strategy is a great step forward and highlights the desire for agencies to work together to reduce the risk of harm linked to people going missing. It's an important issue which affects both missing people and their families. As the Strategy highlights there are approximately 30 000 missing incidents each year, therefore affecting a significant number of people.

We welcome the fact that the draft Strategy highlights the value of our services. Furthermore, we welcome that the Strategy reflects the issues we are campaigning on:

- the need for families to be able to manage and protect their loved one's finances and property;
- the need for adults as well as children to be offered an independent return home interview;
- the need for young people to be educated about the risks of running away and how to seek help;
- and the need for young people to have a safe place to stay.

We have a number of comments to help address some areas where we feel the Strategy could be strengthened such as improving reference to the families of missing people and the support they need to deal with the emotional trauma and practical challenges of having a missing loved one; and the need for a national assessment of emergency accommodation

1. What are your views on the proposed Purpose of the Strategy?

We believe that the Purpose of the Strategy should be amended to include the following phrase: 'to both prevent vulnerable people from going' missing and reduce the risk of harm they may experience whilst they are missing.

2. Are we right to have a national definition?

We believe that you are right to have a national definition as this enables there to be a common understanding amongst key agencies of what characterises a missing person. It will help ensure there is a consistent response to each missing incident.

3. What are your views on the proposed definition above?

We think that the definition should be altered to include the words in red. Furthermore, we think that the definition should cover those people who have not been reported missing to the police.

Definition of Missing

It is recommended that there is a national agreed definition of 'missing':

Anyone whose whereabouts are unknown and:

- Where the circumstances are out of character; **and/or**
- The context suggest the person may be subject to crime; **and/or**

- The person is at risk of harm to themselves (and potentially others)

4. What works well in the Strategy?

We feel that the Strategy is ambitious, which inspires hope that the situation will improve for both missing people and their families.

5. What could be done differently or better in the Strategy?

We are of the opinion that the Strategy could include more focus on the families of missing people, the support they need, the impact of having a missing loved one has on them and the important role of a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) for them.

One family member of a missing person told us that contact from the police stopped after the initial search and that she was not allocated a FLO. She didn't hear much from the police until a cold case review was carried out.

She was referred to Missing People when her loved one went missing and appreciates the charity has provided, including continuing the search for and staying in touch about her loved one.

However, she wishes she was offered counselling sooner. She highlighted that she would like there to be group therapy available in areas outside of Edinburgh and Glasgow, which she is unable to get to as it is far from where she lives.

We consider that the Strategy does not at present acknowledge Scotland's geographical landscape and climate and the implications of people going missing within the country. The dispersal of communities across Scotland means that it is challenging for search teams and Family Liaison Officers to carry out their jobs across isolated communities on the mainland and islands and in some cases mountainous areas. In addition a lack of public transport in some areas means missing children and adults may need to rely more heavily on other less safe means of transport, such as hitch hiking which presents safeguarding risks.

We believe that the Strategy could usefully include other reasons why people may go missing or run away including dementia¹, gang exploitation² and missing incidents on a night out³ on page 6. We would be pleased to provide additional information on these factors.

6. What will be vital to the implementation and success of the Strategy?

We think that in order for the Strategy to be implemented successfully that the actions should be S.M.A.R.T. to ensure it is easier to evaluate progress against them. Furthermore, we feel that it should be made clear who is accountable for delivering these actions, how those organisations responsible report on them, whether that is together or to each other. We strongly suggest that the steering group that is in place continues in order to oversee the implementation of the strategy.

For example, one target for the Strategy should be to increase the number of missing people reported to the police and reduce the number of repeat missing incidents.

¹ Bantry White, E., and Montgomery, P., (2014) *Dementia, walking outdoors and getting lost: incidence, risk factors and consequences from dementia-related police missing-person reports.*

² Sturrock, R., and Holmes, L., (2015) *Running the risks: the links between gang involvement and young people going missing.*

³ Newiss, G. (2011) *Fatal disappearances and Missing People, (2011), Going Missing on a Night Out.*

Furthermore, we think that there should be consideration about how the strategy affects inspections taking place and operated by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland, her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. We feel that these organisations should be involved in the development of this Strategy to ensure that standards for example for return home interviews are fully met by those agencies commissioning and delivering them.

7. Do you see any challenges to implementation of the Strategy?

We are concerned that the main challenge to delivering this Strategy is that the commitments are not statutory and therefore there is no funding attached. Without sufficient resources in place it will be difficult to make the strategy, objectives and actions happen.

8. What issues are raised by this strategy for people with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation)?

9. Are there likely to be any negative implications as a result of the strategy, particularly regarding children's wellbeing?

10. Are there any other equality issues we should consider?

11. What are your views on the proposed Objectives and Commitments?

Objective 1: Prevent

Commitment 1: Prevention planning takes place for vulnerable individuals and groups

In the second paragraph of this section it discusses prevention planning of missing incidents for different types of people. We strongly believe that this should include people who have been diagnosed with dementia as evidence shows that 40% of adults with dementia will go missing at some point⁴. When they are referred to adult social care we think that a plan for missing should take place. This could use the Herbert Protocol, which is mostly used for vulnerable dementia sufferers residing in care homes; however it can be used for those people living at home.

Objective 2: Respond

We believe that objective 2: Respond should include a case study on Missing People's services such as the publicity service we provide rather than a standalone case study on Child Rescue Alert, which is obviously very valuable, it is not however applicable to every child who goes missing. The case study could also helpfully include reference to the Child Rescue Alert service.

In commitment 3 we think that there should be consideration of how the Scottish authorities work with other cross border authorities to help the cross matching of body parts. For example, the body of Derek Burns, a Scottish man, was found 23 years later in West Hampstead, London. We believe that greater cooperation and communication across borders could assist with cross matching body parts and enable the families of missing people to put their minds at rest.

⁴ McShane R et al, International Psychogeriatrics (1998), *Getting Lost in Dementia: a longitudinal study of a behavioural symptom*; Biehal, N et al, The Policy Press (2003) *Lost from View*.

The case study about Missing People charity on page 20 should be amended as follows to ensure it remains relevant:

In the second sentence of the first paragraph, remove the words 'new' and 'has been launched in 2015' and replace the latter with 'is available.'

In the second sentence of the second paragraph change '120 000' to '130 000 as of November 2015' and remove 'and a' and replace with 'including a.'

This section should also refer to the Text Safe service we operate, which involves Police Scotland requesting Missing People to send a supportive text message to a vulnerable missing child or adult, offering our free, confidential 24/7 helpline support.

Commitment 4: Risk assessments are used consistently by agencies responding when someone goes missing

We feel it is important to note with the use of the absent definition that just because there is no known risk among statutory agencies about the 'absent' child, this does not mean that there is no risk, and therefore regular reviews of the application of the absent category to missing people are crucial at an individual level and on a national level.

We believe that the Strategy does need to include reference to engaging with the police in relation to the implementation of the missing and absent categories. Currently it says there is no need to engage with police unless circumstances change. The current interim National Police Chief's Council's guidance on absent and missing⁵ suggests that the police are involved at the beginning when the first risk assessment is done. It also details that there is a regular review of the risks assessment for a missing person who is categorised as absent and this is done when new evidence comes to light.

We are concerned that its current use could be leading to failures in safeguarding. For more information about our concerns regarding absent and missing please see appendix 1.

Objective 3: Support

Emergency accommodation

Please note that our comments on this section on emergency accommodation are supported by DePaul UK.

We welcome the supporting action which details a review of the provision of emergency accommodation for young people by Local Authorities.

We are of the opinion that the review needs to assess how the current provision is being used, the quality and sufficiency of it. We feel that the Scottish Government should be responsible for ensuring this review takes place in every local authority. Then the Government should use this information to produce a national report into quality and sufficiency, which also includes recommendations for a way forward. The review should take into consideration young people's journeys, for example what happens when someone needs emergency accommodation and the risks they face without good quality emergency accommodation.

⁵ Association of Chief Police Officers and College of Policing, (2013) *Interim Missing Person's Guidance*.

One young person called Kayleigh told us about the risks she faced when she went missing and her experience of finding a safe place to stay.

Kayleigh, 16, suffered years of neglect at home which caused her to run away several times. She was taken into care, but continued to go missing:

“By the time I got into care, the damage was done.” While missing, Kayleigh faced many risks and was sexually exploited. “I’ve run away a few times to London and you have to choose whether to spend all night sitting on a cold street or go for a drink with a stranger who’s come up to you.”

Another young person explained what happened when he ran away⁶:

‘I just used to always run to...this male who I felt that I was in a relationship with. I called him my boyfriend and, but then after, you know, knowing him for a while... I had a new network of friends and a new network of kind of adult men who were exploiting me and other young people and, you know, I would go missing for days at a time.’ (Jack)

We recommend that once the review has taken place an action plan is formed. We suggest that the review considers a number of policy solutions including the extension of DePaul’s Nightstop service, which is a cost effective model. However, we feel that for this to take place there needs to be strong local partnerships and funding streams developed. This service could be extended to young people aged under 16 years old and expanded across Scotland to fill in the gaps in current provision.

Nightstop prevents the wasteful cost of teenagers and young adults languishing in inappropriate B&B accommodation for long periods of time. It is a way that young people, aged 16-25, who do not have to take looked after status, can stay three to six nights with a volunteer host, which means their situation can be resolved and they are able to return home.

At the sharpest end, Nightstop prevents rough sleeping and the spiralling impacts of homelessness on young people's physical and mental health.⁷

The costs of homelessness to the individuals (and their families) are, of course, immense. The financial costs to society as a whole are considerable too. Local authorities do pay to place young people per bednight with Nightstop, and costs vary depending on the level of wraparound support each service provides.

Return home interviews

We strongly welcome the objective to provide support through a return interview to both adults and children who have been missing. We feel that the Strategy needs to clearly outline why they are important and what the benefits are. For example, we believe that they are important because they are a key intervention point to enable missing people to receive the support they need at a critical point in their life. Being missing makes adults and children more vulnerable, as they are separated from their support networks and professional help, and are at greater risk of becoming a victim of crime. A return interview provides an opportunity for the missing person to say what happened

⁶ Thompson, J., (2014) *Reaching Safe Places: exploring the journeys of young people who run away from home or care.*

⁷ Depaul, (2012), *Making it Matter: Improving the Health of Young Homeless People.*

whilst they were away, why they went missing and what support they need to help prevent them from going missing again.⁸

Evidence⁹ shows that missing and runaway young people who have received return interviews and follow-up support reported reduced episodes of running away and a range of positive outcomes associated with this, including:

- A safer and happier place to live
- Reduced risk, for example in relation to CSE, drugs or physical violence
- Improved family relationships
- Better education prospects
- Greater confidence and self-esteem
- A more positive view of their future

Moreover, research¹⁰ shows that for every £1 invested in return home interviews and follow up support for young people produces between £3 and £7 of social value, with a 'headline figure' (using best assumptions) of £5.27.

We advocate that the Strategy should outline what a quality return interview should look like, for example we recommend the following characteristics:

- Making sure the young person or adult feels comfortable
- The interview is held at a time and place convenient for the young person or adult
- That the interviewer considers and acts on accessibility issues
- The interviewer should be truly independent and have the time to build up trust with the person who has returned from being missing
- That the interview should be a confidential space, with the person being interviewed being asked to consent to information they give being shared, unless their confidentiality needs to be breached because of a safeguarding risk
- We feel that rather than the caregiver being present it should be an appropriate adult present. In some cases the reason for someone going missing is the relationship with a caregiver.
- The interview leads to referrals made to relevant support services

Following a return interview we feel the following should take place:

- The assessment of need is used to create an action plan to address initial problems and takes into account longer term issues which will need more time.
- The referrals are made to relevant specialists. For example if someone is being exploited by a gang then they are referred to an agency focused on gang exit work.

Objective 4: Protection

12. What are the challenges to delivering these Objectives and Commitments?

⁸ The Children's Society (2013), *Here to Listen? Return Interviews Provision for Young Runaways*

⁹ Railway Children, (2015), *The value of Return Home Interviews and follow-up support when young people have been missing.*

¹⁰ Ibid

13. What are your views on the Supporting Actions and are there any additional actions that would support delivery of the Strategy?

Child Rescue Alert

We believe that the action in the response section for the Scottish Government should be clearer and stronger. We suggest that the Scottish Government promotes Child Rescue Alert as a critical initiative, for example by asking all employees within the Scottish Government and Police Scotland to sign up. The Scottish Government also has a significant opportunity to encourage business in Scotland, and the public, to play their part and get involved too. The Scottish Government could lead the way in ensuring Sir Bob Geldof's vision of 1,000,000 people signed up to receive Child Rescue Alerts by 2020.

Judicial factors

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to raise awareness of judicial factors. We are seeking legal advice whether judicial factors will provide families with everything they need to ensure their missing loved one's finances and property are protected, and that joint assets and liabilities can be effectively managed.

We think that the police could signpost families of missing people to us more, at which point we could raise awareness of the option of using judicial factors with them. We would be happy to provide assistance in writing a guidance sheet for both families and professionals on how to use judicial factors. Furthermore, we feel that once a guidance sheet has been produced then both legal and financial professionals, including those working at Citizen's Advice Service, should be aware of this system in case clients come in with relevant cases

Educating children and young people about the risks of running away and how to access help

We think that Local Authorities should promote Runaway Helpline, a national 24/7 free, confidential service for young people who are thinking of going or are missing or have runaway, to children and young people in care homes through putting up promotional materials and ensuring staff are briefed on the service and are able to talk to children and young people about it in this setting.

The role of local authorities

We urge the Scottish Government to include an action for all local authorities and police forces to have a missing child and adult protocol in place that focuses on preventing and responding to missing incidents and supporting and protecting missing people and their families.

We feel that local authorities have a key role to play in working with local children's and adult's safeguarding boards and multi-agency partnerships to ensure this Strategy is implemented.

Text Safe

Police Scotland should also increase its use of Text Safe to provide support to people who go missing. This will enable the police to offer support to a missing person who can contact the charity Missing People's 24/7 helpline. We think that Police Scotland should commit to ensuring that families are regularly updated on the investigation to find their missing loved one.

We advocate that the coast guard should be named within this Strategy as a key partner to work with the UK Missing Person's Bureau to help with finding unidentified bodies and sharing relevant information with the Bureau. They could also assist with sharing information on relevant sea tides and streams which may result in bodies being washed up on the Scottish coast. It would make sense for the Bureau to work with the coastguard to develop relationships with relevant authorities where bodies may originate from.

Concluding comments

We feel this strategy is a huge step forward for missing people and their families. We are pleased to see that the charity Missing People's services have been recognised. We are very happy that the Scottish Government and partner agencies have committed to the development of this strategy and look forward to its adoption and successful implementation.

If you would like any further information in relation to our response please contact:

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Appendix 1:

Our policy response to the Authorise Professional Practice (APP) guidance on Missing's section on absent and missing

We are very concerned that the use of the absent and missing categories is presenting significant risks. Currently call handlers are expected to make a decision on whether the missing person is absent or missing. We feel this is an important decision and that call handlers should be provided with sufficient training. Without proper systems, processes and training and the right resources, such as a missing person coordinator, we are very concerned that vulnerable adults and young people could slip through the net and not receive the appropriate safeguarding response.

Furthermore, we are concerned that there is a lack of data on how the absent category is being used across forces, or evidence to confirm that it is an effective and safe approach to managing and responding to vulnerable people. We believe there is an urgent need for data analysis on the use of the absent category by police forces that details how many people are being classified as absent and subsequently how many go on to be labelled as missing, and what their characteristics are. We also believe there is an urgent need for a national evaluation of the impact of the absent category in terms of safeguarding vulnerable children and adults. We are very concerned that absent children and adults could be experiencing or at great risk of harm while absent, but because these risks are not known they are not receiving the same level of response as missing children and adults.

We know that non-police professionals find the absent category confusing and are unsure on how children and adults are classified as either absent or missing, and what the different responses are. It would be helpful if the APP on Missing clarified how police should ensure other agencies including social workers and care home staff are trained to understand the local use of the absent category, and their responsibilities to absent children.

Furthermore, the previous guidance around the introduction of the absent category (ACPO: 2013) stated that certain criteria must be in place before a force can consider introducing the new absent/missing classifications including a missing persons co-ordinator to collate, analyse and review information on absence and missing. These criteria do not seem to be made clear in the new APP on Missing.

We believe that it is essential that the APP on Missing provides guidance on how regularly "absences" should be reviewed, to find out whether new information which could affect the risk assessment is available.

Furthermore, we feel that currently there are no good practice suggestions about timescales for reviewing absent, or more generally about how to implement the use of this category. Indeed we suggest that a set of standard operating procedures are developed and implemented which specify timeframes for reviewing absent cases, which may end up becoming missing incidents. The use of standard operating procedures and clear timeframes would enable an appropriate safeguarding response to take place for each person who is absent.

Additionally we feel that when a risk assessment is conducted that at each stage the person conducting it should consider whether the missing person has the capacity to keep themselves safe.

Please note we would be willing to assist the development of absent and missing guidance should Police Scotland and or the Scottish Government wish to develop their own through the course of the development, piloting and implementation of the three National and Local Partnership Protocols (NPP Patients who Go Missing from NHS Care in Scotland; LPP Looked After Children who Go Missing from Residential and Foster Care in Scotland; LPP Adults who Go Missing from Care Homes in Scotland).