

Living in Limbo: Five Years On

A summary of work to improve the support available to the families of missing people

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**missing
people**

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Foreword



In 2009, when I first read the Missing People report *Living in Limbo* it was with huge satisfaction and relief, not to mention emotion, because *at last* here were all the things I had been feeling and saying,

written and acknowledged in such a clear and sympathetic way. For me, it was indeed a profound experience because I had felt so isolated and unsupported living for 17 years as the mother of a missing son. The report pulled together the legal, practical and emotional needs of families with long-term missing loved ones; crucially it also set out an action plan to address these needs and so the Missing Rights Campaign started.

I became involved with the Campaign from the outset and was very proud to represent families at the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults' Inquiry into support for families of missing people in May 2011, alongside Nicki Durbin and Kate McCann. The Inquiry

recommendations started a process of real change to the legal framework and since this time Missing People has worked tirelessly with politicians across the United Kingdom to encourage improvements in law, policy and practice that will benefit both missing people and those they leave behind.

Significant change has come about particularly in the Presumption of Death Act 2013 and progress towards guardianship; a national police website for cross-matching unidentified bodies; closer co-operation and understanding of the issues of missing between the police and all concerned; a counselling programme for families; academic research into 'missing' and international conferences – this list could go on.

The last five years have seen unprecedented growth in the reach and depth of Missing People. The loss of a loved one, the experience of living in limbo - for however many days, weeks, months or years it may last - is a shattering experience, but in the UK we are at last assured that support is now there for families like mine. This is very special and I am proud to have been involved as a Family Representative in helping Missing People reach out and achieve so much, with more to come.

Sarah Godwin, Family Representative
and mother of Quentin Godwin.

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Introduction

'The "Living in Limbo" document rang a lot of bells for us, and my growing involvement as a Family Representative offered new sharing.'

Elizabeth Templeton, mother of Alan Templeton

In 2008 Missing People published *Living in Limbo: The experiences of, and impacts on, the families of missing people*¹. The report detailed ground-breaking research conducted with families of missing people, and made a number of recommendations of ways in which support for these families should be strengthened and enhanced. In the five years since the publication of the report the charity has shared the findings far and wide, through conference presentations, training sessions, widespread media coverage, distribution of thousands of printed reports, and more than 10,000 downloads of the electronic report.

Living in Limbo: Five Years On outlines the ways in which support services and agency responses have improved since 2008, and highlights areas for continued improvement. We have worked hard to meet the recommendations for the charity's own services, and to encourage, support and campaign for others to do their part to improve the multi-agency response. This report will identify the progress that has been made towards meeting the original *Living in Limbo* recommendations²:

Improving access to support services

- 1 Missing People should provide an enhanced range of advice literature for families about the emotional and practical support services provided by the charity, about dealing with media attention, and about other potential sources (in the voluntary and statutory sector) of assistance.

- 2 Missing People should arrange for the findings from this research to be incorporated, wherever possible, into the training, awareness and professional development programmes of other providers (in the voluntary and statutory sector) of assistance to families of missing people.
- 3 Missing People should work with relevant government departments and non-departmental public bodies (etc.) to maximise the opportunities for 'mainstreaming' a range of support services tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of families of missing people.
- 4 ACPO and the National Policing Improvements Agency (NPIA) should encourage police forces routinely to inform the family members of missing people of the range of support services available to them.
- 5 Consultation with families of missing people should be at the heart of service development and planning.

Clarifying the legal and financial position

- 6 Legal and financial advice and support should be available to the families of missing people. While this may not be bespoke, some instructions should be provided to direct families to appropriate resources.

¹ Holmes, 2008.

² Holmes, 2008: 12-13.

- 7 The benefits (or otherwise) of introducing specific legislation governing the presumption of death in missing person cases in England and Wales should be examined. Any opportunity to provide a robust legal framework for dealing with the estate and other affairs of missing people who are presumed dead, and for improving clarity for family members, should be pursued.

Recommendations for the police service

- 8 Police forces should note the importance of the initial and continuing police response on the emotional impact on families, particularly with regard to families' concerns that everything possible is done to find the missing person.
- 9 The family members of a missing person should have a clearly identified single point of contact with the police force dealing with their case.
- 10 Investigating officers should consider families' need to know, as far as possible, what actions have been taken to find their missing family member.

Further Research

- 11 A large scale study based on the findings of this research should be undertaken to estimate the prevalence and extent of the impacts on families, and the costs to left-behind families, and society as a whole, of missing incidents. Such a study could also test the hypothesis, developed by this study, that families' perceptions of whether the disappearance was intentional, and whether the missing person is still alive, inform their coping strategies and emotional reactions to the disappearance.
- 12 Further research should aim to extend the theoretical framework by examining

the impact on families of different types of disappearance, particularly comparing the duration, the characteristics of the missing person, the families' own perceptions of the disappearance and other relevant factors.

- 13 Press and media attention around cases of people going missing can have a profound impact on the families left behind, and further research should more fully investigate this issue in order to provide advice to service providers, media organisations, and families of missing people.
- 14 The impact of low or no interest from official agencies, and families' own expectations about services that are available, can affect not only families' emotional wellbeing, but also the extent of the search for the missing person. Further research should be conducted to explore the experiences of families who have little or no contact with the police or other support providers.
- 15 The main service providers (Missing People and the police service) should conduct evaluations of existing services to assess family members' satisfaction and to identify areas for service development.

Meeting the emotional needs of the families of missing people

'One of the most remarkable aspects of the last five years in the history of Missing People has been their development of a truly incredible range of services designed to reach out to the families left behind when a member goes missing. They have diligently pulled together experience and knowledge from a range of people around the world in an attempt to enhance their expertise and refine what they already do so well. The opportunities now available to families of missing people to acquire first class psychological support is a testament to the dedication of the organisation, and an example of exactly how a charity sets out to meet the complex needs of those it seeks to help.'

Alan Pike, Centre for Crisis Psychology

Missing People has been supporting the families and friends of missing people for 20 years and this work is fundamental to the conception and aims of the charity. Missing People provides the UK's only national and comprehensive service supporting families and friends of missing people. In the five years since the publication of *Living in Limbo*, the charity has better understood the significance and breadth of the emotional and practical support needs of families.

In 2011, Helen Alves (née Morrell), Family Support Manager, was awarded a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to visit Australia to further explore and scope family support services, to apply lessons to service development in the UK. Lessons and recommendations are outlined in *Lessons from Australia: Developing a counselling service for families of missing people*³. In 2012, Missing People conducted a further literature review

about the emotional impact on families, and appropriate responses, and published *An Uncertain Hope: Missing People's overview of the theory, research and learning about how it feels for families when a loved one goes missing*⁴. The improved knowledge the charity has developed in the last five years has underpinned the development of a programme of enhancements to the emotional support service for families of missing people. This has included an understanding of the need to develop our own concept of 'missing loss' which encapsulates both the theoretical understanding of ambiguous loss and the emotional and practical needs of those experiencing it.

This chapter outlines the emotional impacts for people affected by the disappearance of a loved one and what Missing People has done to develop support services to meet their needs.

³ Morrell, 2011: 28 -30

⁴ Missing People, 2012 (a)

The emotional impact on families

'It has been a long road and at some point I placed those feelings inside a compartment in my soul and carry them with me every day, never to see the light of day, at least not around anyone else. I have learned to live a 'normal life' one foot firmly in the present and the other even more firmly in the past. After 16 years I still am looking and it is my life's work.'

Val Nettles, mother of Damien Nettles

The emotional impact for those affected by the disappearance of someone close to them can be far-reaching and unprecedented in terms of experiences they have had before. The type of loss - unresolved, ambiguous, uncertain and enduring - is unique. Where is the person, why did they leave, are they in difficulty, are they alive or dead, when will they walk back in, what if they need me, what did I do wrong, how long will I have to wait to find out?

The persistent need to re-establish physical reconnection often is the main motivator for on-going dialogue with police, search and support agencies and the media. When a family cannot find their missed relative there is a frustrating realisation that control must be entrusted to others, typically the police. This sacrifice and loss of control can be hard to accept, particularly if the family doesn't trust that all that could be done will be done in the search for their precious family member.

Eventually the initial and often significant practical search is likely to diminish, and the family and the police may come to feel that there are no new roads to tread in the search. However, the internal search and the individual's on-going need to search, remember and to hope can increase or at least remain as profound. The normal expectation from others that when there is no seen or tangible physical problem, the experience should diminish or a sense of resolution should be found, is unhelpful.

Without rituals and the normal cornerstones of life, birth, marriages and death, lives go un-lived. The mother who wants answers as her dying wish, the sibling whose new baby will go unmet by its uncle, the exams that parents assumed their children would be taking. Yearnings for this 'lost' life and future can often bring grief, anger and pain.

Many families develop resilience and strategies that are likely to be self-taught and developed, that allow them to function, to remember and to love their missing relative from a different vantage point. For others, the traumatic impact of losing someone remains and there is a constancy and ever-presence to their grief and enduring loss. For some individuals who endure the experience of loss over a long timeframe, there may be times of tangible and consuming grief and other times when they feel more able to cope.

Survival of enduring and unresolved loss is often a lonely and an untrodden path for each person who has to walk it.

'The heartache of having a missing loved one is overwhelming as days turn into weeks, then months, then years. Each search or new lead sets us up for hopeful answers, but also painful disappointments. It's an emotional rollercoaster that is difficult to describe let alone understand. There is so much uncertainty. Our family has experienced death of loved ones and the grieving process associated with this type of loss. But how do you grieve someone who is missing? How do you grieve when you don't know if they are alive or dead? How do you carry on with the demands of life, and at the same time deal with the emotional turmoil? This is our reality. Naturally, one will seek out support services to help cope, seek out those who can help us deal with the uncertainty.'

Maureen Trask, mother of Daniel Trask

What we offer to families

The charity provides its core services to families via its confidential, free and 24 hour helpline – 116 000. Families can contact the helpline via telephone on 116 000, by email to 116000@missingpeople.org.uk and by texting 116 000. Emotional support is provided alongside practical search support such as publicity, tracing and police liaison together with emotional listening support.

As explained in more detail later, the practical issues for families of missing people can be significant. The emotional impact of practical problems, such as loss of income or housing, means that it is important to ensure that practical and emotional support is provided together.

Missing People is committed to providing emotional support to the families of missing people by:

- Actively offering and opening up opportunities for family members to express and explore their feelings about having a loved one missing
- Ensuring families are aware of the emotional support available to them when a loved one is missing
- Melding together the emotional and practical support aspects of the service – providing experience, expertise and understanding of the whole missing situation
- Providing this emotional support throughout the entire missing journey – whether this be at day one or after several years

Core helpline services

'That first phone call and I felt I was not alone and someone might help me in the right direction or listen to me.'

Val Nettles, mother of Damien Nettles

The helpline service provided by phone, email and text to families has grown and helpline staff and volunteers have developed skills, confidence and knowledge in supporting families in the last few years. All staff and volunteers have been trained in 'missing loss' and what families need from them in terms of support. Support is tailored to the individual and led by them. Families are given support and advice to be able to make informed choices about what they want having received a transparent and well-explained understanding of what is available. A Family Support Worker within the team can be assigned to a family to make sure support is consistent, led by one person and can accommodate multiple family members.

Peer support

'Meeting other families, hearing others stories, I don't feel alone when I hear about others' tragedies.'

Family Support Day attendee

The opportunity to meet other people who have experience of missing someone is quite rare. The charity recognised the importance of offering opportunities for families to safely meet and help others. We have trialled various services and activities to try and meet this need.

Mindfulness Pilot

Missing People trialled three Mindfulness Cognitive Behavioural Therapy programmes with very small groups of family members at regional venues. The feedback from those who completed the course was very positive about both the techniques and therapeutic value. However, because gaining and maintaining attendance was challenging, the Advisory Group decided that Mindfulness techniques would be incorporated into Family Support days as 'taster' sessions.



Family Support Days

'Thank you for an excellent thoughtful day, sad but uplifting.'

Family Support Day attendee

Regional family support days have been piloted over the last two years to allow families the chance to meet each other, receive facilitated peer support, to remember their missing person, and to learn some techniques to help them cope. Seven support days have taken place over five different regions with 66 family members attending. Although recruitment and retention was difficult, most people who attended said they were glad they came, that it had been a positive experience and that the mindfulness techniques had been relaxing and could help them.

The overall evaluation of the days is that although they are beneficial, the format is safe and useful, and the value to families is significant, there is not enough on-going interest. The cost and resource implications of delivering the day in comparison to the

numbers of attendees does not make this format of support sustainable at current demand levels.

Missing People events

At all events, a dedicated space for families has been created so they can meet each other, remember together and be treated as special guests by the charity. There are two main events held every year: the national Carol Service to remember those missing, held in December, and the fundraising run, Miles for Missing People, in spring. A total of 153 family members have attended events in the last two years and feedback has been positive. We will continue to deliver these events and also look to regionalise them so families around the country can attend.

Family conference

In September 2013 Missing People hosted a conference event for families. The event was open to families whose relative is still missing, and those whose relative has been found and

also welcomed children and young people.

We aimed to incorporate both the opportunity to bring together family members in the ways we have before - for companionship, community, remembrance and opportunities to support - and also trialled more practical support elements. Through Q & A sessions, presentations and discussion workshops, people had the opportunity to raise awareness, problem solve, learn and challenge. Evaluation of the day's successes will be valuable in planning which events and activities we run in future years.

Family Connect online forum

'It is so good to feel that you can readily connect with others who have an idea how things are and feel with a missing loved one and hopefully to be able to offer some mutual support.'

Family Connect forum member

The online forum has been running since December 2011. It is a private space for families to talk together, post messages, images, memories and find mutual support. Its total membership has not exceeded 47 individuals, with fewer active members. Recruitment to the forum has been more challenging than initially expected. One reason is that 30% of family members using our services don't have internet access, and therefore this service isn't suitable for them.

In feedback from members, most felt it had helped their understanding of their experience, and had reduced feelings of isolation and being alone. Others have not maintained active usage of the forum, or do not use it frequently.

We need to invest in development and conduct further consultation to make the forum sustainable and continue to be of value to its existing and new users.

Telephone counselling

'I was unsure if the counselling would be of benefit to me but would now recommend it to anyone. It has helped me to cope with my everyday life and I have learnt how to deal with my thoughts and emotions in a positive way.'

Counselling participant

It is important that we provide access to counselling, and specialist 'missing loss' counselling is crucial. Since 2008 we have developed our understanding of what a specialist counselling service should look like and what it is that is therapeutically unique about supporting families through missing loss. We recruited a Clinical Lead to the pilot and an Advisory Group of experts to assist in developing the service. We consulted with a number of families who had received counselling elsewhere to understand the support they had received and what they felt they needed.

Practitioner training was developed and delivered to explain to others the uniqueness of the work and also to test our theories about the support that was needed. In 2012, we recruited and trained four experienced telephone counsellors to the telephone counselling pilot and they started delivering the service in December 2012.

The service offers six free sessions of telephone counselling to individuals who recognise their own need for specialist support, and who have already been working with the helpline team. Numbers accessing counselling have been much lower than initially anticipated, and solutions have been continually sought to try and increase referrals. For those who have completed their course of counselling, however, the satisfaction and benefits to them seem very valuable.

There are some themes of presenting issues and symptoms that the individuals could identify with the counsellor. Socially, family members reported feelings of social isolation, breakdown of family relationships, and an inability to maintain friendships. Physical symptoms such as sleeplessness and difficulty with the management of existing health conditions were mentioned. Emotions such as grief, anger, and low mood were prevalent.

The therapeutic approach of the counsellors has been to listen, to give space to the person, and help them to develop resilience and coping strategies to live with the experience that they are having. The sessions cannot be solution-focussed or seek to achieve a resolution or move toward acceptance (since by definition, missing is unresolved). The sessions must strengthen the person's functioning and their capacity to endure.

In considering the feedback received and the counsellors' understanding of their work to date, it would indicate that the counsellors are competent, providing a safe and valuable space and are specialists in understanding the 'missing' phenomenon and the impact of this type of loss. However, it is not necessarily fully helping all people to develop resilience and tools to aid their future health. Feedback would suggest that perhaps a six-session model doesn't appear for some to be enough to tackle the emotional challenges they face.

Managing expectations about what a counselling programme can achieve may also need some consideration, as for some the hope would be that they would in some way feel 'cured.'

The counselling pilot has given us a deeper thematic and therapeutic understanding of the nature of this type of loss and what interventions may be useful to meet individuals' needs. Further examination is needed to develop the service to meet the needs of this unique client group. The length of the intervention, the multi-faceted aspect of the issue and the problems that people face,

and the on-going and uncertain nature of their loss need to be considered further. It is agreed that the pilot has been beneficial and the current counselling service will continue.

'The counselling provided by Missing People is invaluable and a very important service, having someone listen and appreciate the suffering and trauma of having a child abducted as in my case did help and will help others in many ways... I am still devastated after losing the child I love most. Please continue to provide the service.'

Counselling participant

Consultation and family involvement in service development

We have begun our journey to make sure that we learn, consult, hear from and are challenged by the families that we work for. In line with recommendations in *Living in Limbo* we have developed a Service User Involvement Strategy to frame the ways in which we can include the people we work for in developing all areas of our service.

Since 2010, we have conducted a Family Feedback survey⁵ annually, to monitor and review our service provision, to seek further understanding of the impact of our support and to consult people who have used our service about what else we should be doing. This feedback has led the initiatives and the focus for our family support development work each year.

One family member, Sarah Godwin, has been a driving force in helping shape and develop the family support services. She wrote to us in 2010, asking about the lack of provision for both peer support for families and also therapeutic support, and hoping that the charity could improve its service and the national picture. She has worked with us as part of our Advisory Group to take this work forward.

⁵ Missing People, 2011(a); Missing People, 2012(b); Missing People; 2013(a)

Fifteen family members act in a voluntary role as 'Family Representatives' for the charity. They are media spokespeople about 'missing' issues and they represent the charity. They have been very significant in influencing, providing a powerful voice and an impetus for change. They also enable us to consult and discuss services developments the charity is considering.

There are further opportunities to increase families' involvement, including representation in the governance of the charity.

Summary and looking forward

The emotional support services at the charity have become specialised, confident and better equipped to deal with the varying needs of individual families.

We recognise our role of providing a unique and specialist support service, and that we have a responsibility to deepen our knowledge and continue to develop, to meet the varying and multi-faceted needs of the people who may need us. We also need to maintain the comprehensive provision that currently exists.

In the coming years we intend to develop our community: the peer community of families; the professional community who can help; the media and publicity community who can join the search and the public community to increase social awareness and support for those affected.

We know also that families have said, and the Services team identify a need for us to extend our remit to be able to support people who have had a resolution, whether the missing person is alive or deceased. In two of the charity's annual Family Feedback surveys, respondents whose relative had been found were asked whether they would have accessed support after their relative was found. Two-thirds of those asked said they would have been 'very' or 'fairly' likely to have accessed this support. At the moment, specialist support for families after a missing

person is found is not available from the charity or elsewhere.

We also want to develop our understanding of the different stages of a missing incident, what the psychological and practical impacts are and how they may differ over time. Our focus since the *Living in Limbo* research has been around the lived experience and the uncertain and on-going loss that people experience. We would like to strengthen our understanding and our services, to learn more about the traumatic and psychological impacts of the first hours, days and weeks of a missing incident.

Furthermore, there is scope to improve and extend the range of topics covered by our online guidance for families of missing people, to further our understanding of the emotional support needs of children when a relative is missing, and to enhance our knowledge of how best to support families to remember their missing loved one.

We will need to be able to continue to work with the families who ask for our help and be able to have a team who have the capacity to support the many more families who might need us in future. The team's learning and expertise will have to continue on the journey of developing into the 'expert' service that Missing People needs to be.

Finally, there is an opportunity for generic counsellors and support providers to become more knowledgeable about the nature of 'missing loss'. Missing People is able to provide training with this where resources allow. This improvement would mean that more families would be able to access sensitive and more relevant counselling where the unique nature of missing is understood.

'I was frightened to laugh in front of people in case they thought I did not care. Would people judge me and think I was uncaring? Would they think my son was not worth crying over? How dare I get on with my life when the boy I loved so much was still missing?'

Why him? Why us? What had we done to deserve this continuous black hole of sadness? Why did each day get worse? Why the not knowing?

Like I said, I will be patient and wait. I loved him the day he went missing and I love him more now.'

Sandra Flintoft, mother of Craig Hetherington

With thanks to...

Missing People has benefited from partnerships with, and pro-bono support from, a variety of other organisations to help implement the *Living in Limbo* recommendations.

In 2011, Missing People was grateful to receive three years' funding from the Big Lottery Fund to work towards meeting the *Living in Limbo* recommendations. This funding has allowed us to transform our service provision for families. It has enabled us to strengthen our knowledge and skills and also to pilot the new services and guidance information described in this report.

Missing People would also like to thank:

Saintbury Trust
D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust
Zephyr Charitable Trust
Calleva Charitable Trust
Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales
Grand Visual
Rock Choir
Places for People



Providing practical and legal support for the families of missing people

'My husband has been missing for eight years... We still have a mortgage that has not been resolved, which is in joint names. I can't change that mortgage, I can't move house. I haven't been able to do anything for the past eight years. It has been extremely difficult. I have gone from having a joint income of a husband, who earned far more than I earned, to being a single mum overnight, on a greatly reduced income.'

Vicki Derrick, wife of Vincent Derrick

Living in Limbo uncovered the serious practical and legal issues that families can encounter when a loved one goes missing. It demonstrated how families can struggle to manage a missing person's affairs in their absence (such as their banking, insurance, mortgage or rent payments), or resolve them in the long term, and how many struggle to find even basic information to help them with these issues.

Such difficulties can exacerbate the emotional trauma families of missing people already feel, and for those who share assets or liabilities with the missing person, or depend on them, it can also seriously jeopardise their financial security. As such, Missing People used the evidence within and recommendations of *Living in Limbo*, along with consultation with families of missing people, as the basis of its

Missing Rights Campaign, which launched in 2010⁶.

The Campaign calls for:

- Families of missing people to know everything possible is being done to find their missing loved one.
- Families affected by a disappearance to have access to support.
- Families left behind to be spared the pain of unnecessary financial and legal bureaucracy.

The Missing Rights Campaign has been supported by on-going influencing and advocacy work undertaken by Missing People's Policy and Research team.

⁶www.missingpeople.org.uk/missingrights

Our influencing work

Presumption of Death Act 2013

"The certificate of presumed death that we are introducing is a significant step forward for families who face the terrible situation of losing a loved one and creates a simpler legal framework to ensure bereaved people can better deal with the property and affairs of a loved one who has gone missing and is presumed dead."

Justice Minister Helen Grant, 27 March 2013⁷

In March 2013, the Presumption of Death Act was passed in England and Wales following several years of campaigning by Missing People, with pro bono support from our lawyers at Clifford Chance.

Living in Limbo revealed that families in England and Wales faced significant difficulties when seeking to administer and resolve a missing loved one's affairs on the basis that it was believed they had died. They reported that the presumption of death system was complex, costly and cumbersome, and could include multiple court processes which added to the emotional trauma they already felt. Missing People campaigned alongside families affected for a better system modelled on those already in place in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The launch of the campaign successfully helped to raise awareness of issues families can encounter, and in 2011 the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults (APPG, to which Missing People provides the secretariat) and the Justice Select Committee both explored this area of law in inquiries⁸. The Government responded positively to the findings of these inquiries, and supported a Private Members' Bill introduced by John Glen MP to remedy the situation. This was passed in March 2013 as the Presumption of Death Act 2013.

Missing People is proud to have led the campaign for presumption of death law reform

in England and Wales, as it has ensured that all UK families – no matter which nation they live within – will have access to a simple and comprehensive system when the Act is brought into force in 2014.

Guardianship

"She is a chef, she has her own house, almost inevitably with a mortgage, house insurance, car insurance, bank accounts and investments. It was literally a very few weeks before I realised the difficulty in trying to deal with these matters when she is missing."

Peter Lawrence, father of Claudia Lawrence

Living in Limbo demonstrated how families could also struggle to safeguard or maintain a missing relative's affairs in their absence. Many families seek to ensure that their relative's affairs are kept in order, in anticipation of their return. For some, there is the additional concern that any disarray may impact on their own financial and practical wellbeing.

For example, families might seek to ensure that there are funds to meet their relative's mortgage or rent payments, and to cancel or freeze Direct Debits which may negatively impact on this. For those who share assets or liabilities with their missing relative, such as a joint mortgage, they may look to rearrange payments or to sell the property if they are unable to meet the repayments. Yet without the missing person's agreement, institutions are limited in how they can work with families left behind. By speaking to families, along with institutions such as financial trade bodies, we sought better understanding of the issues encountered by both parties along with possible solutions.

Missing People has campaigned for 'guardianship' (the legal right to look after a missing relative's affairs) as a part of the Missing Rights campaign. We organised a meeting of the APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults on the issues that families face in the absence of any provisions,

⁷Ministry of Justice, 2013a

⁸Missing People, 2011b

and it was a focus of a session of the same APPG's inquiry into support for families of missing people. The Justice Select Committee also looked at it as part of its inquiry into presumption of death, and recommended that the government took steps to introduce guardianship.

In June 2013, the government announced proposals to establish a power of guardianship for families of missing people. These will be consulted on before a final decision as to its introduction is taken in 2014. Missing People is delighted with this advancement as any new such power will be of great benefit to the families we work with, and we will support the Ministry of Justice's work towards the consultation.

'When a person disappears with no explanation, their friends and family are left with an unbelievable amount to cope with... That is why we want to put measures in place so they can make alternative arrangements for the legal and financial affairs of their missing loved one. By having guardianship powers in place in those early months we can reduce some of the burdens when people's lives are turned upside down.'

Justice Minister Helen Grant, 20 June 2013⁹

Cross matching

Whilst the vast majority of missing people are found alive, a small number - less than one in one hundred - are found to have died. Living in Limbo touches on an important element of searching for longer-term missing people, known as 'cross-matching', as a means of identifying some of the deceased. This is the process by which missing person reports are cross referenced with unidentified bodies to look for possible matches. It is vital that the processes of cross-matching are robust and effective to avoid delays, ensuring that families of the deceased are informed of their death as soon as possible.

As part of the Missing Rights campaign, Missing People has sought to increase awareness of the importance of cross-matching, and has called on agencies involved to make certain that their processes are fit for purpose. As part of this work, we have published a policy briefing (downloaded over 4,000 times from the Missing People website)¹⁰ with recommendations on this area. We also supported Ann Coffey MP, Chair of the APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults, to organise a session focusing on cross-matching within the inquiry into support for families of missing people.

In November 2012 the UK Missing Persons Bureau, working in partnership with Missing People, created an online database of unidentified bodies. The database contains details of approximately 500 of the 1,500 unidentified cases known to the Bureau, and is searchable by the public, in the hope that people will search through the unidentified cases to see if they can help establish identities. The site recently confirmed its first match and further cases are pending. The site receives around 10,000 views each month¹¹. The website is available to search at www.missingpersons.police.uk

What we offer to families

Missing People is keen to ensure that families who may benefit from our work on practical and legal issues are made aware of it. We do this through a variety of mechanisms, including seeking coverage of the Missing Rights Campaign in print and broadcast media. Missing People has additionally looked to inform individuals and organisations such as Parliamentarians, financial trade bodies and legal professionals, so that they are prepared when families of missing people approach them for support and advice.

Family Guidance

Since the publication of *Living in Limbo* Missing People has developed a suite of written family guidance sheets. These sheets cover a range of

⁹ Missing People, 2012(d)

¹⁰ Missing People, 2012(d)

¹¹ The Investigator 2013: 12-15

topics, from how to make a report to the police and how the charity can help, to how to work with the media and what support is available when someone goes missing abroad. These sheets are all available to download for free from the charity's website and have been downloaded over 85,000 times to date¹².

The family guidance contains a substantial section on legal and financial matters, including sheets on banking, insurance, mortgages, benefits and presumption of death, amongst others. These guidance sheets have been downloaded over 24,000 times from the Missing People website. Where possible, we have written and produced these with experts, including the British Bankers' Association, the Association of British Insurers, and the UK Missing Persons Bureau, with support where appropriate from Clifford Chance.

The family guidance was developed in collaboration with families of missing people to ensure that the areas it focused on, and its tone, meets the needs of those who use it. We have additionally evaluated its impact and sought new areas to develop information through the charity's Family Feedback survey¹³, so that it is as comprehensive as possible and remains relevant.

We have promoted the guidance through social media, and sought other websites to link to it, as the Money Advice Service presently does. We additionally asked partner organisations to disseminate it to their networks.

Helpline advice and support

Missing People's Policy and Research team used the knowledge gained through research and campaigning to train colleagues in the helpline team around practical and legal issues that families experience. This has enabled the helpline team to support families encountering problems connected to these areas with more confidence and better information.

All of the charity's helpline supervisors have

received broad guidance on what presumption of death is and what support is available for families through the charity, and a further five have had more in-depth training. The latter consisted of bespoke sessions on presumption of death provisions families may use, and the issues they might face along with sources of help.

We are also able to signpost families to other service providers where appropriate, to ensure that they have the full range of support that they need. For example, this might be to another charity, such as Missing Abroad if it is an overseas case, or to legal advice services where families have questions around their particular circumstances.

Summary and looking forward

Missing People is committed to continuing to campaign for better support and provisions for all people affected by the missing persons issue. We are encouraged by what we have achieved through our first policy campaign, Missing Rights, and are determined to emulate this success in future work.

We will continue to campaign for guardianship, and will monitor how the Presumption of Death Act 2013 is transposed into practice. There are still gaps, however, in terms of ensuring that families are fully supported. Professionals they encounter, such as within the financial and legal sectors, must have increased understanding of the issues that this group face. Guidance sheets on dealing with practical and legal issues must also be disseminated widely to ensure that all who may benefit can access them, and updated as and when any legal changes are made.

The charity is additionally looking to seek improvements in support for missing adults and vulnerable adults at risk of going missing, having completed work which notes the links between mental health and missing persons, and homelessness.

With thanks to:

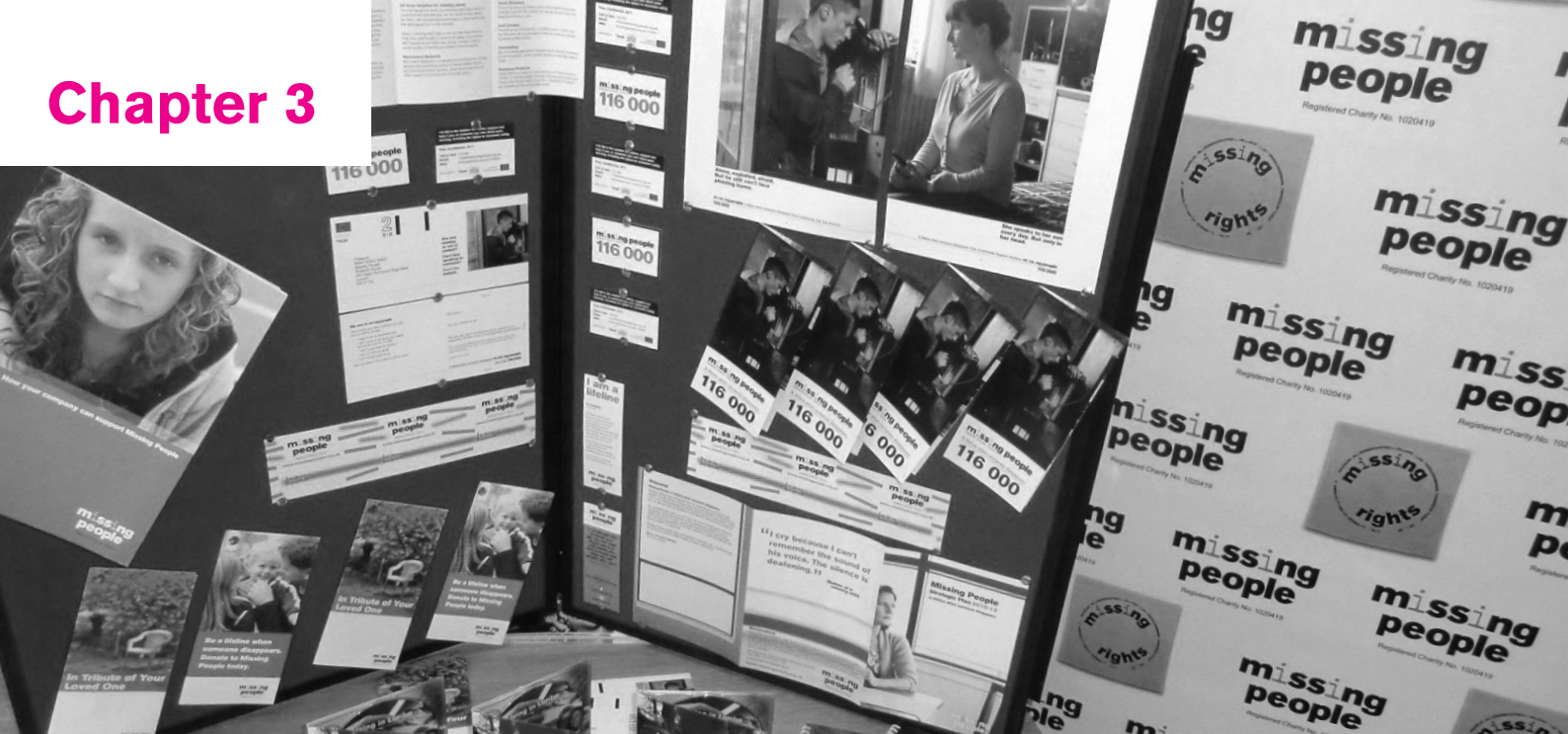
Missing People has benefited from partnerships with, and pro-bono support from, a variety of other organisations to help implement the *Living in Limbo* recommendations.

The Missing Rights Campaign would not have been possible without the support of families who have selflessly shared their own experiences by way of helping raise awareness of the aims of the campaign, and to whom Missing People is very grateful.

Missing People would also like to thank:

Clifford Chance
The Big Lottery Fund
Tracesmart
The Santander Foundation
Marsh & McLennan
The British Bankers' Association
The Association of British Insurers

Chapter 3



Working together to support the families of missing people

'I fully endorse the excellent work that the Missing People charity does. The Police Service works in partnership with Missing People to ensure the family and friends of those who go missing are fully supported through such traumatic events. The level of service and care provided by Missing People is wholly impressive and I encourage all Forces to signpost families to this organisation in order to make full use of the range of services they provide.'

Chief Constable Pat Geenty, ACPO lead for missing persons¹⁴

Throughout its 20 years Missing People has worked closely with agencies such as the police, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations. The charity recognised early on that having an effective working relationship with these agencies meant better services for missing people and their families. In keeping with the UK culture of taking a 'joined up' approach, relationships were fostered which meant everybody benefited. For example, in the 1990s, it was by working together with the police that some of the child victims of Fred and Rosemary West were identified and links were made between their crimes and children who had been reported missing.

Across the charity all teams hold vital partnerships with external organisations. The Policy and Research team focuses on relationships with parliamentarians,

government departments and non-governmental public bodies as well as the wider research community, charities and regulatory bodies. The team publishes the quarterly Missing News sector newsletter which has around 1,500 subscribers.

The Fundraising and Communications team oversees partnerships with corporate and Trust supporters and individual donors, and also develops and nurtures supportive partnerships with media outlets, who can provide invaluable space for missing person appeals. This bolsters the efforts made by families to keep the search for their missing loved one alive.

The Services team work daily with local partners in local police forces, statutory and voluntary service providers, providing liaison between families and organisations, providing

¹⁴ www.missingpeople.org.uk/missing-people/professionals/police-services 2013

direct support, and advocating for direct change.

In 2011, the role of Partnerships Manager was introduced to the Services team to provide oversight of the charity's partnership working. This new role worked on building and re-building relationships at different levels, all of which contribute to the charity's ability to support a missing person or their family member. The Partnerships Team, which was expanded in January 2013, now oversees relationships with 45 police forces in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and the national law enforcement and government bodies who oversee their work. Additionally, the national voluntary sector agencies with whom we work regularly at both a national and local level form a large part of our work to increase use of the charity's services.

National partnerships

Government

We have worked to raise awareness amongst parliamentarians in Westminster, and have garnered support for the Missing Rights campaign within the Houses of Commons and Lords. The charity provides administrative support to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults. In 2011 the All Party Parliamentary Group recommended¹⁵ that the government establish a cross-government policy framework on missing persons. This recommendation was met when the government published *Missing Children and Adults: A Cross Government Strategy*¹⁶ in December 2011. Missing People has supported the delivery of this, and will assist the Ministry of Justice as it prepares a consultation paper on guardianship in 2013.

National policing organisations

"The Bureau's national partnerships, especially the strong bond with Missing People, ensure the raising of standards in missing person investigations. Our strong relationship allows for the improved

protection of vulnerable missing people, greater prevention measures to reduce the numbers of people going missing and, very importantly, better support to the families of missing people. Locally, Missing People's partnerships with police forces, particularly those delivered through regional meetings, allow the charity's services to reach families as soon as is needed. This is crucial when families need support or when families and police forces want the best publicity appeals for cases."

Joe Apps, UK Missing Persons Bureau

By working in partnership with the UK Missing Persons Bureau (UKMPB), the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Missing People is able to influence decisions which affect police practice. *Living in Limbo* found that police needed to be more aware of the emotional needs of families, the need for a single point of contact and the value of effective and regular communication with families. Missing People has a seat at the table when decisions are made about how to embed these needs into practice, and is able to represent the needs of families from all over the UK.

Missing People is a standing member of the Missing Persons Strategic Oversight Group which was formed in 2005. This group is led by ACPO and oversees the effective coordination of relevant government departments, agencies, police forces and voluntary sector organisations working in the area of missing persons.

Missing People is a member of the CEOP Missing Children Advisory Board. Our role is to provide advice and expertise on CEOP's programme of work to better coordinate the safety and wellbeing of missing children and to hold CEOP to account in relation to the role it plays in delivering the cross-government strategy. The charity is also a member of the UKMPB Missing Adults Advisory Board.

¹⁵ Missing People, 2011(b)

¹⁶ Home Office, 2011

“Missing People clearly recognises the value of working in partnership with other organisations and constantly strive to develop and maintain such partnerships through a variety of means. Doing this enhances the value of services already provided, increases awareness of what is available and helps to embed good practice, all of which enable better support for the needs of families.”

Charlie Hedges, Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

Missing People was invited to take part in stakeholder consultation when the ACPO *Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons*¹⁷ was updated in 2010. *Living in Limbo* was subsequently cited in the update document. In this Guidance a number of the *Living in Limbo* recommendations have been transformed into actions for the police:

- Ensure the families are informed of the role of the charity Missing People and the support services available to them – this could be provided as a leaflet or similar;
- Recognise the importance of the incident to the families;
- Give realistic updates on what is being done, how an investigation is conducted and limitations that may be placed on it;
- Make sure that they know that everything possible is being done to find the missing person and give information, where possible, about what is being done;
- Provide a single point of contact that is realistic for them to make contact with and provide updates;
- Continue the contact in long-term cases and inform them of reviews;
- Provide a family liaison officer in appropriate cases¹⁸.

National and international research

In 2012, Missing People was pleased to work with the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth to create the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons. The Centre has brought academics and practitioners from the UK and abroad together in the first International Conference on Missing Children and Adults¹⁹ in June 2013. This conference marked the beginning of a relationship between research and practice which will be nurtured and grown in the years to come, and will help put the voice of families back in the driving seat of change.

Missing People is working collaboratively with the Centre on research projects and staff from the Centre provide oversight of the charity's internal research function. The charity's Research Manager holds an Honorary Fellowship at the Centre, and another member of staff is currently completing a Master's degree within the Centre. Missing People staff are also contributing a number of chapters to the forthcoming book *Missing Persons: A Handbook of Research*²⁰, due in 2014.

Missing People also provides support to external researchers, either providing oversight through participation in Advisory Groups, or by supporting efforts to recruit participants or access data for research. Several of the areas of research recommended for further study in *Living in Limbo* are now being developed or are already underway. Missing People also continues to develop monitoring and evaluation processes across all of the charity's services, including the annual Family Feedback survey²¹.

Local partnerships

UK Police forces

Often, national level relationships open the door for local partnership working with the police. While each of the 45 police forces across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have devolved autonomy from the

¹⁷ ACPO, 2010

¹⁸ ACPO, 2010: 51

¹⁹ Conference proceedings are available at <http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/academic/icjs/csmf/conference/>

²⁰ Shalev Greene and Alys, 2014

²¹ Missing People 2011(a); Missing People 2012(b); Missing People 2013(a)

Home Office to uphold the law locally in a way services are universally available across the UK. Therefore, the charity develops relationships with local forces which start with: 'how can we help you get the most out of our services in your area?' The policing needs, styles and resources vary significantly between forces of different sizes and with the different populations they serve. For example, responding to missing person incidents in Yorkshire, where several miles of countryside may occupy the space between small villages, is different to a built-up urban city like London. It is within these relationships that the Partnerships Team has a unique opportunity to influence practice, grounded in the voices and needs of families.

Visits to a police force will involve delivering a presentation to a wide range of police officers and staff. For example, those who take the first report via a phone call, the Inspectors and Sergeants who then risk assess the initial information, the uniformed officers who begin making enquiries through to the Detectives, Search Advisors and specialist teams who work with high risk, complex investigations. Also present are Missing Person Coordinators (where the role exists) and statistical analysts who monitor missing episodes and act on their findings. It is the role of the Partnerships Team to illustrate: why families need to be supported; why police should respond to missing incidents with care and attention to the possible risks posed to the missing person; and why they should listen to and properly manage the expectations of families throughout an investigation.

Another way this is achieved is through dissemination of the DVD *Living in Limbo* which was a response to a recommendation from the report. Funded by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA), the charity worked with the production company, Scorch London, to produce this short, moving film which features the stories of four families. The messages for the police were clear: understand the uniquely painful tragedy which befalls a family whose loved one is missing; keep

families informed; and do everything possible to search for or investigate the whereabouts of that person as though they were your own flesh and blood.

Other local partnership working

Missing People also seeks to develop partnerships with other organisations at a local level. One example of this work is the 2010 Department of Health-funded pilot of an information-sharing protocol in Westminster, between Missing People, Central and North West London NHS Trust, Westminster City Council, the Metropolitan Police Service and local Non-Governmental service providers. The pilot was successfully evaluated²² and has informed further partnership and service development by Missing People and others.

The charity has also developed and grown networks of partners who support in the search for a missing person via publicity. With thousands of Poster Partners all over the UK, Missing People can arrange for posters to be displayed in a wide variety of public places. The charity can then receive and pass on confidential sightings from the public, or provide support to the missing person via the 116 000 helpline. At police request, we can build a targeted local, regional or national publicity campaign using social media, press partners, and/or the Outdoor Media Centre's digital billboards and posters.

Additionally, we are able to offer a new service via a network of Support Partners who can support us to find and offer support to a missing person. Support Partners are different to Poster Partners because they are local organisations with a safeguarding remit. Support Partners are organisations which exist in the interest of supporting or safeguarding vulnerable people, such as a homeless shelter or an advice centre for children. This newly formed network allows us to reach out to vulnerable missing people in a safe and supported way, which respects their ability to make choices about their future, whilst also making them aware of the support Missing

²² Missing People. 2011(c)

People can provide. The network adds value to police investigations by offering forces an option which avoids mass publicity whilst attempting to contact a missing person in a targeted and supportive way.

Summary and looking forward

Missing People has established itself as a pivotal strategic and operational partner of other agencies when someone goes missing. Furthermore, our proactive approach to achieving success through partnerships has become crucial to our role as influencers and advocates of positive change. It is through this role that Missing People can remain grounded in the hopes, wishes and needs of those who contributed to *Living in Limbo* and who place trust in us to see these through.

The mother of a missing son, on International Missing Children's Day 2012, told the Home Secretary: 'Until I draw my dying breath, I will keep searching for my son'. The Home Secretary said she was brave, to which she replied: 'I'm not brave, I'm his mum'. The charity knows only too well how painful this is; to be stripped of the opportunity to look after your own loved one. It is with this in mind, that we wholeheartedly pursue every opportunity to work with our partners to ease this pain and help end it where we can.

The Home Office *Missing Children and Adults: A Cross Government Strategy* highlights a number of ways in which partners working in the sector must work together to support families of missing people. One of the three main aims of the Strategy is "*Provision - providing missing people and their families with support and guidance – by referring promptly and ensuring that missing people and their families understand how and where to access help and support*" (2011: 5). Many of the specific recommendations of the Strategy have already been met, but there is an outstanding need for local multi-agency structures to be developed, enhanced and sustained. Missing People will continue to support the implementation of the Strategy's

recommendations through our work with the Missing Persons Strategic Oversight Group and its sub-groups.

Over the last five years there has been tremendous improvement in the way that local police forces and national policing agencies, the voluntary sector and central government have worked together to improve the support for families of missing people. In coming years this work must be consolidated, and other agencies must be encouraged to join partnerships where relevant. In particular there is a role for Local Authorities and health agencies to become more involved.

There are also opportunities for improvement in the work that all agencies do across borders; be they police force boundaries, Local Authority borders, boundaries between professions or sectors, or even international borders.

It is also vitally important that all families making a missing person report are made aware of the charity's support. To this end, Missing People will continue to seek to stand before more audiences, to gain the trust of professionals across sectors, to enhance public awareness of our services and to share our knowledge and expertise with anyone supporting families of missing people.

We will also continue to work closely with all of our funders and pro bono supporters to ensure that all of our services can be provided efficiently and responsibly.

With thanks to...

Missing People has benefited from partnerships with, and pro-bono support from a variety of other organisations to help implement the *Living in Limbo* recommendations.

Missing People would like to thank our strategic partners for their incredible support in strengthening our relationships at a local level and their continued strategic work with us:

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)
The UK Missing Persons Bureau
The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)
The Home Office
The NWG Network
Centre for the Study of Missing Persons
UK Police Forces

Missing People would also like to thank:

The Players of the People's Postcode Lottery
The Outdoor Media Centre and its members
The City Bridge Trust
The Oak Foundation
Scorch London
All of our Media Partners, Poster Partners and Support Partners nationally

Looking to the future

In the five years since the publication of *Living in Limbo* enormous strides have been made to meet the recommendations of the report and better support families of missing people.

Of the 15 recommendations, on pages five and six of this report, progress has been made on all of them and many have been met.

Missing People now provides a whole suite of Family Guidance, including legal and financial support and signposting. With support from the NPIA, the findings from the report have been made into a training DVD for police.

ACPO guidance for police investigating missing person cases states the need for police to inform families of Missing People's services. It also transforms other recommendations into action, including providing a single point of contact and informing families on the investigation and what is being done to find their missed loved one. Similarly, we have influenced the creation and content of the *Missing Children and Adults: A Cross Government Strategy*.

Families are routinely consulted through the annual Family Feedback survey and the development of the Service User Involvement Strategy and the role of 'Family Representatives'.

Families' involvement has been crucial in the Missing Rights campaign, particularly giving evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults Inquiry. The inquiry's support for presumption of death legislation and the positive response to this by the government contributed to the passing of the Presumption of Death Act 2013 in March 2013.

The establishment of the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons at the University of Portsmouth has supported further research into 'missing.'

Missing People will continue to work towards fulfilling all of the recommendations of *Living in Limbo*:

- We will continue to consult families, help develop better communities, support families with a resolution whatever that might be and understand better the journey of missing for families.
- We will extend the range of Family Guidance, particularly around supporting children of a missing relative and opportunities for families to remember their missing loved one.
- We will support advancements in guardianship when further announcements are made on proposals to establish a power of guardianship in 2014.
- We will forge new partnerships with local authorities and increase the number of tracing partners.
- We will continue to support research which meets and expands on the recommendations of *Living in Limbo*, including significant contributions by Missing People staff to the forthcoming book *Missing Persons: A Handbook of Research*.²³

²³ Shalev Greene and Alys, 2014

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