



WHEN THE SEARCH IS OVER
RECONNECTING MISSING CHILDREN AND ADULTS
LUCY HOLMES

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2014

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FOREWORD



Missing is an issue that cuts across cultural boundaries, across class, race and age. It's your journey and it's my journey. Have you ever started walking and just wanted to keep on walking? When you just had to get away for a few minutes or hours. Wanted to bury your head in the sand.

Young people and adults alike can be extraordinarily vulnerable while they're away from home. And yet returning to the place you left can be daunting; returning to face the consequences of your actions can be frightening. It is vital that we show returned missing people and their families compassion and support as they put the pieces back together.

Some people who go missing are living with mental health problems, others may have experienced trouble within their family or relationships. Some may even be considering ending their own life. No matter what the reason for the disappearance, someone who has been missing, and the people who have missed them, need us to understand that the turmoil does not end when that person returns. This research shows the opposite to be true; the period after someone is found is a time of hard work and emotional intensity.

This important new report demonstrates the challenges that people face when they reconnect with their lives after being missing, and shows what support they need to rebuild their life, their relationships and their health.

The charity Missing People understands what needs to be done. Using the findings from this valuable research they will continue to campaign for improvements to the way we look after people who have been missing. I wish them all the very best in their endeavours, and hope that this report is read by as many people as possible in order to break down the myth that it's the end of the story when the search is over.

STEPHEN FRY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In 2011-12, British police forces recorded 313,000 missing person incidents, relating to around 192,000 individual people (UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2013: 5). Police data suggests that 89 per cent of missing person incidents are resolved in some way within 48 hours, and 70 per cent within 16 hours (UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2013: 15-16).

This study has sought to explore the ways in which missing people are reconnected with family, carers, support agencies or a place of safety. The term 'reconnection' encompasses a range of potential outcomes for missing people, including a return home to live with their family or carers, contact with search and support agencies (such as the police or social services) or other safe places (such as hospitals or hostels), or a long-lost family member being traced and passing a message to their family. Reconnection does not require direct contact between the missing person and their family, but may be brokered through a third party. Nor does reconnection require that the missing person resumes contact with everyone who is searching. Finally, reconnection may not be permanent, as a reconnected person may go missing or lose contact again.

Events that follow a missing incident are likely to have an impact on the formerly missing person's wellbeing and that of the other people affected by the disappearance. The period after reconnection also presents opportunities: to put in place interventions to reduce the likelihood of that person going missing again; to undertake safeguarding work to reduce the risk should they go missing again; to find ways to change the pattern of any future missing incidents (e.g. reduce the duration, distance travelled etc.); and to inform future investigations by gathering intelligence about the incident.

This research aims to improve understanding of the reconnection process, which can be a challenging and distressing time, as well as a time of happiness and relief. It also aims to support the development of services for formerly missing people and their families that are designed to meet their needs effectively.

KEY FINDINGS

All reconnections are unique, but this research has found a number of common themes. These are identified for two reasons: to help affected individuals prepare for reconnection, and to improve wider understanding of how varied, challenging and complex reconnections can be.

Reconnection is Missing People's ultimate aim

Missing people have the choice about whether to resume contact, but by reconnecting via the charity, they have the opportunity to find out about who is searching and explore the impacts reconnection may have. Families have the chance to reach out and to communicate with the missing person to assuage their fears.

Reconnection can be prompted by many things

Missing people may be prompted to return by a range of internal and external factors such as feeling hungry or cold, or because of emotional ties or discovering that people are searching for them.

"If we are able to open up the lines of communication then we are reconnecting, even if there is no direct contact."

Reconnection can take place in a number of ways

Missing people can reconnect directly to family or friends (be it face-to-face or via correspondence), via police or through a third party such as Missing People. Reconnection can take place in person, by telephone or through written communication.

Reconnection is not always immediate

Once the decision is made to reconnect, missing people may take time before making that connection. Once initiated, the process of reconnection may itself also take time, particularly if messages are passed through a third party.

"When they do come back it can be like having a stranger in your house. And, you know, obviously your whole manner changes because you think 'Have I said the right thing? Can we talk about it now?'"

Reconnection can bring both joy and pain

For some missing people and some families reconnecting may not be an easy or happy process, and there may remain ongoing ambiguity if either side is unaware of what the other experienced during the missing episode.

Reconnection should be handled holistically and tailored to individual needs

All reconnections should be responded to in a tailored way that suits the assessment and support needs of the returned person and their family or carers.

“I think a lot of it is like learning to trust them again. That they’re not just going to go out the door and not come back.”

Reconnection is dynamic (may not be permanent)

For some missing people, reconnection may be short-lived. Either the missing person or their family members may terminate reconnection. For example, either party may decline to send or receive a message or make direct contact. Even if a missing person returns they may leave again.

Reconnection is not the end of the story but the beginning of recovery

Although it can be tempting to see reconnection as the end of a traumatic experience, it may, in fact, represent the beginning of a challenging period of recovery. This period can be difficult for the individual, family members and professionals.

“When somebody’s been missing, even if for a short time, there’s a gap there, and they don’t understand what each other has been through.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reconnection provides an important opportunity to reduce the likelihood, severity or duration of future missing incidents. In order to realise this opportunity, police officers conducting ‘Safe and Well checks’ and providers of return interviews should ensure that all people who have been missing are made aware of the help available to prevent future missing incidents, or to safeguard the individuals concerned should they go missing again.

These resources include Missing People’s phone, text and email services via 116 000, as well as

local services and emergency accommodation options. The government should ensure that children and young people are educated about the risks of running away, and about the help that they can access to stay safe before, during and after a missing incident.

2. Reconnecting missing young people is currently challenging, because of the shortage of appropriate safe places to which to refer them. In order to prevent young people facing risks in the community or having to turn to inappropriate places (such as police stations or accident and emergency centres) for shelter, the government should ensure that every missing child or young person who is unable to return home safely can access suitable emergency accommodation.
3. Not all social services teams are aware of how the charity can help missing people, or how it can support their own work to safeguard vulnerable people. Missing People must communicate with social services teams across the country to ensure that they are aware of the services the charity can provide (including TextSafe¹). The charity should develop a suite of information for local authority staff members, as well as good practice examples, guidance, and information about services for young people.
4. Families are not always sure how best to support a young person who has been missing: what to say, whether to ask questions, how to address their experiences. In light of this research, support services for young people who have run away should consider extending their service provision to include family support once the young person is found, which would ensure that the support given to young people is contextualised and that families are included in a holistic approach to dealing with the young person’s running away. Where this is not possible, referrals for family support work or mediation should be considered.
5. Not all young people have access to support services in their area when they return. Missing People must effectively trial and evaluate support for families when a young person returns from going missing and explore opportunities to roll out suitable services further. This service should, where possible, provide a consistent support service to families and young people who are repeatedly going missing.

6. In order to develop more effective rapport with returned young people, providers of return interviews for young people who go missing repeatedly should ensure that the interviews are conducted by the same person each time. Where this is not possible or appropriate, information from return interviews should be analysed together, to ensure that a full picture is gained.
7. Where return interviews are conducted for children or adults, and where these indicate a need for subsequent support, local agencies must work together to ensure that this is provided. It would be appropriate for statutory guidance to state agencies' responsibilities for working jointly to deliver a co-ordinated support package after return.
8. Many returned missing adults do not receive professional guidance or support after a missing incident, although this and other research suggests would this be beneficial to their wellbeing. All returned missing adults should be offered a return interview, in line with ACPO guidance (2010) and best practice principles, and with the aim of identifying harms and risk, addressing the reasons for the disappearance, and preventing a repeat incident. Return interviews should be available to people who have been reported missing from inpatient care and adults with dementia. As is good practice with children and young people, return interviews would be best delivered by staff from independent agencies who have undertaken training in missing and related issues. This is important because some returned people and their families may find it easier to develop trust with non-statutory services, and services with specialist knowledge about their circumstances.
9. More effective multi-agency work would ensure smoother referral of returned adults from police into other local statutory and voluntary services. While statutory guidance on children who go missing has been available for many years (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2014), no such guidance exists for missing adults. Statutory guidance on adults who go missing from home and care would provide much needed clarity on different agencies' responsibilities for responding to a missing incident and for providing support when people return. Such guidance could be based upon Missing from Care – a multi-agency approach to protecting vulnerable adults – A national framework for police and care providers, being developed by the National Crime Agency.
10. It is likely that it will be harder to reach out directly to missing people who have dementia; they may not carry a mobile phone, they may not realise that they will have been reported missing, and they may not be able to reach out for help if lost. This makes the role of publicity appeals especially important. In order to make local people aware that someone with dementia is missing in their community, Missing People and the charity's current and potential partners should continue to pursue opportunities to access publicity channels to publicise missing incidents quickly.
11. Return interviews with people with dementia, like those for all missing adults, would be best conducted by independent organisations. Organisations with expertise in dementia, and sufficient training in issues around missing people, might undertake this work, in order to share their knowledge about living with dementia, the experiences of carers, strategies to keep people with dementia safe, and sources of additional support.
12. Missing People's services provide a range of options for supporting missing adults to reconnect, including acting as a contact broker. Missing People and partner organisations must therefore explore opportunities to reach out to more missing adults, and to direct them to Missing People's 24/7 services via 116 000. Key opportunities for marketing include support services that missing adults might access, be they targeted drop-in centres, health or social services, or public spaces where missing adults are likely to be (such as transport hubs, supermarkets; Stevenson et al, 2013).
13. In order to reach out to help more missing adults reconnect, Missing People should consider the possible use of TextSafe (or an email equivalent) for low risk missing adults. This approach might be offered in support of low risk police cases that are not ordinarily referred to the charity, in order to reach out to adults who may have chosen to leave but may also welcome advice and support.
14. Police forces should consider signposting returned missing adults to 116 000 if they do not wish to have direct contact with their family, because the charity can then broker contact by passing messages back and forth.

Other service providers (such as homelessness services, refuges, etc.) should be encouraged to direct clients to Missing People's expert, independent services as a contact broker, when clients consider reconnecting with family members. Service providers may also consider becoming Missing People Support Partners, thereby receiving missing person appeals and guidance on supporting missing individuals.

- 15.** Reconnection can be daunting and stressful for adults who have been traced after losing contact with family members. Missing People should therefore consider developing enhanced support for people who have been traced, both on the phone and online (e.g. guidance documents, policy statements), with the aim of supporting reconnections whilst also safeguarding missing people's rights.
- 16.** While adults have the right to go missing and stay out of contact, the police will not close a missing person enquiry until they are satisfied that the missing person is safe and well. Support services that provide information to adults who may be missing (such as people who are homeless, or people who have fled domestic abuse) should ensure they are able to provide up-to-date and accurate information about being reported missing, a missing person's rights and the nature of police investigations. They can do this by pursuing partnership working with local police Missing Person Units or Missing Person Coordinators and the charity Missing People.
- 17.** In order to maximise the chances of reconnecting missing people, Missing People and current and potential Tracing Partners should explore opportunities to extend the charity's family tracing service. Preference should be given to partnerships which allow access to national level data, to ensure that the charity's service is of consistent quality across the UK. Opportunities should be sought which improve the chances of tracing missing adults who are less likely to be registered on the Electoral Roll or have a landline telephone.

INTRODUCTION

The nature, number and outcomes of missing incidents.

Many thousands of people go missing every year in the UK. In 2011-12, British police forces recorded 313,000 missing person incidents, relating to around 192,000 individual people (UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2013: 5). People of all ages and from every walk of life go missing. The most recent police data available show that men account for slightly more missing person reports than women (52 per cent compared to 48 per cent overall) but that, in the 12 to 17 years age group, young women account for a higher proportion of reports than young men (56 per cent compared to 44 per cent) (UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2013: 15-16).

Most police missing person incidents are resolved very quickly; usually within one or two days. Police data suggest that 89 per cent of missing person incidents are resolved in some way within 48 hours, and 70 per cent within 16 hours (UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2013: 26). This is comparable with the experience overseas (Henderson and Henderson, 1998; James, Anderson and Putt, 2008, National Crime Information Center, 2011; New Zealand Police, 2013). Very few missing person incidents end with the death of the missing individual; research findings from the UK and elsewhere show that less than one per cent of police missing person investigations have a fatal outcome (Newiss, 1999; Tarling and Burrows, 2004; Newiss, 2006, Hirschel and Lab, 1998).

Many people are also believed to go missing without being reported to the police, and it is difficult to estimate the number of these unreported missing people. One such group is young people who run away from home or care; research suggests that as many as two thirds of young people who run away are not reported missing to the police (Rees, 2011). Many people who have lost touch with their families are also searched for; for many families in this position it is not necessary or appropriate to contact the police, but their family member is still considered missing. Many families in this situation use publicly available online resources to undertake their searches, meaning that they are not counted by any agency.

MISSING PEOPLE

Missing People is a UK charity that searches for missing people, supports those left behind, and provides 24/7 advice and support directly to missing children and adults.

Search and publicity services

The Missing People website features missing person appeals, which are also circulated via the charity's social media profiles to more than 90,000 followers. The charity has a national network of partners who can display appeal posters, and a number of media partners who run regular appeals, while Appeal Days circulate appeals for missing people in local areas. All appeals feature the charity's phone number, 116 000, through which members of the public can provide sightings and information. The charity is also a partner in Child Rescue Alert, which is a coordinated emergency response to high risk missing children. Missing People maintains a network of Support Partners comprising service providers who may encounter missing people accessing their service, and these partners receive appeals and guidance on addressing clients' missing status. By using Missing People's TextSafe service, police investigators can request the charity to send a text message to be sent to the missing person from the charity, in order to alert them to the charity's services.

Family support services

Families of missing people can access the charity's services 24/7, via the free, confidential 116 000 phone, text and email channels. The charity provides advice and signposting as well as emotional support. As well as supporting reconnections, the charity can provide dedicated family support workers, telephone counselling, the online Family Connect forum and a range of online guidance leaflets. Missing People also organises a number of events where families can come together, including annual carol services and a Family Conference. Families are also able to access the charity's family tracing services, to locate relatives who have lost contact.

Services for missing children and adults

Missing People provides a 24/7 free, confidential helpline via telephone (to 116 000), text message (to 116 000) and email (to 116000@missingpeople.org.uk). Through these channels the charity can provide advice to callers, including signposting them to local services, as well as emotional support. Missing People can pass messages back and forth between callers and their family or carers, and can facilitate three-way conference calls or referrals to other service providers.

Missing People is able to accept out-of-hours calls diverted from local projects, enabling their users to access support around the clock. Missing People also provides a wide range of online guidance for missing children and adults. New services that are under development include an After Missing support service to be piloted in Wales in 2015, and the Wiltshire and Swindon service which will provide return interviews for previously missing and absent children and ongoing support for those at most risk.

MISSING PEOPLE: A YEAR IN NUMBERS

In 2011, Missing People had contact with 1,622 missing people via phone, text and email

- 56% female, 44% male (where sex was known)
- 68% under 18yrs, 32% over 18yrs (where age was known)
- 29% phone calls, 23% emails, 22% text messages, 26% TextSafe messages
- 21% of contacts resulted in a reconnection

In 2011, Missing People supported 690 police vulnerable missing person investigations

- 40% female, 60% male
- 34% under 18yrs, 66% over 18yrs
- 64% found alive, 10% found deceased, 19% still missing two years later

In 2011, Missing People opened tracing searches for 245 missing adults who had lost contact with their families

- 32% female, 68% male
- 64% of tracing searches opened more than a year after the person lost contact
- 40% found alive within a year, 1% found to have died, 60% still missing a year later²

Over four years' of annual Family Feedback Surveys, Missing People has gathered feedback from 662 family members of missing people

- 62% of respondents said their missing relative had been found alive, of whom...
 - 26% had returned to live with their family
 - 36% had resumed face-to-face contact
 - 22% had resumed correspondence contact
 - 16% had not resumed contact with their family

DEFINING KEY TERMS

This report will explore the ways in which people get back in contact (reconnect) with family, carers or appropriate support organisations after being missing. In this context it is important to define what it means to be missing. In this study, ‘missing people’ includes those who have been reported to the police as missing and those who have left their habitual residence but who have not been reported to the police or any other agency. They are people who are, or who feel, disconnected from their support network, from their habits and usual places, and even from themselves.

For someone to stop being missing, they must be back in contact or reconnected to someone, be that an individual or an organisation. This report seeks to explore the ways in which a range of missing people are reconnected with family, carers, support agencies or a place of safety. The term ‘reconnection’ encompasses a range of potential outcomes for missing people, including a return home to live with their family or carers, contact with search and support agencies (such as the police or social services) or other safe places (such as hospitals or hostels), or a long-lost family member being traced and passing a message to their family. Reconnection does not require direct contact between the missing person and their family, but may be brokered through a third party. Nor does reconnection require that the missing person resumes contact with everyone who is searching. Finally, reconnection may not be permanent as a reconnected person may go missing again; police force data suggest that, on average, 39 per cent of missing incidents are attributable to people who have been missing more than once (UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2013: 13).

“To reconnect people in a safe way is to do it in a supportive way, I think. You know, to do it in a way where you are just sort of with them. Almost kind of holding their hand a bit. You are letting them know that it is not just them, they are not alone in having to deal with this.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

Reasons for and aims of the study

Until now, much research about missing people has focused on what is described in Figure 1 below as the primary phase: the time between the missing person being reported missing and subsequently being found. Research has focussed, in particular, on what happens to people whilst away, what happens to the families left behind and on the effectiveness of different search strategies (such as, but not limited to, Biehal et al, 2003; Rees et al, 2005; Gibb and Woolnough, 2007; Holmes, 2008). Some research has also been conducted into the characteristics of missing people, and there has also been some work done to examine causes of missing incidents, with a particular focus on preventing future incidents (e.g. Bartholomew et al, 2009). To date, very little attention has been paid to the means and impacts of reconnection and what happens when the missing person is found (the secondary phase in Figure 1)

Research into these issues is much needed in order to understand better the reconnection process, which can be a challenging and distressing time, as well as a time of happiness and relief. This research is also needed to ensure that support services for formerly missing people and their families are developed and designed to meet their needs effectively.

Figure 1: The cycle of missing



As well as the experience of a missing incident itself, the events that follow the missing incident are also likely to have an impact on the reconnected person's wellbeing and that of the other people affected by the disappearance. The period after reconnection also presents opportunities: to put in place interventions to reduce the likelihood of that person going missing again; to undertake safeguarding work to reduce the risk should they go missing again; to find ways to change the pattern of any future missing incidents (e.g. reduce the duration, distance travelled etc.); and to inform future investigations by gathering intelligence about the incident.

This research aims to explore the various ways in which people can be reconnected, and the different outcomes that can result. Each section of the Findings chapter begins with a case study, and then explores relevant issues and themes before making recommendations for change.

METHODOLOGY

This project has used a number of data collection methods to meet the central research aims:

- To explore the ways in which Missing People supports missing people to reconnect with a place of safety
- To examine and outline the characteristics of the reconnection process (e.g. duration, method and outcome)
- To identify key areas for improvement and enhancement of Missing People services
- To make recommendations for further research and policy

The research was conducted using a mixed methods approach. Initially, cases from Missing People's database were coded and counted according to characteristics and outcome. 2,557 cases were included; all the cases opened by the charity in the calendar year 2011. The sample includes vulnerable missing person cases where the police were involved, family tracing cases and contacts made to the charity's helpline by missing children and adults. A subsample of 474 cases which had involved a reconnection were analysed in more depth.

In order to identify the key themes and recommendations, a joint prospective and retrospective case study approach was taken. Using the findings of the quantitative analysis, a number of composite case studies were created, which form the illustrative examples at the beginning of each section of the Findings chapter. The case studies that appear below are composites, but are all based on characteristics of real cases the charity has worked on. The details have been changed to retain the anonymity of our service users and partner agencies.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 staff members at Missing People, who work in a supervisory role on the helpline, as well as four family members of formerly missing people. Informal scoping telephone conversations were held with three members of staff from Tracing Partner agencies, and a formal interview with one.

Finally, new analysis was conducted on data from four years of annual Family Feedback Surveys (Missing People 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014a). Each annual survey samples families who have accessed Missing People's services in the previous calendar year. The analysis for this report has combined data from four years of the survey, comprising 662 responses.

2. FINDINGS

For some missing people, being reconnected represents the beginning of a new phase – one that may be difficult. It is likely that return will be a time of questions, silences, happiness and worry. Two key themes were identified in analysis across several case studies: fear that the returned missing person might become missing again; and families' uncertainty about how much to ask about the missing experience.

“It’s about to repeat itself”

When a missing person is found, families may experience a range of emotions. Alongside relief, some family members may have residual frustration towards the reconnected person. As described in Holmes (2008), some family members of missing people feel anxiety, anger and guilt during a missing incident. While the relief of return may overshadow less positive feelings, it is still possible for family members to feel resentment about what they have experienced, and distrust of the returned person.

“My son said he didn’t realise he had been missing that long. After I hugged him, I said ‘I just want to knock your bloody head off’.”

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2013 participant)

“Although they, sort of, love [the reconnected person], in a way they dislike him because he’s caused them grief.”

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

A missing person’s return, while welcomed, may not mean that they will remain in contact. Families may be concerned that the missing person is at risk of going missing again and, indeed, a significant proportion of missing people (mostly young people) do go missing more than once (Shalev Greene and Hayden, 2014; UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2013).

Even after the first missing incident, for some families there is a lack of trust in the returned person, and fear that they may go missing again. This study found marked concern among families that it would not take much to cause the returned person to go missing again. For some families, this impression may last for many years, as observed by Payne (1995) in an exploration of calls to the charity Missing People (formerly National Missing Persons Helpline) (Payne, 1995: 344).

“If he went up the road you’d think ‘Is he coming back?’ I think a lot of it is like learning to trust them again. That they’re not just going to go out the door and not come back, you know, and that takes a bit of time to rebuild.”

(Sibling of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

“Shall I talk about it then?”

Family members, and indeed formerly missing people, may find it difficult to talk about the missing incident. For some, this means not knowing what to say or how to frame conversations to avoid upsetting or angering the returned person. For some it means deliberately avoiding certain subjects or questions, or being very aware of not pushing the returned person to talk.

“There’s so many things you want to ask, but you know you can’t ask them all at once and, you know, it’s even things like where they’ve been living away, and how they’ve been living for that period of time, and then coming back, integrating into the normal life again, if you like. It’s very, very difficult.”

(Sibling of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

“Well, in a lot of situations [reconnection] is where the hard work can begin. [...] When they do come back it can be like having a stranger in your house. And, you know, obviously your whole manner changes because you think ‘Have I said the right thing? Can we talk about it now?’”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

A key feature of families’ experience of having a missing relative is the ambiguity of not knowing where they are or what they have experienced. This type of loss may be described as ‘ambiguous loss’; the sense of closure and acceptance that can follow a bereavement may never be reached, and the uncertainty about whether the person is alive or dead means that families can feel unable to recover (Boss, 1999, 2002, 2007; Holmes, 2008).

Following a reconnection some sense of closure is achieved because families know that the formerly missing person is alive and they may have information about their wellbeing. However, if the reconnected person chooses not to share what happened to them whilst missing, while the family may also fear to ask many questions, families may be left with a sense of ongoing ambiguity that may affect relationships between family members and the reconnected person.

This outcome is reflected in Stevenson et al (2013), which reports interviews with returned adults who described finding it difficult to talk about their experience of being missing: “I feel suffocated being here and not being able to talk about my experiences with my husband or anyone really, it’s not something you can talk about” (Stevenson et al, 2013: 96).

The remainder of this section of the report is organised into six case studies, each one a composite based on real cases the charity has worked on. Following each case study is an examination of relevant issues, findings from the research and recommendations.



ASHLEY'S STORY

Reconnecting a young person to safety.

Ashley called Missing People's 24/7, free 116 000 helpline from a public phone at 7pm on a Friday evening. Ashley had left home after an argument and did not feel it was safe to return. Ashley had experienced and witnessed domestic violence and abusive behaviour at home, but had never reached out for help from teachers or wother professionals.

Ashley had travelled some distance from home after school, using public transport. Ashley was now in an unfamiliar area without the means to get somewhere safe. It was getting dark and cold, and Ashley was hungry and scared. Missing People spent a long time on the phone establishing trust with Ashley, who initially found it hard to share information. Missing People explored with Ashley the possibility of going to another family member's home, but there was nobody nearby, and Ashley was frightened about being sent home.

Missing People explored further options, and Ashley agreed to a three-way call with social services. Missing People called through to a call taker in an Emergency Duty Team for the area from where Ashley was calling.

The call taker had not heard of Missing People before, so needed to ask a lot of questions about the charity's remit and policies. The call taker was

not a social worker, but arranged for a social worker to call back.

When the social worker called back at 8pm, they had a lot of questions for Ashley, who was reticent and unwilling to answer questions immediately. Without certain information, the Social Worker was not able to help. Eventually Ashley provided a home address. It then turned out that Ashley lived in a different local authority area to the area covered by that social worker which meant she couldn't help Ashley. Ashley had to end the call because there were people hanging around the phone box, but promised to call back.

Missing People called Ashley's local Emergency Duty Team (the social services out-of-hours cover) and explained the situation, only to be informed that the team would not be able to send anyone to fetch Ashley, and that Ashley's only option would be to go to a police station. When Ashley called back at 9pm Missing People passed on this advice. Ashley agreed to the police being called. While Ashley was on a call with a volunteer, a Services Supervisor called the police and they agreed to go to collect Ashley. Missing People remained on the line until they reached Ashley. Ashley phoned back some days later to say 'Thank you' for the help, and to report that the situation at home now seemed much more positive.

MISSING PEOPLE, HELPLINES AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

This case study explores the nature and outcomes of help-seeking by missing children, through Missing People's 116 000 helpline, text and email service.

Many adults and children who disconnect from their family, carers or usual places of habitation are not reported missing. The Still Running series of surveys found that as many as two thirds of young people who had run away had not been reported missing to the police (Rees, 2011: 18-19). However, many such adults and children do reach out for help. Still Running 3 found that, among other sources of help accessed, 15 per cent of young runaways sought help from a friend, 11 per cent from a relative, 2 per cent

from a teacher or member of staff at school, 2 per cent from the police and 1 per cent from a telephone helpline (Rees, 2011: 18).

Sometimes people who contact Missing People for advice and support do not wish to be reconnected to family but instead are referred to other sources of help. Many support services are not available out of regular office hours. Research has shown, however, that missing people (including missing adults and young people running away) are more likely to seek help out-of-hours (Holmes, 2011; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

This means that the last remaining options for support out-of-hours are 24-hour statutory service providers such as the police or social services.

MISSING PEOPLE: LEARNING FROM CALLERS

Research by Missing People in 2011 explored what happened to a sample of callers after a reconnection was made. Follow-up outcome information was collected for 64 callers:

- In 23 cases the caller could not be contacted by the statutory service (e.g. they did not answer the phone or were not where they said they'd wait) and one was contacted but declined to engage.
- In 7 cases the caller was contacted and given advice.
- In 7 cases the caller returned to home or care, and in 10 cases the caller was returned by the statutory service provider.
- In at least 4 cases the caller was allocated to a social worker, and 1 caller was being supported by Connexions.

23 respondents from statutory services had not previously heard of Missing People's helpline; 4 said they had and 37 were not asked or could not provide an answer.

(Holmes, 2011: 7)

YOUNG PEOPLE, SUPPORT SERVICES AND RECONNECTION

"For a person that has run away from home it may just be getting them to a place of safety, and that place may not be Mum and Dad, it might just be the nice police officer who is going to come out at one o'clock in the morning to get them, or another family member that is going to come out and get them, or the care home worker from the children's home they live in."

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

More than half (57 per cent) of young people who contacted Missing People in the study year (2011) were reconnected to a third party during their contact with Missing People. Most of these reconnections were to social services (56 per cent), followed by the police (19 per cent) and family (14 per cent). Young people who contacted Missing People were more likely than missing adults to be reconnected to police or social services (42 per cent compared to 16 per cent). The majority of young person reconnections were made by three-way conference call (50 per cent), followed by referral (43 per cent) then a message passed (11 per cent). (These do not sum to 100 because some young people were reconnected in more than one way).

“We gained that trust, and we took time in doing so”

When a young person contacts Missing People the most important factor is their safety. If they are not in a safe place, the priority is to help them to find somewhere safe, be that going back to where they live or finding an alternative. For some young people, returning to the place they left is unwelcome or unsafe.

Once staff and volunteers have explored the young person’s reasons for contacting Missing People, and worked out what help they are hoping for, they can suggest different methods of reconnection. At this stage, call takers have often spent a significant amount of time gaining the caller’s trust, and supporting them to consider their options in the context of their circumstances. Some young people take a long time to feel comfortable revealing personal information about their circumstances and experiences.

“You really need to spend a lot of time with them and talk through the issues. To gain their trust and then present what we can do because, obviously, you hope they are going to be wanting the sort of help that we can offer. Call home, social services or the police.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

“You’ve got them crying out for help, making the effort to call us and engage with us on the phone for a long time. You know they did need us to build a trust with us, and that was what was happening. They would panic a bit and say ‘oh, I’ll call you back’. [...] And you could see what was happening, they were just building their trust in us.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

The reconnection depends on factors outside the charity’s or the caller’s control

“We did not just say ‘We have tried everything and we cannot help you’, we actually stayed until somebody actually had to pick her up. We were not going to leave her out in the cold, she had been there all day. Nobody really wanted to help her and nobody really wanted to care.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

Missing People is able to offer callers the option of being reconnected to a third-party agency, such as a voluntary sector organisation, the police, social services or emergency housing departments. The success of these reconnections, however, depends on the response of the third party. Call takers must explain to callers that, while they will do everything they can to connect them to another agency, it may not always be possible.

Research by the charity in 2011 found that, of the calls that the charity attempted to reconnect to statutory services, a proportion of attempts failed. Of the calls that required substantial action: “61 calls resulted in a successful three-way call to Social Care Services (and 40 attempts failed), 66 in a successful three-way call to Police (6 failed), and 3 in a successful three-way call to Emergency Housing departments. 47 calls resulted in a successful three-way call to a children’s home (16 failed).” (Holmes, 2011: 6-7).

Getting through to third parties can present a problem for staff and volunteers at Missing People’s services; many organisations do not work outside regular office hours, or have limited cover on phone lines. Statutory agencies do have out-of-hours cover, but accessing these can be time consuming. For example, some social services Emergency Duty Teams route calls to a voicemail system, meaning that callers must leave a message and wait for a call back.

Once through to a third party, Missing People’s ability to make a reconnection will depend on the choice and ability of the third party to accept the referral. An obstacle that Missing People sometimes faces is unfamiliarity of the third party call taker with the charity’s services; this can delay being put through to the right person, or the third party agreeing to help the caller.

Another obstacle is call takers not being able to access the correct professionals. This can be because of resources (e.g. out-of-hours Emergency Duty Teams may have few staff covering large regional areas, and may not be able to respond quickly), because of procedures (e.g. the phone calls are all answered by civilian or administrative staff) or because of demand (e.g. if the available professionals are engaged on other tasks).

Once Missing People has reached the right person at the third party agency, that person's response can significantly affect the success of the reconnection. This is of particular relevance when connecting a young person on a three-way conference call. Responses likely to elicit a positive response from young people are characterised by: a warm and kind tone; exploring the issues and options before asking for information; emphasising choice; and emphasising that the caller won't be in trouble. Responses that are perceived as less helpful by young people are those which prioritise asking questions over gaining trust, use an abrupt or stern tone, or insist on knowing identifying information before discussing the young person's situation.

“Sometimes the police are absolutely incredible. [...] Really amazing and so empathetic with the caller, understanding their situation and making them feel at ease. But sometimes [...] it is all about that trying to find out where they are. Putting on a lot of pressure on them to find out where they are. Without really understanding why they are away and why they are reluctant to tell anyone where they are. You know, of course, they want to get to them and make sure that they are safe. That is our priority. But actually that can make callers retreat further. And less likely to say where they are.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

“When we went through to the [social services] Emergency Duty Team it was such a fantastic response. You know, the call was out-of-hours as well - I think it was a weekend - and [...] on this occasion I went through to an answer phone service and then the duty social worker [...] called us back really soon after [...] So it worked really well and as soon as I had explained the situation and I asked ‘Is there anything that you might be able to do to help?’ and the duty social worker just said ‘Well there is going to have to be, isn't there?’ Which, you know, was

like an amazing response. One of the very best times I have experienced of going through and trying to get help.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

The lack of provision for young people, especially out-of-hours

Many research studies have highlighted the relative lack of provision for young people who have run away and, in particular, the lack of out-of-hours support and of emergency accommodation (Rees et al, 2005; Evans et al, 2007; Rees et al, 2009; Smeaton and Franks, 2011; Railway Children, 2014 (forthcoming)). The experience of Missing People's call takers reflects these research findings.

“If it's a call earlier on in the evening, there will probably be a lot of bravado still there. But later on in the night when it's cold and they're tired and hungry and all of the anger is gone. That is the time when, you know, it's very important that we get it right. [...] And safety is paramount. Safety is the first thing that comes into your mind. It's one of the first questions that you ask; ‘are you somewhere safe at the moment?’”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

“At three o'clock in the morning, if you have an adult, it's totally different – totally different because with an adult you can mainly get in contact with a hostel or, you know, you can maybe get them to go somewhere. Direct them to a place of safety. With a child you are the person that they are on the phone to and you don't want to be letting them go. You can obviously ask them what kind of environment they are in, but the tempo is obviously ramped up. Everything is heightened, you know, because they are in a vulnerable situation.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

In an emergency out-of-hours, the police often represent the last resort to help a young person who has run away. In 2007 a Children's Society research study found that 10 of 27 police forces consulted reported having had “young people staying in police stations overnight due to a lack of alternative emergency accommodation” (Evans et

al. 2007: 5). This is not always a preferred outcome for the young person, as a police station is not appropriate accommodation for a vulnerable young person (Evans et al, 2007; Rees et al, 2009), but it at least provides a safer place to await further help. Forthcoming research from Railway Children explores in detail young people's experiences of running away and trying to find safe accommodation (Railway Children, 2014, forthcoming).

"I have noticed that a lot of social services, that quite a few social workers nowadays will say 'I can't help that young person until they're in a police station. I'm prepared to speak to them when they get there, because then I know they're in a safe place!'"

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: DEPAUL NIGHTSTOP UK

Depaul Nightstop UK is provided by the charity Depaul UK, and is an umbrella organisation supporting a network of Nightstop services nationwide. Nightstop services provide *"safe emergency accommodation for homeless young people aged 16-25 in the homes of approved volunteer hosts."* There are currently 40 accredited services and more under development.

Young people in housing need can be referred to their local Nightstop and, if they fit the criteria, can be placed overnight with a volunteer host. *"In 2013 Nightstop provided 11,755 bed nights and volunteer hosts gave over 176,000 hours of their time. A placement can be overnight or up to two weeks and can mark the first step out of homelessness for a young person."* Further details about the service can be found at <http://www.depaulnightstopuk.org/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reconnection provides an important opportunity to reduce the likelihood, severity or duration of future missing incidents. In order to realise this opportunity, police officers conducting 'Safe and Well checks' and providers of return interviews should ensure that all people who have been missing are made aware of the help available to prevent future missing incidents, or to safeguard the individuals concerned should they go missing again. These resources include Missing People's phone, text and email services via 116 000, as well as local services and emergency accommodation options. The government should ensure that children and young people are educated about the risks of running away, and about the help that they can access to stay safe before, during and after a missing incident.
2. Reconnecting missing young people is currently challenging, because of the shortage of appropriate safe places to which to refer them. In order to prevent young people facing risks in the community or having to turn to inappropriate places (such as police stations or accident and emergency centres) for shelter, the government should ensure that every missing child or young person who is unable to return home safely can access suitable emergency accommodation.
3. Not all social services teams are aware of how the charity can help missing people, or how it can support their own work to safeguard vulnerable people. Missing People must communicate with social services teams across the country to ensure that they are aware of the services the charity can provide (including TextSafe). The charity should develop a suite of information for local authority staff members, as well as good practice examples, guidance, and information about services for young people.



KIERA'S STORY

Reconnecting a repeatedly missing young person.

Kiera first went missing for two days when she was in Year 11, aged 16. She went missing from her own home, where she lives with her mother and younger sister. The first time she went missing it was thought by her mother and the police that she had run away because she had not been allowed to go to a party with older friends locally.

Kiera went missing on three more occasions within four months of the first incident. On the longest occasion she was missing for a week. Kiera was believed to be at risk of sexual exploitation because she was known to have older friends, and there are known to be gangs active in her local area. Kiera had also lost her grandfather to cancer shortly before the first missing incident, and had been deeply upset by this bereavement.

On each occasion that Kiera went missing, the police requested a TextSafe message be sent by Missing People to her mobile phone. The message sent said: **“Have you run away? Please get in touch for free 24/7 confidential support. Call 116000 or text 116000. www.missingpeople.org.uk”**. Missing People also circulated appeal posters in the areas Kiera was known to frequent, and her appeal was published in a local free newspaper.

On one occasion Kiera phoned Missing People to ask that the appeal posters be removed from public view. The volunteer who spoke to Kiera was able to offer her support and a chance to talk. They also explained that, in order for publicity to be removed, Kiera would need to attend a police station to show them that she was safe and well. Kiera declined to have a conversation with a police officer via a three-way call, although Missing People staff were able to give her some advice and outlined her options.

Missing People provided advice and support to Kiera's family on each occasion that she was missing.

On each occasion, Missing People were notified by police that Kiera had returned home safe and well. Because of the family support provided by the charity, Kiera's mother contacted Missing People to say that Kiera had returned, and was able to explain that Kiera and the family had been assessed by a social worker, and would be referred to a local support service for young people who had run away. Although several months have passed since the last missing incident, Missing People has not been notified of any further missing incidents involving Kiera.

YOUNG PEOPLE, RUNNING AWAY AND REPEAT MISSING INCIDENTS

This case study explores the nature of reconnection as experienced by young people who go missing repeatedly, and their families. Young people account for a disproportionate percentage of missing person reports; in 2011-12 children and young people aged under 18 accounted for 64 per cent of all missing incidents (UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2013: 15).

Although most missing people are found quickly, young people can face significant risks whilst away from home. Research by The Children's Society has found that 25 per cent of young people who had been missing reported having been hurt or harmed, slept rough or stayed with someone they didn't know, or stolen, begged or done 'other things' to survive whilst away (Rees, 2011: 16). More recently, the Office of the Children's Commissioner conducted an Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups and identified that going missing is a risk indicator for sexual exploitation (Berelowitz et al, 2013). Research also suggests that patterns of running away in early life can make a young person more vulnerable to later homelessness (Shelter, 2005: 8-9). For some young people, going missing repeatedly can also become a pattern of behaviour that lasts into adulthood:

"I was first reported missing at fifteen when I ran away. [...] It turned into this big cycle of I'd be home, then I'd be gone, then I'd be home, then I'd be gone. Then there would be phases where I was really missing and nobody knew where I was." (Rhona's story of a life of missing experience).

(Parr and Stevenson, 2013: 28)

Several studies have taken place which have emphasised the importance of return interviews for young people (Burgess et al, 2010; Evans et al 2007; Rees et al, 2005). Use of such interviews is also recommended in national statutory guidance, which states that the "when a child is found, they must be offered an independent return interview", and that the in-depth interview should be carried out within 72 hours of return, and preferably by an independent person (DfE, 2014: 14).

Recent interim guidance for police officers, implemented to reflect changes to police practice, re-emphasises the importance of return interviews to gain: "a better understanding of why the person went missing and what can be done to prevent it happening again. [...] Firm plans should be put in place while the person is still missing to decide how their return will be dealt with, especially with regard to those that repeatedly go missing or are in the highest risk category." (ACPO, 2013: 4).

The 2011 Government strategy on missing persons emphasised the importance of independence when conducting return interviews, stating that "Children and young people are often reluctant to share information with the police or social workers due to fear of statutory agencies. Voluntary sector workers are able to build trusted relationships with children to enable them to share information about where they have gone missing, what happened while they were away and what support they need." (Home Office, 2011: 11).

YOUNG PEOPLE AND RECONNECTION

Emotional responses

"You still need the answers"

For the families and carers of young people who are reconnected after a missing incident, communication with them can prove challenging. It can be difficult for the family to know what to say, and for the young person to open up about their experiences. Concern about the young person's welfare, and what happened to them whilst away, is well-founded, given the risks that young people can face while missing. Some young people, on returning home, appear to have had negative experiences, but do not disclose the details to their family members.

"My daughter was not the same after she had gone missing."

(Parent of a formerly missing young person, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

“One thing that was always noticeable when she came back was that she was dishevelled or, not really very well looked after, like she was just, not really taking very much care of herself, and that was always the case when she came back.”

(Guardian of a formerly missing young person, project interviewee)

Worry about what to say, and whether to ask questions, can be linked to concerns about the young person going missing again.

“When my daughter came home I was scared to ask questions to her and I was made to feel guilty and I was worried she would run off again.”

(Parent of a formerly missing young person, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

“Once someone’s done that, at the back of your mind you’re always wondering whether they’re likely to do it again.”

(Parent of a formerly missing young person, Family Feedback Survey 2012 respondent)

For young people, the fear of them going missing again can be disruptive and a cause of conflict with families, as well as a worry for relatives.

“When [the young person] was there, there was tension, there was eggshell treading, there was watching what you say, how you speak, in case she would run off again.”

(Guardian of a formerly missing young person, project interviewee)

“Returning home even after a short amount of time can be tremendously stressful for families with the young person coming back. [...] One young person went missing on numerous occasions. You know, I always think if you go missing once, then there is a problem. If you go missing twice, then there really is something that needs to be looked at. If it is more than twice or three times or whatever, then there are some serious issues.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

Families and carers face the challenge of setting appropriate boundaries for reconnected young people whilst also demonstrating care and support in such a way as to help prevent them leaving again. Where other young people are living at the same home, it can be difficult for families or carers to balance the need to support the young person who has returned whilst also treating all the young people in the household in a consistent and fair way.

“It’s really difficult because you want her to feel at home, well this is how I felt. I wanted her to feel at home, she didn’t have to keep doing this, but at the same time I had another [child] who is the same age, who needed to know that it’s not OK, what she was doing.”

(Guardian of a formerly missing young person, project interviewee)

Seeking support

Research with reconnected young people who had been missing from care³ found that, on return, young people felt they needed “firm boundaries, reinforced not with actions of power, but rather, empathy, understanding, support, respect and a listening ear” (Taylor et al, 2012: 15). The research found that young people do not always receive a positive response, and some even reported “punitive measures such as being grounded, having shoes removed or ketchup put in shoes (to prevent further running away)” (Taylor et al, 2012: 15).

For families of reconnected young people, providing sufficient support to a young person after a missing incident can be difficult and isolating. This study found that appropriate support from professional agencies is not always forthcoming, but is often wanted.

³ In this context ‘missing from care’ includes children who are looked after by the state, including those in children’s homes and foster care, but excluding adopted children. This reflects the definition of a Looked After Child in the Children Act (1989): “a child who is looked after by a local authority is [...] a child who is – (a) in their care; or (b) provided with accommodation by the authority” (Children Act, 1989, s. 22(1)).

“Initially it was just a case of ‘Oh, he’s just another runaway.”

(Parent of a formerly missing young person, 2011 Family Feedback Survey respondent)

“It took 5 months for a social worker to visit us, which was a bit late for us.”

(Parent of a formerly missing young person, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

“I’m still worried that he could go again, so I would like ongoing support.”

(Parent of a formerly missing young person, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

ONE FAMILY’S EXPERIENCE OF SUPPORT SERVICES

“As soon as I got wind that she’d been found I would notify the police, and they would come over and do what they called a debriefing, and basically that was to ask her where she’d been and stuff like that, and she just wouldn’t answer. She wasn’t engaged at all. [...] Her social worker would come round, and would sit and chat for hours, me and the social worker, and she sat. She didn’t say anything really. She never really engaged with anybody.

“[The social worker] would come and try and get her to talk, and she wouldn’t talk, and we’d formulate a plan and ask her if she agreed with it, which would be ‘Yes’, obviously, but whether she really did or not, I would say ‘No’, because she’d be gone again. And so he would go away thinking he’d done his bit, he’d talked to her and this is what she’d agreed, which is fine, fair enough. Then it happens again and you have to start all over again. You know that that is not really working, that really doesn’t solve the issue, hasn’t made any difference, and you can’t just dot the i’s and cross the t’s and put that away and say it’s finished. It doesn’t work. But, I don’t know how social services work, I don’t know what resources they’ve got, or what pressures they’re under. I don’t know any of that. I just know that [she] needs help, and that’s all I’m interested in, as a parent. Caseloads and numbers don’t mean anything to me.”

“The authorities need to get away from case number this that and the other, they need to. Any organisation that is going to try to help somebody, has to get to know that person. You know, it’s not an easy task and I don’t really understand how you guys are going to do it, because it is time consuming. Time is the one thing that needs investing in these people. Without time, it’s nothing. [...] This is what the young people need to feel, that they’re not just a time slot, that they really care, they really matter, and people are willing to spend the time that it needs.”

(Guardian of a formerly missing young person, project interviewee)

“She needed something to make her stop and think”

Something which some families of returned missing young people felt would be useful is work to help the young person empathise with the experience of the family while they were away, and to help the family understand why the young person went, and what they experienced.

“Would be nice if there was something there, not a mediator, but somebody to bridge the gap. When somebody’s been missing, even if for a short time, there’s a gap there, and they don’t understand what each other has been through.”

(Grandparent of a formerly missing young person, 2012 Family Feedback Survey respondent)

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: RAILWAY CHILDREN'S REACH MODEL

International charity Railway Children has created a model of best practice for responding to young people to reduce risky behaviours and improve their wellbeing, as well as to reduce incidents of running away. The Reach model encompasses seven services: street work; one-to-one support; return home interviews; family support; a local helpline; preventative education; and emergency accommodation/safe places. These services, when delivered in conjunction, are designed to “reduce risk-taking and improve wellbeing by addressing the causes of running away” and to “reduce incidents of running away”. More information on the Reach model can be found on the Railway Children website at <http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/our-solution/where-we-work/uk/reach-model/#.U7-2fPugYqM>

The model has been evaluated, and found to provide a reduction in risk and missing episodes for the individuals studied (Berelowitz et al, 2013: 50).

“She has begun to realise that she’s not an island, she does need other people, and nobody is trying to have a go or upset her, but there are certain things that have to be. And she’s realising that, although she’s still pushing a little bit.”

(Guardian of a formerly missing young person, project interviewee)

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Families are not always sure how best to support a young person who has been missing: what to say, whether to ask questions, how to address their experiences. In light of this research, support services for young people who have run away should consider extending their service provision to include family support once the young person is found, which would ensure that the support given to young people is contextualised and that families are included in a holistic approach to dealing with the young person’s running away. Where this is not possible, referrals for family support work or mediation should be considered.
5. Not all young people have access to support services in their area when they return. Missing People must effectively trial and evaluate support for families when a young person returns from going missing and explore opportunities to roll out suitable services further. This service should, where possible, provide a consistent support service to families and young people who are repeatedly going missing.
6. In order to develop more effective rapport with returned young people, providers of return interviews for young people who go missing repeatedly should ensure that the interviews are conducted by the same person each time. Where this is not possible or appropriate, information from return interviews should be analysed together, to ensure that a full picture is gained.
7. Where return interviews are conducted for children or adults, and where these indicate a need for subsequent support, local agencies must work together to ensure that this is provided. It would be appropriate for statutory guidance to state agencies’ responsibilities for working jointly to deliver a co-ordinated support package after return.



GABE'S STORY

Reconnecting a missing adult experiencing mental health problems.

Gabe had been living with mental health problems for many years and, despite his family's concerns, had never had a formal diagnosis from a doctor or received any dedicated support. Gabe had been living on his own for some time, but relied on his family for financial support from time to time.

Gabe's family became concerned when he did not answer his phone for a regular Sunday afternoon call. On visiting his address, his family found that he had gone missing. His property had not been secured, and although Gabe's cash card and phone were missing, his passport was still present. Gabe's family reported his disappearance to the police immediately, and an investigation was undertaken.

The police contacted Missing People to request publicity and family support, as well as a TextSafe message to Gabe. The charity sent a text message to Gabe's mobile phone, saying **"Away from home? Please get in touch for free 24/7 confidential support or a message home. Call 116000 or text 116000. www.missingpeople.org.uk".** Missing People also circulated an appeal to Support Partners, asking them to be aware of Gabe's missing status, should he approach them for help.

Missing People circulated posters to the areas where police and Gabe's family felt he might be. The police investigation took place, and the family did some searching themselves, taking posters around the local area and contacting local organisations that Gabe might approach. Gabe's family felt frustrated that even though he was vulnerable, they were not able to access confidential information about any activity on his bank account because of data protection policies.

Gabe was found several days later, by police, sleeping rough in his local area. The police officers recognised Gabe from the missing person details that had been circulated in the force, and assisted him to return to his family. Gabe had been experiencing paranoid thoughts and anxiety.

After he was found, Gabe's family encouraged him to see his family doctor, who diagnosed Gabe's mental health problem and prescribed both medication and face-to-face therapy. Gabe's family relationships are gradually improving, and his family feel optimistic that, provided he continues to receive appropriate support, Gabe will be able to manage his mental health and wellbeing.

MENTAL HEALTH AND GOING MISSING

This case study explores the experiences of missing adults with mental health problems who are reconnected to family, carers or support services.

For a large proportion of adults who go missing, mental health problems are present and, for many, will be a contributory factor to the disappearance. Research estimates vary, but the figures suggest that mental health problems are present in between 45 and 60 per cent of all missing incidents (Holmes and Woolnough et al, 2013). Earlier research suggests that as many as 80 per cent of missing adults were thought to have “some form of mental illness” when they went missing (Gibb and Woolnough, 2007: 1). These estimates include both those people with a diagnosed condition, and those for whom there are concerns for their mental health.

Going missing and mental health may be related in a number of ways. For some missing people, a disappearance may be caused by a change in their mental wellbeing, such as an increase in the severity of their symptoms, or not taking medication. For some, their mental health may be reasonable when

they go missing, but may deteriorate over time, particularly if medication is left behind. For some, the missing incident may be the first outward indication that anything is amiss (Holmes and Diamond, 2011: 13-16). Patients who go missing from mental health care services also represent a substantial number of missing person investigations for police forces (Holmes, 2014).

For this project, a representative sample of 230 vulnerable missing person cases were selected from the cases that Missing People worked on in 2011. The case files were examined and revealed that around half (48 per cent) involved a known concern for the missing person’s mental health. The greatest number of cases with a mental health concern flag were in the 18-54 years age group. For this study, indicators of poor mental health included substance use, intellectual disability and a ‘possible suicide risk’ flag, as well as reports of particular mental health problems, because of the effect they may each have on either mental health or the cognitive and decision-making functions. Table 2 below illustrates the number of missing people who were flagged with each concern.

Table 2: Mental health concerns in a sample of 230 vulnerable missing people publicised by Missing People in 2011

MENTAL WELLBEING CONCERN	NUMBER*	PERCENTAGE OF THE SAMPLE (N=230)*
Possible suicide risk**	34	15
Mood related, depression, bipolar or related	30	13
Other or unspecified mental health problem	30	13
Substance use**	24	10
Schizophrenia, psychosis or related	15	7
Alzheimer’s disease, dementia, amnesia or related	12	5
Antisocial behaviour, paranoia or related	9	4
Self harm	8	4
Hospitalised under the Mental Health Act	7	3
Intellectual disability**	7	3
Anxiety, panic attacks, phobias or related	2	1
Eating disorder	1	0

* This column is not additive because some people’s cases were flagged with more than one concern.

** These are included despite not being mental health problems, because of the effect they may each have on either mental health or cognitive and decision making functions.

Some families of missing people find that the missing person's mental health problems not only raise concerns for them, but also enable the family to understand and contextualise the disappearance. This may have an important effect on the family's wellbeing, as families' perceptions of a disappearance can have a strong influence on their behaviour and emotional response (Holmes, 2008: 29-30).

"I am trying to look forward now, and put that dreadful time behind me. My son did not mean to hurt me by going missing; he had what is known as a psychotic break. I just want to get on with life now, and am so happy that my son is alive and in contact with me, and I just live each day as it comes - although things are not perfect, they could have been so much worse."

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2012 respondent)

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: SUICIDE RISK TEXTSAFE®

This new service has been developed in partnership by Missing People and Samaritans. It provides a way of proactively reaching out to missing adults via text message and telephone call, when there is concern that they might be planning to take their own life.

Police investigating a missing incident are able to request a TextSafe message is sent to the missing person. Following this text message about the services of Missing People and Samaritans, the missing person will be telephoned by a volunteer Samaritan and offered emotional support. This lets the missing person know that the charities care for their safety and want to help and encourage them to get in touch, thus contributing towards statutory safeguarding requirements and duty of care to vulnerable people.

MENTAL HEALTH AND RECONNECTION

A recent research project, entitled The Geographies of Missing People, included interviews with 45 returned missing adults, many of whom had experienced mental health problems. Interviewees described their return, and what life was like afterwards. Returned adults described how they and their families found it difficult to readjust after a missing incident. For some, the attention and caring efforts by family members felt stifling. Some returned adults felt under pressure to justify their actions, and too soon after returning. For some, family members simply didn't understand, and weren't felt to be the best people to provide support. Few, however, received support from external services (just 22 per cent of participants), despite many saying it would have been helpful (Stevenson et al, 2013: 90-94).

Emotional responses

"He was absolutely horrified"

In some instances, a returned person may feel shocked, surprised or angry about being reported missing, and some people exhibit frustration

towards the person who reported them missing. In cases where the returned person has also experienced mental health problems, this may also be related to ongoing paranoia or fears about the possible consequences of being forced to accept treatment or surveillance.

"And that was the rage, you see. Who had reported him missing? Of course it was me. [...] He now knows that I was the one who contacted them. So we're back to square one, with me being the bad one"

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

"When my partner was found he was in hospital far away so I would have appreciated support for me when he was found."

(Partner of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

“I could see how counselling would be useful. It took me a long time to get over the month of his missing.”

(Sibling of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

Seeking help

“You’re sent from pillar to post”

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) provides guidance to police officers about managing a missing person’s return. The guidance is clear about the need to make sure that any place of return is safe and that missing adults are allowed to make choices about what information is revealed to informants. This police guidance emphasises that all missing people should receive a ‘safe and well’ check as soon as possible on return, and should be conducted as soon as possible on return (ACPO, 2010: 54-55). Ideally the checks involve a face-to-face meeting with a police officer, wherein the officer checks whether the missing person has experienced any harm, and seeks to find out information about their movements whilst missing (ACPO, 2010: 54).

Police guidance also suggests that more in-depth return interviews are also “relevant to all missing persons” and should be conducted within 72 hours of a missing person being found (ACPO, 2010: 55-56). As stated earlier, best practice and statutory guidance recommend that these interviews be conducted by an independent person rather than a police officer (DfE, 2014).

Analysis of four sweeps of Missing People’s annual Family Feedback Survey shows that a substantial proportion of families would appreciate additional support after the missing person was found. When prompted, almost half (48 per cent) of family members of a found missing person said they would have been ‘very or fairly likely’ to use support after their missing relative was found. Research involving returned missing adults has also emphasised the need for service interventions to ease swift return and to prevent future incidents (Stevenson et al, 2013: 81).

“Talking is really, really important, but it needs time. Just having an initial period of silence was important when I tried to work out what I wanted to say about going missing. Then the doctor asked me questions in such a way that it made it easy to open up to him. For me it’s important to talk about being missing with someone who understands.” (Johnny’s story of being reported missing from psychiatric care).

(Parr and Stevenson, 2013: 12)

This research, however, has found that many families did not receive sufficient support either for themselves or for the person who has returned, and many adults did not receive a return interview. Return interviews would provide an opportunity to assess the returned person’s mental wellbeing, as well as gauging their risk of further missing incidents, gathering intelligence about their experiences whilst away, and assessing what onward referral would be appropriate, if any. This can affect the ongoing wellbeing of everyone concerned.

“I would like more help with the mental health of my son after he was found”

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

“You don’t get guidance about what to do, and if you haven’t encountered this [...] it’s very difficult to tap into it”

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

“You just get paralysed trying to get the mental health services involved”

Previous research findings suggest that access to mental health services has long been problematic for missing people: “Some adults experiencing mental health difficulties or depressive illness reported difficulties gaining access to appropriate therapeutic services. Problems with obtaining treatment were identified by some as a contributory factor to going missing, while for one or two adults who had already gone missing, it affected their ability to re-stabilise their lives.” (Biehal et al, 2003: 31).

This is reflected in the findings of this study, both before and after a missing incident. Families may experience difficulty in accessing help for someone who is unwilling to engage with support, or whose behaviour has not triggered a crisis response.

“He wasn’t diagnosed with any mental health [problems] prior to going. It’s almost, like, so difficult to try and get on that track of trying to find the help that perhaps they do need”.

(Sibling of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

“I’ve been trying to get help for my son for at least ten years.”

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

This study similarly identified potential problems with the assessment of formerly missing people with mental health problems.

“I had concerns about his mental health and I was worried that they didn’t do a full assessment of him when they found him.”

(Partner of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

“It might be an idea, because of what happened in our case, that if the police find someone who they believe has mental health issues and is obviously in distress, they liaise with local health services and also check the missing persons database before they relinquish custody of that individual.”

(Sibling of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2012 participant)

For people in receipt of mental health support, a period of going missing may lead to missed appointments and support packages being cancelled. Further research is required to explore how mental health support services approach this issue. Further research should explore the experiences of mental health patients who go missing; whether they are discharged from services, and how they re-engage on their return.

Research should also explore whether local protocols are in place and what they say, and whether returned missing people are treated as ‘non-compliant’, or vulnerable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Many returned missing adults do not receive professional guidance or support after a missing incident, although this and other research suggests would this be beneficial to their wellbeing. All returned missing adults should be offered a return interview, in line with ACPO guidance (2010) and best practice principles, and with the aim of identifying harms and risk, addressing the reasons for the disappearance, and preventing a repeat incident. Return interviews should be available to people who have been reported missing from inpatient care and adults with dementia. As is good practice with children and young people, return interviews would be best delivered by staff from independent agencies who have undertaken training in missing and related issues. This is important because some returned people and their families may find it easier to develop trust with non-statutory services, and services with specialist knowledge about their circumstances.
9. More effective multi-agency work would ensure smoother referral of returned adults from police into other local statutory and voluntary services. While statutory guidance on children who go missing has been available for many years (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2014), no such guidance exists for missing adults. Statutory guidance on adults who go missing from home and care would provide much needed clarity on different agencies’ responsibilities for responding to a missing incident and for providing support when people return. Such guidance could be based upon Missing from Care – a multi-agency approach to protecting vulnerable adults – A national framework for police and care providers, being developed by the National Crime Agency.



EDWIN'S STORY

Reconnecting a missing adult living with dementia.

Edwin had been living with dementia for some years, and his dementia was advanced. Edwin lived with his wife in a sheltered housing complex in a large town. Edwin still appreciated being independent, and regularly used his free bus pass to travel on public transport locally. Edwin had been very resistant to going to live in a care home.

Edwin had been missing before and, on the last occasion, had been found a long distance away from home, having travelled by bus. In the past, he had been found in potentially dangerous situations, where he was at risk of being hurt.

On this occasion, Missing People were contacted by Edwin's family, who were extremely worried about his welfare. Edwin's wife had left him at home alone while she went to the local shops, and when she returned she realised that he was missing, along with his coat and walking stick.

Missing People immediately contacted the investigating police officer to confirm the details of the incident and to get permission to circulate publicity, in addition to the family's own efforts. Having been granted permission, Missing People were immediately able to circulate an urgent appeal for Edwin on the charity website.

The appeal was circulated to the charity's 35,000 Facebook followers and 58,000 Twitter followers, who were able to share the appeal with their friends and followers too. Edwin's appeal was also shown on digital billboards in the town where Edwin lives. Case publicity volunteers arranged for posters to be displayed immediately in relevant local locations such as shops that Edwin might visit.

Edwin was found nine hours after he went missing, walking along a dual carriageway, after concerned members of the public contacted the police. Edwin was taken to hospital for assessment, where he was found not to have sustained any injuries, although he was slightly dehydrated. Local social services were contacted by the hospital so that they could assess Edwin's living arrangements.

DEMENTIA AND GOING MISSING

This case study explores the experiences of missing people with dementia who go missing and then return, and the effect on their families. It is estimated that there are around 800,000 people living with dementia in the UK, and that there will be over a million by 2021. Two-thirds of people with dementia live in the community, one-third in care homes (Alzheimer's Society, 2014a). Dementia is a condition that usually occurs in older people, but can be present in younger people too. It can lead to "problems with: memory loss; thinking speed; mental agility; language; understanding; and judgement [...] increasing difficulties with tasks and activities that require concentration and planning; depression; changes in personality and mood; periods of mental confusion; difficulty finding the right words" (NHS Choices, 2014).

Dementia can contribute to people becoming missing in a number of ways. A person with dementia might leave their home to travel to somewhere particular, such as a former home or familiar place, and if no one is aware of the journey, they may be reported missing. A person with dementia might become lost whilst taking a regular walk or journey, thus becoming missing. A person with dementia might leave their home with no particular intention

and become lost in the local area⁴ (Rowe et al, 2004; Rowe et al, 2011). Research studies have estimated that between 60 and 80 per cent of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (a form of dementia) will have one or more missing incidents (Rowe and Glover, 2001; Hope et al, 2001).

It is difficult to estimate how many missing incidents are influenced by the missing person's dementia. UK police forces do not routinely report how many missing person incidents include dementia as a contributory factor. Research, including analysis for this study, has found that between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of missing people referred to the charity have dementia; in 2003 Biehal et al found that problems 'way-finding'⁵ were "the most common reason for going missing ascribed to those aged 60 or over, was present in one third of the case files for this age group and appeared equally likely to affect all ethnic groups" (Biehal et al, 2003: 19).

This is likely to be a lower proportion than all police incidents, because the majority of cases referred to the charity have been ongoing for more than 3 days whilst 70 per cent of police missing person cases are resolved within 16 hours (UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2013: 26), and most missing people with dementia are usually found "within a few days" (Biehal et al, 2003; 43).

MISSING PEOPLE, APPEAL DURATION

18% of the 690 police cases the charity worked on in 2011 were referred to Missing People within two days of the disappearance, 23% between 3 and 7 days after the disappearance, and 28% between a week and a month (the remainder were either unknown (7%) or more than one month (24%)).

38% of these cases were closed within a week of being referred to the charity, a further 19% were closed between a week and a month after being referred. 20% of these cases were closed between a month and a year after being referred. (The remainder had been open for more than one year, at the time of analysis).

98% of people who were found were found within a year of being reported to Missing People.

For people with dementia, going missing can present significant risks. Although most people are found alive within a short period, for a small minority becoming lost can result in serious injury, illness or death. A previous Missing People research report indicates that 15 of 186 fatal incidents worked on

by the charity in 2006-2007 involved a person with dementia, and that they were most commonly found outdoors (Newiss, 2011: 33).

For some families caring for someone with dementia, missing incidents can become a regular part of life.

⁴ There is some relationship between the specific behaviour of 'wandering' and going missing, but the two terms are not interchangeable. Rather, becoming lost may be a result of wandering behaviour, but may also be unrelated.

⁵ Way-finding is the process by which people orient themselves in their environment and choose routes by which to travel to their destination.

“Once he had an idea, it was almost like he had to see it through in order to, erm, get it out of his system or something. And just occasionally he would just head off to the day centre. [...] I think probably eleven o’clock at night was the latest he was found. [...] Maybe he would knock on someone’s door looking for a drink, or he’d got muddled and thought he lived there. He tends to seek out people, and they would then contact the police and he’d be brought back safe. Completely oblivious that he’d done anything odd at all. Coming home in a police car or whatever.”

(Daughter of a missing adult, interviewed for Living in Limbo (Holmes, 2008))

DEMENTIA AND RECONNECTION

Challenges with search and reconnection

In cases where the missing person has dementia, their help-seeking behaviour may not centre on being missing. Adults who encounter people with dementia asking for help may not realise they are missing, and so may not endeavour to alert anyone to where they are, meaning that publicity will be of paramount importance. In 2011 Missing People circulated appeals for 12 people with dementia – a sample that is too small to draw meaningful conclusions. However, in at least one of these

instances the person was found as a direct result of Missing People’s publicity appeal.

It is also particularly important, in cases when a missing person is known or suspected to have dementia, that search strategies are well informed by intelligence and knowledge about likelihood of travel in given directions. Research examining police missing person cases resulted in a guidance booklet being produced that provides some such advice (Gibb and Woolnough, 2007). Further research should be conducted to understand way-finding in people living with dementia, and to explore how they can be supported to continue to live independently whilst also being safe. Research should also explore the experience, response and needs of carers in order to inform future policy and practice responses in line with national strategy.

A new project to address some of these concerns has been developed in recent years and has been piloted across three county areas. The Neighbourhood Return project involved a network of volunteers who could be mobilised to search their local area for a missing person with dementia. Adults with dementia could be pre-registered, to allow for a near-instant response to a disappearance. The pilot project has now been concluded, and evaluation findings are due to be published in autumn 2014 (Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network, 2014a and 2014b).

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: MISSING PEOPLE/OUTDOOR MEDIA CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

In order to bring high risk missing person appeals to the greatest possible number of people, Missing People and industry body Outdoor Media Centre have created a pioneering partnership.

Outdoor Media Centre’s members, using technology provided by Grand Visual, provide pro bono advertising space on digital billboards nationwide to be used for missing person appeals. These appeals can be created and circulated within minutes, meaning that a missing person’s details will be seen by the largest possible number of people in a regionally targeted area.

More details about this prize-winning partnership can be found here: http://www.outdoormediacentre.org.uk/outdoor_media/news/Missing_People_brochure/

Attempts to prevent future incidents

“It’s so scary thinking it might happen again.”

(Sister of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

Like the families of many missing people without dementia, family members of returned adults with dementia may be concerned that they are at risk of going missing again. After reconnection, people caring for the missing adult may seek to curtail their freedoms to prevent further missing incidents.

“[The] experience really shook me. I kept thinking that she could have got on another bus to somewhere else. How on earth could I ever have found her? My solution after that was never to let her out of my sight. If she wanted to go out, I went with her. Sometimes she’d be hostile but I would still go along.”

(Quote from the husband of a formerly missing woman with dementia, Member of the Neighbourhood Return advisory group Alzheimer’s Society 2013a)

The use of ‘safer walking technologies’ can help people with dementia to stay independent, and to reduce the worry for carers. Safer walking technologies are devices based on Global Positioning Systems (GPS) or similar, that a person with dementia can carry with them, and that allow their family or police to locate them should they go missing.

For people with dementia, going missing or becoming lost may be a trigger for being moved into supported living or a care home. Research by McShane et al (1998) found that, in their sample of 104 people with dementia, those who got lost during the study period were more likely to be rehomed permanently in institutions (McShane et al, 1998). While current government strategic plans on dementia do not specifically mention missing incidents, they acknowledge that crises can lead to carers or adults with dementia choosing residential care over independent living. Such crises might include incidents where the person with dementia was lost or missing. The National Dementia Strategy recognises that people admitted to hospital after such a crisis might well be moved straight from hospital into residential care “partly because a lack of knowledge and understanding about dementia [that] leads some professionals to the erroneous assumption that residential care is the only option. It is also due to home care staff and family carers not receiving training and advice in dementia, and so not having the skills and competences to provide appropriate care” (Department of Health, 2009: 50).

Researchers fear that imposing restrictive boundaries, in order to keep a person with dementia physically safe, can cause ‘silent harms’ and lead to a decline in their skills and wellbeing: “Rather than simply stopping something which is perceived as risky, such as going for a walk, we need to think about finding ways to make it possible. This could include involving other people – such as alerting neighbours, using volunteer help, informing the police of the person’s address, employing new

GPS or mobile phone technology or engaging peer support” (Professor C. Clarke; ESRC, 2013).

Response to incidents

When people with dementia are found or return after a missing incident, they may require a different approach to returned people who do not have dementia. The Alzheimer’s Society’s guidance suggests: “When the person returns, try not to scold them or show them that you are worried. If they have got lost, they may be feeling anxious themselves. Reassure them, and quickly get them back into a familiar routine” (Alzheimer’s Society, 2013b: 9).

In order to ensure the most effective response to vulnerable adults who have been missing, police forces should consider all appropriate referral routes. Where dementia is flagged (either diagnosed or potential), this referral should include both health and social care services. It is still relevant to offer a return interview, but this should include a dementia-specific component to take account of the different needs of the returned adult and their family.

“We’ve actually got him a social worker so we’ve been able to get help there.”

(Niece of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. It is likely that it will be harder to reach out directly to missing people who have dementia; they may not carry a mobile phone, they may not realise that they will have been reported missing, and they may not be able to reach out for help if lost. This makes the role of publicity appeals especially important. In order to make local people aware that someone with dementia is missing in their community, Missing People and the charity’s current and potential partners should continue to pursue opportunities to access publicity channels to publicise missing incidents quickly.
11. Return interviews with people with dementia, like those for all missing adults, would be best conducted by independent organisations. Organisations with expertise in dementia, and sufficient training in issues around missing people, might undertake this work, in order to share their knowledge about living with dementia, the experiences of carers, strategies to keep people with dementia safe, and sources of additional support.



LARRY'S STORY

Reconnecting an adult caller to Missing People's helpline.

Larry had been reported missing to the police after leaving the home he shared with his wife and adult son. He had been experiencing some financial problems in the months prior to his disappearance. He appeared to have left of his own accord, and had taken his passport, wallet, keys and some other belongings.

Missing People created a publicity appeal and circulated this online and via posters in relevant areas. Missing People provided family support to a number of members of Larry's family, including the use of an online forum for families to talk and support one another, the offer of telephone counselling, 24/7 support by phone, a suite of online guidance leaflets and the support of a dedicated Family Support Worker.

After some months of being out of contact, Larry contacted Missing People's 24-hour services, first by email and subsequently by phone. Larry did not mention why he had decided to get in touch, or how he had found out about the Message Home service. Larry was initially very concerned about confidentiality, and asked many questions about whether he could be traced by his phone call.

Missing People reassured him that his call would not be traced, and that the charity would not tell anyone he had called without his permission, unless he said something that caused concern for his or someone else's safety.

Once Larry had been reassured, he asked to pass a message to his wife and son. Missing People asked some questions to verify his identity then discussed the wording of the message with Larry, to ensure that it was not negative. Missing People asked Larry to call back in an hour's time if he wished to know that his message had been passed successfully. Missing People then phoned Larry's wife, and asked her whether she was willing to receive Larry's message. Larry's wife was keen to receive the message, which was that Larry was safe and well, and would be in touch soon. Larry's wife also asked Missing People to pass a message back to Larry, that everyone just wanted to know that he was OK, and he could get in touch any time.

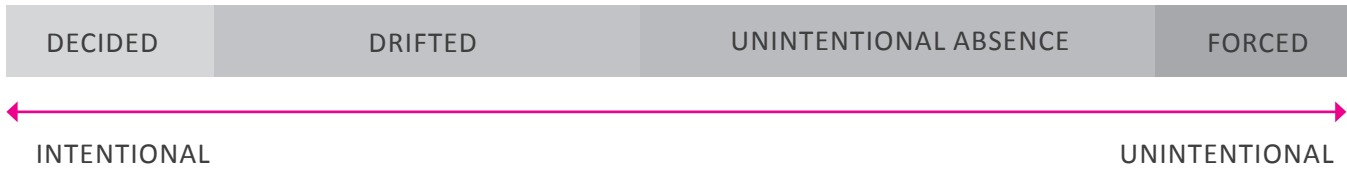
Over the coming weeks, Missing People was able to pass several messages from Larry to various family members, and messages from them back to Larry. Larry did not choose to return home immediately, but informed Missing People that he had resumed direct contact with various members of his family. Missing People has not been informed what happened after this.

MISSING PEOPLE AND REACHING OUT FOR HELP

This case study explores what happens when missing adults choose to reach out to their family via Missing People’s 24/7 services.

People lose touch with their families in a number of different ways. Biehal et al (2003) illustrated this conceptually with the ‘missing continuum’ that mapped the ways in which people go missing:

Figure 1: The missing continuum



Biehal, Mitchell & Wade, 2003: 3.

Although the concept of intentionality, as related to missing incidents, is problematic, many missing adults will have left deliberately (Holmes, 2015, forthcoming). Adults have the right to go missing, provided they are not subject to any legal orders that require them to be present at a given location (for example, being detained subject to a section

of the Mental Health Act (1983)). A 2003 research study into the characteristics of missing incidents investigated by the charity found that nearly two thirds (64 per cent) of missing adults in the sample had left deliberately. The most common reason for leaving deliberately was a breakdown in relationships (Biehal et al, 2003: 14-15).

MISSING PEOPLE, CONTACT WITH MISSING PEOPLE

- In 2011, Missing People had contact with 1,622 missing people by phone, text and email (including 421 outgoing TextSafe messages)
- Age was known in 32% of all 1,622 contacts, of which 32% were adults
- Age was more likely to be known for phone contacts. Age was known in 97% of 470 phone conversations, of which 33% (n=145) were known to be adults.
- Age was known in 13% of 370 email conversations, of which 33% (n=16) were known to be adults.

REACHING OUT AND RECONNECTION

“We try and keep it as neutral as possible. [...] The reconnection is supposed to be positive. We are looking to reconnect people in a positive way. [...] We like to know the background and one of our questions is ‘Why are you now wishing to get back in contact?’

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

Missing adults can contact the charity by phoning or texting 116 000, or by email to 116000@missingpeople.org.uk. As well as providing support and advice to missing adults, the charity is able to reconnect missing people directly with family, a

carer or other support services such as police, social services and emergency housing teams. The charity can facilitate either a three way conference call by phone, or can pass a message from a missing adult to their family. Messages can be passed in both directions without the missing adult needing to reveal their contact details; they can simply contact the charity to collect messages.

Returning of their own accord

“If nobody knows where they are, you can’t communicate with that person to say ‘Look, it’s alright to come back’.”

(Sibling of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

Missing People publicised 408 missing adults in 2011. Of these 408 adults, 69 were still missing at the time of analysis and 339 cases had been closed. Of these 339 closed cases, 47 had returned of their own accord. This represents 25 per cent of cases where the outcome was known (n=191), and 14 per cent of all closed cases (n=339).

Relatively little is known about missing adults who return of their own accord. Biehal et al (2003) found that some missing adults were prompted to return by being contacted by a family member, and some were prompted to renew contact when they received a tracing letter from the charity. For some missing adults, “the key factors that prompted their return were reassurance that they would be accepted back and the fact that both parties were keen to rebuild relationships” (Biehal et al, 42-43).

More recently, a study of returned missing adults (all of whom were searched for by police) found that decisions about the reconnection, including the timing and method, were prompted by “an aspiration to end the constant motion/emotion of the journey. [...] The desire to re-establish everyday norms and routines helped to draw a journey to a close” (Stevenson et al, 2013: 81). Many of the adults in the study had approached ‘sympathetic agents’, such as friends, who encouraged them to reconnect (ibid.).

Help seeking behaviour whilst missing

Recent research found that it was rare for missing adults to seek formal help from any agency relating to their missing status. Some of the sample of 45 returned adults (24 per cent) had sought medical help while missing, but many were turned away without being seen or receiving treatment, and their missing status was not questioned or discussed (Stevenson et al, 2013: 75). The majority of missing adults use informal networks of friends or family members for support rather than seeking help from organisations (Stevenson et al, 2013).

This study examined missing people who were publicised by the charity, and searched for by the police, during 2011. Of these 690 people 66 per cent were found alive⁶, of whom 22 per cent had returned of their own accord, and a further eight people (2 per cent) had been in contact with Missing People before returning.

In 2011, 335 (21 per cent) of the 1,622 analysed contacts to Missing People’s 116 000 channels resulted in a reconnection to family, a carer or a third party. Of the 335 reconnected contacts, 107 (32 per cent) were known to be from adults. Younger adults were reconnected more often than older adults, and more adults were reconnected to family members than to third-party organisations.

Adults who contact Missing People’s 116 000 service do so for a variety of reasons, not all of which relate specifically to being missing. Of the adults who contacted the charity in 2011, only a third (32 per cent) were away at the time (rather than thinking about leaving, or post-return). The most common reason why adults contacted the helpline was concerns around housing, homelessness or having nowhere to stay (24 per cent of contacts).

None of the 45 missing adults in the Geographies of Missing People study had accessed helplines whilst away and, indeed, few had heard of the Missing People services. None of those who had heard of Missing People had made contact, reporting either that they did not feel that the service would be impartial, that they did not feel they could truthfully pass a ‘safe and well’ message, or that they did not identify with a stereotype of a missing person, and therefore did not feel the service was appropriate for them (Stevenson et al, 2013: 76). This has implications for the marketing of relevant services to particular target groups.

Responding to being sought

“They may contact us because they have got a TextSafe. Or they have seen a poster of themselves and they are saying ‘You need to take this poster down’.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

In order to safeguard missing adults, by making them aware of the charity’s services, Missing People offers the TextSafe service to police forces whereby they can request a text message to be sent by the charity to a missing person. This service informs missing people that they have been reported missing, and that the charity is there to help them confidentially.

⁶ A further ten per cent of the 690 people were found to have died, and the remainder either remained missing after a year, or outcome information was not available.

⁷ This count only includes responses sent from the recipient mobile phone. The charity is not able to trace responses from different mobile phones, landlines or other methods such as email.

The outgoing message gives the missing person the charity's email address, text message number and telephone number as well as sharing a link to guidance on the website.

In 2011, the reference period for this study, 517 TextSafe messages were sent to 421 people. Of these, 198 TextSafe messages were sent to missing adults, and these messages had a 5 per cent response rate⁷. Currently these messages are only available to the police, but this will be extended to social services in late 2014. Similarly, TextSafe messages are only currently sent to missing people who are deemed to be at high or medium risk; this could be extended to include people assessed to be at low risk, or 'absent' rather than missing.

Reconnection of adults more commonly took place after a telephone contact than a text or email contact. Fewer than one in ten (8 per cent) of adult reconnections took place via email, compared to more than 9 in 10 (92 per cent) by telephone. Some telephone reconnections started with text or email messages being exchanged, before the missing adult made a telephone call to go through with a reconnection. This may be because callers wish to establish trust in the charity and its procedures before calling (for example, to find out whether calls are traced). This may also be because text or email

messages are the caller's preferred channel, but they come to learn that reconnection may be done quicker and in more ways by telephone. Call takers recognise that this may lead to some tension, and best practice suggests that call takers should not encourage people to change their mode of contact unless it is unavoidable.

"Reconnecting people via text or email] is a harder, longer process. We still do some reconnections. We have passed messages. We have loads of text cases where we end up going through to social services. But it is back and forth, back and forth, and then eventually speaking to the person. It's a harder process."

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

"If they've chosen to contact us using a particular medium, you don't want to sort of say 'Could you please call us', because obviously they've decided they don't want to do that, maybe that's why they're texting or emailing."

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: AFTER MISSING SUPPORT - WELSH PILOT

Missing People has been awarded funding over three years from the Big Lottery Fund Wales Innovation programme for a new project to support reconnected people and their families after a missing incident. The project has been funded for three years in Wales, and will involve an in-depth evaluation of this new service. The project aims to:

- Develop effective partnerships with partner organisations in Wales
- Provide support to formerly missing children and adults, and their families
- To develop an evidence-led service in consultation with families of missing people

The project has been developed in response to needs identified by the charity's Services team, and to responses to the charity's Family Feedback Survey, which showed that nearly half of respondents would have appreciated support after their missing relative was found.

Responses from family members can vary

Previous research has recognised that families of missing people experience a wide range of different emotions following a disappearance (Holmes, 2008). For some families, reconnection with the missing person is not welcomed, but the missing adult may not be able to predict the response their

contact would prompt. For some missing people, reconnecting with family can be daunting, especially if they had parted on bad terms. Missing People provide a Message Home service for missing adults, brokering contact with family members and thus providing a protective buffer should the reaction be negative.

In practice, families do not always respond positively to messages from missing adults. In this instance Missing People is able to offer and provide support to both the family member and the missing adult. This role of contact broker is protective to both parties, and allows feelings to be explored in a safe way before contact is resumed.

“Because you do not know what that other person is going to be like. With missing there are always two sides to every story. [...] With messages I always worry that the person on the end of the phone is going to go ‘Well, actually, I don’t want this message and you can tell XYZ to, erm, whatever’.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

“How will they react? We are obviously taking it on face value. They may have told us that the relationship with the family is OK and they will be happy to hear from them. That is not always the case. So from past experiences I am always a bit, ‘How will it turn out? How is it going to feel? Is it going to be emotional? Are people going to be cross?’ And you never know. [...] I had one call once where someone hung up on me. That was really difficult.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

“At least if we are able to open up the lines of communication then we are reconnecting, even if there is no direct contact necessarily between, you know, the two parties.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

Reconnection can take time

Reconnection is not a process that always happens instantly. Some reconnections take place over the course of several messages, which can take hours, days, weeks or longer. Analysis for this study of 81 instances when a caller was reconnected via three-way call or message passing, found that 10 per cent of callers were in contact with the charity for more than a month.

In some cases, missing people first reconnect by passing a message to family to say that they are safe and well but do not wish to resume contact. On some occasions these missing adults later decide to resume contact.

“She refused to have anything to do with us for a while. I’m not sure how we got back into contact, exactly what triggered it off, ‘cause I think I’d been trying and sending her emails, keeping the lines of communication open. Eventually, we did get back into contact.”

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

When a missing person has passed a message home but has not resumed contact, Missing People retains contact details for the family, so that if the missing adult later wishes to resume contact after all, that option remains open to them.

“She has got back in contact with us and said ‘Look, I appreciate what you do. It is not for me right now.’ And there is always that chance, you know, with a case like that there is always that chance that she might well call back. You know she might change her mind. It is always out there for her and she knows she has a way back if she chooses.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

Reconnection can be both stressful and liberating

When someone is missing, especially when the police are investigating, it is possible that secrets will be uncovered. For example, it may be that in the run-up to the missing incident the missing person had concealed certain things about their behaviour, their health or their relationships. For the missing person, fear of people’s reactions to these secrets being revealed may make reconnection all the more daunting. After reconnection, this information may cause difficulties between family members, but the openness may also be liberating for the returned person and could result in the missing person being able to address issues with their family’s support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.** Missing People's services provide a range of options for supporting missing adults to reconnect, including acting as a contact broker. Missing People and partner organisations must therefore explore opportunities to reach out to more missing adults, and to direct them to Missing People's 24/7 services via 116 000. Key opportunities for marketing include support services that missing adults might access, be they targeted drop-in centres, health or social services, or public spaces where missing adults are likely to be (such as transport hubs, supermarkets; Stevenson et al, 2013).
- 13.** In order to reach out to help more missing adults reconnect, Missing People should consider the possible use of TextSafe (or an email equivalent) for low risk missing adults. This approach might be offered in support of low risk police cases that are not ordinarily referred to the charity, in order to reach out to adults who may have chosen to leave but may also welcome advice and support.
- 14.** Police forces should consider signposting returned missing adults to 116 000 if they do not wish to have direct contact with their family, because the charity can then broker contact by passing messages back and forth. Other service providers (such as homelessness services, refuges, etc.) should be encouraged to direct clients to Missing People's expert, independent services as a contact broker, when clients consider reconnecting with family members. Service providers may also consider becoming Missing People Support Partners, thereby receiving missing person appeals and guidance on supporting missing individuals.



ANITA'S STORY

Reconnecting a long-lost relative.

Anita had not been in touch with her family for several years following an argument with her parents about some choices she had made when she was younger. Anita's brother contacted Missing People, and staff discussed with him how he thought she would feel about hearing from him. He felt that she wouldn't mind it because he hadn't been involved in the arguments in the past, although he accepted that she had chosen to be out of touch. The brother also had some sad family news that he felt Anita would want to know.

Missing People agreed to take on the case because her brother wanted to resume positive contact with Anita. A member of staff discussed in depth the charity's remit and confidentiality policies, explaining that if Anita chose to remain out of contact, Missing People would not share her details with her family.

Missing People took on the case, and began enquiries by searching the Trace IQ database and social media sites. Immediately an address was found for Anita, and a letter sent asking her to contact the charity because her brother was searching for her.

A week after the letter was sent, Anita contacted the charity. Anita said that she had felt somewhat upset when she received the letter, and had taken a few days to decide what to do. She wanted to discuss her options. Anita was very concerned about her privacy, and wanted to understand how Missing People had traced her. The Missing People volunteer who answered Anita's call was able to explain that Missing People would respect her wishes and would not share her whereabouts with her brother. Anita understood this, and decided that passing a message via the charity would be the best option.

Missing People contacted Anita's brother to give him her message. He was happy that she had been in touch, and asked to pass a message back. Missing People was able to pass several messages between the two, before Anita decided to share her email address with her brother so they could contact each other directly.

MISSING PEOPLE AND FAMILY TRACING

This case study explores the experiences of families who attempt to trace a relative who has lost contact, the types of reconnection that take place, and the impact of reconnection on families.

In 2011, Missing People opened lost contact family tracing searches for 245 adults; in 2012 the figure was 232 and in 2013 it was 421⁸. In the majority (70 per cent) of instances in 2011 when a family approached Missing People for help tracing a family member, they had not tried anything else first, and nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of families had not seen their missing relative for more than a year when they contacted the charity.

When families contact the charity, Missing People will check whether it would be appropriate to involve the police. Where there is no concern for the person's wellbeing, and there is no reason to suggest the police should be involved, the charity can undertake family tracing enquiries using a variety of methods. These are best used when the person has been out of contact for a number of months, because before then it is unlikely their details will have been updated on official records. Enquiries are likely to be most effective when the available information about the missing adult is accurate, and when the missing person is living a

lifestyle that is conducive to tracing them through official data sources.

“As long as they're open to being found, so they're registering themselves, with their original name, on the electoral roll or on the telephone, they should be found very easily. But the problems that would occur is when individuals don't want to be found, they change their names, they opt out of the electoral roll, or they're not on the phone. [...] Generally people do live in a household and they do have a connection with some sort of data source. [...] In cases where they don't have a residential address, that would be very difficult.”

(Missing People Tracing Partner, project interviewee)

Missing People uses a range of enquiry methods, including searching online networks and data sources (both public and private) and working in partnership with tracing agencies. In some instances, Missing People is not aware of the traced person's contact details, but passes a letter to them via a partner agency. On other occasions Missing People traces the missing person directly, and sends a letter to them inviting them to contact the charity.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE: MISSING PEOPLE/TRACESMART PARTNERSHIP

Tracesmart, a Lexis Nexis company, is a leading UK consumer data company. The company is Missing People's official Data Partner, providing pro-bono data cleansing and analysis, as well as free access to the company's Trace IQ tool. This access provides a core of the charity's family tracing service.

More details about this partnership can be found at <http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/tracesmart>

Family tracing work is not rushed; enquiries are undertaken in the knowledge that some traced people will take time to respond, and that missing people must not be harassed. After sending a letter to a traced person, Missing People will wait for three months before starting a new enquiry, and will not send more than two letters to the same address. Despite the time delays built into the system, this study found that nearly one-third (31 per cent) of all cases had been resolved within six months of the charity beginning to search. Forty per cent of the lost contact people searched for in 2011 were found

alive within a year. A small proportion (1 per cent) of people who were traced were deceased, and sixty per cent of tracing cases remained unresolved more than a year after being opened.

In 2011, Newiss explored fatal disappearances amongst the missing person cases Missing People worked on in 2006 and 2007. The study found that, of 64 family tracing investigations that ended when it was discovered that the missing person had died, more than two thirds of the missing people had died before their family started working with Missing People to find them (Newiss, 2011: 20).

While there are conceptual difficulties with the notion of intent as it relates to missing incidents (Holmes, 2015, forthcoming), in circumstances where families have lost contact, consideration of whether the missing adult had deliberately withheld contact will be relevant both to the family and to the missing person. This study found that, in nearly half (47 per cent) of all 245 family tracing cases Missing People worked on in 2011, the missing person had drifted out of contact. In 11 per cent of cases there had been conflict with family or partner, and in 7 per cent of cases the missing person had cut off contact (the remainder were missing for other reasons or reasons were unknown).

“I received a letter from the charity asking me to contact one of my sisters. Having spoken to (my sisters) and been told how much they wanted to get back together with me and my wife, we decided it was time to re-establish relationships” (Samuel, missing 30 years, from age 26 – conflict over choice of partner).

(Biehal et al 2003: 42)

FAMILY TRACING AND RECONNECTION

In this study’s sample of 245 family tracing cases opened in 2011, 97 people (40 per cent) were found alive within a year⁹. Of these, 63 people (65 per cent) had been reconnected with their family by the charity, and 34 people (35 per cent) were independent reconnections, where the missing adult had been found by the family or police, or had made contact of their own volition. A subsample of 60 reconnected cases was explored in more detail. Of these, more than half of the traced people (53 per cent) had shared their contact details with those searching; 7 per cent opted for a partial reconnection (to some family members but not all, or only sharing certain details, such as an email address); 18 per cent passed a ‘safe and well’ message but wished for no further contact; and 10 per cent asked for their family not to be informed that they had been found.

This finding is reflected in responses to the charity’s annual Family Feedback Survey. Across four years’ of responses (2011 to 2014) 85 families of traced missing people responded and, of these, 22 per cent were not in contact with the traced person at the time of the interview.

Reconnection can take time or be immediate

Some people who are traced, and receive a letter from Missing People, take some time to decide how to proceed. In a 2011 study of fatal disappearances, Newiss found that two missing adults (of a sample of 64 non-police cases) had died in possession of a tracing letter from Missing People (Newiss, 2011: 21). Missing People staff members have had experience of working with traced people who have waited for a while after receiving a letter before contacting the charity. Staff members at Missing People emphasise to families searching that tracing can be a lengthy process, so as not to raise hopes unfairly.

“It is essential for us to get what we do across to them. [...] We need to say that they might get the letter and they might not. And they might not want to come back to us. [...] They might get the letter, it might be that they keep the letter for months and months before they reply.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

As well as allowing the traced person as long as necessary to respond, Missing People also maintain contact details indefinitely, so that should someone change their mind in future, they can reach out to reconnect.

“To spend time with them if they want to talk. To say to them ‘He does not want contact at this moment but if you do change address do let us know’. Because you know we will always keep this case open. So even though it has not been the outcome you wanted at this time, just bear in mind that things do change. I think I would probably end with ‘But at the moment he does not want contact’, because you do not want to give the false hope of ‘Yeah, he is going to change his mind’, or instil that in them. So it has to be very balanced.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

⁹ Of the remaining 148, 3 were found to have died, while the remaining 145 were still missing after a year. **When the Search is Over: Reconnecting Missing Children and Adults | 43**

“There is always the chance she might well call back. You know, she might change her mind. It is always out there for her and she knows she has a way back if she chooses.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

“When a party does not want to reconnect, that is always going to be difficult. But I think you have to be really, really tactful in the wording that we use. We always sort of say, ‘This person is not ready to reconnect at this moment in time’. We would never say ‘Never never never’, because both parties know that they can always contact us. And he might change his mind, like other people have, further down the line.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

Reconnection can be partial

Traced adults can reconnect partially with the family members who have been searching for them; either by reconnecting only through messages passed by Missing People, by only reconnecting to certain family members, or by only sharing certain contact details (such as an email address). This can be protective for the traced adult, allowing them to regain control of a situation in which they have not chosen to be traced, to be found, or to reconnect.

“She obviously wanted to have some sort of link with us, to maintain contact even though she didn’t want us to come after her. [...] I just don’t know where she’s living. I understand why she won’t say.”

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

“I am so grateful for finding him. He does not want me to inform his parents - I honour his wishes. I write to him every month. He does not want a visit, unfortunately, but I understand. [...] It has made my day that I have found him.”

(Relative of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

“Some family members are happy just to know that the person is safe. For others, if you go back and say they are safe and well and they do not want contact, that can cause a lot of upset.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

Third-party mediation can be helpful

As when missing adults and children reach out for help, traced adults may appreciate the role the charity can play as contact broker between them and their family. Since traced adults have disconnected from their families intentionally (to some degree), being traced may raise difficult emotions. By making contact initially through Missing People, traced adults can find the reconnection process less stressful. If they choose not to resume contact immediately, or at all, using the charity to pass messages can make communicating this to their family significantly easier. This is also protective for the family who have been searching, as they are supported to deal with their own emotional reaction to receiving messages.

“At least if we are able to open up the lines of communication then we are reconnecting, even if there is no direct contact necessarily between the two parties.”

(Missing People staff member, project interviewee)

“The person who’s run away might not ever want to come back, and that would have to be respected, but at least it would facilitate some sort of contact. [...] But I don’t know what would happen if she became ill or, you know, had an accident and she wasn’t able to contact us”.

(Parent of a formerly missing adult, project interviewee)

Reconnection can be straightforward or more complex

Even when traced adults choose to resume contact with their families, the process of reconnecting can go on for a long period, as they and their family members gradually share information and rebuild relationships. In some cases, both families and traced adults find that the reconnection is not what they had hoped for, and presents new challenges.

“I’m happy to be in contact with my father again but it’s difficult to get him to write anything of interest in his emails at times. He still hasn’t told me his address and never has apologised for not being in touch for years.”

(Child of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

“Another phone call [from Missing People] a little bit later after he had been found would have been really useful as difficulties surfaced.”

(Child of a formerly missing adult, Family Feedback Survey 2014 participant)

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Reconnection can be daunting and stressful for adults who have been traced after losing contact with family members. Missing People should therefore consider developing enhanced support for people who have been traced, both on the phone and online (e.g. guidance documents, policy statements), with the aim of supporting reconnections whilst also safeguarding missing people’s rights.
16. While adults have the right to go missing and stay out of contact, the police will not close a missing person enquiry until they are satisfied that the missing person is safe and well. Support services that provide information to adults who may be missing (such as people who are homeless, or people who have fled domestic abuse) should ensure they are able to provide up-to-date and accurate information about being reported missing, a missing person’s rights and the nature of police investigations. They can do this by pursuing partnership working with local police Missing Person Units or Missing Person Coordinators and the charity Missing People.
17. In order to maximise the chances of reconnecting missing people, Missing People and current and potential Tracing Partners should explore opportunities to extend the charity’s Family Tracing service. Preference should be given to partnerships which allow access to national level data, to ensure that the charity’s service is of consistent quality across the UK. Opportunities should be sought which improve the chances of tracing missing adults who are less likely to be registered on the Electoral Roll or have a landline telephone.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF RECONNECTIONS

All reconnections are unique, but this research has identified a number of themes which are relevant for missing people, their families and those searching for them. These are identified with two main purposes: to help affected individuals prepare for reconnection, and to improve wider understanding of how varied, challenging and convoluted reconnections can be.

RECONNECTION IS MISSING PEOPLE'S ULTIMATE AIM

Missing people have the choice about whether to resume contact, but by reconnecting via the charity, they have the opportunity to find out about who is searching and explore the impacts reconnection may have. Families have the chance to reach out and to communicate with the missing person to assuage their fears.

RECONNECTION CAN BE PROMPTED BY MANY THINGS

Sometimes missing people are prompted to return by a range of internal and external factors such as feeling hungry or cold, or because of emotional ties or discovering that people are searching for them. Search strategies should consider when and how to reach out to missing people.

RECONNECTION CAN TAKE PLACE IN A NUMBER OF WAYS

Missing people can reconnect directly to family or friends (be it face-to-face or via correspondence), via police or through a third party such as Missing People. Reconnection can take place in person, by telephone or through written communication.

RECONNECTION IS NOT ALWAYS IMMEDIATE

Once the decision is made to reconnect, missing people may take time before making that connection. Once initiated, the process of reconnection may also take time, particularly if messages are passed through a third party.

RECONNECTION CAN BRING BOTH JOY AND PAIN

For some missing people and some families reconnecting may not be an easy or happy process, and there may remain ongoing ambiguity if either side is unaware of what the other experienced. In circumstances where one side decides not to resume contact, the missing person's reconnection with one party can be very painful for others and may invoke feelings of rejection and frustration.

RECONNECTION SHOULD BE HANDLED HOLISTICALLY AND TAILORED TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

All reconnections should be responded to in a tailored way that suits the assessment and support needs of the returned person and their family or carers.

RECONNECTION IS DYNAMIC (MAY NOT BE PERMANENT)

For some missing people, reconnection may be short-lived. Either the missing person or family members may terminate reconnection. For example, either party may decline to send or receive a message or make direct contact. Even if a missing person returns, they may leave again.

RECONNECTION IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY BUT THE BEGINNING OF RECOVERY

Although it can be tempting to see reconnection as the end of a traumatic experience, it may, in fact, represent the beginning of a challenging period of recovery. This period may be difficult for the individual, family members and professionals.

4. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research, and the identified characteristics of reconnections, point to a number of changes that would benefit missing people and their families. These have been highlighted in each case study previously and are now listed in the order in which they appear in the report.

1. Reconnection provides an important opportunity to reduce the likelihood, severity or duration of future missing incidents. In order to realise this opportunity, police officers conducting 'Safe and Well checks' and providers of return interviews should ensure that all people who have been missing are made aware of the help available to prevent future missing incidents, or to safeguard the individuals concerned should they go missing again. These resources include Missing People's phone, text and email services via 116 000, as well as local services and emergency accommodation options. The government should ensure that children and young people are educated about the risks of running away, and about the help that they can access to stay safe before, during and after a missing incident.
2. Reconnecting missing young people is currently challenging, because of the shortage of appropriate safe places to which to refer them. In order to prevent young people facing risks in the community or having to turn to inappropriate places (such as police stations or accident and emergency centres) for shelter, the government should ensure that every missing child or young person who is unable to return home safely can access suitable emergency accommodation.
3. Not all social services teams are aware of how the charity can help missing people, or how it can support their own work to safeguard vulnerable people. Missing People must communicate with social services teams across the country to ensure that they are aware of the services the charity can provide (including TextSafe). The charity should develop a suite of information for local authority staff members, as well as good practice examples, guidance, and information about services for young people.
4. Families are not always sure how best to support a young person who has been missing: what to say, whether to ask questions, how to address their experiences. In light of this research, support services for young people who have run away should consider extending their service provision to include family support once the young person is found, which would ensure that the support given to young people is contextualised and that families are included in a holistic approach to dealing with the young person's running away. Where this is not possible, referrals for family support work or mediation should be considered.
5. Not all young people have access to support services in their area when they return. Missing People must effectively trial and evaluate support for families when a young person returns from going missing and explore opportunities to roll out suitable services further. This service should, where possible, provide a consistent support service to families and young people who are repeatedly going missing.
6. In order to develop more effective rapport with returned young people, providers of return interviews for young people who go missing repeatedly should ensure that the interviews are conducted by the same person each time. Where this is not possible or appropriate, information from return interviews should be analysed together, to ensure that a full picture is gained.
7. Where return interviews are conducted for children or adults, and where these indicate a need for subsequent support, local agencies must work together to ensure that this is provided. It would be appropriate for statutory guidance to state agencies' responsibilities for working jointly to deliver a co-ordinated support package after return.
8. Many returned missing adults do not receive professional guidance or support after a missing incident, although this and other research suggests would this be beneficial to their wellbeing.

- All returned missing adults should be offered a return interview, in line with ACPO guidance (2010) and best practice principles, and with the aim of identifying harms and risk, addressing the reasons for the disappearance, and preventing a repeat incident. Return interviews should be available to people who have been reported missing from inpatient care and adults with dementia. As is good practice with children and young people, return interviews would be best delivered by staff from independent agencies who have undertaken training in missing and related issues. This is important because some returned people and their families may find it easier to develop trust with non-statutory services, and services with specialist knowledge about their circumstances.
9. More effective multi-agency work would ensure smoother referral of returned adults from police into other local statutory and voluntary services. While statutory guidance on children who go missing has been available for many years (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2014), no such guidance exists for missing adults. Statutory guidance on adults who go missing from home and care would provide much needed clarity on different agencies' responsibilities for responding to a missing incident and for providing support when people return. Such guidance could be based upon Missing from Care – a multi-agency approach to protecting vulnerable adults – A national framework for police and care providers, being developed by the National Crime Agency.
 10. It is likely that it will be harder to reach out directly to missing people who have dementia; they may not carry a mobile phone, they may not realise that they will have been reported missing, and they may not be able to reach out for help if lost. This makes the role of publicity appeals especially important. In order to make local people aware that someone with dementia is missing in their community, Missing People and the charity's current and potential partners should continue to pursue opportunities to access publicity channels to publicise missing incidents quickly.
 11. Return interviews with people with dementia, like those for all missing adults, would be best conducted by independent organisations. Organisations with expertise in dementia, and sufficient training in issues around missing people, might undertake this work, in order to share their knowledge about living with dementia, the experiences of carers, strategies to keep people with dementia safe, and sources of additional support.
 12. Missing People's services provide a range of options for supporting missing adults to reconnect, including acting as a contact broker. Missing People and partner organisations must therefore explore opportunities to reach out to more missing adults, and to direct them to Missing People's 24/7 services via 116 000. Key opportunities for marketing include support services that missing adults might access, be they targeted drop-in centres, health or social services, or public spaces where missing adults are likely to be (such as transport hubs, supermarkets; Stevenson et al, 2013).
 13. In order to reach out to help more missing adults reconnect, Missing People should consider the possible use of TextSafe (or an email equivalent) for low risk missing adults. This approach might be offered in support of low risk police cases that are not ordinarily referred to the charity, in order to reach out to adults who may have chosen to leave but may also welcome advice and support.
 14. Police forces should consider signposting returned missing adults to 116 000 if they do not wish to have direct contact with their family, because the charity can then broker contact by passing messages back and forth. Other service providers (such as homelessness services, refuges, etc.) should be encouraged to direct clients to Missing People's expert, independent services as a contact broker, when clients consider reconnecting with family members. Service providers may also consider becoming Missing People Support Partners, thereby receiving missing person appeals and guidance on supporting missing individuals.

- 15.** Reconnection can be daunting and stressful for adults who have been traced after losing contact with family members. Missing People should therefore consider developing enhanced support for people who have been traced, both on the phone and online (e.g. guidance documents, policy statements), with the aim of supporting reconnections whilst also safeguarding missing people's rights.
- 16.** While adults have the right to go missing and stay out of contact, the police will not close a missing person enquiry until they are satisfied that the missing person is safe and well. Support services that provide information to adults who may be missing (such as people who are homeless, or people who have fled domestic abuse) should ensure they are able to provide up-to-date and accurate information about being reported missing, a missing person's rights and the nature of police investigations. They can do this by pursuing partnership working with local police Missing Person Units or Missing Person Coordinators and the charity Missing People.
- 17.** In order to maximise the chances of reconnecting missing people, Missing People and current and potential Tracing Partners should explore opportunities to extend the charity's family tracing service. Preference should be given to partnerships which allow access to national level data, to ensure that the charity's service is of consistent quality across the UK. Opportunities should be sought which improve the chances of tracing missing adults who are less likely to be registered on the Electoral Roll or have a landline telephone.

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