

# OUR STRATEGY: FROM CRISIS TO HOPE

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**missing  
people**

Registered charity in England and Wales (1020419)  
and in Scotland (SC047419)

**A lifeline when someone disappears**



# INTRODUCTION

## **People disappearing is a huge social issue.**

170,000 children and adults are reported missing to the police every year. Many more than once – which means someone is reported missing every 90 seconds<sup>(1)</sup>. These figures are an underestimate as thousands of people are not reported missing<sup>(2)</sup> many more than once.

## **Most people are in crisis when they go missing.**

They include care experienced young people, victims of exploitation, and trafficked children. Adults in mental health crisis or facing relationship breakdowns or financial hardship. Going missing can be the first sign that someone is living with dementia, or that they need to escape a dangerous situation.

## **There are disparities and discrimination in the response to missing people.**

Black and Asian missing people are less likely to be flagged as at risk of harm including mental health harm, are more likely to remain missing for longer, and are less likely to be found by the police than white people<sup>(3)</sup>.

## **Financial problems are leading people to go missing.**

People unable to make ends meet. People telling us they feel they have no options except to disappear. Getting them help and non-judgemental support quickly, is crucial.

## **Huge numbers of missing people come to**

**serious harm while missing**, as victims of crime and exploitation, self-harm and suicide. 1,000 people die while missing each year<sup>(4)</sup>. That's three people every day. That number has been increasing at an alarming rate.

## **Every disappearance has a vast impact for the missing person and the community.**

We estimate that a million people are affected by a disappearance each year<sup>(5)</sup>. Their loved ones go through unimaginable trauma. All too often they don't feel their concerns are taken seriously by the police. The impact of a disappearance is also felt deeply by wider family members, friends, colleagues and communities too.

## **When people are found or return, it is rarely the end of the story.**

Half of all missing episodes are people who have been missing before<sup>(6)</sup>. Providing the right help at the right time can reduce someone's risk of ongoing harm and the risk of going missing again.



**Justin McLaren**  
Chair of Trustees



**Jo Youle OBE**  
CEO

(1) [Downloads | UK Missing Persons Unit](#)

(2) Still Running 3, 2011, The Children's Society

(3) See Missing People research [The ethnicity of missing people](#)

(4) Data up to 2020-21 from [NCA UK Missing Persons Unit](#) and for 2021-22 data from 27 police forces responding to a Freedom of Information Request from Missing People, December 2022

(5) The figure of one million people is based on an estimate using social network research by anthropologist Robin Dunbar which found the average person has 5 loved ones (close family and friends) see for example Dunbar's number

(6) [UK Missing Persons Unit – Missing Persons Data Reports](#)

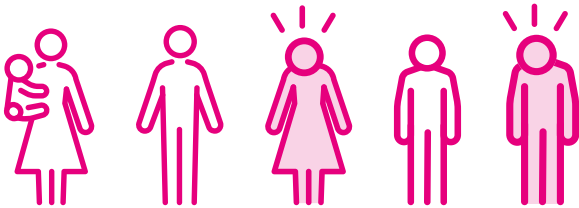
# THE FOCUS FOR THE STRATEGY

## RECOGNISING CRISIS



Someone going missing is a crisis. Most often linked to mental health problems, exploitation, relationship breakdown or financial challenges.

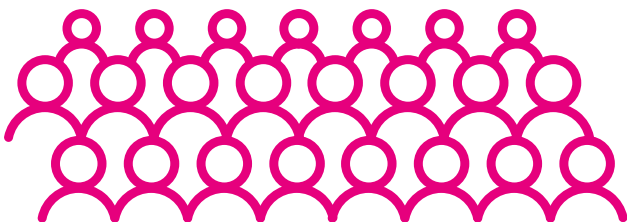
However, their families often struggle to get these risks recognised and the police response to find the missing person does not always match the crisis.



## MENTAL HEALTH AND FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

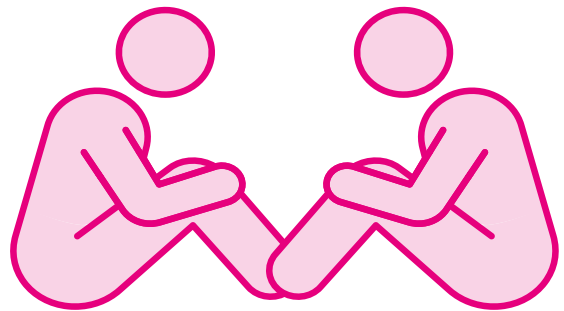
Some of the key reasons for people to go missing including mental health and financial problems are becoming more prevalent. At the same time, the police, NHS and local authorities are overstretched.

This means access to safeguarding and support services is challenging and the charity's support services are needed more than ever.



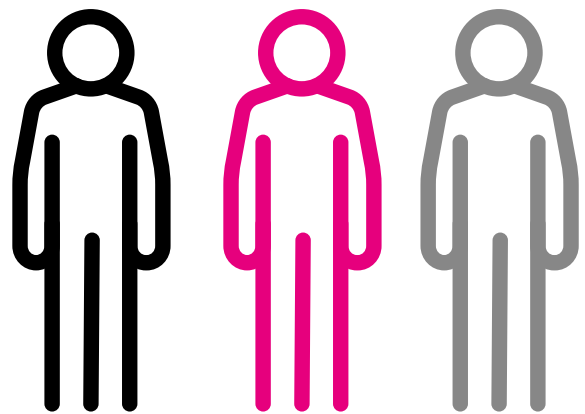
## PREVENTING HARM AND DEATH

Most people are at risk of harm before they go missing and are at even higher risk while missing. Our research suggests as many as 75% of adults come to harm, and tragically 1,000 missing people die each year. **Because people can't get support to help them with whatever caused them to go missing in the first place, half of all missing reports are for people who have been missing before.**



## FIGHTING FOR EQUITY

The response to missing people and their loved ones can vary depending on where people live and who they are – with **gender, ethnicity, care status and homelessness all affecting how people are treated.**



# OUR STRATEGY: FROM CRISIS TO HOPE

## OUR GOALS

**1**

**GOING MISSING IS UNDERSTOOD AS A CRISIS THAT CAN BE A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH**

**2**

**ALL MISSING PEOPLE AND THEIR LOVED ONES GET THE RIGHT HELP AT THE RIGHT TIME**

**3**

**FEWER MISSING PEOPLE COME TO HARM**



# OUR GOALS

# 1

**GOING  
MISSING IS  
UNDERSTOOD  
AS A CRISIS  
THAT CAN BE  
A MATTER  
OF LIFE  
OR DEATH**

## WE WILL

Raise **public awareness** of how going missing links to crisis and harm, what support people can access, and how people can help

Build **professional** understanding of how going missing links to mental health problems, suicide, exploitation, neurodivergence and financial problems and ensure missing is built into national plans and partnerships

Influence **UK governments** to prioritise missing people, focused on harm reduction.



*“ This work will move to dispel both negative paradigms, to create a narrative that is hopeful, a dialogue that responds to known societal influences and continues to put all vulnerable people and their loved ones at the heart of timely, responsive intervention. ”*

**4** Ju, former missing person



# OUR GOALS

## 2

**ALL MISSING  
PEOPLE AND  
THEIR LOVED  
ONES GET  
THE RIGHT  
HELP AT THE  
RIGHT TIME**

### WE WILL

Reduce **discrimination and unequal treatment** faced by missing people and their loved ones through research, campaigning and advocacy

Reach and **support more family**, friends and colleagues of missing people through our expert services, new partnerships, digital and peer support

Campaign for **fair and sensitive treatment** for missing people and their loved ones from the media, police and other agencies



**“** To know that the charity is campaigning for a better police and community response to missing, support for those going missing and potentially coming to harm while away, is just incredible. I am so grateful to be supported by Missing People who campaign to have our voices heard, and always offer an ear to listen.

Evidence Joel, Mother  
of Richard Okorogheye

**”**

# OUR GOALS

## 3

### FEWER MISSING PEOPLE COME TO HARM

#### WE WILL

Deliver and develop our expert **services and partnerships** to reach and support more missing people, with a focus on exploitation, mental health problems and suicide

Deliver ground-breaking research to better understand how missing people come to harm, and what can be done to reduce that harm

Work with police and other agencies to improve **local and national** responses to missing people, focused on reducing harm, and preventing people going missing repeatedly, and improved multi-agency working



“ *Our son Anthony went missing 11 years ago and throughout this time Missing People have been a great support and helped in many ways. Having seen the proposal, I'm happy to endorse the strategy and aims they have put forward for the coming year.*

Julie Stammers, mother  
of Anthony Stammers



# HOW WE WILL DELIVER THE STRATEGY

## WE WILL BUILD A MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE THROUGH

Ensuring people with lived experience are at the heart of everything – from designing services to sharing their experiences, to leading campaigns for change

Working in partnership with a wide range of agencies to ensure that people can access the right support to meet their individual needs, and to change systems to improve the response to people going missing

Ensuring the staff and volunteer team is made up of people with diverse experience and skills who are equipped and empowered to make a difference

## WE WILL BE FUTURE FOCUSED BY

We will be making a step change by amplifying awareness of the cause and increasing income to create more impact. This will include working with more families, friends and colleagues of missing people to raise awareness and funds 'in hope' of their missing loved ones.

Helping more people to find the charity's support through digital innovation.

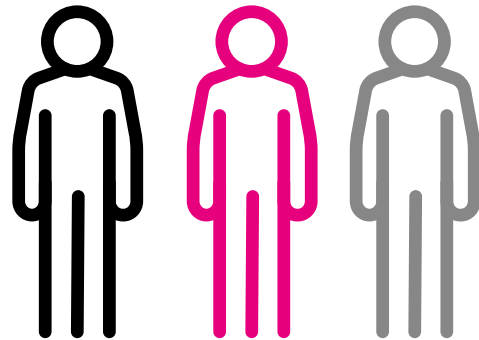
Reducing our environmental impact and creating a working environment that enables us all to work in more climate conscious ways.



# WILL YOU GIVE HOPE?

Right now, there are thousands of families facing each day with the trauma of a missing loved one. **Each disappearance is a crisis.** Tragically, the number of missing people being found dead has been increasing at an alarming rate. The heartache for their families is unbearable. You never expect it to happen to you.

Some people do not get the response they need to get safe and stay safe. Some will face intense media intrusion, public speculation, loneliness and stigma. Change and understanding is desperately needed.



With your support, Missing People can provide free support services and campaign with families facing the worst of all losses. To ease their pain, to keep hope alive, however long their loved one is missing. To support their missing loved ones too.

**TOGETHER, WE CAN CREATE A BETTER  
AND FAIRER FUTURE.**

Please make a donation at [www.missingpeople.org.uk/donate](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/donate) and by pledging to leave a gift in your Will.



Registered with  
**FUNDRAISING  
REGULATOR**



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**Helpline – text or call 1 16 000  
(free and confidential).**

**[www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)**

Missing People wishes to thank every supporter of  
the cause, and players of the People's Postcode Lottery,  
who all make our work possible, 365 days a year.

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