Scottish National Missing Person's Framework Implementation Project

Project Report (Full) Year 3
April 2021 - March 2022

Contents

Project Background

There are nearly 15,000 missing incidents reported to Police Scotland every year, with the majority of these being medium to high risk missing persons. Many more incidents go unreported. In 2020-2021, over 40% of investigations related to someone who has been missing more than once, and nearly 50% of investigations related to children. Most of the harm suffered by missing adults and children in Scotland relates to mental health. Moreover, Scotland sadly had 117 fatal outcomes from missing incidents in 2020-2021,[1] which is a greater number than the 58 victims of homicide in Scotland in 2020-2021.

In 2017, Scottish Government published [The National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland](), which puts Scotland firmly ahead of the curve in its approach to safeguarding and supporting missing people.

The Framework exists as good practice guidance for professionals who are working with and supporting missing people and their families. The Framework's aims are **to prevent people from going missing in the first place, and limit the harm associated with people going missing.** These aims are broken down into four objectives; **prevent, respond, support, and protect**:

> *'A missing person is anyone whose whereabouts are unknown and where the circumstances are out of character; or the context suggests the person may be subject to crime; or the person is at risk of harm to themselves or another.'* – National Missing Persons Framework 2017

- Objective 1: To introduce preventative measures to reduce the number of missing persons episodes
- Objective 2: To respond consistently and appropriately to missing persons episodes
- Objective 3: To provide the best possible support to both missing people and their families
- Objective 4: To protect vulnerable missing people and reduce the risks of harm.

Responsibilities of key agencies when responding to missing are summarised as **eight commitments** that require local and national action:

1) Agencies to ensure that prevention planning takes place locally for vulnerable individuals and groups
2) Agencies to ensure that people most at risk of going missing are treated as a priority at a local level
3) Agencies to exchange proportionate information to ensure that missing people are located quickly
4) Agencies to adopt a consistent approach to risk assessment when someone goes missing
5) Agencies to hold return discussions with young people and adults after they have been missing
6) Agencies to ensure that specialist support is made available to people who have been missing and their families
7) Scottish Government to oversee a programme of activity to raise awareness of missing people
8) Scottish Government to ensure that risks of harm are highlighted in all training and guidance.

In the 2 years after The Framework was published, some valuable steps were taken to encourage its implementation, including a national training programme for frontline professionals to raise awareness of The Framework and how to deliver effective Return Discussions; the local piloting of protocols to

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[1] NCA UK Missing Persons data available here: https://missingpersons.police.uk/cy-gb/resources/downloads/missing-persons-statistical-bulletins.

prevent high risk groups being reported missing; and the development of educational resources for young people.[2]

The Scottish Government's Missing Persons Team has worked hard to disseminate The Framework and to secure support for its agreed definition of missing persons and its shared approach to risk assessment. However, as of 2019, some local areas had not yet identified a partnership to lead on missing persons, or a champion to lead the local implementation of The Framework – key actions to ensure people at risk of going missing are treated as a priority, locally. Furthermore, challenges in implementing The Framework were identified as the following:

- Local information sharing between different agencies
- The consistent use of The Framework's standard approach to risk assessment
- Local agreement on which agency is best placed to deliver Return Discussions
- Knowledge of good practice in preventing and responding to missing incidents
- Limited awareness of support services available for people at risk of being reported missing and families of missing people.

Missing People has supported every stage of the development and implementation of The Framework – from being a key member of The Framework Development Steering Group, leading the partnership to deliver training to frontline professionals on Return Discussions, and working with Members of Scottish Parliament to gather political support from all parties for The Framework's implementation.

In July 2019, Scottish Government provided £70,000 of funding to Missing People for 9 months of project delivery, the first year of a two-year programme of consultancy, training and good practice sharing to ensure the implementation of The National Missing Persons Framework across Scotland, until March 2020.

The first year of the project involved Missing People working with multi-agency professionals in 3 local areas in Scotland – Dundee, Edinburgh, and Fife, to identify areas of good practice and areas for development in these areas, against Framework objectives. The project report for Year 1 can be found here.

In April 2020, Scottish Government provided £90,000 of funding to Missing People, and Missing People were able to continue our work in 3 additional local areas across Scotland for a further 12 months. The project report for Year 2 can be found here.

In April 2021, Scottish Government provided just under £100,000 of funding to Missing People, which enabled us to continue our work into a further 5 local areas across Scotland for 12 months. Missing People continues to be uniquely placed to carry out this work, as the only national charity that supports missing and returned children and adults as well as their families left behind.

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[2] These resources are available here: https://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk/scotland/resources.

Project areas across Scotland

July 2019-March 2022

- Aberdeen City
- Aberdeenshire
- City of Edinburgh
- Dumfries and Galloway
- Dundee City
- East Dunbartonshire
- Fife
- Moray
- North Ayrshire
- North Lanarkshire
- Renfrewshire
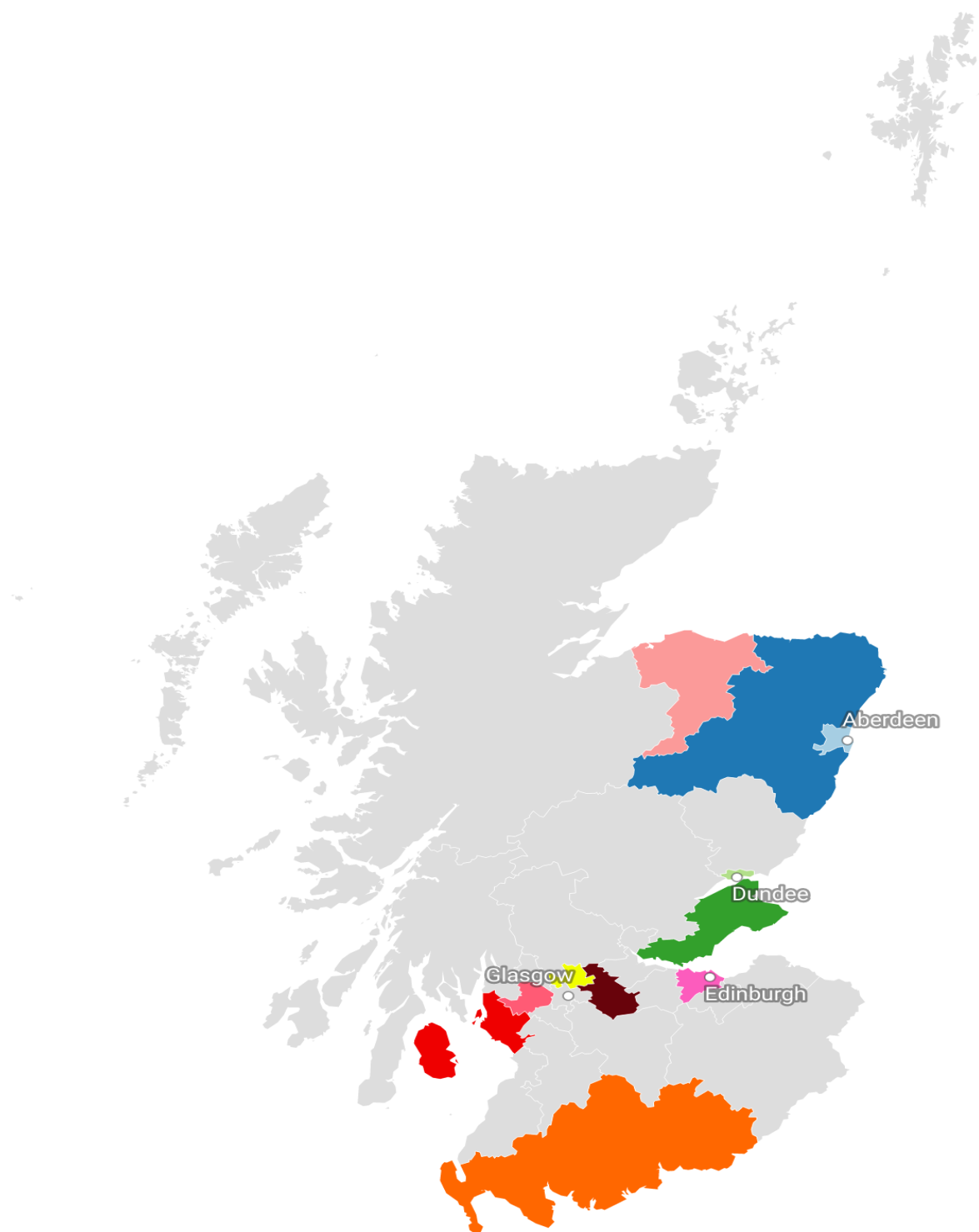
Aberdeen

Dundee

Glasgow

Edinburgh

Missing People's Role

With nearly 30 years of frontline experience in supporting missing people and their families, Missing People work in collaboration with a range of partners across the UK, including local police forces, the UK Missing Persons Unit, and the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

This project is an opportunity for Missing People to continue to share our specialist knowledge of missing by providing support to teams implementing The National Framework across three years. It was designed to complement Scottish Government's and Police Scotland's commitment to create a national response to protect vulnerable missing people from harm. It also continues to build on Missing People's strong working partnership with Police Scotland, following a renewed partnership signing in 2018; and our receipt of multi-year funding from the Scottish Government to increase awareness and the use of our services for young people.

Part One: Year 3 Project Overview and Findings

Project Aims

The project aims were as follows:

- To ensure that local partnerships and agencies in 5 new, additional local areas to Years 1 and 2 understand the priorities and responsibilities for improving the local response to missing persons and their families in line with The Framework:

  - 2 areas to receive 'in-depth' support, to include a review of local missing policies and procedures, and additional consultancy work
  - 3 areas to receive 'light-touch' support, to include 5-10 days of consultancy work.

- To ensure local partnerships and agencies continue to be more aware of good and innovative practice in preventing missing, inclusive of the areas already worked with in Years 1 and 2.

The project team continued to report to and receive input from The National Working Group on Missing Persons throughout Year 3 of the project, which is comprised of leads from Scottish Government, Police Scotland, The University of Glasgow, Barnardo's, and Missing People.

The selection of 5 local areas in which to work was decided through an application process, guided by the National Working Group. As in Year 2, areas were asked to: detail their current local partnership arrangements for missing; tell us about up to 3 areas in which they demonstrate good practice around missing children and/or adults and their families; and tell us about up to 3 areas for development that they thought would benefit from Missing People's expertise in supporting local professionals to more closely implement practice within The Framework.

Dumfries and Galloway, East Dunbartonshire, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, North Ayrshire and **Edinburgh** were the local areas chosen, based on where Missing People could add the most value across all 5 areas, within the project time frame.

Having already worked in Edinburgh in Year 1, this area was chosen to work with in Year 3 with a more strategic focus, to build on the operational support we delivered in Year 1.

Project Activity & Key Outputs

To achieve the project aims, the following key activities were agreed with the National Working Group:

Work with local areas

- Continue the National Coordinator role as a point of contact for local areas in Years 1 and 2, and develop relationships with partners in new local areas to provide support and guidance to them throughout the project in Year 3.
- Support professionals to implement The National Framework by mapping, reviewing and auditing current local approaches in the 5 new local areas.
- Continue to support professionals across areas from Year 1 and Year 2 and the new areas to implement The National Framework by providing advice, assistance and training in developing a new response in line with The Framework.

National sharing of good practice

- Update the 'Toolkit' created in Year 2 for professionals across Scotland working with missing adults, children and their families, with good practice from the areas we will work with in Year 3.
- Continue to provide Return Discussion Training for professionals from multiple sectors completing Return Discussions with adults and children
- Deliver a second annual conference to share good and promising innovative practice for practitioners involved in preventing and responding to missing incidents.
- To update the online Toolkit for professionals working with missing adults, children and families in Scotland
- To deliver Scotland's second national conference on missing and good practice
- To deliver three webinars on missing and mental health for Scottish professionals
- Continue to deliver online Return Discussion training to professionals across Scotland
- Develop an online forum for professionals to discuss local issues and share best practice around missing.

In July 2020, Missing People appointed a new National Coordinator for Scotland, based in Glasgow. The National Coordinator continues to be a crucial presence in Scotland in Year 3 and is able to build relationships with partners both in the 5 chosen local areas, and across Scotland more widely.

Local area in-depth support

In a change to Years 1 and 2 of the project, Missing People provided in-depth support for professionals to implement The Framework locally in 2 of the 5 local areas – Dumfries and Galloway, and East Dunbartonshire. In these areas, the mapping and reviewing of local policy and protocol was completed. This included reviewing policy and other relevant documentation relating to missing adults and children from Police Scotland, NHS, education, and local authority partners. Documentation was assessed for clear purpose, reference to relevant legislation and national guidance, and good practice.

A set of recommendations for improvement was then created with input from conversations about front-line practice with professionals from Police Scotland, NHS, education, local authorities and private care settings.

Findings and recommendations were then shared with each area, respectively, including the identification of good practice in each.

Local area light-touch support

Missing People provided light-touch support for professionals to implement The Framework locally in the 3 remaining local areas – Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, North Ayrshire and Edinburgh. In these areas, we provided 5-10 days of consultancy work with to multi-agency partners, including Journey Mapping Workshops, reviewing local missing protocols and providing feedback, and presenting on Missing People's core services.

Key Achievements

The project team achieved the following:

- Workshops with **115 professionals** to map the respective journeys of missing adults and children in order to clarify roles and responsibilities, locally. Learning was shared with professionals who attended in a document that can be referred to by all staff
- Online Return Discussion training for adults and children to **336 professionals**
- 3 webinars on mental health for **93 professionals**
- **128 delegates** attended our Good Practice Sharing Conference which was held in November 2021
- The update of an **online 'good practice' toolkit** for professionals in Scotland working with missing adults, children, and their families
- Create an online forum for professionals across Scotland to network, problem-solve and share good practice on missing.

Summary of Project Findings

Through the mapping and reviewing stage of the project's delivery, the project team identified several areas of good practice and areas for further development in the response to missing.

The project's key findings in relation to good practice were:

- Multi-agency work between local partners and care providers to appropriately support children who go missing from care, and strong guidance protocols.
- Effective local protocols on children and young people missing from school, including primary, special, and early years settings.
- Comprehensive NHS missing person policies, that ensure that appropriate reporting procedures and support upon return is delivered for adults, and vulnerable adults and children.
- Consistent use of The Herbert Protocol.
- The coordination of Return Discussions for adults, completed for all adults, regardless of any threshold relating to risk and concern.

The project's key findings on areas for improvement were:

- Return Discussions are not consistently being offered to all children, young people and adults.
- The need to grow existing multi-agency working with clear local missing person protocols and guidance, which outlines roles and responsibilities of each agency at every stage from prevention to support. This would clarify who the lead agency should be for completing Return Discussions and how relevant information should be shared among key agencies.
- Improved support for Missing Persons and their Families in the form of signposting to additional support services.

Project Findings: Good Practice Key Themes

Supporting Children Missing from Residential Care

Strong multi-agency working exists for supporting children and young people missing from residential care in most areas.

> *Children accounted for 49% of missing person investigations in Scotland between 2020 and 2021, of which 50% were looked-after (NCA UK Missing Persons data). The right support for children who go missing is crucial to identify any ongoing risk or factors which may make them more likely to go missing again or establish whether they have come to harm whilst away.*

Area 1

Area 1's protocol for missing Looked After and Accommodated Children, particularly local Social Work Services policy and procedure for *Looked after and accommodated children and young people who go missing,* provides professionals with clear instruction on a number of issues, and should be considered as good practice – for example, when to report a child missing; a helpful list on what information to share with police when a child or young person goes missing, including any circumstances that may increase risk to the child, local authority leadership structure for liaising with police, and when to hold strategy meetings if a child is missing. Return Discussion procedure is noted, and the local Care Planning Officer is to retain a record of repeat missing incidents and an overview of patterns of missing for the child or young person - A 'good' log of any action taken or required to be completed is to be kept.

Further, Return Discussions for children in residential care are completed by social workers who also complete 'life story' work with them, identifying patterns of behaviour and any triggers for missing episodes. Residential care workers are regularly sharing information with social work, school and the community police officers about any known or perceived risk for children around their online and digital safety, particularly around known hotspots for exploitation.

Area 2

There has been recent local consideration of how to reduce police contact with children and young people in residential care homes, including a pilot project, and the local Children and Families Team have a weekly meeting with a local authority residential care provider to discuss any concerns or issues, including how to prevent repeat missing children. This Children and Families Team are also operating with a 'Signs of Safety' approach, which is a relationship-grounded, safety-organised approach to child protection practice, aimed at building meaningful safety for vulnerable and at-risk children. We understand a 'Circles of Safety and Support Tool' is also used locally which involves children and young people identifying who they would like to be informed if they are not safe, including during or following a missing episode.

Area 3

In Area 3 there is a focus on multi-agency prevention planning for children. In cases were a child or young person is repeatedly missing – particularly those from residential care – multi-agency meetings and trigger plans can allow for additional responses beyond general missing processes to be considered. These meetings allow care plans, risks to the child, and any additional support needs to be discussed, allowing local agencies to arrange a more flexible response to a child who may have specific needs. For example, a child who may be traumatised by police contact.

Area 3 have adopted a 'Not at Home' missing persons pilot protocol, which aims to ensure a more proportionate response when there are grounds to believe a child or young person is 'not at home' rather than 'missing.' This has been found to reduce unnecessary police contact with children and young people, locally, including those in residential care.

Area 4

Area 4 officially launched their Missing Person Guidance in September 2021. This guidance outlines the steps to be followed by multi-agency practitioners when responding to a missing incident. As part of this, there is a clear procedure and a local priority for people to be able to choose who completes their Return Discussion. For children and young people in residential care homes, individual care plans are in place which enable important information regarding vulnerabilities, friends and associates, and routine, etc. to be readily available to help inform an effective response should they go missing. Allocated social workers, children's residential keyworkers, education staff, and school nurses are all considered as appropriate professionals to complete Return Discussions if the child has an active involvement with these services and chooses them to do so.

Children Missing from School

Area 1

Good practice exists in Area 1 for managing 'un-notified absences of children' in primary, special and early years settings, where children fail to attend their school/early years centre, and no explanation for absence is received from their parents or carers.

The procedure is a clear step by step-by-step process, including an initial search and liaising with police and/or children's services. Although Missing People acknowledge that this may lead to concerns of a child 'missing from Education' (rather than a need for them to be reported missing), where there are immediate concerns for the welfare of a child who is not in attendance, local procedure is clear. Head Teachers or designated leads are to make an urgent referral to the police when a pupil and their parents or carers are unable to be located, or when parents/carers have been spoken to and they are also unable to locate the child, or, where staff are not convinced that the child is safe. Procedure encourages staff to liaise with social work, housing and health as necessary for a multi-agency response.

There are also strong procedures in place to notify parents/carers if a child is absent from secondary or primary school. If there is no response, attendance officers will be informed and follow guidance procedures. There are also Hubs at local schools open during school holidays for vulnerable families seeking support. Area 1 also have designated police officers to work with schools regarding any incidents of missing and managing any risk around children.

Area 2

Area 2's Children Missing from Education Information and Guidance for Schools and Early Learning Child Care Settings contains clear differentiation between missing from school and missing from education (unexplained absence). Guidance includes the consideration of pre-school age children, which is good practice. The document contains in-depth consideration of why a child or young person may be missing from education with a view to supporting family, including a consideration of children as young carers, and children from traveller families, and considers the perspective and role of multiple agencies in understanding any unexplained absence from school.

Health

Health is a key agency through which a person can be supported, both in the prevention of a missing episode or on a person's return. Local NHS protocol and guidance in the following areas is particularly strong in providing an opportunity for this prevention work with, response to and support of a missing person. 'Return to Ward Discussions,' are taking place in most areas, and are a crucial point of engagement with a returned person and provide opportunity to safeguard and prevent further missing episodes.

> *'Evidence suggests that up to 80% of adults who go missing have one or more mental health problems … adults with dementia, although only making up around 3% of the people who are reported missing, remain one of the most vulnerable groups.'* - National Missing Persons Framework, 2017

Area 1

Area 1's *NHS Mental Health Inpatient Services Missing Person Policy* is an excellent document that uses the definition of missing, and high, medium, and low risk levels as per The Framework. It clarifies the difference between 'absent' and 'missing' and when an 'absent' case would be reclassified as 'missing.' The policy also sets out all steps that should be followed in an NHS setting before contacting police, advising that high risk or 'restricted' patients are reported missing to police immediately.

Locally, Joint Action Forms are completed prior to contacting police containing significant information relating to the missing patient. On a person's return, Return to Ward Discussions are completed within 24 hours, and recorded on internal systems. Policy states that this must be done and explains that any detail shared will be relevant to the level of risk then determined. There is emphasis that these discussions must be done with 'careful consideration' of the 'right time,' in the 'right circumstances,' and the 'appropriate level of support given.'

Return to Ward Discussions must establish the reasons for a person's disappearance; circumstances whilst they were away and of their return; any information relating to health and vulnerability or suicide; and any other relevant information. Police are then to be contacted and informed of the content of and actions following a Return to Ward Discission Care and Pass Plans are updated with any relevant information following the Return Discussion and missing episode.

Local NHS Mental Health Inpatient Services missing person policy also contains a Missing Persons Policy Flowchart and Return Missing Patient Flowchart, which are excellent visual representations of process and should be considered good practice. Policy also includes Police Scotland Missing Person Classification of Risk and Response, a blank Joint Action Form and Pass Plan Protocol as a helpful appendix for references.

Area 2

Area 2 have strong local guidance on missing families, particularly children who may be missing from health services, and in particular, women missing from antenatal appointments where there is significant risk of harm to an unborn child, vulnerability, or abuse. Guidance includes what information should be gathered and who should be notified, for NHS staff.

Local guidance also exists for procedures to be followed should a child on the Child Protection Register or with a Child Protection Plan in place go missing or should a vulnerable child or pregnant women go missing from another local authority in the UK where child protection concerns have been raised in relation to the child, or unborn baby. The guidance clearly outlines who, in senior positions, should be notified if a child on the child protection register goes missing or, if a vulnerable pregnant woman, where there are concerns about the unborn child, goes missing. It also contains a form and templates to use to correspond with these roles, and relevant persons in other local authority areas, and clearly outlines information sharing protocol with key agencies such as other local authorities, education, homeless services and out of hours social services.

The local NHS is also using Missing Family Alerts, which enhances the circulation of information about children who have disappeared and for whom there may be concerns of 'significant harm.' Under the alert scheme, 'missing family' is a family who has disappeared from a known location within a health board

area for whom there may be concerns of significant harm for the children in terms of unmet need, vulnerability, or abuse. This includes risks to unborn children.

When NHS personnel have concerns that such a family may be missing, and all reasonable and practical efforts have been undertaken to locate the family locally, the Child Protection Advisor within the Public Protection Team will decide if the threshold has been met to issue a Missing Family Alert. This alert is sent to NHS child protection leads, A&E departments, lead nurses in relevant acute and community sectors, homelessness family services, Scottish health boards, NHS 24, and Scottish ambulance services.

Area 3

Recently updated guidance in place in Area 3 informs professionals how to respond if an adult goes missing from NHS Mental Health In-patient Services. NHS staff are following internal procedures and effectively risk managing any missing episodes, as opposed to immediately contacting the police and mitigating any risk themselves, with positive changes in appropriate reporting from the Hospital, according to Police Scotland.

Return Discussions are taking place within NHS Services (both for in-patients and through the Community Mental Health Teams), and effective information sharing takes place between the Hospital and Police Scotland regarding relevant information relating to missing persons. Local agencies are considering in-patient and community mental health staff as appropriate professionals to complete Return Discussions if the missing person has an active involvement with these services.

Area 4

In Area 4, Hospital Communication Passports are in place for adults with learning difficulties in supported accommodation, or those with individual care plans, which enable important information regarding vulnerabilities, and routine to be readily available in order to help inform an effective response if a missing incident occurs. Area 4 are also considering NHS Learning Difficulty Nurses as appropriate professionals to complete Return Discussions if the missing person has an active involvement with this service.

Adults

All 5 areas demonstrated consistent use of The Herbert Protocol for adults living with Dementia, consistent with good practice under 'response' and 'prevention' under The Framework. Good practice also included the following good practice around missing adults, particularly regarding support on return.

Area 1

Local Area 1 guidance contains information on missing, human trafficking, and exploitation. which references The Framework and is accessible according to a professional's agency. There are strong multi-agency procedures in response to, and inter-agency practice for, adults affected by harm, including recognising that this may include those who may have been trafficked.

Local guidance on missing reminds professionals to factor in the risk of missing into assessments of adults and their support plans and share information with police and agencies should someone be reported missing. Local procedure recognises that a missing adult is more vulnerable to harm and exploitation,

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particularly those who suffer from mental health issues or live with Dementia. There are also informal processes to report a person missing from home who is regularly visited by local carers.

Area 2

Descriptive care plans are in place for adults using Home Care services in Area 2. This ensures that care agency staff have all the relevant information required by the police immediately to hand when reporting someone missing, to prevent unnecessary delays to an investigation. A

The Mental Health Officer and Crisis Assessment Treatment Service (CATS) are able to offer immediate support upon return where a mental health issue has been identified and follow up support were appropriate.

As a result of our work, Area 2 are currently working to formalise their Return Discussion procedures and have formulated a **new** local multi-agency missing persons protocol. Our journey-mapping workshops for adults identified that Adult Services, a person's GP, NHS Social Workers, and the CATS Team could be appropriate professionals to complete Return Discussions if the missing person has an active involvement with these services, which would be co-ordinated by the local Concern Hub.

Area 3

In Area 3, protocols are in place to prevent and respond to missing adults in supported accommodation. These protocols are similar to The Herbert Protocol and outline details of the persons behaviour, routine, and what steps should be taken if the person was to go missing (including, who to contact, places to check, potential triggers for a missing episode, how they may react to emergency services). These protocols ensure that staff have all relevant information required by the police immediately to hand, to prevent unnecessary delays to the missing investigation.

For adults who are in supported accommodation, discussion takes place between supported accommodation staff and police regarding how the police should act when the missing person is found/who is best placed to attend/ and what the missing person's needs might be. Further, if the police find the missing person, steps will be taken to arrange for the supported accommodation staff to attend if it is known that the missing person does not want to be approached by police or may respond negatively.

A new local procedure has been approved that the professional who is closest to the missing person will carry out the Return Discussion. While Area 3 are currently working to formalise their Return Discussion procedures, our journey mapping workshop identified that Adult Services, key workers, and in-patient and community mental health staff could all be appropriate professionals to complete Return Discussions, if the missing person has an active involvement with these services.

Area 4

Area 4 have recently introduced their Missing Person Guidance, which outlines the steps to be followed by multi-agency practitioners when responding to a missing incident. As part of this, Adult Services plan to take the role of coordinating the completion of Return Discussions for all adults regardless of any threshold relating to risk and concern. This will involve Adult Services offering to complete Return Discussions or identifying an alternative appropriate agency to complete Return Discussions, depending

on the returned person's preference. It is also clear that locally, it is a priority for people to be able to choose who completes their Return Discussion.

Project Findings: Areas for Development and Recommendations

The need to grow multi-agency working

Missing People has identified a need and local appetite in all areas to grow their current multi-agency work in response to and in prevention of, missing children, young people and adults. In particular, there was recognition across all areas that local multi-agency missing protocols would help facilitate greater local awareness of multi-agency process and procedure around missing adults and children.

Recommendations

- We recommend the formulation of a multi-agency Missing Persons Protocol that contains useful information for agencies around prevention, respective actions required at each stage of a person's missing journey, and how this will benefit the missing person. Any new protocol should provide greater emphasis on, and clarity regarding roles and responsibilities of each local agency, at the time of a person's return. This will help to ensure that each agency is consistently responding and supporting missing people and their families, locally. It may be useful for those developing this protocol to review The Area 2 local missing protocol, as an example of good practice, which we are happy to share.
- Missing People can facilitate the clarification of multi-agency roles and responsibilities in the form of 2 multi-agency Journey Mapping Workshops, within which the respective experience of missing adults, and children (perhaps children missing from home in particular) is 'journey-mapped' from reporting to supporting them on their return. These workshops would also clarify agencies roles for the front-line prevention and support. All agencies which respond to missing locally would benefit from clarification of the actions required to support missing persons upon their return, as per The National Missing Persons Framework, and to inform any local multi-agency missing protocol.
- To grow local accountability and information sharing, Missing People recommend that regular multi-agency operational meetings concerning missing adults and children are held locally, to monitor local trends around missing, hotspot locations, and discuss individuals of particularly high concern. For example, children who have recently been placed in residential care from out of area. Previous good practice in local areas across Scotland has seen separate groups for adults and children, with attendees from Police Scotland; local NHS; the local authority; private residential homes; Education and voluntary sector organisations. This group could also inform new local missing person's protocol and associated processes that may be required in order to establish successful outcomes for all local agencies.
- In order to facilitate a consistent local multi-agency approach to missing, we recommend that any current guidance, policy, or protocol should be updated to use the language of The National Missing Persons Framework, including the definition of missing, low, medium and high risk levels, and 'Return Discussions.' This includes replacing any 'traffic light system' of risk assessment with a low, medium and high risk assessment for all agencies.

The need for formal Return Discussion procedures

missing people

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

Across all 5 areas, Return Discussions are not consistently being offered to all children, young people and adults. In some areas, thresholds exist such as the number of missing episodes, or risk level, before someone is offered a discussion. In all 5 areas local information sharing pathways should also be formalised in order to establish how relevant information from Return Discussions should be shared among key agencies.

Recommendations

- A clear process should be in place regarding each agency's actions to support missing persons upon their return. As per The National Missing Persons Framework, Return Discussions should be completed within 1 week of a person's return, following a Prevention Interview (Safe and Well Check) by Police Scotland.
- We suggest that any new local Missing Persons Protocol and practice emphasises the difference between a Prevention Interview by police, and a Return Discussion. This distinction will help ensure that both interviews are completed with, or offered to, all returned children and adults as separate discussions, as per The Framework.
- Area 1's *NHS Mental Health Inpatient Services Missing Person Policy* should be considered good practice when needing guidance on local procedure on Return Discussions under the 'support' objective of The Framework.
- We recommend the introduction of a process through which who will be assigned to deliver Return Discussions within 1 week of a person's return (with initial contact within 72 hours) as per The Framework for all adults and children be clearly established, and the completion and quality assurance of these Return Discussions monitored. The Framework also suggests that the returned person should have their Return Discussion completed by a person of their choosing. Previous good practice in Scotland has seen the completion of Return Discussions by multi-agency partners coordinated by the Missing Person's Operational Coordinator (MPOC) for Police Scotland, and also ensures that all relevant information has been shared and used to update care plans and/or risk assessments. Any process should consider how Return Discussions are offered, recorded, and relevant information shared with local agencies. Missing People are happy to discuss this further with managers and front-line staff, and it is hoped that Missing People's online Return Discussion training will also help improve levels of engagement.
- Education and Health should also be considered as an option for the completion of Return Discussions with children and young people missing from home (should a child choose), as well as NHS staff for returned adults missing from hospital, where appropriate.
- Missing People to offer local areas multiple licences for Return Discussion training for those working directly with returned adults and children. Training is free of charge and will be most beneficial to multi-agency front-line staff and/or Managers responsible for staff who complete Return Discussions.
- Missing People can offer access to our online toolkit for professionals in Scotland, which contains valuable resources for the completion of Return Discussions: https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/for-professionals/services-for-professionals.

Improved support for missing people & their families

Missing People has identified opportunities for agencies to signpost missing people and their families to further support.

Recommendations

- Signposting to Missing People's core services to be included within standard procedures for all agencies, where possible. To include signposting on documentation, leaflets and information supplied to missing persons and their families during and after a missing episode.
- Missing People to deliver 1-hour online inputs to or share our 7-minute briefing video with local professionals to raise awareness of our core services, where required.
- We suggest the signposting provided to families and carers to also include Purple Alert, developed by Alzheimer Scotland.

Part Two: Project Successes and Challenges

What Worked Well

In Year 3, we kept the same application process we had created in Year 2, through which areas could apply for our support. 5 local areas across Scotland submitted applications in in which they were each asked to identify 3 areas of good practice around missing, and 3 areas of practice for development. This enabled the project team to be informed about local missing practice at the earliest possible opportunity. The scope of Year 3 of the project allowed us to accommodate all the areas that applied with appropriate levels of support.

As in Years 1 and 2, crucial to the successful outcomes of Year 3 of the project was a high level of multi-agency engagement from relevant sectors in all areas. Missing People continued to be flexible and bespoke in our approach in response to all areas requiring different kinds of support, continuing to deliver the project online, post Covid-19.

When delivering in-depth support, we repeated the same project process and stages from Years 1 and 2, completing the 'map,' 'review' and 'help' stages within each local area. We assessed relevant documentation for good practice and identifiable areas for development and spoke with multi-agency front-line staff members to gain insight into what occurs in practice.

The facilitation of journey mapping workshops in all areas were again a key success of the project. These workshops resulted in identifying good practice, clarifying local procedure and responsibility for partners, and evidencing opportunities where partners could better work together when responding to and supporting missing adults, children, and families. In particular, the workshops this year ensured that professionals understood the importance of the returned person having a choice of who completes their Return Discussion.

We had **584** online Return Discussion training licences leftover from Year 2 when we began Year 3 of the project. During Year 3 of the project, we allocated **315** of these training licenses to professionals. The remaining **249** still to be allocated will roll-over into Year 4 of the project.

Over **125** professionals attended our Missing & Good Practice Conference, which was delivered online in November 2021.

Throughout the project, oversight from The National Advisory Group continued to be invaluable for our approach within all three local areas and with multiple agencies. Throughout Year 3, we continued to make professionals from multiple agencies aware of, and engage with, The National Missing Person's Framework, successfully sharing further good practice across different local areas. The toolkit has enabled us to share this good practice more broadly across Scotland, The Toolkit has been updated with good practice examples from local areas in Year 3, and from March 2021-April 2022 had **819** visitors to its homepage.

Thinking around the professional's forum began in early 2022, and its development was put on hold to see if Scottish Government would approve additional funding for this to be hosted on a platform that Missing People use to host an online community for missing persons and their families. In February 2022, Scottish Government gave the project team an additional £2,000 to deliver this. The professional's forum project activity will therefore roll over into Year 4 of the project from March 2022-April 2023 and begin with the forum being accessible to the local areas we have worked in during Years 1-3 of the project.

Continuation of the National Coordinator role in Year 3 of the project remained fundamental to relationship building to ensure local knowledge and the effective implementation of The Framework. The role has enabled Missing People to have a continuing presence in Scotland that allows for multiple opportunities to raise awareness of our Helpline and core services to Police Scotland, Education, NHS staff, private care providers, and local authority staff. As we have previously highlighted in Years 1 and 2 project reports, these agencies can then in turn, signpost more missing people and their families in Scotland to access wrap-around support that contributes to meeting The Framework's four objectives; to prevent, support, respond, and protect.

Local Area Successes

Area 1

Area 1's local *NHS Mental Health Inpatient Services Missing Person Policy* was guidance that we found most aligned with The Framework, and the most comprehensive in setting out all the steps that should be followed in an NHS setting before contacting police. Locally, Return to Ward Discussions are also completed within 24 hours of a patient's return. This good practice was presented at our conference in Year 3 and has been shared in the online toolkit for professionals.

Area 2

We worked with Area 2 to develop a local multi-agency missing person protocol. This is now being implemented and ensures that all local agencies understand their roles and responsibilities at different stages if missing and work together effectively. In fact, the protocol is now being shared as an example of good practice to other areas. We encouraged Area 2 to set up a short life working group to ensure that

the protocol and its approach are implemented across the local area. We also supported Area 2 to roll out the 'Not at Home' missing persons protocol for children missing from residential care, which has been extended following its initial test, locally. This protocol aims to reduce the criminalisation of children and young people in care, ensuring a more proportionate response when there are grounds to believe a child or young person is 'not at home' rather than 'missing,' therefore reducing unnecessary reporting.

Area 3

At the time of our work in this area, local procedure had been approved for emphasis in Area 3 to be on the person choosing who completes their Return Discussion. Since we have supported professionals in the area, there has been work undertaken to strengthen the ability of different agencies to undertake Return Discussions if they have a good relationship with the returned person. The adoption of the 'Not At Home' missing persons protocol, which aims to ensure a more proportionate response when there are grounds to believe a child or young person is 'not at home' rather than 'missing,' has also been found to reduce unnecessary police contact with children and young people, locally.

Area 3 fed back to Missing People that our support helped them develop a local multi-agency working group for missing persons, and that the journey mapping workshops were the most valuable part of our work:

"The journey mapping workshops were most helpful in identifying tricky situations and how we should respond (for example) to an inpatient missing from hospital or a young person missing with mental health issues – they helped us unpick challenging situations, tease out what we needed to do and agree a way forward. They also made the challenges very real for people." – Team Manager, Children and Education.

Area 3 also shared that the project's webinar on mental health saw an increase in staff knowledge and skills about additional support services such as Purple Alert, and good practice responses to missing people who are living with autism.

Area 4

With our feedback on the document, Area 4 officially launched their Missing Person Guidance in September 2021. This guidance outlines the steps to be followed by multi-agency practitioners when responding to a missing incident. As part of this, there is a clear procedure outlined to ensure that Return Discussions are offered to all people, and that relevant information is shared with Police Scotland and other key agencies. It was clear from our journey mapping workshops that it is a local priority for people to be able to choose who completes their Return Discussion. As part of this protocol, Adult Services plan to take the role of coordinating the completion of Return Discussions for all adults regardless of any threshold relating to risk and concern. This will involve Adult Services offering to complete Return Discussions or identifying an alternative appropriate agency to complete Return Discussions, depending on the returned person's preference.

Feedback

> "*Missing People made it clear they were working with us; we didn't feel done to … What they did for us was pull everything together.*" – Team Manager, Children and Education, Area 3

A feedback survey was completed at the end of the project by 4 areas. We asked those who responded to the survey how straightforward they found the process of engagement with the project on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant 'very difficult' and 5 meant 'very straightforward.'

- 100% (6 of 6) respondents scored the process as a 4 or 5.

We asked why that score was given, and feedback includes:

- "Meetings were very useful and collaborative in approach."
- "Communication was excellent, and any queries were responded to in a timely manner."
- "Flexibility in scheduling meetings."
- "It was generally very straightforward."
- "They have always been readily available to answer and queries and offer advice."
- "Process of engagement has been good."
- "Excellent communication with project workers, especially (The National Coordinator)."

We asked what went well in our engagement with the areas. The main themes here were:

Communication:

- "Recommendations were clear."
- "Communication and expectations were defined; pace was set to achieve outcomes."
- "Friendly, accessible and eager to assist."
- "Initial contact with (local area) was good - easy and clear."

Expertise:

- "Available, responsive, wealth of knowledge and experience."
- Supporting us in highlighting strengths and gaps within our guidance."

Conference feedback

Overall, conference delegates rated the conference 4.6 out of (1 being poor, 5 being very good). Delegates' knowledge of the National Missing Persons Framework went from 2.6 out of 5 at the beginning of the conference, to 4 out of 5 by the end (1 being low, 5 being high).

We asked delegates. 'What will you do differently in your practice because of what you have learnt today?" We had the following responses:

- "Open discussions about how to take the information learned today forward and how we can implement into practice."
- "A great deal of valuable information and best practice shared."
- "Share brilliant work in Glasgow and Clyde on mental health and missing."
- "Develop links with other agencies and partners from other parts of Scotland."
- "(An) operational group to review missing cases more routinely."
- "I am now aware of more resources that I can advise the people I work with of."
- "Think about the ongoing support that can be provided not just the process of return interviews."
- "Learning of other good practice and developments across Scotland will inform ongoing evaluation of service delivery/practice."
- "Look into missing children and young people being deemed as (a) child protection (issue), arranging meetings to discuss those who have been missing and the gaps for those who don't have service involvement."
- "Take forward quality improvement regarding return discussions."
- "I am much more aware of The Framework and how to support people who have gone missing and return. Today has been really informative and I have a lot to reflect on to make changes to my practice and develop my skills and knowledge."
- "More local discussion."
- "Point colleagues to return interviews where information may be available to support a missing person investigation. Encourage the adoption and completion of The Herbert protocol by people living with dementia."
- "The conference has really increased my awareness of the incredible work which is going on in terms of Missing People."

Benefits of the project

We asked respondents what they felt the benefits of Missing People's work in their area would be:

Answer (multi-select options)	%	Number
A better understanding of opportunities for partnership working to support missing persons and their families in your area	50	3 of 6
The identification of areas of work that require support, guidance, and / or training to better support missing persons and their families	100	6 of 6
A better understanding of Missing People's services, including the charity's 24/7 support service	83	5 of 6
A better understanding of best practice around missing in Scotland	83	5 of 6
A better understanding of the National Missing Persons Framework	67	4 of 6

Other benefits

Additional benefits of the project that respondents shared were:

- "Understanding the local area and working with partners in a joined-up approach."
- "Workshops encouraged further discussion."
- "Networking opportunities and engagement with frontline staff."

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Challenges of the project included the continuation of the Covid-19 pandemic for part of the year. Due to having previously adapted the project to be delivered online, this did not impact delivery. However, we were able to consider face to face meetings as an option towards the beginning of 2022.

Although initial meetings were positive, engagement from Area 5 was challenging during the delivery phase of the project. We had agreed to deliver more strategic support than we had in Year 1 to professional to increase awareness of the importance of missing, locally as part of our 'light touch' support over 5-10 days. However, we did not get the responses we required to action this support from professionals for the duration of Year 3.

It was challenging to engage and manage priorities of 2 additional areas compared to Years 2 and 3 of the project. For example, the project team had to balance key areas of priority within each 'in-depth' area and manage their time effectively for those receiving 'light-touch' support, keeping within the 5-10 days timeframe to deliver this support.