

Scottish National Missing Persons Framework Implementation Project

Project Report (Full) Year 4

April 2022 - March 2023

**missing
people**

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

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Project Background

In 2022-23, there were 17,856 missing incidents in Scotland¹. Many more incidents go unreported. Over 33% of investigations related to someone who has been missing more than once, with children being disproportionately likely to go missing on multiple occasions². 31% of police recorded missing incidents had a mental health flag³. However, this is likely to under-represent the issue as research has shown that up to 80% of missing adults are experiencing mental health issues at the point of going missing⁴. Sadly 134 fatal outcomes from missing incidents were recorded in Scotland in 2022-23 which is a 40% increase from the number of fatal outcomes in 2017-18, when there were 96 deaths recorded⁵. The most common cause of death for missing people is suicide⁶.

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

¹ Missing Person Investigations 01/04/2020 – 31/03/2023, Police Scotland

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ My World Was Falling Apart, Missing People, 2022

⁵ Missing Person Investigations 01/04/2020 – 31/-3/2023, Police Scotland

⁶ Ibid

- 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 prevent high risk groups being reported missing; and the development of educational resources for young people.⁷

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. These areas were Renfrewshire, North Lanarkshire and Moray. 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. These areas

⁷ These resources are available here: <https://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk/scotland/resources>.

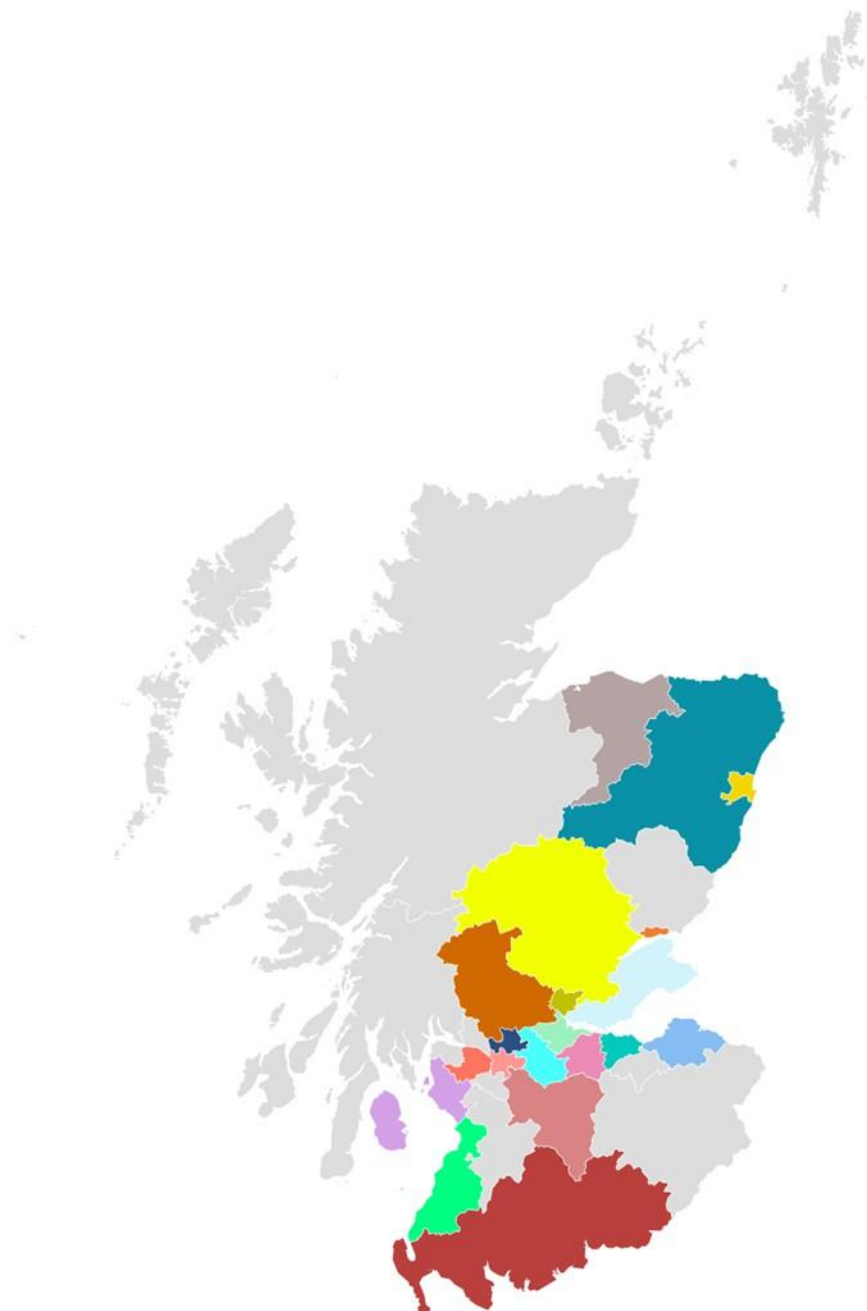
were North Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, East Dunbartonshire, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. The project report for Year 3 can be found [here](#)

In April 2022, Scottish Government provided £145,000 of funding to Missing People, which enabled us to recruit for a second National Coordinator and work with an additional 9 local areas across Scotland for 12 months. These areas were East Lothian; West Lothian; South Ayrshire; Glasgow; Dundee; Perth & Kinross; Clackmannanshire; Stirling; and Falkirk. While Missing People had originally been commissioned to work across 5 local areas this year, it was agreed that we would work division-wide with multiple local authorities in both Forth Valley (Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire) and Tayside (Dundee and Perth & Kinross) which brought the total to 9 local areas. 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.

Project areas across Scotland

July 2019 - March 2023

- Aberdeen City
- Aberdeenshire
- City of Edinburgh
- Clackmannanshire
- Dumfries and Galloway
- Dundee City
- East Dunbartonshire
- East Lothian
- Falkirk
- Fife
- Glasgow City
- Moray
- North Ayrshire
- North Lanarkshire
- Perth and Kinross
- Renfrewshire
- South Ayrshire
- South Lanarkshire
- Stirling
- West Lothian



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Missing People's Role

With 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, local authorities, the UK Missing Persons Unit, and the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC).

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 four 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 4 Project Overview and Findings

Project Aims

The project aims were as follows:

- To ensure that local partnerships and agencies in 9 areas, additional to those local areas we worked with in Years 1-3, understand the priorities and their responsibilities for improving the local response to missing persons and their families in line with The Framework:
 - 5 areas to receive 'in-depth' support, to include a review of local missing policies and procedures, and additional consultancy work.
 - 4 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 - 3.

The project team continued to report to and receive input from The National Working Group on Missing Persons throughout Year 4 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 9 local areas in which to work was decided through an application process, guided by the National Working Group. As in previous years, 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 the implementation of The Framework.

East Lothian, West Lothian, South Ayrshire, Glasgow, Tayside (encompassing **Dundee** and **Perth & Kinross**), and **Forth Valley** (encompassing **Clackmannanshire, Stirling,** and **Falkirk**) were the local areas

chosen, based on where Missing People could add the most value across all 9 areas, within the project time frame.

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 current National Coordinator role, and recruit for a second National Coordinator, as points of contact for local areas in years 1 - 3, and develop relationships with partners in new local areas to provide support and guidance to them throughout the project in Year 4.
- Support professionals to implement The National Framework by mapping, reviewing and auditing current local approaches in the 9 new local areas.
- Continue to support professionals across areas from years 1 - 3 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 online 'good practice' Toolkit created for professionals across Scotland working with missing adults, children and their families, with good practice from the areas we will work with in Year 4.
- Continue to provide Return Discussion Training for professionals from multiple sectors completing Return Discussions with adults and children.
- Deliver a third annual conference to share good and promising innovative practice for practitioners involved in preventing and responding to missing incidents.
- Develop an online forum for professionals to discuss local issues and share best practice around the issue of missing.

In May 2022, Missing People appointed a second National Coordinator for Scotland, based in Fife. This National Coordinator worked alongside the existing National Coordinator, based in Glasgow. The two Coordinators provide a crucial presence in Scotland and have been able to continue to build relationships with partners across Scotland in additional local areas.

Local area in-depth support

Missing People provided in-depth support for professionals to implement The Framework locally in 5 of the 9 local areas – East Lothian, West Lothian, and Forth Valley (encompassing Clackmannanshire, Stirling and Falkirk). 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 4 remaining local areas – South Ayrshire, Glasgow, and Tayside (encompassing Dundee and Perth & Kinross). In these areas, we provided 5-10 days of consultancy work with multi-agency partners, including Journey Mapping Workshops which help partners to identify any gaps in process, and the roles and responsibilities of each agency; reviewing local missing protocols and providing feedback; producing a 'best practice in response to a missing person' video; and presenting on Missing People's core services.

Key Achievements

The project team achieved the following:

- Workshops with **166 professionals** to map the respective journeys of missing adults and children 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 has been made available to **671 professionals**.
- **122 delegates** attended our Good Practice Sharing Conference which was held in February 2023
- **90 professionals** attended awareness raising sessions about missing adults, risks associated, and good practice of how to respond grounded in the Framework.
- The update of an **online 'good practice' Toolkit** for professionals in Scotland working with missing adults, children, and their families.

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:

- Successful multi-agency work between local partners to appropriately support vulnerable adults and children who are at risk of going, or who have, gone missing.
- Effective local protocols are in place to respond to vulnerable adults and children who are at risk of going, or who have gone missing.
- Comprehensive NHS missing person policies that ensure that appropriate reporting procedures and support upon return is delivered for adults, and vulnerable adults and children.

- Strong local protocols and multi-agency working between local partners and care providers to appropriately support children who go missing from care.
- Good mental health pathways, particularly for young people, and the adoption of trauma-informed practice.

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

- The need to grow existing multi-agency working in some areas with clear local missing person protocols and guidance, which outlines roles and responsibilities of each agency at every stage from prevention to support.
- Return Discussions are not consistently being offered to all children, young people and adults. This includes a lack of clarity on who the lead agency should be for completing Return Discussions and how information should be shared between local partners.
- A lack of knowledge around available support services for missing persons and their families.

Project Findings: Good Practice Key Themes

Multi-agency working for vulnerable adults and children

Strong multi-agency working exists for supporting vulnerable adults and children who may be at risk of going missing or have gone missing.

Area 1

For young people who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Area 1, there are clear individual risk management plans in place. Staff within education and residential homes are provided regular training on CSE. There is strong cross network information sharing on young people who are risk of CSE through the Missing Person Group, and professionals work closely with the Rise Team within Barnardo's who support young people at risk of CSE. Building on this, professionals working with young people are developing their awareness of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). Staff in education get regular briefings on the issue to build their understanding that young people who regularly go missing from school could be at risk of this form of exploitation. In Area 1, Action for Children run the Sidestep Initiative which is for young people who are currently experiencing criminal exploitation.

Area 2

In Area 2 there is a Complex Needs Coordinator employed by the local authority who is co- located with police. If a person goes missing who is identified as having complex needs, the police can make a verbal referral and the coordinator will contact various support services and places in the community that the person may have had recent contact with.

Area 3

The Area 3 *Missing Young Person's Review Group* and *Missing Adult's Review Group* both meet monthly and involve representation from relevant statutory, private and voluntary sector organisations. The groups focus on those with the highest number of missing incidents and those who are assessed as being the most vulnerable or at highest risk of harm. This enables partners to better understand and monitor performance and interventions relating to missing people within the local area.

Area 5

The *Alcohol and Drug Partnership's Multi-Agency Vulnerable Group*, which was set up during COVID-19, provides a space for relevant statutory and third sector agencies (including Police Scotland, adult services, housing services, justice services, addictions services and homelessness services) to discuss adults of concern where one or more agency has lost contact with the adult. The group provides a space for agencies to share any relevant information regarding when an adult was last seen and which services are working with them.

Area 6

In Area 6, a *Risk Harm Reduction Protocol*, and a *Risk Assessment Management Plan* is in place. These procedures allow for a multi-agency review of the adults needs, specifically for cases where there are concerns identified but which do not meet the Adult Support and Protection threshold. These reviews provide an important mechanism for adults to access support following a missing episode where there are concerns identified.

Protocols to support vulnerable adults and children

There are a number of strong protocols identified in local areas that demonstrate good practice in actions to prevent and respond to a missing episode in different circumstances.

Areas 3 and 4

The *Autistic Missing Person Protocol* (Police Scotland Division Pilot) is an excellent and clear-to-use risk reduction tool to help individuals, families, schools and other organisations assist police in the event an autistic adult or child goes missing. The protocol includes a number of important sections, such as: a section on a person's sensory needs and how these are affected by stress/distress; preferred communication styles when someone may be stressed or anxious; behaviours a person with autism may display when in crisis or distressed and the best way to provide support when this occurs; perception of and likely response to police; possible reactions and responses to a range of stimuli including: sirens, helicopters, shouting, and uniforms; and questions to identify if the person with autism is attracted to things that can present additional risks to them, such as fire, water, or trains.

Area 6

The *Multi-Agency Young Runaways Protocol* outlines multi-agency practice that should be in place when responding to a missing child or young person. This includes agencies' responsibility to communicate with police their own assessment of risk so that this can inform the overall investigation strategy. If a young person is missing on two or more occasions the Young Runaway Coordinator will coordinate a formal Young Runaway Discussion with social work, health, and education, in order to decide the most appropriate intervention for the child or young person. Formal intervention meetings will take place if there are escalating concerns and repeat missing episodes and will involve all key agencies who are working with the young person. It is noted that if any agency has a serious concern, they can arrange this meeting regardless of the number of missing episodes.

Further, the *Multi-Agency Guidance: Child Trafficking and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)* is an important document which informs staff on best practice in relation to Child Trafficking and Child Criminal Exploitation. This document emphasises CCE is often unrecognised, that young people can often be prosecuted rather than recognised as victims of exploitation, and that professionals' understanding of the indicators of CCE, and ability to take appropriate safeguarding actions, is critical.

Area 3 and Area 5

Home Care services in Area 3 and Area 5 have *The Herbert Protocol* in place for adults with dementia and digital care plans are updated on each visit to include details of what the adult was wearing when last seen. These procedures ensures that staff have all relevant information required by the police immediately to hand, to prevent unnecessary delays to the missing investigation. Further, in Area 6 and Area 7, all social care staff receive training on the Herbert Protocol.

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 for 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.

Area 3

The Standard Operating Procedure for Reporting Missing Persons from Mental Health In-patient Services and Associated Services and at local Hospital Site is an excellent document grounded in The National Missing Persons Framework, providing detailed guidance for clinical staff. It demonstrates good practice through outlining the different responses required to manage the risk of a missing episode based on the patient's status. The document 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. It clarifies the difference between 'absent' and 'missing' and when an 'absent' case would be reclassified as 'missing.' The procedure uses the high, medium, and low risk levels as per The Framework and sets out what factors clinicians should look out for. In addition, digital pass

plans have recently been implemented for patients. This will make sure all staff have up to date information about a patient's stay in hospital, including when they can leave hospital premises and at what point they should be reported as missing, ensuring no unnecessary police involvement.

Area 6

The *NHS Missing Persons Policy* outlines how clinical services will respond to missing persons. It includes a *Missing Persons Policy* flowchart which clearly outlines the key steps that should be taken at each stage including upon return, and a *Missing Persons Action Plan* which is completed for all patients on their admission and documents what actions would be taken in the event of that patient being missing. These actions are personalised and based on the recorded level of risk assessed by the care team. A Nurse-in Charge/Shift Coordinator takes the role of a 'Missing Person Coordinator' and is responsible for coordinating the steps which are outlined in this policy.

Supporting children missing from residential care

Strong local protocols and guidance documents exist to support the response to children and young people missing from residential care in all areas. These documents have helped to improve communication between agencies and have created an effective joined-up response to a missing child or young person.

Area 7

The Respect Programme has been implemented in children's residential care settings. This programme is designed to improve partnership working between residential care settings and Police Scotland allowing a clear understanding of each agency's roles in response to a missing episode. If care home staff contact the police, and as a result of a conversation being held between both parties it is decided that the child should be deemed as 'not at home', then there is no requirement for any further police involvement at that time and the child's absence will be managed by care staff in-house. A key concept is that care home staff are appropriately guided and empowered to safeguard and manage children in their care. Only if that risk becomes 'intolerable' to that care staff member who is reporting the incident, consideration should then be given to reporting the child missing to Police Scotland, generating a multi-agency response.

Area 1

In Area 1 the *Not at Home Policy* has led to a reduction in missing incident reports to police. Residential care staff are trained in how to use the '*not at home*' category appropriately. Staff continue to have discussions with the young person if they have been assessed as 'not at home,' so that they can continue to accurately assess any risk.

Area 6

There is guidance in place to inform how professionals should respond if a child goes missing from local authority residential care, including steps to effectively risk manage any missing episode, and steps to try

to locate the missing person prior to contacting Police Scotland. Effective communication takes place between local authority residential care providers and Police Scotland. Both agencies agreed that they have a positive working relationship.

Area 5

There is a clear procedure in place to inform how professionals should respond if a child or young person goes missing from residential care. Individual risk assessments and 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 to a missing incident.

Area 4

Police in Area 4 have been proactive in building relationships between partners by attending meetings at the residential homes and identifying a Single Point of Contact (SPOC). There is now a SPOC for each of the local units in East Lothian.

Mental health

There is a strong link between going missing and experiencing poor mental health. Previous research has found that up to **80%** of missing adults will be experiencing diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issues, and **1 in 5** children who completed Return Discussions with Missing People disclosed information about mental health issues. For these reasons, Missing People have been looking at access to mental health services and referral pathways for those at risk of, or who have returned from, a missing episode. Good practice around missing and mental health was found in the following areas.

Area 5

Area 5 have adopted a trauma-informed approach, led by trauma informed practice officers working across different settings. This approach to trauma-informed practice ensures that services have an awareness and understanding of trauma, that policies reflect agencies commitments to reducing trauma, and that all people receive trauma-informed services. These services include education, social work, housing and the NHS. Since working with Missing People as part of the National Framework Implementation Project, police and social work teams will be adopting a trauma informed approach with missing adults, children, and young people, including when supporting them on return. This is a positive approach as traumatic life events and stressors can lead to people going missing and exposure to harm while missing can lead to further trauma for an individual.

Professionals agreed that mental health support for children and young people in Area 5 is easily found and accessed. There is a clear crisis pathway for young people through which they can access various healthcare professionals depending on the support required. All schools in Area 5 have a school counselling service in which young people can self-refer. Children and young people can access advocacy from two organisations: Action for Children or Barnardo's.

Area 6

There are many mental health and wellbeing services available to young people due to increased Scottish Government funding. Area 6 have been able to commission the following services, which are now available to young people locally:

- Digital support services, which can be accessed 24 hours a day.
- An Educational Psychologist, and Additional Support Advisors available in school.
- School counsellors
- Barnardo's Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing Services.
- Aberlour's Primary Outreach Service.
- District Association for Mental Health's Young Person's Service.

Further, the NHS Mental Health Triage Service – run jointly by NHS and Police Scotland, is helping to improve the response to a missing person who has been found by the police and where there are mental health concerns. This service has been designed particularly to help people with a mental health disorder or where an individual has symptoms which require an urgent mental health assessment. Police are able to call the Service to speak with a senior mental health nurse who will be able to direct people to the most appropriate service. This could include an emergency mental health assessment within the Mental Health Unit at the local area Hospital and telephone counselling.

Area 3

Schools in Area 3 can refer young people to the Inclusion and Wellbeing Support Service. This service takes a holistic view at meeting wellbeing needs of pupils and works in partnership with schools to support pupils and families. This service is a great source of support for pupils who are at risk of, or are repeatedly going missing.

Area 4

Partners in Area 4 are implementing plans that ensure staff across agencies are trained in suicide prevention and ASSIST, so they are confident in having discussions with people at risk of suicide or self harm and supporting them to make a safety plan.

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, it was identified that there was a need to improve multi-agency working with private care providers, hospitals, and out of area social work services. It was also identified that there was a need for greater clarification regarding the roles and responsibilities of schools in response to missing pupils. 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 across agencies.

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 include all agencies who play a role in the response to missing people, and provide greater emphasis on, and clarity regarding roles and responsibilities of each of those agencies, at the time of a person's return. This will help to ensure that each agency is consistently responding to and supporting missing people and their families.
- 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; 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' for all agencies.

The need for formal Return Discussion procedures

Across all areas, Return Discussions are not consistently being offered to all children, young people and adults. In all areas local information sharing pathways should also be formalised 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.
- We recommend the introduction of a clear process through which the best placed professional to deliver the discussion is identified; and through which the completion and quality assurance of these Return Discussions can be monitored.
- The Framework 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.

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

As in previous years, crucial to the successful outcomes of Year 4 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.

When delivering in-depth support, we repeated the same project process and stages from previous years, 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.

Over **122** professionals attended our Missing & Good Practice Conference, which was delivered online in February 2023. As well as showcasing examples of good practice which we had found in Year 3 of the project, the conference also maintained a focus on the link between missing and mental health throughout. Speakers included those with lived experience of missing and speakers from South Ayrshire who presented on the trauma-informed approach which was being embedded locally. Further, speakers from the Lothians presented on the Autistic Missing Person Protocol which had been recently piloted locally.

Throughout the project, oversight from The National Advisory Group continued to be invaluable for our approach within all local areas and with multiple agencies.

Throughout Year 4, we continued to share good practice across different local areas. The toolkit has allowed this to happen beyond just the areas in which we have worked each year, but across the whole of Scotland. The toolkit has been updated with good practice examples from local areas in Year 4, and from March 2022-April 2023 had **531** visits to its homepage.

Continuation of the National Coordinator role, and recruiting a second National Coordinator in Year 4 of the project has been fundamental to relationship building and the effective implementation of The Framework. Having two National Coordinators has allowed Missing People to increase our reach in Scotland as multiple points of contact for professionals, and allowed us to further raise awareness of our Helpline and core services to local partners. As we have previously highlighted, 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.

At the local areas request, it was agreed that Missing People would work division-wide with multiple local authorities in both Forth Valley (Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire) and Tayside (Dundee and Perth & Kinross). While this approach did have its challenges, as it required a high level of coordination, the benefit of the approach was that it supported the local areas to develop a joint and consistent approach to missing persons division-wide.

Local Area Successes

Area 6 and Area 5

Since taking part in the Project, both Area 6 and Area 5 have created Missing Person Short Life Working Groups (SLWG) to take forward the agenda of missing locally. Both SLWGs plan to develop a multi-agency missing person protocol for their local area and identify appropriate multi-agency staff to undertake the Return Discussion training. We have put the responsible leads from both areas in contact with the leads from an area from year 3 of the project, who have taken forward the Missing Person agenda in their areas. They were able to share their experience of establishing a Missing Person SLWG and a multi-agency missing person protocol, thereby passing on lessons-learned and helping to ensure an effective approach in Area 6 and Area 5.

Area 7

As part of our work in Area 7, we created a video to provide guidance to police officers in Scotland on how to respond to a missing person when they have either been found or have self-returned. This video has been sent to the National Missing Persons Unit to be disseminated to police officers in Scotland.

Further, we lead two awareness raising sessions for Adult Services staff which were attended by 90 professionals. These sessions focused on missing adults, the risks associated, and good practice of how to respond grounded in the Framework.

Area 4

Since taking part in the project, there are now plans to make sure that all council employees have The Purple Alert downloaded on their work mobile phones. This will support efforts to find the missing person in an effective and timely way.

Area 1

Since taking part in the project the police and NHS have been able to begin discussions regarding how they can better work together to prevent people going from the hospital. They will be conducting an audit of missing person data and will review if there is a need to deliver more joint training sessions in the hospital. This will cover NHS Adult Missing Patient Policy, risk assessment and return discussion procedures. They also are looking to identify a Missing Person Champion for the hospital.

Feedback

A feedback survey was completed at the end of the project by 5 areas. We asked those who responded to the survey how straightforward they found the process of engagement with the project, feedback includes:

- 'Engaging and well mapped out content'
- 'It has been difficult to engage some partner agencies and get others to see the importance and significance of the project'
- 'Process was very clear and easy to engage with'
- 'Consistency of communication via email and online workshops etc.'

We asked what went well in our engagement with the areas. The feedback included:

- 'Flexibility and adapting to area wide'
- 'Following up on requests with resources and/or suggestions'
- 'Content and communication was engaging and well thought out'
- 'Great inputs and speakers'
- 'Regular updates on progress'
- 'Brought partners together and helped everyone understand the bigger picture and where gaps are'
- 'Clear, understandable and workshops and relevant meetings helpful to networking etc.'

Conference feedback

Overall, conference delegates rated the conference **4.8 out of 5** (1 being poor, 5 being very good).

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

Trauma-informed approach

- 'More effectively promote a trauma informed approach'
- 'I am more aware of the requirement for a trauma informed and joined up workforce within the local authority in which I work'
- 'Very much more aware of trauma informed practice'
- 'We will focus on making our process more formalised and trauma informed'

Return Discussions

- 'Raise the question again about the return discussion'
- 'School staff have been suggested as suitable interviewers. I am happy to take this further but feel they do need fully trained to ensure they complete the return discussion in a trauma informed way'
- 'I am delivering inputs around return discussions with young people'

- 'Ensuring that the return interviews are carried out which are crucial going forward'

Local multi-agency response

- 'When setting up SLWG greater focus on protocol, electing a champion, creating operational and strategic focus'
- 'Really interested in being a part of the Implementation project for our HSCP. Will be contacting (National Coordinator). Was not sure when information about it came out for assistance this' year - competing priorities - but today has convinced me that our HSCP should seek help for this.'
- 'Definitely going to identify if there is a local champion and link in. If not going to promote establishing one'
- 'By ensuring the Herbert protocol is in place for all my vulnerable adults'

Autism

- 'Reframe some of our working with those affected by ASD'
- 'Gain further information on the autism toolkit'
- 'Ensure inquiry regarding Philomena and Autistic protocols are made to ascertain if available'

Lived Experience

- 'Consider further how to incorporate and listen to the voice of the lived experience in our work on Missing'

Support

- 'Share learning with team to provide better support'
- 'I am more aware now of what help is available'
- 'Signpost onto services I wasn't aware of before'
- 'Centre responses around missing peoples needs.'

Benefits of the conference

We asked conference delegates if they had heard of any good practice today that they weren't already aware of. We had the following responses:

'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.'

NHSGG&C Mental Health In-Patient Services - Missing Person Protocol

- 'A great deal of valuable information and best practice shared. Immediately, best practice on comms from NHSGGC on easy read-style briefings etc.'
- 'Share brilliant work in Glasgow and Clyde on mental health and missing'

- 'Food for thought definitely some important points that we will share given mental health component'

Trauma-Informed Approach

- 'Good to see trauma informed approaches and importance placed on same'
- 'Further research into trauma informed practice'

Service development

- 'Learning of other good practice and developments across Scotland with inform ongoing evaluation of service delivery/practice'
- 'Open discussions about how to take the information learned today forward and how we can implement into practice'

Multi-agency meetings

- 'Operational group to review missing cases more routinely follow up with Dundee and Renfrewshire examples'
- 'Look into missing CYP being deemed as child protection, arranging meetings to discuss those who have been missing and the gaps for those who don't have service involvement'
- 'More local discussion'

Return Discussions and Support

- 'Think about the ongoing support that can be provided not just the process of return interviews'
- 'Have a better understanding of the supports available'
- 'Take forward quality improvement re 'return discussions'
- 'Point colleagues to return interviews where information may be available to support MP 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'

Other

- 'Lots of schemes I wasn't aware of will go away and research them some more'
- 'Develop links with other agencies and partners from other parts of Scotland'
- 'I am now aware of more resources that I can advise the people I work with of'
- 'I am looking forward to including some of the information in my thesis'
- 'Use information to continue to advocate for a Missing Persons Framework across Canada, long overdue'

Challenges and Lessons Learned

In one area, a key agency lead was on long term leave and had not been fully replaced. This person had been critical in driving forward the agenda of missing locally and their absence made it challenging to identify who would be able to take the work forward, and who would be able to share key information regarding relevant multi-agency contacts. This issue highlighted the importance of having a multi-agency missing person group in place, with representation from all key agencies, so the agenda of missing can be taken forward as a multi-agency shared priority and responsibility. This issue also highlighted the importance of the local area being able to share all multi-agency leads contact details with the project team from the beginning to prevent any unnecessary time delays.

In one area, there was a high turnover of staff within children's services, which made it challenging to ensure that all staff were accessing the relevant awareness raising and training regarding how to respond and support missing people. This issue highlighted the importance of having a clear and accessible missing person protocol in place so that all new staff could be aware of the correct procedures to follow. The Return Discussion e-training also continues to be available to all areas in Scotland.

In two areas, it was challenging to get representation from NHS staff at journey mapping workshops due to staffing capacity issues. We arranged additional meetings to focus on hospital issues relating to missing people. While it is a strength of the project to be able to be flexible, this issue also highlights the importance of local areas ensuring that there is a multi-agency commitment to take part in this project and that the issue of missing is understood to be a priority locally so that appropriate resources can be committed.

In one area, the decision to take part in the project had not gone through the correct local partnership group for approval. This resulted in one local authority being unable to take part. To avoid this issue happening again, the application form to take part in the project now includes the question: *'Does your area require approval for this project from your local partnership group or Health and Social Partnership Board? If yes, please provide detail of the process and approximate timelines?'*

