



# IMPACT REPORT 2023/24

**missing  
people**

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

A lifeline when someone disappears



**IN THE LAST YEAR,  
WE REACHED MORE  
MISSING PEOPLE THAN  
EVER BEFORE WITH  
NEARLY 45,000 MISSING  
PEOPLE RECEIVING  
AN SMS MESSAGE  
OFFERING OUR  
CONFIDENTIAL  
HELPLINE SUPPORT.**

Our search efforts included 575 appeals launching publicly – and even more people being searched for behind the scenes through our network of briefing partner organisations.

We pushed on with our mission of ensuring better professional response to each missing person by sharing our expertise with over 4,000 professionals. We also launched guidance on police response to missing people and their families, as well as providing good practice recommendations to best help unaccompanied children who arrive in the UK, then go missing or are at risk of going missing.

Throughout all of this, we put lived experience at the heart of everything we do - thanks to the numerous people with lived experience who worked with us on our key projects this year. Families affected continued to be a big part of the charity especially at key events throughout the year, including designing a Missing You garden border at BBC Gardeners' World Live

**IN 2023-24:**

**OVER**

**8,000**

**PEOPLE WERE  
DIRECTLY HELPED  
BY US.**

**NEARLY**

**20,000**

**PEOPLE WHO WERE  
MISSING, OR THINKING  
OF GOING MISSING,  
ACCESSED OUR ONLINE  
INFORMATION.**

**NEARLY**

**1,500**

**FAMILY MEMBERS,  
FRIENDS AND  
COLLEAGUES WERE  
SUPPORTED BY US.**

**OVER**

**17,500**

**PEOPLE READ ONLINE  
ADVICE FOR MISSING  
LOVED ONES.**



# INTRODUCTION BY KEVIN GOSDEN

## KEVIN IS THE FATHER OF ANDREW GOSDEN, WHO WENT MISSING IN 2007, AGED 14.

This year marks 17 years since Andrew went missing. I think Andrew was perhaps 10 or 11 when he read somewhere that if you planted an oak tree and kept it in a tub the roots would be constrained but it would grow into a fully mature oak tree. At the time, I picked up half a dozen acorns and we had an afternoon where we popped them into a tub of compost. They grew and gradually I've replanted those over the years, but kept just one for our back garden to remind us of Andrew. Last year, it produced its first acorns.

Almost every day since he disappeared, I've struggled with, at times, crippling anxiety and depression, to the point that it's barely possible to function at all. No matter how many years pass by without him, those feelings never change and are often intensified by small things that just wouldn't have been a problem before he wasn't there. After all the searching, appealing, praying, and hoping, as a family we all still miss him intensely every single day and it never seems to become any easier.

Missing People has tirelessly supported us through these years as they do with so many others. As Andrew's oak tree bears the fruit of the acorn, we hope that other families are spared the pain that too many of us live with every single day. I think Missing People's preventative campaign is a sign that the acorns planted all those years ago have matured but have many years of growing yet. There's a saying from tiny acorns a mighty oak may grow. This year that saying feels very apt.



FIND OUT WHAT WE  
ACHIEVED AGAINST  
EACH OF OUR  
STRATEGIC GOALS  
IN 2023-24:

GOAL 1

*Going missing  
is understood*

**AS A CRISIS  
THAT CAN BE  
A MATTER OF  
LIFE OR DEATH**



## GOAL 1

### “HOW IS MISSING PEOPLE ENSURING THAT MISSING IS UNDERSTOOD AS A CRISIS THAT CAN BE A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH?”

We are working to ensure that the cause is understood by the public, that professionals implement a best practice approach to supporting missing people and their loved ones, and that the cause is a priority for the government. Here's how:

#### MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

We are running regular insight surveys to chart what the public think of the cause, and in doing so, we've found that the overwhelming majority of the public agree that investigating missing people should be a priority for the police and the families of missing people deserve support and understanding by the public, police and the media.

While our work has contributed to over 60% of people understanding that many adults who go missing do so because of a mental health problem, including feeling suicidal, our work will continue to increase this understanding.

In January 2024, we reached over 3 million people through an awareness campaign with House337 and Stephen Fry, by releasing an audiobook with no ending, leaving the listener in limbo indefinitely.

“I myself went missing at a time of crisis in my life, I have an understanding of the pain it causes for everyone involved. I was fortunate enough to be reunited with my loved ones, not everyone gets that reunion. When someone disappears, they become invisible, and many of them come to harm. Tragically, more missing people than ever before are being found dead. This is a national crisis. The charity Missing People exists to connect everyone who is missing to safety, and to give them, and those who miss them, hope.”

*An excerpt from the campaign with Stephen Fry, a longstanding patron of Missing People*

#### PROFESSIONALS

IN 2023-24 WE SHARED OUR EXPERTISE WITH OVER

4,000

#### MULTI-AGENCY PROFESSIONALS

We delivered a wide range of training, conferences, workshops and e-learning to local authority staff, police forces and third sector agencies.

Topics included:

- ▶ Supporting Care Experienced Children on their return from being missing
- ▶ Return Home Interviews/ Return Home Discussions
- ▶ Unaccompanied Missing Children
- ▶ Criminal exploitation, including county lines





## THE GOVERNMENT

We developed our manifesto asks in preparation for the 2024 general election. These set out the need for a future government to prioritise the response to missing people, in particular:

- ▶ Committing to leading a truly multi-agency response that allows people to get the right support at the right time.
- ▶ Taking a more proactive approach in preventing repeat missing incidents, thereby reducing the harm experienced by thousands of children.
- ▶ Committing to reducing the number of missing episodes that end in fatality, by better supporting missing people at risk of suicide.

These manifesto asks were distributed to key decision-makers across the different political parties. We hosted the Shadow Ministers for Safeguarding and Policing at our office and arranged for people with lived experience to meet them and share their priorities.

There has continued to be a national conversation about police responsibilities when a person is missing. We have actively participated, advocating for missing people, pushing to reduce unnecessary reports that lead to over-policing, while stressing that the police must not neglect their safeguarding and public protection duties. We have developed briefings, engaged with senior leaders and continue to support appropriate implementation of the **Missing from Health and Care Settings Framework** for adults and the **Missing from Care Framework** for children.



### SPOTLIGHT ON SCOTLAND

In Scotland, we continued to deliver our impactful project working with professionals in local areas to ensure an effective multi-agency response to missing children and adults.

### OUR WORK HAS INCLUDED:

- ▶ Mapping and reviewing local policy and protocols for missing adults and children.
- ▶ Developing bespoke recommendations for the improvement and identification of good practice locally.
- ▶ Journey Mapping Workshops with professionals to clarify local roles and responsibilities.
- ▶ Delivering Return Discussion training to professionals across Scotland.
- ▶ Hosting a national 'Missing and Good Practice' conference.
- ▶ Delivering 'missing awareness' sessions with private care providers, Police Scotland, Child Services for a local authority and child protection coordinators within Education.

**"This project ... highlighted issues that were bigger than we first understood and helped us to create new policies and redefined our practice to better support those who have gone missing, family, friends and prevent future episodes of missing. Communication between partners has improved as well as data sharing which facilitates better and more accurate reporting as well as helping to redefine best working practice and supporting those in need."**

*- Chair of Child Protection Committee*



# GOAL 1

## HOW WE HAVE REACHED MISSING PEOPLE

TextSafe® is a targeted way to reach children and adults reported missing, to let them know support exists. In partnership with the police, we send a text message, and the missing person can then contact the charity if they need help, or to talk to someone.

Missing People, in partnership with the Samaritans, can also send a Suicide Risk TextSafe® message to people who have gone missing who may be thinking of taking their own life. The message lets them know that they have been reported missing and that the Samaritans will be phoning them to provide any support that they need.

We also continue to reach out to people who are missing, or thinking of disappearing, through our prevention campaign, which is widely distributed by JCDecaux and promoted on social media channels. In October 2023, posters across the South Western Railway network and announcements at the operator’s flagship stations encouraged people to contact our Helpline and seek support.

IN 2023-24, TEXTSAFE®  
MESSAGES WERE  
SENT TO:

27,746

MISSING CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

13,792

MISSING ADULTS

2,701

SUICIDE RISK  
TEXTSAFE® MESSAGES  
WERE ALSO SENT  
IN 2023-24



FIND OUT WHAT WE  
ACHIEVED AGAINST  
EACH OF OUR  
STRATEGIC GOALS  
IN 2023-24:

GOAL 2

**ALL MISSING  
PEOPLE  
AND THEIR  
FAMILIES**

*get the right help*

**AT THE  
RIGHT TIME.**



## GOAL 2

"HOW IS MISSING PEOPLE ENSURING THAT ALL MISSING PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES GET THE RIGHT HELP AT THE RIGHT TIME?"

IN 2023-24:

1,471

FAMILY MEMBERS,  
FRIENDS AND  
COLLEAGUES  
ACCESSED HELP  
FROM MISSING  
PEOPLE

We have a number of frontline services through which people affected by missing can get help:

### FAMILY SUPPORT

Providing specialist emotional and practical support. We also connect people to each other, as they navigate the trauma and challenges of ambiguous loss.

### LOST CONTACT TRACING SERVICE

Helping people to trace/reconnect with a relative who they have lost touch with, where there is no open police investigation.

### SAFECALL

We provide a dedicated, confidential, non-judgmental and anonymous helpline and support service for young people at risk of or currently experiencing criminal exploitation, including those currently missing, and their parents, carers and family members.

### COUNSELLING

Our counselling is for anyone with a missing loved one, aged 12+. Our qualified and experienced counsellors are trained to understand their unique trauma.

"To have someone just to listen and show kindness, compassion, and empathy, it was so important."

– Feedback from a family member who accessed counselling.



## GOAL 2

### HOW WE HELP THE SEARCH

IN 2023-24:

# 288

CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE WE SEARCHED  
FOR WERE FOUND SAFE

# 491

ADULTS WE SEARCHED  
FOR WERE FOUND SAFE

This year, the charity partnered with Trainline to make geo-targeted appeals for missing people. Between November 2023 and March 2024, 77 appeals for missing people were displayed on Trainline's mobile app. That campaign resulted in more than 132,000 click-throughs to our website.

We also joined forces with Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), Britain's largest rail operator, as part of our Safe Return initiative with the transport industry. This included a campaign at East Croydon and Blackfriars stations, with approximately 700,000 people seeing the campaign. Appeals for missing people were also shown on train's WiFi, resulting in 2.97 million passengers viewing the appeals.

We also reached hundreds of thousands of people by highlighting missing people appeals on The Missing podcast and Vanished television series on Channel 5.

### SPOTLIGHT ON LOST CONTACT TRACING SERVICE

This service, made possible thanks to LexisNexis Risk Solutions, can help people to trace/reconnect with a relative where there is no open police investigation.

In 2023-24 we received 500 requests to trace someone - our highest ever.

"The team really cared about my situation and were doing all they could to help. They were also empathetic about how I may be feeling and the sadness of my situation."

- ▶ 88% agreed this service helped them 'feel better able to cope with the emotional or practical challenges of having lost touch with a relative.'
- ▶ 96% agreed this service helped them 'feel other people cared about your situation.'
- ▶ Source: Survey of 25 people.



## LOST CONTACT CASE STUDY

*Sam*

In Autumn 2023, we were contacted by Sam who lives in America. Sam's elderly father had dropped all means of contact quite suddenly after Christmas of 2022. There had been suggestions he may have been evicted and been living in his car. As his dad had never owned a mobile phone, it was impossible for the family to know whether he was safe, and they had serious concerns that he may have come to harm.

In a matter of weeks, we had sent a letter and a call came from a care home. Confused, Sam's dad had been found lost on the streets not knowing where he lived. Since arriving, he had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and, although he didn't know where they were, he talked to the staff about his much-loved sons regularly.

'I can't thank you enough. I'm at peace now knowing he's safe and being taken care of when I'm so far away.'

***Feedback from Sam once we had found his father.***



## GOAL 2

### HOW MISSING PEOPLE IS WORKING WITH OTHERS TO IMPROVE THE RESPONSE FOR MISSING PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

#### WORKING TO END DISCRIMINATION

Throughout 2023, Missing People continued to influence the Police Race Action Plan to ensure that a better response to missing Black people is centred within their ongoing improvement plans. We co-hosted a webinar with the community group, Missing Black People, for police to learn directly from those with lived experience. Families of Black missing people shared their stories and the long-lasting impact that racism and poor responses from the police has had on their lives.

We conducted research with Listen Up about the experiences of Black missing children and their families, this was published in 2024.

#### PRINCIPLES FOR THE POLICE RESPONSE TO MISSING PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

People who have been missing, and families of missing people, have long spoken out about the need for clearer guidance on what happens when someone is reported missing to the police. Alongside those who have been missing or reported a loved one missing, we have developed 13 principles that set out what everyone should be able to expect from the police.

We hope these principles will help improve understanding and ensure a consistent response for everyone.

Police forces have been asked to ensure they follow the Principles in every missing person investigation.

To read more, please [click here](#).



FIND OUT WHAT WE  
ACHIEVED AGAINST  
EACH OF OUR  
STRATEGIC GOALS  
IN 2023-24:



### GOAL 3

Fewer

**MISSING PEOPLE  
COME TO HARM.**



## GOAL 3

**“HOW IS MISSING PEOPLE ENSURING THAT FEWER MISSING PEOPLE COME TO HARM?”**

**IN 2023-24 WE HELPED:**

**5,623**

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**2,654**

**ADULTS**

**NEARLY**

**20,000**

**PEOPLE WHO WERE MISSING, OR THINKING OF GOING MISSING, ACCESSED OUR ONLINE INFORMATION.**

## **WE HAVE FRONTLINE SERVICES FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED TO GET HELP:**

### **HELPLINE**

Providing emotional and practical support, every day. We can also pass a message home to families or the police or set up a three-way call. The Helpline is available, for free, via text, phone, email and online chat.

### **ONLINE GUIDANCE**

[www.missingpeople.org.uk](https://www.missingpeople.org.uk) offers a wealth of free information for anyone who is missing or thinking about going. In 2023-24, nearly 20,000 adults and children accessed these resources.

### **SAFECALL**

Dedicated, confidential, non-judgmental and anonymous support for young people at risk of, or currently experiencing, criminal exploitation, including those currently missing. Support is extended to their parents, carers and family members.

### **CHATBOT**

Children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, exploitation can access information and receive support for a range of issues. From the Chatbot they can also chat online to someone real about their concerns and worries.

### **RETURN SUPPORT**

Commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council, we provide support to young people who are going missing, with one-to-one intensive support and a dedicated worker. This support includes return home discussions and tailored sessions.



## SPOTLIGHT ON OUR INTENSIVE SUPPORT AND RETURN HOME INTERVIEW SERVICE

Missing People is commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council to provide support to young people who are going missing, via one-to-one intensive support with a dedicated worker. This includes 'return home' discussions and tailored support. Support is child-led and is offered both face-to-face and virtually. Young people are given a safe and non-judgemental space to talk about what is happening in their lives. They can access emotional support, advocacy, information about how to stay safe, and coping strategies. We also work together with parents, carers and other professionals involved in the young people's lives to make sure they are safe and supported.

"You made it easy to talk to someone and you actually listen"

– young person  
receiving intensive support.

"Could talk without being moaned at. Helped me understand things. Could ring her if I needed to talk"

– young person  
receiving intensive support.

"Having someone to listen and chat to when I felt I needed it. I don't always answer my phone but they didn't stop trying"

– young person  
receiving intensive support.

IN 2023-24:

# 49

## YOUNG PEOPLE

in Hertfordshire were supported through intensive one-to-one support.

# 100%\*

## YOUNG PEOPLE

said it 'helped you to feel better about yourself and your situation'; 'gave you ideas about how to cope if things are difficult or stressful in the future'; and 'gave you information about where you can go for any advice and support for any problems.'

\*(7 of 7 young people who provided feedback)



## HERTFORDSHIRE INTENSIVE SUPPORT CASE STUDY

Leah\*

Leah\* was referred to the service due to missing episodes and concerns that she may be being exploited. Professionals were struggling to engage Leah.

She was supported via Return Home discussions and one-to-one sessions, all completed by her designated worker.

Leah began to open up to her worker about the struggles she has faced and built a positive relationship with them.

By the end of support, she was no longer going missing, and said that she had a better understanding of safe, positive relationships. Leah also began to feel comfortable enough to talk to other professionals.

\*names and ages have been changed for anonymity



## GOAL 3

### HOW MISSING PEOPLE EVIDENCES THE LINKS BETWEEN GOING MISSING AND HARM

We conduct original research and evidence-gathering, to better understand the experiences of those affected.

In 2023-24 this included:

- ▶ Evidence-gathering project exploring good practice in response to unaccompanied asylum seeking children going missing.
- ▶ Project to collate data about people dying whilst being missing.
- ▶ Two public insights surveys with 2,000 adults asked for their views about the cause and how much of a priority responding to missing people should be for the police.
- ▶ Research exploring the links between autism and disappearances.

#### SPOTLIGHT ON GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE IN RESPONSE TO UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN GOING MISSING

In partnership with The Children's Society, Missing People developed good practice guidance to help professionals better support unaccompanied children who are at risk of going missing.

Unaccompanied children are some of those at most risk of going missing, and of staying missing long-term. These are children who are often already vulnerable upon their arrival in the UK. This is due to the circumstances that drove them to leave their home country, and the trauma they will likely have experienced on the journey. Going missing puts them at even greater risk. They may face serious harms, such as trafficking and exploitation, and be hidden from help and support.

It is vital that all professionals who have contact with unaccompanied children play a part in preventing them from going missing, and in safeguarding those who do.

The guidance includes:

- ▶ Why unaccompanied children go missing.
- ▶ What professionals can do to prevent unaccompanied children from going missing.
- ▶ How professionals can work with children to prepare them to stay safer if they do go missing.
- ▶ What can help the investigation if an unaccompanied child goes missing.

The full report is [available here](#)



## GOAL 3

### PUTTING LIVED EXPERIENCE AT OUR HEART



Nearly 100 people with experience of being missing, or having a missing loved one, influenced Missing People's work this year.

We have two lived experience Advisory Groups: for families of missing people and for people who have been missing themselves. They meet regularly to advise on a range of things, from Missing People's strategy, policy projects and service delivery, to fundraising and awareness activities.

People with lived experience are also directly engaged with work across the charity, including:

- ▶ Chairing Missing People's Good Practice conference in Scotland for 130 professionals.
- ▶ Leading the development of the **Missing You** garden at BBC Gardeners' World Live.
- ▶ Young advisors recruited to co-deliver a review of the marketing and user experience, of our services for young people.
- ▶ The Missing People Choir provides a special space for anyone affected to sing together.
- ▶ Being involved in the design and delivery of our training for professionals and events for professionals.



### SPOTLIGHT ON BBC GARDENERS' WORLD LIVE

Families with a missing loved one joined Missing People staff and volunteers at BBC Gardeners' World Live in Birmingham. Together, they unveiled a garden border called 'Missing You' to commemorate all missing loved ones.

The border was designed and created by a group of families of missing people, and those who had sadly died whilst missing. They wanted to come together to mark the charity's 30th anniversary.

Their garden border conveyed the much needed moments of escape and refuge that tending to a garden can provide, and the healing power of nature. It also captured the difficult emotional journey experienced by families of missing people, fluctuating between feelings of hope, loss and reflection.

To read more and see photos, please [click here](#)



# Thank you

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