

**Scottish National Missing Person's Framework  
Implementation Project**  
**Project Report (Full) Year Five**  
**April 2023 - March 2024**

**missing  
people**

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

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## Project Background

In 2023-24, there were 18,000 reports of missing incidents in Scotland<sup>1</sup>. 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 occasions. 31% of police recorded missing incidents had a mental health flag<sup>2</sup>. 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 missing. 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 recorded. The most common cause of death for missing people is suicide.

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. In 2023 the National Working Group began work on a update of the National Missing Person's Framework, this is expected to be launched in Autumn 2024.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Police Scotland and NCA Missing Person Data Reports

<sup>2</sup> 2021-22 NCA data

Some excellent first steps have been made since The Framework was launched, 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.<sup>3</sup>

The Scottish Government's Community Safety 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.

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 additional 3 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. These areas 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

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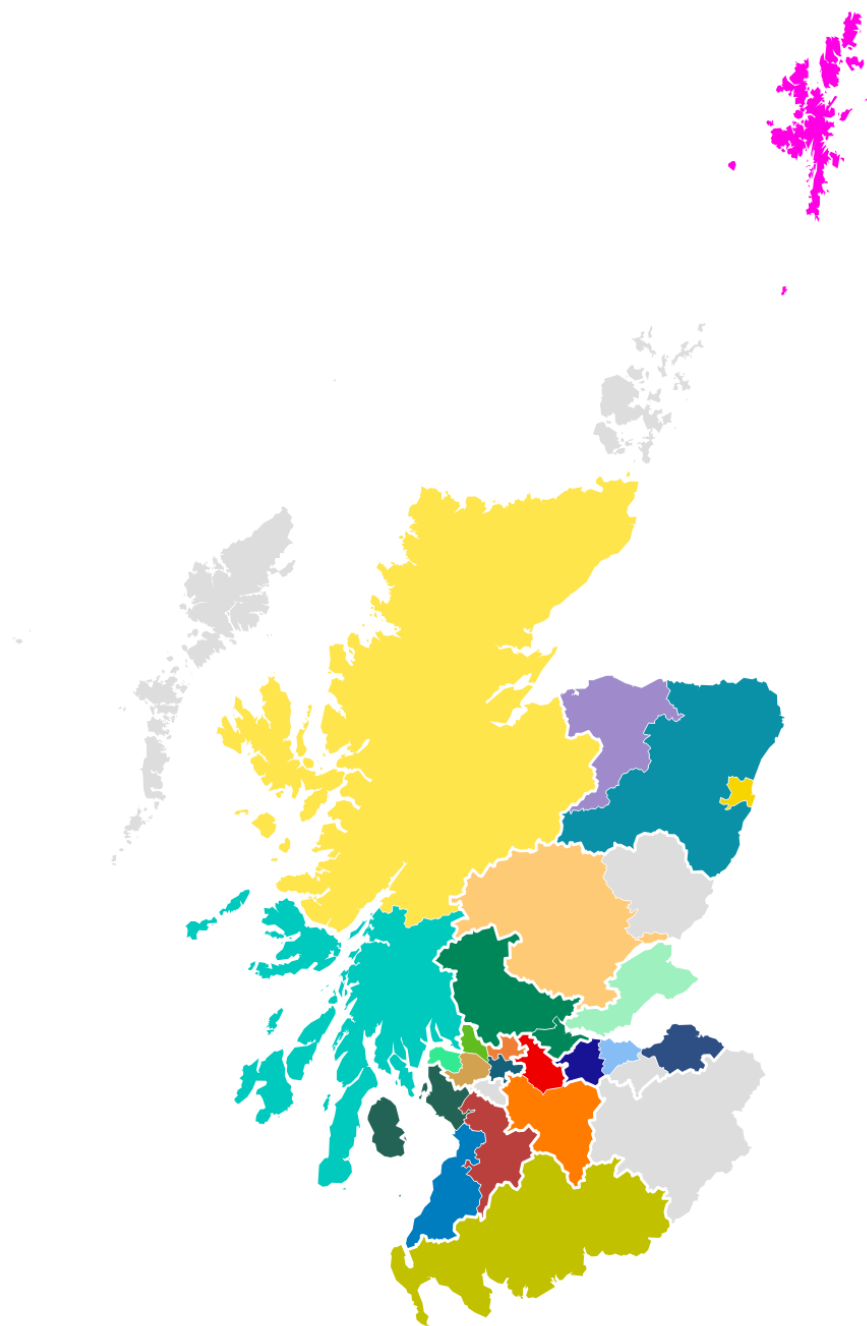
<sup>3</sup> These resources are available here: <https://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk/scotland/resources>.

authorities in both Forth Valley (Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire) and Tayside (Dundee and Perth & Kinross) which brought the total to 9 local areas.

In April 2023, Scottish Government provided £145,000 of funding to Missing People, which enabled us to maintain our two National Coordinators and work with an additional 7 local areas across Scotland for 12 months. These areas were Shetland; Highlands; L Division encompassing Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire; South Lanarkshire; East Ayrshire; Inverclyde, and Renfrewshire. 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

Aberdeen City
  Aberdeenshire
  Argyll and Bute
  Dumfries and Galloway
  East Ayrshire
  East Dunbartonshire
  East Lothian
  Edinburgh
  Fife
  Forth Valley
  Glasgow City
  Highland
  Inverclyde
  Moray
  North Ayrshire
  North Lanarkshire
  Renfrewshire
  Shetland Islands
  South Ayrshire
  South Lanarkshire
  Tayside
  West Dunbartonshire
  West Lothian



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## Missing People's Role

With over 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. It was designed to complement Scottish Government 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: Project Overview and Findings

### Project Aims

Similarly to previous years, the project aims were as follows:

- To ensure that local partnerships and agencies in 7 areas (additional to those local areas we worked with in Years 1-4) understand the priorities and their responsibilities for improving the local response to missing persons and their families in line with The Framework:
  - 4 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 that local partnerships and agencies continue to be more aware of good and innovative practice in preventing missing, inclusive of the areas we have already worked with in Years 1 - 4.

The project team continued to report to and receive input from The National Working Group on Missing Persons throughout Year 5 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 the 7 new 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 areas in which they demonstrate good practice around missing children and/or adults and their families, and tell us about areas for development that they thought would benefit from Missing People's expertise in supporting the implementation of The Framework.

In April 2023 we held three online information sessions for multi-agency leads to learn more about the benefits of the Framework project and the application process. These information sessions were well

attended, and the National Coordinators had follow-up meetings areas after these sessions to provide support on completing the application.

**Shetland, Highlands, L Division (encompassing Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire), South Lanarkshire, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire and East Ayrshire** were the local areas chosen, based on where Missing People could add the most value across all areas, within the project time frame. The decision was made to support 8 areas as Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire are within the same Police Scotland Division, covering both local areas is beneficial to the division as a whole.

## Project Activity & Key Outputs

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

### Work with local areas

- Continue the 2 National Coordinator roles as a point of contact for local areas in Years 1 to 4 and develop relationships with partners in new local areas to provide support and guidance to them throughout the project in Year 5
- Support professionals to implement The National Framework by mapping, reviewing and auditing current local approaches in the seven new local areas
- Continue to support professionals across areas from Year 1 to 4 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 good practice sharing

- 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 worked with in Year 5.
- Update our online Return Discussion training to be trauma-informed. When conducting a Return Discussion it is important to be aware that the person you are speaking to may be affected by trauma due to events which have occurred both before and/or during their missing episode.
- Continue to provide online Return Discussion training for multi-agency professionals working with missing adults and children
- Contribute to the update of The National Missing Persons Framework to be launched in 2024, at the Working Group.
- Deliver a fourth annual hybrid conference to share good and promising innovative practice for professionals involved in preventing and responding to missing incidents.
- Maintain and promote the online Professionals Forum for professionals to discuss local issues and share best practice around missing, which was developed in Year 4.

In June 2023, Missing People created a Senior Coordinator role to lead the project. Our previous National Coordinator, Emma, was successful in applying for this role. Due to additional staff changes, in October 2023 Missing People recruited a new National Coordinator, Emily, who is based in Perth. Both the Senior National Coordinator and National Coordinator provided a crucial presence in Scotland and Emma and



Emily have been able to continue to build relationships with across Scotland in additional local areas during Year 4 of the project.

### Local area in-depth support

Missing People provided in-depth support for professionals to implement The Framework in 4 of the 8 local areas – Shetland, Highlands and L Division (encompassing Argyll and Bute and West 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 for each area with input from conversations about frontline practice with professionals from Police Scotland, NHS, education, local authorities, and private care settings. These 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 Lanarkshire, Inverclyde, East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. 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; delivering an awareness raising session on identifying indicators that someone could be at risk of going missing and best practice responses to support someone who has returned from a missing episode, and presenting on Missing People's core services.

## Key Achievements

The project team achieved the following:

- Workshops with **145 professionals** to map the respective journeys of missing adults and children to clarify roles and responsibilities locally. Learning was shared with attendees in a summary document.
- **143 professionals** across Scotland completed our online Return Discussion training for adults and children.
- In February 2024 we delivered our National Good Practice Conference, which was attended by **140 multi-agency professionals** online, and in person.
- **114 professionals** attended awareness raising sessions about missing children and young people, the risks associated with missing, and effective responses to missing. These topics were grounded in the good practice 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:

- 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, additional support, and early years settings.
- Successful multi-agency working between local partners to appropriately support Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking 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.
- Consistent use of The Herbert Protocol.
- Areas adopting The Philomena Protocol for young people residing in children's houses.
- Effective multi-agency working in rural and remote communities.
- Effective mental health pathways, particularly for young people, and the adoption of trauma-informed practice in various local settings.

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 outline the 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 between agencies.
- A lack of knowledge around available support services for missing persons and their families.

## Project Findings: Good Practice Key Themes

### Multi-agency working in rural and remote communities.

This year the project was able to engage with rural and remote communities within Scotland. For example, the population for the whole of the Shetland Islands is estimated to be 22,870 compared to cities such as Glasgow which has a population of 1,698,000. Through our work with Highlands, Argyll and Bute, and particularly The Shetland Islands, we were able to gain a better understanding of how local multi-agency partners consider resources within the community when it comes to the response to and prevention of missing, examples which are outlined in our Findings and Recommendations reports for

these areas. Through this work we engaged with the Coastguard, Water Rescue, and Mountain Rescue, who contributed to our project activities in these areas.

## Area 1

In Area 1, adult services, Police Scotland, and the NHS, including mental health services and occupational health, work closely together to put in safety measures for adults with cognitive impairments or those lacking capacity who are at risk of going missing. Through the Adult Services Initial Inquiry Procedure, social workers will support a family to make plans and safeguarding arrangements to prevent missing episodes for adults at risk. Occupational health play a key role in prevention planning by implementing safety measures such as Telecare, exit sensors, and the Buddy System which is a GPS tracker. These types of prevention measures are crucial in the Area 1 Islands where the weather and exposure to the elements can put someone at high risk during a missing episode.

Due to extreme weather conditions and distances from the mainland to the outer isles, multi-agency partners in Area 1 recognise the importance of utilising resources from outside traditional care services to ensure that the response is timely, and the person is found. Therefore, the Coastguard is included in care and prevention planning meetings for adults at risk living on the outer isles of Area 1.

On the outer islands of Area 1, there is no police presence and a population of approximately 200 people. Therefore, this locality faces additional challenges regarding a lack of police resource should someone go missing. The distance to travel to some of these locations will require the use of a ferry and can take up to 3 hours. The community and police in Area 1 have demonstrated excellent resilience to these challenges, where professionals who are already in the locality such as doctors, nurses, and fire staff will assist in the search for a vulnerable missing person along with family and the wider community to support the police.

Furthermore, these remote areas can present additional challenges and dangers in terms of being close to cliffs, subject to poor weather conditions, and be of proximity to the sea. Police have therefore also built strong partnerships with the Coast Guard, Fire Service and Mountain Rescue to boost resources and locate a missing person as quickly, safely, and efficiently as possible.

## Areas 2&3

In cases where someone has gone missing on the water, the local area Partnership Approach to Water Safety hold regular meetings to address water safety concerns regarding any incident and discuss measures that can be put into place to mitigate risk and improve water safety. Partnership Approach to Water Safety (PAWS) is a multi-agency approach across Scotland that is dedicated to improving water safety that combines the knowledge and experience of those individuals and organisations that best understand, and can manage, risks in and around water.

## Older Adults with Dementia

## Area 2

After a missing incident, similar to a Return Discussion, local authority care home staff hold 'Caring Conversations' to identify any push/pull factors that may have caused the person to become Missing.

Staff use creative tools such as My Home Life which incorporate visual aids to support a person to share their feelings and thoughts. In addition, any person diagnosed with Dementia who is reported to the police as missing and returns will receive information about the [Purple Alert](#) directly from the Police Scotland Preventions and Interventions Team. The information is provided directly to the person, family member, care staff or any other relevant person. Information includes signposting to the Alzheimer Scotland website, explaining the Dementia Safeguarding Scheme, and providing a dementia fob. Police Scotland will also signpost people to the [Meet Adam website](#), which is endorsed by Alzheimer Scotland for families to explore technology in assisting them safeguarding their loved one.

#### Area 4

The Herbert Protocol is widely used in the Area 4. Local police work closely with adult services and care homes to ensure that Protocol forms are kept fully up to date at all times. There is a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) who sees to this on a regular basis and alerts all officers to any changes in individual's circumstances

#### Area 3

The NHS Post Diagnostic Team visit those recently diagnosed with Dementia to introduce The Herbert Protocol with families and carers who are encouraged to use it. The team ensure that people are keeping the information up to date, including a recent photograph, past addresses and other familiar content related to the person. These procedures ensure that carers and family members have all the relevant information required by the police immediately to hand, to prevent unnecessary delays to the missing investigation.

#### Vulnerable Adults

#### Area 5

In Area 5, mental health and addiction services work with a Vulnerable Person Agenda. This agenda considers an understanding of the person through a multi-agency approach. Looking at missing through a Vulnerable Person Agenda lens allows partners to recognise, not only that the risk of a vulnerable person going missing will be significantly higher, but that the person is more likely to come to harm. Area 5 have an outreach worker whose role is to support a person with addictions. Their role is to support people with more complex issues such as frequent episodes of missing, have taken a near fatal overdose, and face additional barriers to accessing support.

In addition, Area 5 hold complex case discussions where multi-agency partners have discussions about how best to support individuals who are vulnerable and at risk of going missing or have returned from a missing episode. Area 5 hold hub weekly meetings where multi-agency partners from homelessness, addictions and mental health come together to share relevant information about people of concern in the community who have either gone missing or go missing frequently. The group provides a space for agencies to share any relevant information regarding when an adult was last seen, and which services are providing support.

## Area 2

The *Missing Person Procedure for Area 2 Homeless Person Unit* outlines how staff at the Homeless Unit will respond to missing persons. This document demonstrates good practice by:

- Outlining the definition of a missing person as per The National Missing Persons Framework.
- Outlining the high, medium, and low risk levels as per The Framework.
- Clearly outlining key steps that should be taken at each stage, including when to contact the police, and the person's relatives/named persons.
- Encouraging the use of a form like The Philomena Protocol, which has been adapted for use within the Homeless Person Unit. Staff have been trained how to use the form to work in partnership with the police to locate their residents as quickly as possible should they go missing.

## Health

Health is a key agency through which a person can be supported, both in the prevention of a missing episode, and 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 4

The Hospital has bespoke care plans for each patient that outlines when they can leave the hospital and at what stage they will be reported as a missing person. There are regular meetings between Police Scotland and NHS staff to provide advice on closer monitoring of patients are repeatedly going missing. Information sharing between police and the NHS is strong and police have shared that they are able to respond quicker and more effectively due to effective local information sharing protocols.

Police work with hospital staff in the acute mental health ward to hold Return Discussions with a returned person. This is allowing services to support the adult who has returned from the missing episode and capture information that may identify any underlying causes of missing, triggers, and any ongoing risks of harm.

## Area 2 and Area 4

NHS is using Missing Family Alerts, which enhances the circulation of information about children who have 'disappeared from view,' and for whom there may be concerns of 'significant harm.' Within this protocol, the definition of a '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 respect 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.

## Multi-agency working for vulnerable children and young people

### Area 6

A local Missing Young Person's Group meets weekly with representation from relevant statutory organisations. The group focuses 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, along with a lens of contextual safeguarding. Within this group there is a focus on multi-agency prevention planning. It was agreed that in cases where a young person is repeatedly missing, multi-agency meetings and plans can allow for additional responses beyond general missing processes to be considered – for example, the discussion of care plans, risks to the young person, and additional support needs. These meetings also allow the local agencies to discuss a more flexible response to a young person who may have specific needs.

### Area 5

In East Ayrshire there are multi-agency groups where themes and trends around missing are discussed. These include the multi-agency child protection and Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAHMS) meetings where missing is discussed, in terms of prevention and support for the child or young person. On a strategic level, the High Vulnerability Group (a subgroup of the child protect committee) looks at addressing local incidents of missing, trafficking and exploitation. There is a practice network for private providers that allows multi-agency partners to be alerted when a child or young person has recently been accommodated in East Ayrshire, enabling services to allow for additional responses beyond general missing processes to be considered – for example, the discussion of care plans, risks to the young person, additional support needs etc.

### Area 4

Aberlour's Guardianship Project is undertaking significant work to improve the multi-agency response and support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who are at risk of going missing. Children's services now have a dedicated social worker that is allocated to all UASC and regular meetings take place between multi-agency partners about the best way to support UASC, locally. Aberlour's Guardianship Project are having conversations with young people at the beginning of a support relationship around the risks of going missing, and the project clearly outlines the steps their guardians would take if they suspected a young person was missing. Police Scotland liaise directly with the UASC social worker in Children's Services to ensure that the Philomena protocol is completed upon the young person's arrival into the area.

There is strong focus on prevention of CCE for young people who are at risk of going missing, as this an area of concern for young people. There is clear guidance and resources for professionals who are supporting a child or young person at risk of CCE which demonstrates that the multi-agency partners are

aware of the link between CCE and missing. There is strong cross network information sharing on young people who are risk of Child Sexual Exploitation and CCE through The Place meetings where young people who are most at risk of exploitation are discussed. Partners reported that professionals working with young people are building their awareness of CCE. Staff in education have had awareness raising sessions on CCE to build their understanding that young people who regularly go missing from school could be at risk of this form of exploitation.

## Area 2

The Missing Person Local Partnership Protocol Memorandum of Understanding between Police Scotland Area 2 Health and Social Care Partnership and Area 3 Health and Social Care Partnership is a clear and comprehensive document that sets out the process and procedure that should be followed when a child or young person is missing or absent from local authority care. The document demonstrates good local practice in the following ways:

- There is a clear definition of missing taken from The National Missing Persons Framework.
- A clear explanation of the Not at Home procedure and how to appropriately use it.
- The section on risk assessment includes an explanation of low, medium and high-risk levels as per the National Missing Person Framework.
- The importance of information sharing and a multi-agency response at the early stages of a child or young person going missing is highlighted.
- States that a Return Discussion should take place upon the missing person's return in order to identify risk factors and push and pull factors which may contribute to a child or young person going missing, are outlined.
- The inclusion of local flowcharts that clearly outline each agency's responsibilities for a Looked After Child that goes missing or is 'Not at Home', including a thorough overview of risk assessment and steps for each agency.

## Supporting Children Missing from Children's Houses

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. All areas have adopted the Police Scotland Missing From Local Authority Care Procedure and the Philomena Protocol had been rolled out in 6 of the local authority areas we worked in during year 5.

*Children accounted for 59 per cent of missing person investigations in Scotland between 2022 and 2023, of which 45 per cent were looked-after. 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 3

Children's Houses in Area 3 have Missing Person Prevention Plans in place and use the Not At Home Protocol. The Prevention Plan is a comprehensive document to ensure staff and agencies involved have an accurate and up to date profile of the young person who is missing. The form includes prompt questions for the professional completing the form to ensure as much information is collected as possible. The form includes information on the young person's mental health and support involved; past behaviour (including details of previous missing episodes), and the inclusion of information relating to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). This is crucial for prevention work and delivering the most effective support for a child following a missing episode.

### Area 6

Police Scotland and a private care provider, are working closely together to prevent missing episodes from the children's houses. The private provider and Police Scotland are developing an information sharing agreement to ensure information can be shared effectively to locate a missing young person as quickly as possible. Regular meetings are taking place between partners to look at prevention and planning for young people residing in the children's houses.

### Area 7

Partners in education work closely with children's houses to ensure that a young person is provided with effective support upon return from a missing episode. Young people will be offered the choice of who conducts their Return Discussion, which could be a member of staff at the children's house or a member of school staff. Guidance teachers will offer emotional support and discussion on any required supports/modifications to school life for the young person, as well referring them to additional support if required.

### Area 4

Staff supporting young people at the children's house operated by a private provider are clear that missing as a risk indicator of a child or young person being more at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation (CSE) or child criminal exploitation (CCE). Staff are confident in identifying signs of both CSE and CCE and are proactive in working with multi agency partners to support the young person.

The Philomena Protocol has been rolled out to local authority residential homes in the Area 4 and staff have been trained how to use the form to work in partnership with the police to locate young people as quickly as possible should they go missing.

### Area 1

The Area 1 Multi Agency Procedure for National and Local Missing Children/Family Alerts sets out clear roles and responsibilities for handling national and local requests for information regarding children or



families who are regarded as missing from a known address, referred to as 'alerts' in the document. Good practice in the document includes:

- A clear definition of missing taken from The National Missing Persons Framework.
- A clear outline of local information sharing protocol with key agencies such as other local authorities, education, homeless services and out of hours social services.
- A clear process for agencies to follow when they receive an alert.
- A list of the Missing Children and Missing Families Co-ordinators from each agency.

## Education

### Area 3

Partners in education demonstrated excellent practice when responding to children and young people going missing, in line with the National Missing Person Framework. Education provide support to the family of the missing person during the investigation, coordinating with multi-agency partners to ensure the young person is located as soon as possible, and ensuring that information is handed over to police and social work when the school day is over. Good practice from education is consistent when the missing young person is located and has returned from the missing episode – school staff offer the young person a Return Discussion and explore any required support or modifications to school life.

### Area 2

*The Lost/ Missing Child Guidance* aims to ensure that children and young people are supervised to ensure their safety within educational premises and when on outings /trips. This policy applies to all children and young people within education. This guidance for 'lost/missing children' in primary, special and early years settings should be considered good practice for managing situations where children fail to attend their school or 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.

## Mental health and trauma informed approaches

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<sup>4</sup>, 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

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Missing Persons – understanding, planning, responding 2007 Woolnough P et al, Lost from View 2003, Biehal, N et al

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

Multi-agency partners in Area 5 have good working relationships with third sector mental health organisations and recognise the value of these partners in supporting communities at a local level and delivering outcomes that statutory services can find challenging to deliver on their own.

### Area 3

Staff within children's houses in Area 3 demonstrate trauma-informed practice when supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. Partners recognise the factors which may impact on an UASC's unwillingness to have a Return Discussion but are proactive in exploring how best they can support a young person when they return from a missing episode. Staff in the children's houses recognise that traumatic life events and stressors can lead to people going missing and exposure to harm while missing can lead to further trauma on an individual.

There is a wide range of mental health support available for children and young people in Area 3. Partners in education highlighted that there is a focus on prevention, as evidenced by a number of programmes with a focus on mental health and wellbeing.

### Area 4

Staff within residential care homes highlighted that access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for all children is very difficult, with long wait times for initial assessments. However, it was mentioned that staff in residential care homes now have access to regular consultations with the Looked After Child Team within CAMHS. These consultations are beneficial in circumstances where a young person is struggling with their mental health but might not want or feel ready to engage with mental health services. The team within CAMHS can give the staff advice and guidance on how to best support the young person they are concerned about. It was discussed that this has increased staff confidence in carrying a higher level of risk with the young people they are caring for, this has sustained placements over a longer period and has prevented some young people moving to secure care.

## 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. It was identified that there was a need to improve multi-agency working with private care providers and hospitals in all areas.

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. The following are recommendations based on the National Missing Persons Framework that the project shared with areas where multi-agency working needed to be improved.

### 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 multiagency 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

Missing People have created a process through which areas could apply for our support. In **Year 5** we introduced information sessions for local area leads to attend to learn more about the benefits of the project and apply for support. 8 local areas across Scotland submitted applications in which they were each asked to identify areas of good practice around missing, and areas of practice for development. As we received more applications than space on the project this enabled the project team and national working group to be informed about local missing practice at the earliest possible opportunity and decide which areas would receive support in year five. Throughout the project, oversight from The National Advisory Group continued to be invaluable for our approach within all local areas and with multiple agencies.

As in previous years, crucial to the successful outcomes of Year 5 of the project was a high level of multi-agency engagement from relevant sectors in all areas. 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.

Missing People continued to be flexible and bespoke in our approach in response to all areas requiring different kinds of support. Throughout the delivery of the project if we notice a gap for an area we are able to offer additional support and project activities, such as awareness raising on missing children and young people and good practice responses. For example, after the delivery of our Missing Children and Young People Journey Mapping Workshop for Area 4, we were invited by the child protection lead for Education to attend a meeting for the Designated Child Protection Coordinators (DCPC) in schools. The project team delivered a presentation on missing children and young people, the risks/harms associated with going missing, and how professionals in schools can use The National Missing Person Framework. This session was attended by over 60 DPCPs working in education.

In March 2023 the project’s National Coordinators have worked closely with NHS Education Scotland’s National Trauma Training Programme to update our online Return Discussion training for professionals. This means that multi-agency professionals who work with missing adults, children and young people across Scotland are now able to access free training on how to deliver effective Return Discussions in a trauma-informed way. Professionals will be able to confidently speak to adults and children and young people about their mental health and respond to any disclosures of harm with a safe and supportive approach. This will indirectly lead to higher engagement from missing persons on their return, and the increased identification of crime and harm – missing persons are likely to feel more comfortable disclosing the circumstances around their missing episode/s.

In February 2024 we delivered our National Good Practice Conference, which was attended by 140 multi-agency professionals online, and in person. The conference showcased the good practice from areas we had worked with during Year 4 of the project (2022-2023), Missing People’s free services available in Scotland, and research on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, relevant to some of the local areas we have worked with in year five.

Additionally, previous conference feedback from 2023 included professionals asking for the next conference to include information about support for older people who are at risk of going missing and information and resources on Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). This year in 2024, we were able to provide two break-out sessions on both subjects by inviting Alzheimer’s Scotland to facilitate a session

on the Purple Alert and the National Serious Organised Crime Interventions Unit to facilitate the session on CCE.

Throughout Year 5, we continued to share good practice across different local areas. The Toolkit has enabled Missing People to do this beyond the areas we have worked with each year and allowed us to share good practice across the whole of Scotland. The Toolkit has been updated with good practice examples from local areas in Year 5, and from March 2023-April 2024 had **1621 visits** to its homepage. This was a significant increase in comparison to previous numbers. On viewing Missing People's website analytics, **the number of visitors to the Toolkit steadily increased** during, after, and around the time of the Good Practice Conference at the end of February 2024.

The project team continue to be a contact point for areas we have supported in previous years who get in touch for support and information on missing in Scotland. For example:

- Learning and development managers from local authorities Valley for regular reports on who from their areas have completed Return Discussions.
- We get contacted by Education for guidance on Children Missing from Education (CME) procedures. We provide guidance and sign post them to the Scottish Government CME team.

Continuation of the National Coordinator roles 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.

In total we have successfully reached over **2108 professionals** through our project activities in Scotland, including those from local authority child and adult services, Police Scotland, the NHS, Third Sector Organisations such as Barnardo's and Aberlour, and Education.

## Local Area Successes

### Area 6

- In Area 6, our in-person awareness raising session on missing and good practice was attended by **28 professionals** who received input on the indicators that someone could be at risk of going missing and good practice responses to support someone who has returned from a missing episode.

- The private care provider, and Police Scotland, have set up a regular operational meeting on missing to focus on young people who are at risk of going missing 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 young people who are missing from the children's houses.
- As a result of working with the private provider, Missing People were asked to provide feedback on their Return Discussion form. We provided feedback and a good practice example of an effective Return Discussion form. This feedback and relevant changes have been incorporated into an updated form.

## Area 7

Area 7 have implemented the recommendations that Missing People suggested into their Children and Young People Missing Person Protocol. The Protocol now includes:

- Clarification of the difference between a Safe and Well Check and a Return Discussion.
- A process that clearly establishes who may be assigned to deliver Return Discussions in different scenarios, and how the completion and quality assurance of these Return Discussions will be monitored.
- A Return Discussion pro-forma that outlines questions that will establish the push and pull factors which may contribute to a child or young person going missing.
- The inclusion of Child Criminal Exploitation within the definition table, when previously only Child Sexual Exploitation was mentioned.
- A clear list of each agency's role and responsibilities during a missing episode and upon return.

## Area 8

- Children's houses will be implementing training for staff on The Philomena Protocol to encourage wider use of this protocol in response to missing children and young people.
- Area 8 are establishing a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) to progress Missing People's recommendations and develop the local Missing Person Protocol.
- The local authority are developing training on missing for staff in the local Health and Social Care Partnership.
- The implementation of a roll out of Missing People's Return Discussion training for Missing Children and Young People and adults to identified staff in the Health and Social Care Partnership.
- Information on Missing People's free support services in Scotland and a link to Missing People's Good Practice Toolkit are now included on the council website.

## Area 5

- Findings and recommendations made by Missing People through the project will be addressed through two separate short-life working groups, one for children's services and one for adult services.
- Implementing a roll out of Missing People's Return Discussion training for Missing Children and Young People for staff within local authority run children's houses.

- Out of Hours Social Work will updating their procedures to include procedures around missing and signposting to Missing People services.

#### Area 4

- Created a short-life working group to take forward Missing People's recommendations and develop a local Multi-Agency Missing Person Protocol.
- Following our Journey Mapping Workshop for professionals working with children and young people, partners have identified the Barnardo's Rise Service as an ideal partner to be delivering Return Discussions for children and young people, as there is already an information sharing agreement in place.
- Missing People's recommendations on the importance of multi-agency information sharing around missing adults will be taken forward by the Community Awareness Subgroup that falls under Adult Protection.

## Feedback

A feedback survey was completed at the end of the project by 8 areas. We asked those who responded to the survey how straightforward they found the process of engagement with the project, feedback includes:

- "Emma and the team were very engaging and made the process very easy. Regular updates and explanations throughout."



- “Communication with the representatives of the project was consistent and straightforward. The plans were clear and the objectives realistic and achievable.”
- “Everyone in the team were very responsive and helpful and their support helped galvanise us.”
- “Communication was clear and planned thoughtfully throughout the involvement. The process was straightforward and shared before and during the engagement. Emma and Emily were always on hand to answer questions and guide us through the whole thing.”
- “The team have been extremely helpful in guiding us through the process, giving advice and guidance and supporting our development.”

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

- “Communications were excellent. There was never any doubt as to what was happening, what the next stage was and what the goal was.”
- “Missing People supported us to discuss our areas of strength and improvement. Focused group discussions and helped to facilitate these discussions. Benchmarked us against the national framework and provided useful resources to support local improvement activity.”
- “Missing People 'engaged' professionals. You demonstrated clearly your expertise around the subject of Missing People. You made us think about how we could do better.”
- “Involving strategic and front line staff has helped develop relationships locally. Practical examples at the Journey Mapping exercise were really useful.”
- “Good communication and understanding of other work pressures. Missing People Scotland did all the work.”
- “Clear communication, sharing of the process throughout and very personable and easy to engage with and ask questions during our time. It was evident that there was a lot of expertise and knowledge to share, which we found extremely valuable. It was welcomed that we were given ideas and feedback and tools that were easily accessible and 'quick wins' for us to share with our workforce to improve practice around missing people. I thoroughly enjoyed being involved in the project.”

## 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	60	9 of 15
The identification of areas of work that require support, guidance, and / or training to better support missing persons and their families	74	11 of 15

A better understanding of Missing People's services, including the charity's 24/7 support service	67	10 of 15
A better understanding of best practice around missing in Scotland	74	11 of 15
A better understanding of the National Missing Persons Framework	80	12 of 15

## Conference feedback

Overall conference delegates rated the conference **4.6 out of 5** (1 being poor, 5 being good).

We asked attendees whether they heard about any new good practice around missing at the conference. Responses included:

- “Yes, the education checklist, the support services the tools for talking to S1-S3 being launched on 18th March. The good practice guidance for UASC will be helpful too.”
- “Alzheimer’s Scotland technology sounds great & look forward to this becoming available across the country.”
- “Loads. Learning from Forth Valley stood out.”
- “The Not At Home model is an excellent example of an organisation being able to confidently apply risk assessment to keep young people safe and protected without the automatic need to contact police and report missing. This helps nurture positive relationships between staff and young people and helps reduce unnecessary police involvement in a service that is already under immense pressure.”
- “Missing - various schemes & programmes they have I was totally unaware of.”

We also asked attendees what they will do differently in practice because of what they have learned from the conference. Responses included:

- “Ensure The Missing Person Framework information is incorporated into Adult Support and Protection guidance for staff.”
- “I will be asking our public protection committee to consider having missing as the main theme for our local Public Protection Week in 2025, to help raise awareness.”
- “I will contact other areas to find out about implementing some of the good practice I heard about today. I will raise awareness of the support services and improve info on website held locally I will use some of the learning tools showcased today.”
- “[Establish a] short life working group to revisit protocol/risk assessment and training on Return Discussions”.
- “Hold Briefing sessions on missing with staff to raise awareness”.
- “Develop clearer processes for collaborative work.”

Other feedback included:

- “This was a very informative and interesting day, very enjoyable and very well organised.”

- “All presenters had something to offer but personal accounts from lived experience speakers were exceptional”
- “There are various schemes and programmes they have [that] I was totally unaware of.”

### Feedback from Return Discussion Training

In April 2023 we updated our Return Discussion training in line with Scotland’s National Trauma Transformation Programme. This means that multi-agency professionals who support children and young people on their return from missing are now able to access free training on how to deliver effective Return Discussions in trauma-informed way. We have received the following feedback from professionals who have completed this training relevant to this impact:

*“This training has been beneficial in reinforcing the importance of completing return paperwork following a period of a young person being “missing” from their 12 placement and to always ensure I am working in a trauma informed practice and that the voice of the child/young person is always the most important voice.”*

*“I will listen and be non-judgemental and understand how important what happened before a young person goes missing. I understand better the effects of trauma better, and this will inform my practice.”*

### Other feedback from areas we worked with in Year 5

Following the support provided by The Framework Implementation Project, West Lothian who we worked with in 2022-2023 have told us this year that they have seen a **33% reduction in missing children and young people** being reported over the last year.

When the project started working with partners in West Lothian there was a group already set up to discuss missing young people. Partners reported this group was poorly attended, the representation was not multi-agency, and it did not have a clear remit. This year the senior manager for children and justice services told us that being involved with the Framework Implementation Project:

*“Had a significant impact in helping us understand what the gaps were, which partners we needed around the table and what was and was not working at a local level. It supported us to ensure we had in place consistent guidance and accessible training to support our work force to work in partnership to reduce the incidents of missing people. The result has been increased appropriate membership of our group, consistent guidance, training which has been rolled out across social policy (which included social workers, residential care staff, foster carers, out of hours services) education, police, residential houses both internally and externally. Improved partnership working has been noted and a focus on child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation has begun to emerge. We are keen to progress to look at a community safety hub using a contextual safeguarding approach and planning for this has begun. We found the focus and direction provided from the framework implementation project along with the report with recommendations to be very helpful in our work.”*

In another area we supported in Year 4 of the project. Forth Valley went onto create a SLWG with multi-agency membership from three local authorities with the aim of progressing the recommendations made by Missing People. The SLWG has now ended and has led to the development of a multi-agency Missing Person Forth Valley Protocol. Return Discussions are now completed by the best person and agency for the returned person, and a new multi-agency operational and strategic group has been created. The group is chaired by Police Scotland and continues building on existing local good practice and multi-agency collaboration to support missing people and their families. The Police Scotland chair of the SLWG told us:

*“The review and recommendations have given us an opportunity to explore improved partnership working, a better understanding of how a collaborative approach can enhance the prevention and investigation of those who go missing and updated guidance and training opportunities across Forth Valley. The feedback from the group and the respective Child and Adult Protection Committees has been positive and it is hoped that on full implementation our service users will experience improved service delivery across the partnership in Forth Valley.”*

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The project has found consistently being able to engage with the NHS in all local areas a challenge. This includes being able to obtain policies and procedure documentation for mapping and reviewing purposes and identifying key professional leads to be involved in the project. Although this did not impact on overall project delivery. We have continued to share good practice from Edinburgh, Tayside and Glasgow around reducing missing from hospital incidents with the new areas.

The project’s Professionals’ Forum had been underused, despite the team promoting it and holding engagement events. Project learning told us that professionals prefer to use the Good Practice Toolkit in their own time to access information on missing or speak with the National Coordinators directly. The project has previously held webinars for professionals, and these resulted in good engagement from professionals. Therefore, we have decided to include 3 webinars for professionals in Year 6 of the project. These webinars will be on different topics based on issues that professionals have shared with us through audits and journey mapping workshops and will facilitate a discussion of key challenges and good practice.

The uptake of Return Discussion training for missing adults is significantly lower than for missing children and young people with 14% of the total number of Return Discussion trainings completed by professionals for training for working with adults. Throughout our work with local areas, we see a lower number of local protocols encompassing multi-agency support for missing adults than for children and young people in general. There is a clear need to raise the prioritisation of both children and adults missing from home who are not open to support services, and of missing adults more generally. In our work with Year 6 areas we will continue to raise this as an area of improvement and encourage the uptake of Return Discussions for adults.

