



Making every child matter ... everywhere

# Scoping Report on Missing and Abducted Children

2011



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## Executive Summary

This scoping report provides an overview of what is known about the nature and scale of the multi-faceted series of problems collectively known as 'missing children' and what the current response is, both locally and nationally. It also explains what role the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre will play in supporting the good work already being undertaken in the statutory and voluntary sectors and how it will work with practitioners in those sectors to protect and safeguard more children and tackle those who would seek to abuse them.

CEOP intends to bring a different approach to this problem; one that seeks to use the limited resources available nationally to target problems that have a national/international complexion; require specific oversight and coordination; suggest some form of serious and/or organised criminality; and recognises that it is more economic to provide specialist resources at a national level to support local activity. Our approach will be partnership-driven, working with existing national and local organisations that already do valuable work and identifying new partners who may be able to help. Our aim will not be to replicate that already being done but to deliver complementary activity.

The new CEOP capability will provide:

- educational resources and awareness for children and their parent/careers;
- training for the police;
- support to police operations through targeted research and analysis (for example development of problem profiles on nature and scale of the issues and emerging trends);
- operational support for forces and missing children by extending the CEOP 'one stop shop' to include online missing children resources; and
- assurance that co-ordination arrangements and capability are in place to manage complex or high profile missing children cases.

A missing child is a child at risk from harm, irrespective of the length of time they are away from home or a caring environment. The causes are many, whether that it is simply losing them in a crowd or a busy shopping centre, through to family breakdown, becoming detached from society, looking for a better life in another country, being abducted from the street or lured by a 'stranger' on the internet. In 2009/10 there were an estimated 360,000<sup>1</sup> missing person incidents, of which approximately 230,000 (64%) related to a child under the age of 18. In a CEOP child trafficking report from 2010<sup>2</sup>, of the 287 children identified as potentially trafficked, 17% (50) of those children had gone missing from care at some point and 15% (42) were still recorded as missing. In 2004, a Home Office study of 768 incidents that were recorded as child abductions, 56% (447) involved a stranger and 23% (183) involved a parental dispute.

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<sup>1</sup> NPIA (2011) *Missing Persons: Data and Analysis 2009/102*

<sup>2</sup> CEOP (2010) *Strategic Threat Assessment, Child Trafficking in the UK*

The missing incident itself represents an acute episode in a child's life which is the consequence of a range of complex factors specific to that individual child. Most missing children return within 24–48 hours; however, for some children and their families there are tragic outcomes. The high-profile cases can easily be recalled, but there are many that do not attract the same attention. There will be painstaking investigations by police and hope given to families by the unceasing efforts of voluntary sector organisations at national and local level to publicise such cases. Even where children do return or are found, often they will have suffered some form of harm while they have been absent. There is emerging consensus which suggests that many of the exploited children identified go missing from home or care on a regular basis, often for short periods. The risks to these children are high, ranging from sexual abuse and exploitation, violence, drug and alcohol addiction, involvement in petty crime, sexually transmitted diseases and, in rare cases, murder.

Children are recognised in law as a vulnerable group in our society who require additional protection from the risks posed to them by different forms of harm – a child-specific response is necessary. This is recognised by the type of action taken in a missing child incident by local services, which are generally treated as high-risk events. The protection and safeguards available to children are different to those in place for adults. The consequences for those who sexually abuse children can be more severe; the management arrangements in place in the UK for these individuals are amongst the most rigorous in the world. The UK is a signatory to many international legal instruments which places certain obligations on it when it comes to its children and their protection.

Inevitably there are costs when a child goes missing; some are incalculable with any degree of precision, such as emotional or societal. This can be demonstrated by the impact on a child's life chances and their future contribution to society or the emotional impact on a family left behind, wondering. Some costs are easier to quantify, such as to the police service; in 2010 this was estimated at £222m<sup>3</sup>. Others can only be guessed at, such as the cost to health, education, children's services and the criminal justice system from dealing with the consequences of a harmed child. However, such estimates, although often large, will always prove challenging to deconstruct to enable attributions of specific costs because of the different causes behind a missing episode and its consequences. However, looking at child abuse alone in 2007, the NSPCC estimated the cost of this to the UK was £12bn<sup>4</sup>; the abuse of children while missing will form a significant proportion of this cost.

Missing children is a significant issue which requires a child-focused response. Much good work is already taking place, but there are gaps where a different approach is required to tackle problems that are cross-boundary and jurisdictional in nature or where it is more economical to deliver a service nationally. CEOP plans are intended to bridge that gap and support those that have responsibility and primacy for the safety of children who live in their communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Report of the Parliamentary Panel (2007) *Safeguarding Children and Young People who Runaway or go Missing from Home or Care*

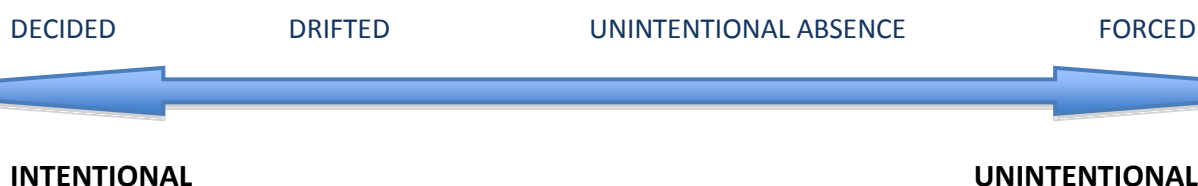
<sup>4</sup> NSPCC evidence to Treasury Select Committee 2007

## Chapter 1: The Nature and Scale of Missing and Abducted Children

### 1.1 The Nature of the Problem

Children who go missing are at risk of harm. When a child goes missing, there is something wrong, often quite seriously, in that child's life. Police are immediately responsible for investigating the case, and along with local authority children's services are responsible for safeguarding the child. The reasons behind missing incidents are varied, where children go missing as a consequence of specific, distinct circumstances. The serious problem of missing and abducted children in the UK is a broad, complex and challenging issue. In the UK, it is poorly defined, lacking in accurate statistics and subject to an array of responses at local, national and international levels. At the same time, there is a pressing and urgent concern for improving responses to cases of missing and abducted children. Being missing from home or a place of residence not only entails several inherent risks for children and young people, but is also a cause and consequence of other grave concerns in any child's life.

Missing children is often subsumed into the overarching issue of missing persons. The leading ACPO working definition of a 'missing person' is "*anyone whose whereabouts is unknown whatever the circumstances of disappearance. They will be considered missing until located and their wellbeing or otherwise is established*".<sup>5</sup> However, given the inherent subjective perspective of the nature of a missing incident, conflicts in the defining criteria of missing persons persist. Who decides when someone is missing? If no one reports a person missing, does it mean they are *not* missing? To a young person who does not want to be found, they may not be missing. Biehal et al<sup>6</sup> highlight a continuum of missing:



The reasons for which children go missing are broad and varied. Some young people will have 'decided' to leave home, others have become increasingly detached for various reasons, while some children are forced or abducted. According to research, children are more likely to be reported missing than adults, even though young people are more likely to go missing wilfully<sup>7</sup>. In research conducted in 2003 by Biehal et al, 70% of children and young people reported missing had done so by choice. This included those who stayed away from home without permission, without intending to leave for good. Furthermore, 4% of the young people had 'drifted' away, 10% were unintentionally missing, and 8% had been forced to leave, which included both parental abduction

<sup>5</sup> ACPO (2005); *Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigations on Missing Persons*, section 1.1

<sup>6</sup> Biehal, Mitchell and Wade (2003) *Lost From View: Missing Persons in the UK*, Bristol: The Policy Press

<sup>7</sup> "Research to Date" Missing People Charity, referring to Biehal, Mitchell and Wade (2003) "*Lost From View: Missing Persons in the UK*", Bristol: The Policy Press

and being thrown out. Children who have been abducted will not necessarily be recorded as missing children.<sup>8</sup>

## Distinction between long term and short term missing children

It is first necessary to make a distinction between cases of long and short term missing children. The vast majority of missing children cases are resolved within a matter of days, if not hours. These cases, often coming under the umbrella term of ‘young runaways’<sup>9</sup>, usually indicate particular problem issues within a child’s life which require immediate attention. Where such issues are not resolved, the child often becomes increasingly detached from home and vulnerable to dangers such as crime, homelessness, sexual exploitation and grooming.

On the other hand, long -term missing cases are generally distinct from the problems surrounding ‘young runaways’ (albeit that cases may overlap) and can be further broken down into sub groups. Longer term missing children often come to some serious harm. Such cases include those who were previously repeat runaways, those who have been abducted or kidnapped or those who have been trafficked.

## Categories of missing children

### **Stranger abduction**

Child abduction is an offence under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. Although such cases are relatively rare, children face the risk of abduction by strangers who approach them in public. Such strangers may be motivated to commit sexual offences. Alternatively, children may be abducted as a result of family feuds.

Children and young people may also be targeted and groomed by adults for sexual abuse, exploitation, criminality and other under illicit activities. In the present information and communication technology age, children are increasingly targeted and groomed online and through other media devices. The term ‘stranger abduction’ may not be relevant in these situations as the child or young person may feel that the abductor is known to them and will often refer to them as a ‘friend’.

### **Parental abduction**

Children and young people are also caught up in custodial disagreements between parents, sometimes leading to child abduction by the non-custodial parent. This is also an offence under Section 1 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. On separation, where the parents cannot agree on residence and contact arrangements, the family courts will intervene and decide on which parent takes principal custody of the child. This can be a particularly contentious issue where the mother and father live in two different countries or are from two different cultures. An aggrieved parent may abduct their own child from the custodial parent contrary to court orders and take them abroad. Such situations are extremely fraught for both the children and parents involved. As a result, children are at risk of harm where the abducting non-custodial parent may present a danger

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<sup>8</sup> This is further explored in Section 1.2

<sup>9</sup> DCSF (2008) “*Young Runaways Action Plan*”

to the child or where the lack of ensuing contact and sudden change of locality may detrimentally affect the long term wellbeing of the child. There have been cases where an estranged parent abducts their children and which lead to fatal outcomes.

### Runaways

The term 'runaway' is used to describe "a young person who describes him/herself as having spent one night or more away from home without parental permission while under the age of 16"<sup>10</sup>. Children and young people may leave home of their own volition. This may be a consequence of *running away* from a problem at home, or *running to* another, often problematic, situation. Push factors for children and young people to leave home are broad and variable. Research has demonstrated that the most common reasons for running away relate to problems at home or school<sup>11</sup>. This group of missing children have historically been termed 'runaways', implying that young people go missing of their own volition. However, the term 'runaway' refers to a broad group of children and young people, some of which are not described accurately by the term. Cases of young people are often more complicated, involving an interplay of various risk and vulnerability factors.

Main triggers and root causes for running away usually reside in the child's place of residence. Parents or other legal guardians may be unable or unwilling to provide the care and provisions the young person needs, pushing them out of home. Some parents or other individuals within or close to the household or place of residence may be the source of a threat or fear of violence, whether physical, sexual or emotional. Running away can be seen as an attempt by the young person to escape from these threats of violence, abuse, neglect or rejection, and may be regarded as a positive step toward taking control by young people<sup>12</sup>. Young people may go missing a number of times, and each incident presents authorities and agencies with an opportunity to intervene. One police force reported that a young person had been reported missing close to a hundred times within a year.<sup>13</sup> Where root causes are not resolved, the underlying issues continue to grow with the danger that they can spiral out of control. Clearly, the more often a child goes missing, the more vulnerable they become<sup>14</sup>. Only a very small proportion of these children actually receive any help from agencies.<sup>15</sup>

In their report *Still Running II*, the Children's Society<sup>16</sup> were able to draw together some social factors relating to the 'runaway' population in their research. The research surveyed 10,772 young people in 70 mainstream secondary schools. The final data set consisted of 10,716 respondents. According to the report, young people in single, step or other 'different' types of family settings have a higher probability of running away. Those young people living in care were found to be three times more likely to run away than those living within their family home. Many of these children came from troubled backgrounds and had a history of running away before going into care. Overall, more girls admitted to having run away than boys. Young people of Afro-Caribbean ethnicity suffered the

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<sup>10</sup> Evans, Houghton-Brown, Rees (2007) *Stepping Up: The Future of Runaway Services* The Children's Society (page 9)

<sup>11</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society

<sup>12</sup> Pearce, J, Williams, H and Galvin, C (2003) *It's someone taking a part of you: a study of young women and sexual exploitation*. National Children's Bureau, London

<sup>13</sup> West Mercia Police.

<sup>14</sup> See Page 13 for risks and consequences of missing.

<sup>15</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society – 4% accessed help from an agency

<sup>16</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society

highest rate of running away with Asians having the lowest rate. Some children began running away from the age of 11 years, though the mean age was shown to be 15 years.<sup>17</sup>

Problems at school have also been recognised as a factor in causing young people to run away from home; evidence points to links between running away from home and truancy from school.<sup>18</sup> More research is necessary to establish the common causal factors between educational engagement and going missing. For example, it is not known if low academic achievement is a consequence rather than a cause for the child's problems at home or their missing incidents.

Other young people may become increasingly detached from their home or school life and more attached to other ways of life.<sup>19</sup> Many of these cases go unreported, especially where the young person has been pushed out of their home. In such cases, parents or legal guardians may themselves be the cause of the child going missing and would hence be unlikely to report it to the police.

Looked-after children are clearly a particularly vulnerable group and the source of a disproportionately large amount of missing reports.<sup>20</sup> For various reasons, they have been taken into local authority care as their parents or other legal guardians are absent or incapable of providing the necessary care and support. Such children and young people commonly enter the care system with their own sets of problems and issues. Indeed, such children may already have a history of going missing. The specific system of institutional care, particularly outside of a family setting, has its own push factors. For example, looked-after children may seek affection and love elsewhere. This vulnerability can be specifically targeted by groomers for exploitation (see section below on grooming and trafficking).<sup>21</sup> Looked after children will also be more readily reported missing than children living at home in families. Whereas a parent may not feel so alarmed by their child coming home late and may also engage in some enquiries themselves, such as phoning friends and relatives to locate the child, children's homes must follow strict protocols where a child is late after curfew or absent.

### **Detached**

'Detached' describes children and young people who *"are away from home or care for lengthy periods of time and who live outside of key societal institutions such as family, education and other statutory services: who do not receive formal sources of support; and who are self-reliant and/or dependent upon informal support networks"*.<sup>22</sup> These children and young people are particularly vulnerable and marginalised. Recent research by Smeaton, commissioned by the Railway Children, conducted a three-year study on 103 children and young people who had experienced being detached under the age of 16 years.<sup>23</sup> Issues raised by this research include chaotic and difficult family and home lives, and ongoing regular experiences of violence from carers, partners and others

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<sup>17</sup> The report admits possible limitations to this conclusion as the questionnaire gave a selection of ages to choose from, the lowest being 'under 11'. See report for full details of limitations to the study.

<sup>18</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society (page 13)

<sup>19</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK*, Railway Children

<sup>20</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society - reported that looked after children were three times more likely to go missing than children from home

<sup>21</sup> Interviews with stakeholders working in local runaway projects such as Project Eclipse – Barnardos.

<sup>22</sup> Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.

<sup>23</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK* Railway Children

in the form of threats, intimidation and assault. Half of the males defined themselves as belonging to a gang and both males and females experienced sexual violence, including gang rape. The majority of young people who participated in the research had experienced life on the streets before becoming completely detached. Survival strategies included shop-lifting, burglary, stealing cars, involvement in selling drugs, selling sex and begging. Most of the children and young people did not seek formal support due to their experiences being normalised. Many of these children would not be reported missing.

### **Groomed and trafficked**

Sexual exploitation is both a cause and consequence of children going missing. Children can be exploited in a number of ways, the most documented form of which is sexual exploitation.

In recent years, there has been growing concern over the grooming of children and young people (mainly girls) into sexual exploitation. The principal profile of sexual grooming is that of older males who befriend vulnerable girls, gaining their trust, and eventually becoming their 'boyfriends'. These relationships are carefully planned so that the groomer gains control, placing them in a position of power and enabling them to perpetrate and facilitate varied and serious sexual offences against vulnerable girls, often by groups of men.<sup>24</sup> Missing incidents often begin with or are further exacerbated by relationships with groomers. These children and young people will go missing overnight or over a number of days or weeks while their abusers provide them with drugs and alcohol. Abusers often transport their victims around towns and cities where they will be sexually abused by other men. Offenders often act in concert, establishing a relationship with a child or children before sexually exploiting them. Some victims of this type of exploitation may believe that the offender is in fact an older 'boyfriend', introducing peers to the offender group who may also be sexually exploited. Abuse may occur at a number of locations within a region and on several occasions. Children may be coerced into going missing from short to extended periods of time.

There is also an emerging concern regarding girls exploited by gangs they or their peers may be involved with.<sup>25</sup> There is limited evidence to suggest that girls are often 'linked' with gang members for their own safety and status.<sup>26</sup>

Migrant young people are a specific sub-set of children missing from local authority care, often separated from their parents or other legal guardians. This group is often called Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC); however, this term does not include those children from abroad who have not claimed asylum, but are separated from the parent or carer and placed in care. These young people are at particular risk of exploitation – there are serious concerns that UASC are often victims of trafficking, having been brought into the UK for the purpose of various types of exploitation.<sup>27</sup> Even separated children and young people who have been smuggled into the UK are vulnerable to exploitation, as networks of exploiters will gain access to them relatively quickly. Such young people often go missing from care and are not found again. Others may be recovered in a place of exploitation, such as a cannabis farm, only to go missing again from care. One of the most

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<sup>24</sup> CEOP (2009) *Strategic Threat Assessment on Child Trafficking in the UK*

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Project Eclipse – Barnardo's

<sup>26</sup> HM Government (2010) *Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity* – paragraph 42

<sup>27</sup> HM Government (2007) *Safeguarding Children who may have been trafficking* – Page 10

significant reasons behind their disappearance from care is their fear of the agents that control them and their need to pay off debts, often worth tens of thousands of pounds.<sup>28</sup>

## Effects of missing – risks, causes and consequences

A child going missing triggers immediate concerns for their safety. Abuse, exploitation, and risk to life are the most concerning of all dangers that children face. Other risks include violence, criminality, and loss of potential due to lack of school attendance or other education, lack of economic wellbeing, sleeping rough, hunger, thirst, fear and loneliness.<sup>29</sup> The risks are further exacerbated by the fact that only a very small proportion of children and young people who do run away access any help from an agency, statutory or otherwise.<sup>30</sup> The following are some of the ways in which children and young people are at risk of harm when they go missing, most of which can be viewed as both *causes* and *consequences* of missing.

### Death

The gravest danger to children and young people who are missing is their death. In some instances it is a child's accidental death that results in a report of missing. However, cases of unfortunate and avoidable deaths of children and young people permeate through all types of missing children cases. Media coverage has highlighted the deaths of children like Sarah Payne<sup>31</sup>, and Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman.<sup>32</sup> Recent media has also reported on the case of five-year old Rebecca Smith who had been reported missing with her mother Liane Smith since 2007.<sup>33</sup> The case of 15-year-old Tulay Goren<sup>34</sup>, who went missing in 1999 and whose father was found guilty of her murder in December 2009, highlights the issues of honour-based killings.<sup>35</sup> Serious case reviews have highlighted cases of troubled young people who have repeatedly gone missing and have then died as a result of self-harming behaviour. Living on the streets is particularly harmful and unsafe, and can lead to illnesses and diseases sometimes causing death of young people. Homeless young people are found to have poor physical and mental health and engage in higher risk taking and self-harming behaviour.<sup>36</sup> The highest cause of death amongst homeless young people is suicide.<sup>37</sup>

### Physical abuse and violence

Children who go missing are particularly vulnerable to violence and physical abuse. Young people

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<sup>28</sup> CEOP (2009) *Strategic Threat Assessment on Child Trafficking in the UK*; Beddoe C (2007) *Missing Out: A study of child trafficking in the North-West, North-East and West Midlands* ECPAT UK

<sup>29</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society - Table 7

<sup>30</sup> According to *Still Running II*, only 4% of children who ran away used any help of external agencies. Rees and Lee (2005)

<sup>31</sup> Eight-year-old Sarah Payne went missing on the 1 July 2000 and was found to have been murdered by a child sex offender. Following a missing investigation, Sarah's body was found on 17 July 2000.

<sup>32</sup> The two 10 year old girls, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman went missing on 4 August 2002 and were later found to have been murdered by Ian Huntley. Following a hugely publicised national missing person's campaign, their two bodies were found on the 17 August 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Rebecca Smith and her brother Daniel, 11 months, were found dead in a hotel in Spain in May 2010. At the time of writing this report, the mother Liane Smith was undergoing trial for their murder.

<sup>34</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/8389053.stm>

<sup>35</sup> Tulay Goren's body had not been found at the time of writing this report.

<sup>36</sup> Stephens J (2002) *The Mental Health Needs of Homeless Young People, Bright Futures: Working with vulnerable young people* Barnardo's, The Mental Health Foundation, page 3

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

living on the streets are more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators.<sup>38</sup> This often leads to young people carrying weapons. Violence can be a common and routine part of these young people's lives, whether enacted through strangers, peers, carers or partners.<sup>39</sup> Violence is often accompanied by threats and intimidation, which can lead to children joining gangs in order to survive and be safe<sup>40</sup>. Trafficked and abducted children are also extremely vulnerable to all forms of violence.

### **Sexual abuse and exploitation**

There are various ways in which children who go missing are at serious risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. Those with a sexual interest in children pose a threat to children in all circumstances, but particularly so for those who are missing. In order to gain access to a child, perpetrators can resort to luring, grooming and abduction.

In recorded cases of stranger abductions and attempted stranger abductions, motives for the offence are not recorded but are assumed to be sexually motivated<sup>41</sup>. Other child sex offenders sexually exploit vulnerable young people by grooming, using gifts and affection. Girls will often be attracted to the 'older' lifestyle their 'boyfriend' shows them, with money and cars. Gradually these men will begin manipulating them into having sex with other men. Often these men will take the girls round to various locations in order to be sexually abused by different groups of men.

Sexually exploited children and young people may go missing from their place of residence as a consequence of being groomed. In this scenario, children are groomed by an offender, initially staying away from home for one or two nights, perhaps at the residence of the offender, where they will be sexually exploited and perhaps exposed to alcohol and drugs. The offender may offer little more than a place of comparative comfort, where the child or young person is treated like an adult. The offender is a significant 'pull factor', cultivating a sense of trust and affection with the victim as part of a grooming process. Over time, the relationship between the offender and the victim develops, with the offender coercing the victim into sexual activity with friends or associates, and the victim kept away from home for longer periods of time. Repeat missing episodes may suggest that a child or young person is being groomed and sexually exploited, though young people may go missing overnight and be returned to their place of residence by the morning.<sup>42</sup>

Alternatively, children and young people may be 'pushed' from their place of residence for a number of reasons, such as neglect, parental substance abuse, physical or sexual abuse, or a general deficit of parenting. A number of factors may cause family lives to become chaotic. Sudden changes, such as a family bereavement, may cause dysfunction in families and lead to children and young people going missing. Where family life is dysfunctional, young people may see running away from a difficult situation to be a positive step towards taking control of an otherwise intolerable situation.

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid*

<sup>39</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK* Railway Children

<sup>40</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK* Railway Children

<sup>41</sup> Newiss G, Fairbrother L (2004) "Child abduction: understanding police recorded crime statistics" Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office - states that in 2002/03; 15 of the 361 stranger abductions or attempted stranger abductions recorded for England, contained sufficient detail to record a sexual motive in the case. In the 2003/04 statistics, out of the 58 successful stranger abductions, consisting of 68 victims, 12 cases had clear showed a sexual motivation by the offender. Two of these victims were subjected to serious sexual assaults.

<sup>42</sup> Evans, K, Houghton-Brown, M, and Rees, G (2007) *Stepping Up: The Future of Runaways Services*, The Children's Society

Being pushed from a place of residence may cause a child or young person to spend an increasing amount of time in the streets, where they may be identified as vulnerable to grooming by potential exploiters.<sup>43</sup>

There is increasing evidence to suggest that looked-after children are particularly at risk of going missing from home and experiencing sexual exploitation. Children and young people who repeatedly go missing are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, and a significant proportion of children and young people in the care system go missing from placements.<sup>44</sup> Where children and young people in care are groomed for sexual exploitation, they may be coerced into swapping sex for accommodation, becoming increasingly detached from any form of support.<sup>45</sup>

The onset of the internet and other communication technology has changed the way that child sex offenders groom children. The internet offers a perceived anonymity to offenders who use social networking and other similar sites to befriend children. Offenders will use various false personas and identities in order to acquire as much information about the child as possible. Often offenders will work towards meeting the child offline. Such incidents often only come to light once the child has gone missing.<sup>46</sup>

Migrant young people arriving in the UK under the control of agents are often manipulated by their traffickers to pay off huge debts. The young person will be bonded into prostitution until his or her debt is paid off. Victims are often transported around the UK to service various brothels and massage parlours for a number of years.<sup>47</sup>

Other young people who go missing and begin living on the streets may become involved in sexual exploitation in order to survive. Young people may feel they are in control of their situations but are putting themselves at grave risk.<sup>48</sup> Evidence submitted to a UK Government consultation in 2004<sup>49</sup> highlighted that between 50-75% of women entered prostitution before they were 18, with 15 years being the average age of entry.<sup>50</sup> The paper further noted that 75% of children abused through prostitution had been missing from school.

### **Criminality and gangs**

With limited education, the influence of drugs or alcohol, and troubled lives that become normalised, many vulnerable children and young people become involved in criminality. Various

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<sup>43</sup> Pearce, J, Williams, H and Galvin, C (2003) *It's someone taking a part of you: a study of young women and sexual exploitation*. National Children's Bureau, London

<sup>44</sup> Scott, S and Skidmore, P (2006) *Reducing the Risk – Barnardo's support for sexually exploited young people: a 2 year evaluation*, Barnardo's

<sup>45</sup> Palmer, T (2001) *No Son of Mine! Children abused through prostitution*, Barnardo's; Munro, C (2004) *Scratching the Surface – what we know about the abuse and sexual exploitation of young people by adults targeting residential and supported accommodation units*, Barnardo's; Creegan, C, Scott, S and Smith, R (2005) *The Use of Secure Accommodation and Alternative Provisions for Sexually Exploited Young People in Scotland*, Barnardo's

<sup>46</sup> CEOP (2010) *Strategic Overview*

<sup>47</sup> CEOP (2009) *Strategic Threat Assessment on Child Trafficking in the UK*, CEOP (2007) *Scoping Report on Child Trafficking in the UK*

<sup>48</sup> Interview with NSPCC social worker who worked with sexually exploited girls

<sup>49</sup> Home Office (2004) *Paying the Price*

<sup>50</sup> Farley M, Bindel J, Golding JM *Men who buy sex; who they buy and what they know* Eaves, London; Prostitution Research, San Francisco (page 14)

crimes committed by these young people include arson, shoplifting, stealing cars, aggravated burglary, actual bodily harm (ABH), grievous bodily harm (GBH), criminal damage, being drunk and disorderly and vandalism.<sup>51</sup> As mentioned above, children and young people are also at risk of becoming involved in gangs as both a cause and consequence of becoming detached from home. Joining a gang can be seen by young people as a way to survive on the streets.<sup>52</sup>

### **Alcohol and drug abuse**

Children and young people who go missing are often also vulnerable to alcohol and drug abuse. *Still Running II* also found that young people with drugs and alcohol problems were at least four times as likely to run away as those who did not have these problems.<sup>53</sup> For some, drug abuse within their families and by their parents may have been the root cause to their running away<sup>54</sup>. Involvement with drugs will often lure young people further away from home.

### **Homelessness**

When children run away or are pushed out of home, they are generally unprepared. They may be escaping from a troubled situation or have had little choice about being pushed away. The *Still Running II* research highlighted that 16% of young people who ran away for a duration of greater than one night slept rough. Other children and young people stayed with friends or relatives. As children increasingly run away from home, they become progressively vulnerable, which in turn results in children feeling let down by the authorities when no intervention is made successfully.<sup>55</sup>

### **Health problems**

Young people who go missing and find themselves on the street or in other compromising circumstances are at risk of suffering severe health problems. Living outdoors, through the cold, rain and dark, sleeping on the ground or on benches, suffering unhygienic conditions, not eating properly or regularly and combined with other possible harmful behaviours and risks of violence, is gravely injurious to the health of children and young people. The risk of sexual exploitation can lead to sexual health problems, such as sexually transmitted disease. Some girls may become pregnant and not access appropriate care and advice through their maternity, presenting risk to their own health and that of their unborn child.

### **Psychological impact**

Children and young people will suffer great psychological pressures living on the street or in other circumstances. Young people may continue to suffer the trauma of previous abuses and absorb new traumas from more recent experiences. *Still Running II* found that young people who ran away had an overall lower sense of well-being. These feelings included feeling depressed, feeling they have no one to turn to, feeling that life was not worth living, or had no sense of purpose.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK Railway Children* (page 88) – Over a third of the 103 children and young people who participated in this research had been involved with the criminal justice systems

<sup>52</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK Railway Children* (page 58)

<sup>53</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society – (Page 14)

<sup>54</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK Railway Children* (page 22)

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>56</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society – (Page 15)

Children who are abducted by a stranger may suffer extreme psychological abuse from their abductor. This may occur in the form of direct psychological abuse or as a result of other abuse inflicted on the child<sup>57</sup>.

In the case of parental abduction, studies have shown that the psychological impact may cause extreme stress, a lack of faith in the legal system and those adults involved, feelings of confusion, guilt and having had their childhood 'stolen', a lack of trust and feelings of guilt for their 'choosing' one parent over the other<sup>58</sup>. The upheaval of removing a child from their familiar environment and family life has also been found to be profoundly distressing for the child<sup>59</sup>.

### **Lack of education, lack of development, economic factors**

Often, children and young people who run away or become detached will lose their secure and safe network and environment in exchange for a different kind of social network. *Off the Radar*<sup>60</sup> found that, of the 103 young people who participated in the research, only three regularly attended school and completed their compulsory education. Problems at school can trigger running away behaviour. *Still Running II* found that children who had been excluded from school were three times more likely to run away than those that had not. Similarly, a third of young people who had experienced problems at school had run away at least once.<sup>61</sup> *Still Running II* found that economic factors in the family of children who ran away from home had less of an influence on their behaviour than the composition of their family<sup>62</sup>.

### **Forced marriage**

In addition to issues around honour-based violence as mentioned above, young people, particularly within South Asian communities, are at risk from forced marriage. Such episodes come to light following the child's increased truancy from school or disappearance altogether. According to evidence submitted to the Home Affairs Select Committee on Domestic Violence, a substantial proportion of children missing from school could be victims of forced marriage.<sup>63</sup> The Home Affairs committee report also stated that 30% of cases dealt by the Forced Marriage Unit were of minors under 18 years.

## **Impact on society**

The impact of going missing from home has been relatively well documented. However, the way in which missing children and their consequences on young people affect society is much less understood. Not only does the impact on children severely impede their ability to grow up into adults with meaningful lives, but their lack of opportunity to develop to their full potential as productive members of society also debilitates the communities they live in. In addition to the lost contribution that a whole population of children and young people could make to society, the

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<sup>57</sup> The psychological trauma suffered by the left behind parent is also documented. See Freeman, M (2006) *International Child Abduction: The Effects, Reunite* (page27-28)

<sup>58</sup> Freeman, M (2006) *International Child Abduction: The Effects, Reunite* (page27-28)

<sup>59</sup> PACT, *Victims of Another War*

<sup>60</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK Railway Children* (page 84)

<sup>61</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society –(Page 15)

<sup>62</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II* The Children's Society – (Page 13)

<sup>63</sup> Home Affairs Committee (2008) *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence* Sixth Report of session 2007-08, House of Commons (page 54)

economic and social costs of universal services (such as local authority services, police, the criminal justice system and health), as well as the whole host of service provisions by the charity sector, could amount to significant amounts of money. Smeaton examined the cost of crime committed by children under 16, living on the street at an average of £500,000 each.<sup>64</sup> She argues that in light of comments regarding the cost of responding to children and young people who run away, it is also relevant to count the cost of failing to respond.<sup>65</sup> In evidence to a Parliamentary Panel given by the then ACPO lead on Missing Persons, former Deputy Assistant Commissioner Richard Bryan gave an annual estimate of £222 million cost to society of missing children.<sup>66</sup> It has been estimated that the average missing person enquiry costs £1,000<sup>67</sup>, and in the period 2003-2008 (five financial years), the police costs to support missing persons cases was just under £500m.<sup>68</sup>

One study by Action for Children and the New Economics Foundation<sup>69</sup> compares costs of social problems in 16 countries across Europe on issues such as productivity losses when 16 to 19 year olds are not in education, employment or training; the costs of crime to the state and the wider economy; welfare and health costs of substance misuse and teenage births; and mental health problems to the state and wider economy. Specifically, it found that the UK spent a third more (£161.31 billion) on addressing the consequences of problems than the next country, Italy (£118.87).<sup>70</sup> The study goes on to estimate that the cost to the UK economy of doing nothing and failing to address current levels of social problems will amount to almost £4 trillion over a 20-year period.

Clearly, the cost of investment upfront in prevention and early intervention, in all areas of missing children, including child abduction, is always significantly lower than implementing a crisis response.

## 1.2 The Scale of the problem

Accurate information and intelligence about the threat posed to children who go missing in the UK is necessary to help understand and effectively tackle the problem. Accurate statistical information on specific forms of missing children could provide vital baseline figures, which could be used to assess and monitor future themes, trends and patterns on specific threats to children. However, gathering comprehensive statistical information on missing children is problematic. Current efforts concentrate on the generality of incidents of missing children. This is further complicated by the fact that police forces, children services and voluntary organisations will record information in a different way for their own purposes, making collation and analysis extremely difficult. Lack of consistency in recording data undermines efforts to determine the scale of missing children on a national level.

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<sup>64</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Street Life* <http://www.publicfinance.co.uk/features/2009/12/street-life/>

<sup>65</sup> Smeaton E (2010) *Evaluation@Last: Finds from the Evaluation of the Safe@Last safeplace* Refuge Safe@Last, Railway Children

<sup>66</sup> Report of the Parliamentary Panel (2007) *Safeguarding Children and Young People who Runaway or go Missing from Home or Care*

<sup>67</sup> Lancashire Police 2004

<sup>68</sup> NPIA (2010) *Taskforce Briefing Paper: the costs associated with missing persons enquiries*

<sup>69</sup> Aked, Steuer, Lawlor, Spratt (2009) *Backing the Future: why investing in children is good for us all* Action for Children, New Economics Foundation

<sup>70</sup> Aked, Steuer, Lawlor, Spratt (2009) *Backing the Future: why investing in children is good for us all* Action for Children, New Economics Foundation. The least expensive countries from the highest were Finland (£44.55b), Denmark (£84.94b), Sweden (£88.54b). The costs of social problems were calculated based on UK cost equivalent.

While much research has been conducted over the past decade, there remain significant gaps in knowledge of key threat areas, such as sexual exploitation, trafficking, and abduction, despite a potential wealth of information held by many agencies and organisations.

### **Strategic knowledge at national level**

Reliable strategic knowledge and ongoing understanding of missing and abducted children is fundamental to the police response at all levels. A dynamic understanding of missing and abducted children is also necessary to measure the impact of responsive frameworks. Even a basic count of numbers of missing children in their various categories would be of great value in reviewing where the greatest investment for solutions is needed. The key elements of developing strategic knowledge are (i) data recording, (ii) data gathering (iii) analysis; and (iv) disseminations.

There are a number of significant strategic reports and research that have been carried out which shed light on the scale, trends, factors, causes and consequences of missing children, principally runaway missing children. This chapter examines the most salient pieces of research produced in the last five years, the majority of which have been carried out by the voluntary sector.<sup>71</sup> Key stakeholders have asserted that current strategic data on missing children is still not sufficiently accurate. Indeed, many of the surveys and assessments on the scale of missing children are based on localised data, subject to its own limitations, which is in turn extrapolated to national level estimates. Strategic police data would provide official trends and patterns on specific themes and would provide a good comparison with research conducted in the voluntary and academic sector. The National Policing Improvement Agency's (NPIA) Code of Practice articulates that the NPIA Missing Persons Bureau (MPB) have the national remit to collect and share missing data, to analyse and produce tactical and strategic assessments, to provide anonymised data for academic research as well as to publish regular statistical bulletins. However, the NPIA Code of Practice also recognises that the *"effectiveness of this approach is dependent on police forces submitting to the Bureau all relevant or potentially relevant cases, and the fullest possible information about those cases"*.<sup>72</sup>

A more methodological focused approach to strategically assessing scale and nature of children who go missing should be adopted at a national scale. This should concentrate on the causes of missing cases, including those who have been missing for a few hours. A top-level count, year-on-year would give general statistics, and these could be disaggregated to police force areas. For more in-depth data analysis, each force could produce their own force-side strategic analysis, outlining the major and minor profiles of missing within their areas. All force wide assessments and numbers could then be examined to provide a national strategic assessment, which would highlight key trends and deliver an overview of national issues.

### **Data gathering/ collection**

Basic features of the child's profile are gathered in the first instance when a child goes missing. ACPO guidance outlines the minimum data necessary in order to conduct the investigation<sup>73</sup>. Given that the reason for the child's missing incident is highly important to the case, as well as for

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<sup>71</sup> Albeit occasionally commissioned or funded by Government departments.

<sup>72</sup> NPIA (2009) *Collection of Missing Person's Data: A Code of Practice for the Police Service on collecting and sharing missing persons data with public authorities – Paragraph 1.17*

<sup>73</sup> ACPO (2005) *Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons* NPIA – Section 2.2

objectively assessing the best responses for such cases, indicators and data fields to record the causes of the missing incident will help to keep this issue within the forefront of officers' minds. Other features and details currently not recorded as a matter of course, but relevant to the child's profile, such as nationality and possible indicators of abuse, exploitation and trafficking could add tactical value for any missing investigation that continues for more than a few days and would also give valuable insight from a strategic angle.

The other key issue in relation to data gathering is that certain types of missing children cases – for example, stranger or parental abductions<sup>74</sup> – may not be recorded as missing. Therefore, when collecting information, it is important to gather data from related crime reports such as trafficking, grooming and abduction.

Additionally, although data gathering is harmonised through a nationally agreed reporting form, some problems persists where some forces only use part of the form.

### **National repository**

The NPIA MPB act as the national repository for all missing person's data. Their database is stored and managed on *Hermes* software. *Hermes* does not reflect a complete picture of missing persons in the UK because, as with any database, it is as only as accurate as the information it holds. As of February 2011 37 out of 43 police forces in England and Wales contributed their missing data to *Hermes*. The NPIA MPB requires missing data to be sent before the expiration of 72 hours after the time the incident was reported. In high-risk cases the information can be sent immediately.

A standardised approach as set out in the guidance from NPIA MPB, where common data fields are used by all police forces, would significantly improve a national dataset. More importantly, if all police forces contributed their missing data regularly to the national dataset, there would be a more complete national picture of the problem.

Missing People also has a *Hermes* case management system, which currently consists of missing person's data contributed by police forces. This data largely consists of cases that are unresolved after approximately a week.<sup>75</sup>

### **Other strategic research**

The broad issues surrounding missing and abducted children are complex, and, there is a wide range of specific and related subject areas which require further examination. These include the impact on families<sup>76</sup>; the financial and economic costs of society<sup>77</sup>; long term effects on young people who become detached from their families or institutional care<sup>78</sup>; and the impact of parental alienation on

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<sup>74</sup> PACT (2005) *Every 5 Minutes* – (page 76)

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Missing People

<sup>76</sup> Holmes L (2008) *Living in Limbo: The experiences of, and impacts on, the families of missing people* Missing People

<sup>77</sup> Smeaton E, *Counting the Cost* (unpublished) Railway Children

<sup>78</sup> Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK*, Railway Children

children<sup>79</sup>. These pieces of research have been undertaken in addition to evaluations and strategic reviews of responses to missing and abducted children.<sup>80</sup>

Such research is inherently valuable in addition to regular national assessments on these issues. In 1989, the first research to provide an estimate of the number of missing children incidents over a one-year period in the UK was undertaken<sup>81</sup>. The report, commissioned by the Children's Society, estimated 97,715 incidents of children and young people under 18 years who were reported missing in 1986. Conducting similar research in 1992, Abrahams and Mungall<sup>82</sup> estimated just over 102,000 annual incidents of children and young people under 18 years who were reported missing. The first UK-wide analysis in relation to young people under the age of 18, who leave, run away or are forced to leave their home, was published in 1999<sup>83</sup>. The research consisted of a study of over 13,000 young people, interviews with young people who had run away and professionals who worked with young runaways. It estimated that there are at least 100,000 overnight running away incidents annually in the UK. Missing reports concerning children and young people under the age of 18 comprised 64% of all reports made to these police forces, with most incidents relating to young people aged 12-17.<sup>84</sup> These figures relate to discrete missing *incidents*. It is not possible to determine how many *individuals* under the age of 18 were subject to missing reports, though many children and young people go missing repeatedly.

The limitations which prevent the recording of accurate statistics can be outlined as follows:

**Definition of missing.** *"There is certainly an implicit recognition by the police and by missing persons agencies of the problematic nature of a definition that originates with those left behind"*<sup>85</sup>. Disparity over what constitutes a 'missing person' between agencies can contribute to complications in recording missing person data. However, for police purposes the ACPO definition is clear.

**Definition of a child.** There is no single law that defines the age of a child across the UK. Specific age limits are set out in relevant laws or government guidance. England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland each have their own guidance setting out the duties and responsibilities of organisations to keep children safe, but it is generally agreed that a child is anyone who has not yet reached the age of 18. This can prove difficult when dealing with cases of missing children aged 16–17 years, as they have greater independence from their parents and carers and can choose to leave home at that age.

**Under-reporting of missing children incidents.** A missing person report may not be lodged for various reasons. These include cases of parental abduction when the whereabouts of the child is

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<sup>79</sup> PACT Documentary DVD: *Victims of Another War: The Aftermath of Parental Alienation*

<sup>80</sup> Examples of these include: Smeaton E (2010) *Evaluation@Last: Finds from the Evaluation of the Safe@Last Safeplace Refuge Safe@Last*, Railway Children, Malloch MS, *Running-Other Choices Refuge Evaluation* University of Stirling Evaluation for Abelour Child Care Trust, as well reports by PACT.

<sup>81</sup> Newman (1989) *Young Runaways* The Children's Society— study used data from 38 forces

<sup>82</sup> Abrahams and Mungall (1992) *Runaways: Exploding the Myths* - Used data from five forces

<sup>83</sup> Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999) *Still Running* – Commissioned by three charities, The Children's Society (England and Wales), Aberlour Childcare Trust (Scotland) and EXTERN Organisation (Northern Ireland)

<sup>84</sup> NPIA (2011) *Missing Persons: Data and Analysis 2009/10*

<sup>85</sup> Biehal, Mitchell and Wade (2003) *Lost from View*

known; where a child has been pushed out or even run away, due to circumstances that might involve the parents or carers; where a missing persons report is cancelled; or where the incident is not considered serious enough to report by the parent or carer. In cases where a child may have been kidnapped and murdered, the incident will not be recorded as a missing person's case due to the 'principal crime rule' which requires that only the most serious offence is recorded.<sup>86</sup>

**Recording.** When a missing person's report is made to the police each incident is recorded. This means that for young people who go missing more than once, this fact will be recorded as an incident, even though it relates to the same person.<sup>87</sup>

**Limited study demographics.** Studies and surveys looking at the numbers of children and young people reported missing to police forces provide an indication of the problem of missing children in the UK. However, there are limitations to these studies, due to the small geographical area under study, or the types of missing incident studied.

On an international level, missing children is also an issue which causes great concern. The United States Department of Justice produced two extensive pieces of research on missing children. The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway children (NISMA) reports<sup>88</sup> led to an improved understanding of the different aspects of missing incidents, as well as a more comprehensive picture of the number of children missing in America. In 2005, Parents and Abducted Children Together (PACT)<sup>89</sup> suggested a similar study should be carried out in the UK in order to create a more accurate picture of the scale and nature of the problem of missing children and young people.

When trying to better understand the characteristics of children who go missing in the UK, many of the studies which used police data found little difference between the numbers of males and females. In 1992, Abrahams and Mungall<sup>90</sup> showed a 55% to 45% split of males to females who went missing, and further research by Newiss in 2004<sup>91</sup> reported that males accounted for 52% of missing incidents, but the proportions differed considerably in the age groups with a higher number of males in younger groups. There has been limited research so far on the ethnicity of missing children. In 1992, Abrahams and Mungall<sup>92</sup> indicated that children and young people of black origin are more likely to run away compared to white or Asian children. In 2005, Rees and Lee<sup>93</sup> found that white and mixed race young people were proportionately more likely to run away from home or care while Asian young people are least likely to run away from home or care.

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<sup>86</sup> Newiss, G and Fairbrother. L. (2004) *Child Abduction: understanding police recorded crime statistics*. Findings 225. London: Home Office. Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

<sup>87</sup> Abrahams and Mungall (1992) *Runaways: Exploding the Myths* estimated that 43,000 young people ran away in England and Scotland in 1990, producing a total of 102,000 incidents being reported to the police

<sup>88</sup> Finkelhor. D (1990) *Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children in America First Report: Numbers and Characteristics, National Incidence Studies*. Finkelhor. D et al (2002) *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children. Runaway and Thrownaway Children: National Estimates and Characteristics*

<sup>89</sup> PACT (2005) *Every Five Minutes: A review of the Available Data on Missing Children in the UK*

<sup>90</sup> Abrahams and Mungall (1992) *Runaways: Exploding the Myths*

<sup>91</sup> Newiss and Fairbrother (2004) *Child Abduction: understanding police recorded crime statistics*

<sup>92</sup> Abrahams and Mungall (1992) *Runaways: Exploding the Myths*

<sup>93</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II: Findings from the Second National Survey of Young Runaways* The Children's Society

In 1999, *Still Running*<sup>94</sup> estimated that 100,000 children and young people under 16 years run away from home or care overnight each year in the UK. The follow-up report in 2005, *Still Running II*<sup>95</sup> suggested that there had been no substantial change in the overall rate of running away amongst young people under the age of 16 in the last six years. Statistics taken from the *Still Running II* show that 11% of children (1 in 9) in the UK run away from home or are forced to leave and stay away overnight on one or more occasion before they are 16 years old. 52% of young people who have run away overnight only spent one night away from home, while 10% (1 in 10) stated that they spent more than four weeks away from home. 16% of young people (1 in 6) slept rough when they were away from home and two thirds of the young people who had run away overnight said they had not been reported by their parents or carers as missing to the police.

The annual number of estimated missing children in the UK includes child abductions. The principal source of annual child abduction statistics in England and Wales is taken from crime records published by the Home Office (see figure 1)<sup>96</sup>. Figures for Northern Ireland and Scotland are not annually reported in this document, further adding to the lack of comprehensive data recorded on missing children in the UK as a whole. Recorded incidents of child abduction include attempted abductions, but do not include incidents of abduction where a more serious crime has occurred. The ‘principal crime rule’ requires that only the most serious offence be recorded<sup>97</sup>. A 2004 Home Office research study on child abduction<sup>98</sup> examined 798 police reports of child abduction in England and Wales. Just over half (399) were attempted abductions. Out of the 798 reports, 56% (447) involved a stranger, 47% (375) were attempted abductions by a stranger and 9% (72) of all reports were successful child abductions by a stranger; 23% (183) of all reported abductions were parental.

**Figure 1:**  
*Home Office England and Wales Crime Statistics*

Year	Child Abduction Figures
2002/03	846
2003/04	930
2004/05	1035
2005/06	919
2006/07	696
2007/08	594
2008/09	566
2009/10	561

In terms of parental child abduction, the Home Office statistics will only strictly count those incidents that fall within the legal definition, which consists of the child being taken or sent out of the country.

<sup>94</sup> Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999) *Still Running* – Commissioned by three charities, The Children’s Society (England and Wales), Aberlour Childcare Trust (Scotland) and EXTERN Organisation (Northern Ireland)

<sup>95</sup> *Still Running II: Findings from the Second National Survey of Young Runaways* Rees, G and Lee, J, 2005

<sup>96</sup> Home Office Statistical Bulletin on Crime in England and Wales

<sup>97</sup> Home Office (2007) *Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime*

<sup>98</sup> Newiss and Fairbrother (2004) *Child Abduction: understanding police recorded crime statistics*

PACT found a sharp increase in the numbers of international parental child abduction from 1995 to 2004 on review of reports by the charity Reunite<sup>99</sup>. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have recently reported that numbers of parental abduction were continuing to rise.<sup>100</sup> It can therefore be deduced that although overall numbers of child abduction in England seem to be falling, the overall numbers of parental child abduction<sup>101</sup> appear to be increasing.

As noted previously, Rees and Lee reported that young people living in care homes are three times more likely to run away overnight compared to those living with families.<sup>102</sup> Latest statistics from the Department for Education<sup>103</sup> show that at 31 March 2010, there were 64,400 looked after children in the England, including 3,400 UASC. Nine hundred of the looked after children went missing from care for longer than 24 hours. Statistics gathered by CEOP from the period 1 March 2009 to 29 February 2010 identified 287 potential victims of child trafficking.<sup>104</sup> Seventeen percent (50) of the children identified were recorded as having gone missing from care at some point, with 15% (42) still recorded as missing.

To help tackle the issue of missing people, the Missing Persons Taskforce was set up in December 2009, making a number of recommendations<sup>105</sup> to address the variations across the country in the basic processes and arrangements in place to respond to and deal with the issue of missing persons. A code of practice was implemented by the NPIA MPB on 1 April 2009, which makes it a statutory requirement for all forces to collate information on missing people and submit their data to the on a quarterly basis. If all forces comply, it will provide greater consistency and inform a more comprehensive database to assess the scale of incidents of missing children in the future.

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<sup>99</sup> PACT (2005) *Every Five Minutes: A review of the available data on missing children in the UK* – (Page 77-Fig 19)

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10792704>

<sup>101</sup> Numbers from Reunite and the FCO would cover the whole of the UK, whereas Home Office statistics only cover England and Wales.

<sup>102</sup> Rees and Lee (2005) *Still Running II: Findings from the Second National Survey of Young Runaways* The Children's Society

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000960/sfr27-2010v2.pdf>; last accessed 25/3/11

<sup>104</sup> CEOP (2010) *Strategic Overview*

<sup>105</sup> Home Office (2010) *The Missing Persons Taskforce; A Report with Recommendations for Improving the Multi-Agency Response to Missing Incidents*

## Chapter 2: The Current Response to Missing and Abducted Children

### 2.1 Introduction

In order to develop a full response to the problem of missing and abducted children in the UK, it is essential to understand the multi-faceted needs of children, parents, carers and statutory authorities in the various circumstances under which children may be missing. This section provides an overview of existing responses and gaps in tackling the issue of missing children.

The report by the Children's Society *Stepping Up*<sup>106</sup> reviewed services and responses following a consultation of local authorities and police forces across England and found that 40% of police forces did not have sufficient access to local data in order to provide information on local needs. Of the local authorities, 93% had protocols for managing and responding to cases of children missing from care, but only half had such protocols for children missing from home and just over 12% had specific services targeted to runaways. Ten out of 27 police forces who responded stated they had kept a young person over night in a police station due to inadequate emergency accommodation for runaways in their local area. *A Postcode Lottery*<sup>107</sup> by PACT states that there is an "enormous geographical disparity in the types and levels of services provided to missing children (particularly runaways and throwaways) across the UK... Both the geographical disparity of voluntary sector provision and the precarious future of the many local projects are the result of the planning and commissioning of services for children in crisis being devolved to the local authority level. Local demand for services can be obscured by the lack of clear data and these crucial services have not been considered a priority".

It has been recognised that one of the main obstacles to provision of local services is the lack of clear localised evidence and data for missing children.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, in a report commissioned by the Department for Education and written by the Children's Society<sup>109</sup>, it was found that though national-level data and work with young people had both highlighted a significant need for emergency accommodation for runaways, this level of need was not evident to local services. A Parliamentary Panel chaired by the then MP Helen Southworth, found that "inadequacies of data collection make it difficult to identify how to direct resources and allocate priorities".<sup>110</sup> The report further states that "a survey at the end of 2006 by the Parliamentary All Party Group for Runaway and Missing Children identified twenty-three Children's services departments that did not know how many children in their own care had been reported missing to the police in the previous year. A

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<sup>106</sup> Evans, Houghton-Brown, Rees (2007) *Stepping Up: The Future of Runaway Services* The Children's Society

<sup>107</sup> PACT (2006) *A Postcode Lottery: Services to Missing Children in the UK*

<sup>108</sup> PACT (2006) *A Postcode Lottery: Services to Missing Children in the UK* (page 6)

<sup>109</sup> Rees, Franks, Medforth and Wade (2009) *Commissioning, Delivery and Perceptions of Emergency Accommodation for young Runaways* The Children's Society

<sup>110</sup> Report of the Parliamentary Panel December (2007) *Safeguarding children and young people who runaway or go missing from home or care* – (Page 4)

*further forty-two did not know how many children on their child protection register had been reported missing during the same period”<sup>111</sup>.*

Another significant obstacle to the provision of services has been the lack of strategic or local leadership on the specific issues associated with missing children, such as sexual exploitation or trafficking. One of the main criticisms of the current framework response has been that it is “*fragmented and disorganised*”, lacking leadership and coordination, and that there has been a “*reluctance across sectors to treat missing and abducted children as a discrete and unique issue*”.<sup>112</sup> *Stepping Up* also highlights the needs for clear government leadership, as well as for Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) to lead on missing children at a local level. The Parliamentary Panel report highlights good practice in the Birmingham LSCB due to strong and effective strategic leadership and a specifically mandated sub-group to the LSCB dedicated to the response to missing children.<sup>113</sup>

It is clear that the best responses to missing children involve effective leadership and inter-agency working at national, regional and local levels. There is significant evidence exhibited in practice and in research of the safeguarding impact of these principles, some of which will be presented in this section.

As exhibited by a multitude of reports, the work of the voluntary sector is invaluable. This section also outlines how the community voluntary sector provides the most key local services directly to missing children, in support of local statutory services. *Stepping Up* presented various calls from consultees, including the need for renewed guidance, statutory provisions in aspects of the response such as return interviews, for LSCBs to take the lead on the issue of missing children, and generally more clarity of roles and responsibilities at all levels.<sup>114</sup>

## 2.2 Prevention

Preventing a child from going missing is clearly the best option in planning responses. Prevention falls squarely within the larger imperative for agencies to safeguard children, ensure their well-being and protect them from harm. It is important for young people to understand where they can find support to better help them cope with difficult issues which may make them want to run away or to turn to, once missing from home and at risk. This needs to be accessible in a contemporary way, one that reflects how young people lead their lives and find information. Where needed, children’s services and other agencies must recognise any problem indicators and sensitively intervene.

In the case of migrant young people at risk of trafficking, children’s services and other agencies will have opportunities to inform them of the risks they face if they go missing. It is also imperative that these children are educated about their rights to protection in the UK so that they are able to seek help when needed.

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>112</sup> PACT (2007) *Beyond Every 5 Minutes: A Blueprint for Action on Missing Children* – (Page 43)

<sup>113</sup> Report of the Parliamentary Panel December (2007) *Safeguarding children and young people who runaway or go missing from home or care* – (Page 6)

<sup>114</sup> Evans, Houghton-Brown, Rees (2007) *Stepping Up: The Future of Runaway Services* The Children’s Society (Page 5)

Equally, where children are at risk of being groomed and exploited, both online and offline, raising awareness among young people and those responsible for them is the best form of prevention. By sensitively informing young people of the risks they face and the services they can access, they will be empowered to protect themselves.

There is sufficient research-based knowledge regarding the key vulnerabilities which lead to children going missing. Such identified trends can direct the focus of prevention work and other early intervention services to specifically target areas and groups of children and young people.

## Information and awareness raising campaigns

Education and awareness raising programmes targeting children and young people have been developed by NGOs and specialised projects. These are usually run in schools, outreach programmes and within specific projects targeted at children at risk of running away. There is no overarching comprehensive programme of national educational resources accessible from one point.

Primary prevention work in the form of *generic* awareness-raising about the risks of going missing and the services available to young people is very important. Relevant information about where to seek help must be made available to all children. General information for all children must be supported with *targeted* awareness-raising. Work to identify common social factors and reasons for going missing<sup>115</sup> can inform targeted awareness-raising and education campaigns. Specific and targeted information is particularly important where a child first comes to the attention of authorities or agencies with a problem, such as a first missing incident or other issues such as domestic abuse, truancy, drug abuse or bullying. A young person needs to be able to access a trusted impartial adult, such a counsellor in school, who they can talk to if they need. The experiences of services such as Childline<sup>116</sup> demonstrate that children usually need someone to simply listen to them. It has been shown that listening to a young person builds trust, which in turn helps to re-engage the young person.

Children and young people between the ages of 11 to 15 years of age are commonly taught Personal Health and Social Education (PHSE) at school. PHSE classes cover a broad range of issues affecting the personal lives of children, such as drugs and alcohol; emotional health and wellbeing, sex, relationships and safety<sup>117</sup>. The PHSE setting enables issues such as missing and related problems to be raised within a safe setting. Further work around direct education to children can be undertaken for select groups, in settings where children are looked after. However, stakeholders have commented that teaching within schools in PHSE classes is often the most effective way to reach young people, due to trainers having a 'captive audience'. In more private settings, it can be more difficult to gain the attention of vulnerable young people.

Many local projects also work in local schools to educate children about the risks of going missing and to inform them about where they can seek help and advice if they are in trouble. The Department for Education partnered with the Children's Society to launch the 'My Life' resource

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<sup>115</sup> Research in this area has been examined in Chapter 1

<sup>116</sup> Childline is a free and confidential service for children, hosted by the NPSCC

<sup>117</sup> <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/pshe/>

pack<sup>118</sup>, which is a free interactive online resource for teachers, children and parents/carers on a broad range of issues in accordance with the national curriculum for 7 to 11 years classes in Citizenship and PHSE. The resource consists of a specific section on runaways and widely covers issues of keeping safe, abuse, self-harm, keeping healthy and so on.

Research conducted by the Children's Society (*Stepping Up*)<sup>119</sup> found that 14 local authorities out of 40 areas in England carried out preventative work in schools. *Stepping Up* noted that no systematic evaluation of the impact of primary universal prevention has been undertaken in the UK. Any progress in this area must be systematically evaluated to determine its impact on running away incidents.<sup>120</sup>

Where children are at risk through grooming or exploitation, CEOP's *ThinkUKnow* programme has been successful in informing and empowering children. CEOP's preventative work with children includes education for all four key stages, online resources for children, parents and professionals, as well as online reporting abuse mechanism 'Click CEOP' button, which can be accessed through some of the most popular social networking sites, where children can find help, advice from a range of organisations or simply report a problem to law enforcement.

### **General advisory help lines for children**

General helplines delivered through traditional means, and more latterly through online services, allow children and young people to speak with another person immediately. The problem may relate to any issue in the child's life, including those which may cause a child to run away. A young person with problems must be able to trust that they can talk with someone any time they want. This significantly deters a young person from going missing as they would potentially be breaking themselves off from their support mechanisms. Where the young person has run away, they may be unprepared and confused, heightening their vulnerability. This is where confidential national or local helplines are vital.

Given the problems that the young person may face at that moment in time, it is important that persons answering helpline calls or interacting online are properly trained and counsellors are available to speak with the child. Counsellors may then be able to directly support the young person regarding the specific problem they face. For example, a young person may be afraid of their stepfather and unwilling to go home; if they can share these concerns with a counsellor on the phone, the counsellor may be able to advise the young person to go to a place of safety as well as to refer them to the police or children's services. The trained counsellor should always be trying to work out what the root problem is and ensure that the young person is listened to.

There is a whole host of dedicated children's national and local helplines in the UK, for all types of issues and problems that children and young people may have. These issues include health issues, acne, bullying, forced marriage, abuse, drugs and alcohol. Childline<sup>121</sup> provides a national service and can now also be contacted by children through text and email. The opening hours of helplines

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<sup>118</sup> <http://mylife.edcoms.com/MyLife/home.aspx>

<sup>119</sup> Evans, Houghton-Brown, Rees (2007) *Stepping Up: The Future of Runaway Services* The Children's Society (page 30)

<sup>120</sup> Evans, Houghton-Brown, Rees (2007) *Stepping Up: The Future of Runaway Services* The Children's Society (page 14)

<sup>121</sup> Childline is a free and confidential service for children, hosted by the NPSCC

vary, with some open 24 hours a day, and some offering the possibility to communicate through text or webchat.

One identified gap in the provision of helplines for children is a lack of those available to migrant children in the UK. Some helplines, such as the Children's Legal Centre, use Language Line<sup>122</sup> to communicate through other languages over the phone; however, the majority of helplines have no provision for non-English speakers.

### **Online resources for children and young people**

Children and their parents and carers are able to access various types of advice online. Websites of organisations such as Shelter, the NSPCC, Reunite International and English language websites from other countries, have advice, information and signposting on issues relating to missing children. Other websites, such as Missing People charity, have information regarding their helpline and local projects around the country that provide specific services for young people. Generally, the information from these websites is not aimed at young people.

There is a dearth of dedicated, well-marketed, online children's resources at a national level. Existing online information encourages young people thinking of running away to reflect on their reasons, and signposts children to helplines and other sources of direct help. Some websites are better designed for young people than others, such as Childline, who have a specific page for children thinking about running away, and signposting to helplines and other services<sup>123</sup>. Childline is also a well-known brand amongst children. Websites aimed at local populations of children such as Safe@Last and the Runaways Project Derby also have specially designed websites for children dedicated to issues around running away. These sites have special and innovative features for young people, are generally easy to navigate and have spaces online where young people can access help. Safe@Last has a 'My Safe Place' feature, where children can keep an online diary and communicate with a project worker, an extensive FAQ section and a useful online chat facility where they can communicate with each other or with a project worker. Each of these dedicated websites are targeted at local or regional populations of children and young people and are not accessible outside of these areas<sup>124</sup>.

The Department for Education has recently funded an online resource developed by the charity Missing People to be known as Turn2. The Turn2 Directory will help children and young people who have run away or are at risk of running away to find details of help in their local area. It is a confidential service and the information will be kept up to date by Missing People.

There is an outstanding need for a national website aimed at children and young people on issues of running away. Such a website could also include additional information and guidance for migrant and disabled children.

### **Parents and families**

The involvement of parents and families in providing a safe environment for children is absolutely

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<sup>122</sup> Language Line is a phone interpreting service: <http://www.languageline.co.uk/>

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.childline.org.uk/explore/homefamilies/pages/homelessnessrunaway.aspx>

<sup>124</sup> Although any child could visit and log on to these sites, they may not necessarily know about these sites as they would be marketed at in those localities.

essential. Many of the support services mentioned above also provide education and information for children. Some services that provide support to young people who feel they want to run away may do so in the form of family mediation. This can help the young person and their parents work through the root issues underlying their problem. A few of the online resources also have dedicated pages with information for parents. Examples are CEOP's ThinkUKnow website<sup>125</sup> which is specific to sexual grooming and the Missing Children Europe 116000 number website<sup>126</sup> regarding parents taking their children abroad within Europe. The Children's Society 'My Life' Resource website only includes a 'runaways' section in the children and teachers part of the website, but not in the parents section.

## 2.3 Early intervention

The early identification of issues in a child's life, including a first missing incident, provides an opportunity to prevent further risk-taking behaviour and harm. Where children and young people have demonstrated a need for intervention, local services must provide for those needs and ensure the young person is safeguarded. Actions include appropriate risk assessments, return interviews and support services to the young person and his or her family.

### Support services

Early interventions would assist with resolving issues in a child's life, such as family relationship breakdown and all forms of abuse and neglect. The primary agency responsible is the local authority children's services. However, children's services are not always able to respond to the needs of young people due to competing priorities, a lack of capacity and resources. Therefore, in some areas around the UK, local NGOs provide further support services for young people.

Services such as those highlighted below are available to children and young people who are either at risk of going missing, or children who have returned or been otherwise located. These services specifically address the causes of missing episodes and seek to prevent future incidents. Many of these valuable services are provided by the voluntary sector and are therefore dependent on donor funding. In areas where such services are available, local authorities can work with local projects to provide more holistic care. Many of the local projects run by voluntary services are not necessarily dedicated to working with missing children; however, they will include young people who go missing within their target groups. Below are some of the most well known local projects in the UK.

**Home and Away (NSPCC)** - works with young people who have recently run away from home, specifically targeting early incidents. They allow self-referrals from children and young people, which is effective in engaging those who have had negative experiences with police and/or social services.

<sup>125</sup> <http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.hotline116000.eu>

**Streetwork UK**<sup>127</sup> is unique in providing support to children and young people who have become detached and are not engaged in any safeguarding systems. It was set up in 1992 to tackle the problem of youth gangs in Edinburgh's city centre and now works with young people who are sleeping outdoors, involved in prostitution, underage runaways, taking drugs, and involved in crime. They provide crisis support and help young people to access emergency accommodation.

**Talk Don't Walk**<sup>128</sup> based in Warrington specialises in family mediation. By working with the families of children and young people who run away, the causes for missing incidents are targeted. Parents and carers can attend the centre for counselling and advice, or can attend with the young person to work through the issues causing repeat missing incidents. The *"project reported more than a 50% decrease over 2 years (from 2003/4 to 2005/6) in the number of police reported incidents of runaways since the project began. Similar decreases (around 50%) were recording the costs of responding to runaway incidents and in the level of crime recorded as a result of children going missing (see McCausland 2006)"*.<sup>129</sup>

**Safe@Last**<sup>130</sup> provides various services for runaways in South Yorkshire. This includes a 24-hour helpline, a refuge (at a secret location) and a missing persons' scheme. The missing persons' scheme gives young people the opportunity to speak with an independent person about the reasons why they may have run away. After any child or young person has left Safe@Last, dedicated workers continue to support them by talking through issues, supplying information on how to get help, engaging them in interests and hobbies, assisting them in developing life skills and supporting them through other appointments, such as sexual health appointments or housing interviews. Young people are assigned a worker who will keep in contact with them and support them.

**Plymouth Young Runaways Project**<sup>131</sup> is a police led multi-agency project that works with runaways after they have returned home. Other agencies are the Drugs and Alcohol team and local children's services. Unfortunately, the project, which was at least half funded by the local New Renewal Fund, is coming to an end.

**Paladin and Hillingdon Children's Services** have joined up to provide a specialist response to at-risk profile children and young people entering the UK through Heathrow airport. Paladin is a Metropolitan Police-led multi-agency team consisting of both police and UKBA immigration officers who identify and safeguard children at ports. Referrals of at-risk profiled children to Hillingdon Children's services are followed by an appropriate assessment and safety plan. A unique feature of the safety plan is working with the young person and informing them of the dangers of trafficking and the risks they face if they go missing from care.

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<sup>127</sup> <http://www.streetwork.org.uk/>

<sup>128</sup> <http://www.therelationshipscentre.co.uk/talkdontwalk>

<sup>129</sup> PACT (2006) *A Postcode Lottery: Services to Missing Children in the UK*

<sup>130</sup> <http://www.safeatlast.org.uk/>

<sup>131</sup> <http://www.plymouth-young-runaways.co.uk/>

**Hertfordshire Local Authority and police** have joined together to launch an awareness campaign against trafficking. Particular focal points have included lorry drivers and other transportation workers who are often targeted by traffickers to bring children within the UK.

Local projects such as these highlight the added value that the voluntary sector can provide to support the work of local authorities. Furthermore, they have the added benefit that they are often able to better communicate with children and young people who find it more difficult to interact with statutory services. Whereas the success of supported local projects funding work on runaways is invaluable, it is important that all projects are appropriately evaluated so that learning can be rolled out across local services throughout the UK. Projects such as Safe@Last and ROC (Running – Other Choices)<sup>132</sup> have publicised their evaluations enabling other stakeholders to reflect on how services can be improved. This is especially helpful in the context of local projects, because the funding is often short term, not leaving sufficient time for experience and good practice to be fully established. The short-term character of many projects also means that successful responses in reducing numbers of runaways can be short-lived. Experience from the multi-agency local authority and police team in Plymouth have found that as their project comes to a gradual end, numbers of runaways have increased.

### **Return interviews**

Where a child or young person goes missing, it is essential that the causes of the incident are investigated and procedures are put in place to prevent repeat incidents. Missing incidents, especially the first few such events, can be seen as an opportunity to intervene within a child's life to respond to an unresolved issue. Statutory guidance<sup>133</sup> outlines that it is good practice to conduct return interviews within 72 hours of a child returning following a missing incident.<sup>134</sup> A return interview is generally described as an in-depth interview with the child, undertaken by an independent person. The purpose of the return interview is to identify and deal with any harm the child may have suffered, to understand the reasons why s/he ran away, and to prevent it from happening again. Police should refer the child or young person to the local authority so that they can provide continued support to that young person. For the purposes of the return interview, an independent person can be a police officer, a social worker or from the voluntary sector as long as they are appropriately trained and are not directly responsible for the response to the missing incident (i.e. duty social worker or response police officer).

If appropriate return interviews are not undertaken by a suitable professional, the risk of that young person running away again will remain, as the root causes of the missing incidents are unlikely to have been resolved. Local services are often dealing with competing priorities. Intervening after a seemingly insignificant missing incident may not take priority over another urgent child protection case. In many incidents, return interviews are not undertaken unless the child is deemed at high risk. Stakeholders interviewed for this report commented that this was a gap in the response to missing children. Some stakeholders commented that this gap may stem from a lack of awareness and capacity, as well as a lack of adequate resources. Some social workers and their managers may

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<sup>132</sup> The ROC Project is hosted under the auspices of Aberlour, A Scottish Children's Charity  
<http://www.aberlour.org.uk/rocrefugeevaluation.aspx>

<sup>133</sup> DCSF (2009) *Statutory Guidance for children who runaway or go missing from home or care*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, Section 2.5

not be aware of the longer-term risks that young people face when they are away from home or care. Some stakeholders feel that return interviews should be made compulsory for any child that has gone missing at least three times.

### **Multi-agency working**

Multi-agency working is at the centre of all successful projects relating to missing children, including those designed to prevent repeat missing incidents. For example, Safe@Last, Streets and Lanes and Streetwork Edinburgh all prioritise two-way information sharing between police, local authorities and NGOs in order to understand trends and patterns, develop effective working practice and increase their holistic understanding of each case.

Statutory guidance for England states that *“Where an individual needs-assessment indicates the child may be at risk of harm, a referral should be made to children’s social care. An evaluation of whether the child is likely to run away from home in the future will be one of the factors that informs the level of risk posed to the child, and the decision as to whether a referral to children’s social care is appropriate.”*<sup>135</sup> Below is an example of successful multi agency working:

#### **Awaken Team (Blackpool):**

Blackpool Council and Lancashire Constabulary established a jointly managed specialist sexual exploitation team, Awaken. The Awaken Team was formed in 2005 after the tragic disappearance of Blackpool teenager Charlene Downes in 2003. The town's groundbreaking Awaken Project was set up to combat the growing problem of sexual exploitation of children and young people in the area. Awaken were set up to establish effective systems for safeguarding vulnerable children and those open to sexual exploitation and to identify, target and prosecute associated offenders.

Awaken engage with statutory and voluntary agencies working with vulnerable children at risk of sexual exploitation and have developed and implemented information sharing protocols between partner agencies. The Awaken team ensure police have primacy for investigation and prosecution of criminal acts whilst children’s services have primacy in safeguarding and meeting the welfare needs of the child.

Awaken work with a list of ‘sexual exploitation risk indicators’ to identify children and young people at risk and have seen a reduction of 60% in the number of repeat ‘missing from home’ reports and they also provide bespoke sexual exploitation awareness raising.

Awaken won the 2009 Children & Young People Now Awards, the ‘Stay Safe Award’ - Awaken Project, Blackpool Young People's Services.

### **Looked After Children**

One of the key issues raised by stakeholders has been in the provision of care for looked after children. Evidence presented above has highlighted the particular vulnerability of looked after children.

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<sup>135</sup> DCSF (2009) *Statutory Guidance on children who runaway or go missing from home or care* – Section 2.4

## 2.4 Crisis response

Once a child has gone missing, immediate and urgent actions must be undertaken in order to locate and safeguard the child. The crisis response services for missing children are critical. Crisis response includes police first response and social services child protection teams. The nature of the crisis response is dependent on the nature of the missing incident.

### Missing report

The reporting of a missing or abducted child to police is the first part of the response to safeguarding the child. A missing persons report (known as 'misper') with local police triggers a prompt and thorough process of enquiries, recordings, assessments, checks and investigation. The investigation begins at the first point of notification to the police when as much information as possible is gathered and established.<sup>136</sup>

There are some groups of children who go missing but are never reported as missing to the police. Parents and carers who push or force their children out of the family home are unlikely to report them as missing for obvious reasons. In other cases, children may be reported missing to police but police officers may be familiar with the young person who is known to go missing repeatedly, sometimes several times in a week, only to turn up again after a few hours. Some families will report their children as missing to the charity Missing People, in these cases the charity works with the family to trust the process of reporting to the Police. Other reports of missing children, such as those where migrant children go missing from care, may be more difficult to follow up because there is very little information regarding the profile of such young people and therefore few further enquiries that can be made.

In terms of parental abduction, the left-behind parent would need to report the incident to local police. In some cases, police may still be reluctant to intervene as their understanding of parental abduction may be limited. They may fail to appreciate the risks to the child; or they may consider it outside of their remit as it regards civil rather than criminal law.

### Child Rescue Alert

The Child Rescue Alert (CRA) system is coordinated by the NPIA MPB and is a partnership between the police, the press and the public aiming to locate an abducted child and bring them to safety. The principal concept behind the system is to promptly publish details of an abducted child's disappearance to the public following the report. When an alert has been broadcast, the public will be asked to call a national number with any information that may help the investigation. The NPIA MPB also offers advice and operational support to help investigate and publicise cases where a child has been abducted. The UK's CRA system is also being aligned with other similar alert systems in Europe.

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<sup>136</sup> ACPO (2005) *Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons* NPIA

In order to launch a CRA, strict criteria must be applied and the operational decision is taken by the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) for the police force. The main criteria are (i) the child is under 18 years of age, (ii) there is a reasonable belief that the child has been kidnapped or abducted (which includes being taken under the influence of a third party), (iii) There is a reasonable belief that the child is in imminent danger of serious harm or death, and (iv) There is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist the police in locating the child. The CRA is based on a system first created in the US known as Amber alerts<sup>137</sup>.

The CRA and international systems have been tested but there have been no live activations. Police forces in the UK have always maintained strong relationships with local and regional media which is highlighted by high profile publicity campaigns in previous missing children's cases. Recent abductions have been successfully resolved using ANPR to track the offender without alerting them, enabling a successful recovery of the child whilst still in transit.

## Publicity/media campaigns

In supporting the search and safeguarding of a missing child, it is important to be able to quickly share important information, such as photographs across police forces in the UK, as well as to make them available publicly.

The Missing People charity was established in 1992 to give advice to missing people and their families. Amongst the varied work that the charity does, Missing People launches appeals and publicity for missing persons. Their website includes, appeals are viewed by an estimated 2.83 million people per week. This work includes:

- Appeals are launched at the request of police forces across the UK in line with the strategic agreements between Missing People and ACPO / ACPOS.
- Missing People will liaise with other police forces on behalf of the tasking force in order to widen the appeal.
- Web based appeals include profiles and photographs of missing persons, including children, across the UK ([www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)).
- Posters and other information are displayed in places across the UK, calling for information on any sightings; these posters are actively monitored to expediently take them down when a case is resolved.
- The charity manages a number of media partnerships with the Metro, the Big Issue, the Daily Mirror, the BBC and other outlets.
- The charity also uses social media to highlight cases of missing children.
- Sightings, received 24 hours a day via a freephone number, are securely passed to police forces using a Metropolitan Police Service tested protocol.

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<sup>137</sup> <http://www.amberalert.gov/>

The 'missing kids' website ([www.missingkids.co.uk](http://www.missingkids.co.uk)) is a multi-agency website, originally created by NCMEC (The National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children in the US) and is a partnership between police, charities and the private sector. Approved by the Home Office, ACPO and ACPOS, the secure website is currently managed by the NPIA MPB. It allows law enforcement to instantly disseminate photographs of and information on missing children around the world for the public to view 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Only trained police officers and staff can input information on the website. The website content is fully protected from unauthorised interference by a complex security system.

The success of publicity appeals to locate missing children is difficult to measure. Clearly, there are stories of individuals who have identified photographs of missing children, leading to resolution; however, there is a lack of information to demonstrate the frequency of such cases. The broader appeal of publicising cases of missing children is to enable families to play an active role in organising efforts to locate their child.

Websites with photos and information about missing children are clearly important resources for police and other stakeholders. However, the usefulness of two websites holding profiles of missing children with two different numbers to call in regard to sightings or other information can be confusing, and a duplication of efforts. It is recommended that a review is undertaken to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of providing a more integrated approach reflecting how technology is now delivered and used.

Much effort is devoted to joining up campaigns between off and online media. The latter provides a significant untapped potential to promote activity to identify, locate and recover missing children, not just through traditional websites but by harnessing the reach and power of social networking media, for example Missing People's 'Big Tweet'. More joined-up and coordinated campaigns between the statutory and voluntary sectors, both on and offline, have the potential to transform this specific tactic.

## Investigative process

When a missing child report has been made to the police the risk to the child should be determined and investigators must decide whether the incident is 'critical'; this could involve the use of the Child Rescue Alert system.

In cases where a missing incident is reported, the following actions should be taken by police.<sup>138</sup>

A Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) with experience in child protection cases should be appointed to oversee the case. A gold group made up of senior police officers and staff should be established to support the investigation from a strategic perspective. Establishing a major incident room (MIR) for critical incidents relating to missing children is crucial as it will assist with managing and retaining the information and intelligence generated.

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<sup>138</sup> NPIA Guidance 2010

In order to build a good relationship with the child's family, it will also be necessary to appoint a Family Liaison Officer and Co-ordinator. This officer will communicate any progression in the investigation with the family and offer them support. House to house work has proven to be one of the most effective methods of identifying important witnesses and suspects. This work should be coordinated by a designated officer.

For complex investigations, a crime scene co-ordinator should assist with the coordinating, assessing and prioritising the processing of crime scenes in line with the overall agreed forensic strategy.

In some cases, it will be necessary for a thorough search to be carried out in the surrounding areas. This is necessary to ascertain the whereabouts of the child, but also to discover any evidence or intelligence which will lead to their discovery.<sup>139</sup> Some forces send selected officers on training in search management technique, creating a pool of search managers to assist duty officers who are carrying out an extended or systematic search for a missing person or child. Search managers can provide guidance on the parameters of a search, taking account of the circumstances and the techniques appropriate to each search. This is especially important in the 'golden hours', when efficient working is essential in order to preserve evidence. Using search managers in the correct circumstances can avoid wasting police resources on fruitless searches.<sup>140</sup>

## 2.5 Ongoing Response

These are services for individuals and families of individuals who are missing for prolonged periods of time. Examples of this are media campaigns, cold case reviews, unidentified body matching and public record checking.

### Re-engaging with missing children

One of the most effective ways of re-engaging with children who have run away and gone missing is by allowing them to access free and confidential advice and support. This method recognises that the young person is in need and addresses the underlying causes for their running away.

The most prominent national service in this regard is the confidential 24 hour Runaway Helpline run by Missing People charity. Many local projects in the voluntary sector, such as Safe@Last, have local helplines. Where local helplines are not 24 hour, they will divert out of hours calls to the National Runaways Helpline.

Textsafe™ is another service provided by Missing People charity, which contacts a missing person by texting their mobile phone. They are informed about the charity's confidential advice service and are able to reply by text anonymously. Twelve police forces have signed up to the service so far with an additional 12 able to use the service through the COMPACT database system. Missing Children Europe<sup>141</sup> is launching an EU-wide central helpline for missing children which allows for one

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<sup>139</sup> ACPO (2005) *Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons* NPIA

<sup>140</sup> Geoff Newiss, (1999) *Missing presumed...? The police response to missing persons*, Home Office

<sup>141</sup> Missing Children Europe are a federation of 24 NGOs, in 16 EU states and Switzerland, who work on issues of missing and sexually exploited children. <http://www.missingchildreneurope.eu/>

memorable number to be publicised across Europe.<sup>142</sup> The number 116 000 is operational in the UK as a 24 hour hotline and will be launched publicly in Spring 2012 by the charity Missing People, the UK representative NGO of the federation, will be hosting the line.

## Specific support to families

The focus on missing children's issues is rightfully on the missing child. However, those left behind to deal with the loss are often neglected. Families left behind are commonly dealing with unresolved loss, which cannot even be compared to death. Research conducted by Missing People, *Living in Limbo*<sup>143</sup>, found that "*Families of missing people experience a range of emotional and social impacts. These result not only from the emotional trauma of their family member's disappearance, but also from the financial, legal and practical impacts, and from their experiences dealing with the police, other agencies and the media*".<sup>144</sup> For families of long term missing children and young people, there is no closure. One family member interviewed for *Living in Limbo* likens it to "*torture*"; another stated that they can "*never ever get over it*".<sup>145</sup>

The charity Missing People provides specialised support to families. They offer 24 hour emotional support and a range of resources for families. They are currently developing counselling and face to face support for families who face trauma as a result of their loved one going missing. The charity also ensures that there is a direct link between the publicity they provide and case work with the family left behind. The ACPO Guidance provides for Police forces to signpost families to these services.

## Recording and tracking missing incidents

Police forces record and track reports and incidents of missing children (as well as missing persons). Police forces also need to relate missing reports to any other relevant information about the individual young person, including all other incidents of missing.

COMPACT (The Community Policing and Case Tracking System for Missing Persons) is an intranet software system that has been developed in collaboration with Gloucestershire Constabulary and created for UK police forces to support and efficiently manage the many processes associated with missing persons.<sup>146</sup> There are currently 22 forces<sup>147</sup> in the UK using the COMPACT system to record missing persons' reports. This system has many benefits for recording individual cases and also for providing a strategic overview of the nature and scale of missing children within any police force. The software also enables fast, efficient and automatic information sharing with the NPIA MPB.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> <http://www.hotline116000.eu/>

<sup>143</sup> Holmes L (2008) *Living in Limbo: The experiences of, and impacts on, the families of missing people* Missing People

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, Page 19

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, Page 25

<sup>146</sup> The software is developed and managed by a company called WPC Software for more information see <http://www.wpcsoft.com/products/compactmisper.htm>

<sup>147</sup> Information provided by Missing Persons Bureau, NPIA, August 2010

<sup>148</sup> According to the statutory Code of Practice issued on the 1 April 2009 all police forces must to share all missing persons cases (those unsolved within 72 hours) with the NPIA Missing Person's Bureau. (NPIA (2009) *Collection of Missing Person's Data: A Code of Practice for the Police Service on collecting and sharing missing persons data with public authorities*).

Police forces have implemented COMPACT in different ways. Some forces have linked missing reports on their COMPACT systems with their broader intelligence systems. Others have enabled files to be added to reports, which means police forces being able to cross-check cases with other intelligence they may have, such as information on grooming, sexual exploitation or domestic abuse. Such links across force wide systems enables improved capacity for searches and strategic analysis.

Other police forces use an array of other types of software and systems. Some of these systems have similar characteristics to COMPACT, and have their own advantages. Lancashire Constabulary use Sleuth software for the recording, retrieval and analysis of cases and enquiries. A Sleuth software database is used as the hub of information for each young person who goes missing. Using this central database, Lancashire Constabulary retain information about any young people who are reported missing, allowing incidents of the same young person going missing to be linked automatically. It also records more accurately the number of children and young people who go missing, rather than recording missing incidents.

Using this system, Lancashire Constabulary have also developed a “highly-commended”<sup>149</sup> scheme with Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool Council to allow the online reporting of children who go missing from residential care. The staff at each care home input the personal and descriptive details of all young people resident at the establishment onto a Sleuth database accessible via the internet. The care home is then able to log a missing person report for this child directly to the Lancashire Constabulary. The efficiency of this system saves time and resources. Having a central database for repeat missing incidents is a process being used in different forms in various police forces in the UK.

Forces should be able to collate all missing person reports on a central database which all officers involved in investigating missing cases should be able to access. Commonly, police forces will have a command and control system where all cases, reports and referrals are logged. If a missing report comes into the police, it may initially be recorded onto the command and control system, to be transferred to the main missing persons database within the force (i.e. COMPACT) after some hours. If that child is found before the report is recorded on the missing person’s database, then it may not be logged at all. It is important that all cases of missing, including short-term cases are recorded onto the force wide missing persons database.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, police forces should be able to share this data with the NPJA MPB on a regular basis. Some forces, such as Kent Police, have seen the recorded numbers of missing children rise substantially since launching their force COMPACT system, highlighting the need for better reporting and managing of cases across police forces.

In regard to each case that is recorded, it is vitally important that a full profile and as much information about that child is recorded. Not only is this relevant to the individual child’s case, but it is also invaluable for building strategic knowledge. Police officers interviewed for this scoping report commented that a full profile of the child is critical in both investigating the missing incident, as well as gaining the best understanding of the young person’s life when conducting a return interview. As much as possible, the *causes* of the child’s missing incident should be recorded in every instant.

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<sup>149</sup> The system was recognised as “Highly-Commended” in the Guardian GC Awards for the Public Sector Collaborative Working category in 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/gcawards/winners-highly-commended>

<sup>150</sup> Some Police forces, such as Kent Constabulary, record all cases on their Force Missing Persons Database.

## Missing person's coordinators

Some police forces have missing person coordinators who generally lead at force level for missing person cases. The nominated officer will gain expertise in the investigation of missing people cases, and their co-ordinating role will provide the force with a source of expertise in patterns of disappearances. Their consistent work in this area will also allow them to develop close links with other police departments, in particular child protection units, domestic violence teams and external agencies such as social services, health authorities and local voluntary sector organisations. Two innovative examples of police practice:

**West Mercia Police** were experiencing high numbers of reports concerning 'looked after children': one home, for example, reported 265 missing children to the force since 2008, with one child reported missing 81 times. Working with local authorities, West Mercia developed an action plan which investigated the reasons these young people were going missing and types of missing incidents. The action plan also highlighted the seriousness with which each incident should be taken and laid out the importance of multi-agency working. Clear step-by-step guidelines were developed for creating a care plan for the young person, planning before any young person runs away, the immediate actions to be taken if a young person does go missing and how the return of the young person to their placement should be managed. This action plan enabled them to deal more effectively with the problem of repeat missing incidents. Figures show that during the year 2009/10 the force was able to reduce the number of missing incidents significantly and make cost savings of £5,723,00.<sup>151</sup>

**Sussex Police** have developed a specialist *Operation Newbridge*, which delivers a multi-agency response (police, UKBA and children's services) targeting at-risk profiled young people entering the UK through Gatwick airport who may be being trafficked for exploitation and go missing from care. It is the responsibility of all agencies to take pre-emptive action to prevent young people from absconding from care. This project has also highlighted the need for effective care placement and has resulted in a reduction in numbers of trafficked children travelling through Gatwick.

## Emergency accommodation and refuges

Emergency accommodation for children and young people provides an often necessary respite in a safe and protective environment. When a young person is found there are usually three options open to them: (i) return home; (ii) informal accommodation such as family or friends; or (iii) emergency accommodation provision. There are various types of emergency accommodation available, mainly through local authorities. Sections 20, 21 and 44 of the Children Act 1989 allow children's services to provide emergency accommodation to runaway children in accordance with various factors.

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<sup>151</sup> Home Office (2010) *Missing persons taskforce: A report with recommendations for improving the multi-agency response to missing incidents*

There are various models for emergency accommodation including community based foster care projects and children's homes. Accommodation providers such as Centrepoint<sup>152</sup> specialise in providing housing and services for homeless young people and wholly take referrals from local authorities.

Refuges<sup>153</sup> which are usually run by the voluntary sector provide somewhere safe and confidential for children and young people. These refuges minimise harm to children and young people and provide access to advice and support, the opportunity to reconcile the young person with his or her family where appropriate, or divert the child to other suitable services or accommodation.<sup>154</sup> Refuge enables a registered children's home to provide emergency accommodation for a child without parental consent. Therefore, young people can self refer to these services unlike other emergency accommodation for which they would need to be referred by a local authority. Currently, there are only two refuges in the UK, offering five beds; Safe@Last in South Yorkshire and the ROC refuge in Glasgow. Refuges provide emergency accommodation for children and young people under 16 who either do not want to go to the local authority or for whom the local authority is unable to provide emergency accommodation.

A recent report<sup>155</sup> commissioned by the Department for Education found that national research highlighted a need for emergency accommodation for young runaways, but local perceptions of evidence of need were divergent. Amongst stakeholders there is much debate around the viability, cost and effectiveness of refuges and types of emergency accommodation for young people in the UK. However, all stakeholders generally agree that facilities for children accessible at short notice and on a temporary basis are a necessary service for responding to young runaways.

## 2.6. Support for local practitioners

### Training and awareness raising for practitioners

Training and specialist awareness raising is essential for all police and local authorities working with children in order to provide a consistent and effective approach to safeguarding young people at risk of going missing. The current needs for training are normally met by police forces and local authorities, with specialist inputs from other agencies such as the NPIA MPB. Given the broad array of issues that involve missing and abducted children, stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that training and capacity building for professionals was a much-needed resource. There is clearly a need for nationally developed training packages that can be adapted and made available to local multi-agency services that go beyond the missing incident itself and address the causes and consequences. Currently, no such nationally developed training package exists.

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<sup>152</sup> <http://www.centrepoin.org.uk/>

<sup>153</sup> Refuges are legal and operate under s51 of the Children's Act 1989 (England and Wales) and s38 of the Children's (Scotland) Act 1995. According to relevant regulations, a refuge may only house a child for up to 14 days and for no longer than 21 days in any 3 month period.

<sup>154</sup> Smeaton E (2008) *Refuge for Young Runaways in the UK: A Critical Overview* Railway Children

<sup>155</sup> Rees, Franks, Medforth and Wade(2009) *Commissioning, Delivery and Perceptions of Emergency Accommodation for Young Runaways* The Children's Society

## Guidance and good practice models to share

In order to establish common standards for the response to missing and abducted children across sectors, it is necessary that appropriate guidance and operating procedures are developed and shared. Standard practices often result from pockets of successful practice by individual agencies or in a particular area through a strong multi-agency approach. Therefore, it is very important that such efforts are recognised and such effective models are documented and shared across the country. There are a number of eminent guidance documents that have provided support, raised awareness and established a framework of response across sectors and agencies over the years. These guidance documents include the following.

### **Department for Education: Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away and Go Missing From Home or Care**<sup>156</sup>

This statutory guidance for local authorities was published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), now Department for Education (DfE) in July 2009<sup>157</sup>. The guidance is targeted at local authorities and other safeguarding agencies. It outlines the push/pull factors which cause young people to run away; the risks to young people while they are away from home or care; the importance of multi-agency working; how to respond to repeat runaways; and the importance of return interviews and ongoing support. The guidance uses case studies and good practice examples to demonstrate issues facing young people who go missing while clearly stating the essential safeguarding response.

### **NPIA Code of Practice**<sup>158</sup>

The most recent NPIA Code of Practice was launched on 1 April 2009. It is now a statutory requirement for police forces to forward data on missing and unidentified persons, bodies and body parts to the NPIA MPB. It establishes the role and remit of the police and national policing organisations in response to missing persons. It sets out strategic principles in relation to the management of missing person investigations; establishes standards for case data submissions to the NPIA MPB; highlights the importance of partnerships with key public service agencies; identifies ACPO portfolio holders within police forces; and advocates that police forces keep an accurate system of records in relation to missing persons and data exchange.

### **ACPO guidance**

ACPO have produced guidance for police investigators on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons (2010).<sup>159</sup> This statutory guidance covers every aspect of investigating a missing person case. This includes detail on the appropriate investigative and safeguarding response to children missing from care, stranger and parental abduction (international

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<sup>156</sup> DCSF (2009) *Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away and Go Missing From Home or Care*

<sup>157</sup> A new government took office on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2010. The Department for Education replaced the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2010 and, as such, all statutory guidance and legislation continues to reflect the current legal position unless indicated otherwise, but may not reflect Government policy. Guidance will be referred to as DCSF guidance as this is how it was published and is the current guidance which local authorities are required to adhere to.

<sup>158</sup> NPIA (2009) *Collection of Missing Person's Data: A Code of Practice for the Police Service on collecting and sharing missing persons data with public authorities*

<sup>159</sup> An update to this guidance was published in 2007 and the guidance was updated fully in 2010, but was not published due to changes in government. Both can be found at <http://www.npia.police.uk/en/10237.htm>

and otherwise) and human trafficking. The purpose and use of the Child Rescue Alert are also set out for police. The ACPO Guidance on Investigating Child Abuse and Safeguarding Children<sup>160</sup> (2009) also provides information and guidance on missing children and families. This covers parental and stranger child abduction, children who run away from home or care and issues related to missing children, such as sexual exploitation and child trafficking.

### **National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland**

The Scottish Government published National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland in 2010.<sup>161</sup> The guidance includes information on all aspects of missing children, including different categories of missing incidents, information on child trafficking, and issues linked with missing children such as sexual exploitation. There is currently no specific guidance for local authorities on their required response to missing children in Scotland.

### **Other guidance with relevance to missing children**

Various other guidance documents highlight that when young people run away and go missing, this may be an indicator of other issues, such as sexual exploitation, child trafficking or domestic violence. These guidance documents include the supplements to Working Together to Safeguard Children; 'Safeguarding Children Abused through Exploitation'<sup>162</sup>, 'Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked'<sup>163</sup> and 'Safeguarding Children Abused through Domestic Violence'. They provide direction on how to identify when missing incidents are indicators of deeper issues and how to safeguard the young people in these situations which will prevent further missing incidents.<sup>164</sup>

These guidance documents have gone a long way towards improving the response to missing and abducted children over the years. They build on and disseminate existing good practice and provide the opportunity for further improvement and development. It has been recommended by stakeholders that further useful work on these guidance documents would be to evaluate their impact on actual practice.

Stakeholders and research reports have highlighted the need for guidance for local projects run by the voluntary sector. This includes a call for guidance on refuge provision<sup>165</sup> as well as for runaway projects.<sup>166</sup> While local projects can follow existing guidance for local authorities and Children's Homes, there is no specific guidance yet available for multi-agency projects working with runaway and exploited children. It would be most helpful to have national standards that can aid and guide local projects that work with runaways.

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<sup>160</sup> The ACPO Guidance on Investigating Child Abuse and Safeguarding Children can be found at <http://www.npia.police.uk/en/14532.htm>

<sup>161</sup> The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland can be found at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/12/09134441/21>

<sup>162</sup> HM Government (2009) *Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation* DCSF

<sup>163</sup> HM Government (2008) *Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked* DCSF

<sup>164</sup> Other DfE guidances such as Safeguarding Children Abused Through Domestic Violence and Safeguarding Children Affected By Gang Activity do not directly mention the issue of children who go missing. However, many reports have highlighted the links between these issues and missing and so these guidances should also be taken into consideration.

<sup>165</sup> Smeaton E, (2008) *Refuge for young runaways in the UK: A critical overview*, Railway Children

<sup>166</sup> PACT (2006) *A Postcode Lottery: Services to Missing Children in the UK*

## National policy response

The national policy lead for Missing People lies with the Home Office, who oversee the work of the NPIA and CEOP and who hold the cross-government lead on this portfolio. The issue of missing persons is devolved to the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Office. In terms of international parental child abduction to non-Hague countries, the Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) is the responsible Government office for the whole of the UK. The national leads for 'young runaways' England and Wales are the Department for Education and the Department for Health. The Department for Education works closely with other government departments, and stakeholders include police, local government, children's services and the voluntary sector to drive forward improvements in the services for young runaways.

### **Runaways Action Plan**<sup>167</sup>

The Department for Education published the Young Runaways Action Plan in June 2008, setting out how local agencies should work to help vulnerable young people who run away in England and Wales. Since launching the Action Plan, the Department for Education published statutory guidance for local authorities, and has worked with partners to produce a resource pack that helps inform young people about the dangers of running away.<sup>168</sup> Finally, the Department for Education has reviewed the provision of emergency accommodation in a commissioned review.<sup>169</sup>

## (International) parental child abduction

Parental abduction usually occurs when parents have begun divorce proceedings, or following a custody battle in which one of the parents was dissatisfied with the court ruling. Parental child abduction involves the child being removed from care of one parent without the permission of the other. This will sometimes involve the removal of the child to a foreign jurisdiction against the express direction of a British court. It should be noted that there is disagreement amongst stakeholders as to whether parental child abduction should fall under the definition of 'missing children', and a definitive position is yet to be established on this issue.

## Hague Convention cases

The 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction is an international instrument aimed to protect children under the age of 16 from the harmful effects of wrongful removal or retention from their country of habitual residence, and to secure protection for rights of access. Seventy-five countries are signatories of this Convention<sup>170</sup> of which 68 have the Convention in force with the UK.<sup>171</sup> Article 1 of the Convention outlines the objectives as:

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<sup>167</sup> HM Government (2008) *The Young Runaways Action Plan* DCSF

<sup>168</sup> For more details see Section: Effects of missing – Risks, Causes and Consequences, page 13

<sup>169</sup> Rees, Franks, Medforth, Wade (2009) *Commissioning, delivery and perceptions of emergency accommodation for young runaways* DCSF

<sup>170</sup> [http://www.pact-online.org/html/hague\\_convention.html](http://www.pact-online.org/html/hague_convention.html)

<sup>171</sup> <http://www.reunite.org/edit/files/International%20Agreements/Hague%20Convention%20Signatories.pdf>

- to secure the prompt return of children wrongfully removed to or retained in any Contracting State; and
- to ensure that rights of custody and of access under the law of one Contracting State are effectively respected in the other Contracting States.

In accordance with this and other international legislation, namely the relevant European Regulation<sup>172</sup> and Convention<sup>173</sup>, each signatory country must have a central authority responsible for administering the operation of this legislation. The International Child Abduction and Contact Unit (ICACU)<sup>174</sup> under the office of the Official Solicitor is the central authority for England and Wales. The Minister for Justice and her office under the Scottish Executive acts as the equivalent central authority for Scotland.<sup>175</sup> The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service discharges the functions of the equivalent central authority in Northern Ireland.<sup>176</sup> The central authorities are able to contact other central authorities directly, process applications and provide practical advice and information to parents, solicitors and others relevant to the case.

The main limitations to the Convention are:

- It covers only those countries who are signatories. This results in those who therefore purposely go to non Hague Convention countries where there is little recourse.
- It is a private law instrument therefore it is for individuals to pursue cases in their own capacity, rather than Government.
- Its interpretation and application of the Convention differs in each country. This complicates the process for parents who have to juggle their efforts between at least two different jurisdictions.

Despite its limitations, the Hague Convention is still the most effective legal mechanism for international parental abduction cases. According to PACT, it is almost impossible to secure the return of abducted children from non-Hague countries.

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<sup>172</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 (Revised Brussels II)

<sup>173</sup> European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions Concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children

<sup>174</sup> <http://www.officialsolicitor.gov.uk/os/icacu.htm>

<sup>175</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/law/17867/fm-children-root/18533/13585>

<sup>176</sup> <http://www.courtsni.gov.uk/en-GB/Services/ChildAbduction/ChildAbductionTheCentralAuthority/>



Dark Blue = Hague Countries

Grey = Non-Hague Countries<sup>177</sup>

## Non-Hague Convention cases

For any parent looking to retrieve their child from a non-Hague country, the only real recourse is to apply through the courts of that country. This can be particularly difficult due to legal, cultural and language barriers in legal systems different from that of the UK. For parental abduction to non-Hague convention countries, the responsible Government department is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Child Abduction Section<sup>178</sup>, which can provide some basic advice on foreign lawyers, travel and accommodation, and facilitate contact with authorities and agencies in the other country. FCO consular services are able to visit the child if his or her location is known. They are not able to provide legal advice.

Recent figures released by the FCO have shown that abductions to non-Hague countries have risen by 39% (from 105 last year to 146 cases this year).<sup>179</sup> The highest number of cases related to Pakistan. The UK-Pakistan Judicial Protocol was signed in 2003 by senior judges aiming to secure the return of an abducted child to the country where they normally live, without regard to the nationality, culture or religion of the child. Liaison judges have been appointed in the UK and Pakistan to facilitate the operation of the Protocol. The Protocol has not been incorporated into national law in either country although it is in line with national laws in the UK.

The Office of the Head of International Family Justice for England and Wales provides a broad range of legal advice on international family issues, including assistance with parental abduction cases with non-Hague countries.

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<sup>177</sup> Figure is freely available for public use by Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hague\\_Signatories.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hague_Signatories.png)

<sup>178</sup> <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/child-abduction>

<sup>179</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10792704>

## Police response

Some agencies view parental abduction as a civil issue which requires civil and private law remedies, Others view the police's role as central and believe a criminal investigation should be instigated in every instance. In any case, all agencies agree that where the safety and wellbeing of a child is of concern, the police must be involved.

The Child Abduction Act makes it an offence for a person to take or send a child under 16 out of the UK without appropriate consent. This also applies to parents. Both statutory and non-statutory agencies advise parents to report parental child abduction to the police who must in turn take immediate action to prevent the child from leaving the country. Police are then able to issue an 'All Port Warning'<sup>180</sup>. If the whereabouts of the child are unknown, police should liaise with Special Branch and INTERPOL.<sup>181</sup> Guidance has also been published for police forces on the Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA).

## Prevention and support services

Families dealing with parental abduction have significant needs for specialist services. The negative impact of alienation on both the child and the left-behind parent is long term and deeply felt. In addition to the trauma resulting from the separation and divorce of their parents, children abducted by one parent will feel a huge sense of loss and security from losing contact with the other parent, mistrust against the alienated parent, and may also be victim to manipulation by the abducting parent. Indeed, unreasonable alienation of a parent from a child is a form of abuse which causes long-term damage. For the alienated parent, there will often be a continuing sense of loss, anxiety and the long-term burden of financial and legal costs in their attempts to regain contact with their child, especially in foreign countries.

Prevention work in the area of parental child abduction is particularly necessary in the area of family work, specifically mediation between parents whose relationship is under strain. The voluntary sector plays a key role in this area, offering counselling and dispute resolution.<sup>182</sup> Relate<sup>183</sup> is a charity which offers various types of relationship counselling and mediation, over the phone, face-to-face and through their website. Parentline Plus<sup>184</sup> is a UK charity offering help and support to parents and anyone caring for children. They offer 24-hour support through a variety of methods, such as by phone, telephone groups, Skype, text and community groups. A range of other local projects offer mediation and support through the National Family Mediation network (NFM), providing help to those affected by separation and divorce.<sup>185</sup> In addition, there exists an array of other voluntary sector specialist services for particular issues within a family, such as domestic abuse and contact with children.

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<sup>180</sup> ACPO (2005) *Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons* NPJA – (Page 9)

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>182</sup> PACT (2006) *A Postcode Lottery: Services to Missing Children in the UK*

<sup>183</sup> <http://www.relate.org.uk/home/index.html>

<sup>184</sup> [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

<sup>185</sup> <http://www.nfm.org.uk/>

In regard to international parental child abduction cases, the charity Reunite International<sup>186</sup> offers a helpline for parents and families on both sides of the equation, as well as an out of hours emergency line. On their website, there is a parents' forum where parents can discuss and share information, as well as a FAQ section. Importantly, Reunite International also offer specialist mediation services for parents both in Hague and non-Hague Convention cases. In a breakthrough mediation pilot scheme Reunite has undertaken for Hague convention cases, they found that of the cases that went through to mediation, *"75% were able to agree a memorandum of understanding focused on the best interests of their child, ensuring that the child continue to have a positive relationship with both parents and their extended family, thus avoiding a court enforced decision and future litigation."*<sup>187</sup> Often the responses to international parental child abduction begin once the child has been taken. However, Reunite International have made available 'Prevention Guides' for parents who are concerned that their child may be abducted<sup>188</sup>. These guides have been jointly produced by the police, Reunite International and ICACU. These guides are available for England and Wales. Adapted versions for Scotland and Northern Ireland have also been produced, as well as for Spain and Greece. These guides offer basic information to parents about actions to take, numbers to call, information to gather and reports to make if they suspect possible international parental child abduction.

The charity CFAB (Children and Families Across Borders) provide inter-country social work expertise, operating from a child-centred approach, and in accordance with relevant domestic and private international law. CFAB are able to support legal proceedings by linking with appropriate authorities and agencies. Individuals approaching the agency are also able to access the support of a social worker. Their Family Reunion Project, operating since 1997, is a dedicated initiative for parents of children abducted to Libya. With the co-operation of the FCO and the Libyan Government, CFAB facilitates and supervises an annual family reunion in Libya, between the children and family members in the UK.

The charities Reunite and PACT<sup>189</sup> raise awareness about international parental child abduction. Reunite International's awareness raising campaign was launched in Jul 2009 and works in communities in the UK. It has also collaborated with the FCO to provide mediation training for social workers abroad. PACT has produced a DVD documentary highlighting the destructive effects of parental abduction on children<sup>190</sup>.

PACT views the provision of services in the area of parental child abduction as "patchy"<sup>191</sup> and calls for

- specialist support and counselling for children who have been abducted and/or alienated from a parent to promote long-term positive relationships

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<sup>186</sup> [www.reunite.org](http://www.reunite.org)

<sup>187</sup> Reunite International Child Abduction Centre (2006) *"Mediation in International Parental Abduction: The reunite Mediation Pilot Scheme"* reunite International. The report went on to say that even in the cases where an MOU was not agreed, the mediation helped to move things forward and open lines of communication.

<sup>188</sup> <http://www.reunite.org/pages/prevention.asp>

<sup>189</sup> <http://www.pact-online.org/>

<sup>190</sup> <http://www.victimsofanotherwar.com/>

<sup>191</sup> PACT (2006) *A Postcode Lottery: Services to Missing Children in the UK-* (Page 44)

- specialist support and counselling for parents reunited with their children to facilitate the rebuilding of familial relationships.
- further and extensive promotion of the negative impacts of parental alienation on children and on both the alienating and alienated parent.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> *ibid*

## **Chapter 3: CEOP's Response to Missing and Abducted Children**

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre was launched in 2006 to combat child sexual abuse and exploitation. In 2010 the current government confirmed the transfer of the national strategic and operational lead for missing and abducted children from the NPIA to CEOP. CEOP's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is also the Association of Chief Police Officer's (ACPO) lead for Missing Children.

In preparation for the assumption of responsibilities, CEOP commenced a programme of work designed to develop its approach to this matter. This programme aimed to facilitate consultation with stakeholders and experts, to gather information on missing children, to gain an overall understanding of the issues and responses, and finally, to make key conclusions and recommendations regarding CEOP's longer term strategy against missing and abducted children. This section outlines the strengths CEOP can bring to the response to missing and abducted children, as well as the areas of activities where it can most appropriately – with adequate resourcing – add value to the present framework response to missing and abducted children.

CEOP takes a child-centred approach and plays a decisive role with government, police forces and law enforcement agencies, children's services and other stakeholders in order to protect children, young people, families and society from paedophiles, sexual offenders and others who seek to harm them. CEOP's approach is designed to reduce the risk to children and young people. It works in partnership to protect children drawing on advice and expertise from across the public, private and voluntary sectors. As part of UK policing, CEOP achieves this by tackling the threat of offenders and by reducing the vulnerability of children and young people.

CEOP's success relies on tackling the problem in a holistic, integrated way. CEOP works with a wide range of stakeholders, and embeds law enforcement officers and specialist workers from children's charities, social services and industry throughout the organisation. As well as achieving better outcomes for children and society, this consolidation and co-location of specialist protective services provides better value for money through economies of scale.

CEOP's strength lies in the strategic and specialist tactical responses to child exploitation. CEOP's unique character as a law enforcement, child protection, multi-agency organisation gives it key advantages which can bring value to the existing response to missing children. Given CEOP's experience and record against child exploitation, it is in a unique position to develop a more in-depth understanding of the issues of missing and abducted children. CEOP is able to give the subject of missing and abducted children the strategic attention and focus it urgently demands. CEOP works just as effectively within police and law enforcement sectors as it does within children's services and the education sector, and this cross-working is particularly relevant for the overall wellbeing of children.

As in child exploitation, cases of missing and abducted children know no borders. People today have easier access to others, whether through modern communication and information technology or through travel and migration. It follows that any child protection response will include an international element. CEOP's new initiative of the International Child Protection Network (ICPN) brings together child protection networks across the world. Currently, the CEOP ICPN has established Advisory Panels in Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Romania and is dedicated to sharing capacity, information and partnership abroad.

CEOP is also part of the Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT)<sup>193</sup>. The VGT is a global partnership that brings together national law enforcement agencies to protect children from sexual exploitation. The VGT ensures closer cooperation between these national law enforcement agencies to share information and intelligence, run joint law enforcement operations and to raise public awareness about the nature and scale of child sexual exploitation. Currently, the VGT comprises the Australian Federal Police (Chair), CEOP, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Italian Postal and Communications Police, the Ministry of the Interior for the United Arab Emirates, Online Child Exploitation Across New Zealand, Europol and INTERPOL.

### 3.1 CEOP overview and key strengths for the missing agenda

CEOP's activities are delivered through three faculties comprising of Intelligence, Specialist Operational Support and Harm Reduction. These faculties are examined below, along with an exploration of how responses to missing and abducted children would be integrated into them.

#### Intelligence

The largest of CEOP's three frontline faculties, the Intelligence Faculty, is the organisational hub, receiving and processing all reports of allegations of child sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking of children and young people. They assess and prioritise all the operational and public information received by CEOP, provide allegations of crime to law enforcement, and undertake initial child protection intervention as appropriate. Analysed intelligence may be disseminated to local police forces, international law enforcement or other child protection agencies for action or developed internally as active investigations and intelligence. All information collected is used to develop CEOP's evolving picture of child exploitation. It also provides support to local public protection units in managing high risk sex offenders, particularly those who go missing or pose a serious threat to children in the UK or abroad.

This faculty houses:

- Referrals and case development
- Offender management
- Strategic analysis

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<sup>193</sup> <http://www.virtualglobaltaskforce.com/>

## Specialist Operational Support

The Specialist Operational Support faculty provides support to police forces, international law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organisations, ultimately disseminating intelligence (largely to an evidential standard) leading to the safeguarding intervention activity – protecting children – whilst holding offenders to account. In doing so it liaises with UK and foreign counterparts. The faculty provides the following distinct functions:

- Covert investigation;
- Tactical support;
- Behavioural analysis; and
- Victim identification

## Harm Reduction and Public Affairs

Through utilising the products of the Intelligence and Specialist Operational Support faculties and CEOP's knowledge of how children and young people operate online, the Harm Reduction Faculty aims to reduce the vulnerability of and create a safer environment for children. The faculty also incorporates CEOP's corporate communications function, which has supported numerous public launches and campaigns, including the effective appeals for high-risk offenders in collaboration with Crimestoppers. The team have most recently set up CEOP's ClickCEOP campaign on prominent social networking websites, such as Facebook. The area of missing children will greatly benefit from work such as this. The faculty is divided into a number of specialist teams, as follows:

- International & Relations;
- Children and Young Person's Team;
- Professional Development;
- Corporate communications and Public Affairs, and
- Safer by Design

## Safeguarding and Child Protection

This business area ensures that the overarching organisational goal to safeguard and protect children is shaped by high quality child protection advice at both a strategic and practice level. This includes ongoing operational support and delivery of key social work advice and activities across all parts of the business. It is ensured that child protection standards are continuously monitored so that they are based on best practice and reflect contemporary legislation, guidance and evidence from research.

## Partnerships

CEOP's multi-sector approach draws on the skills and experience of front line police, children's charities, government, academic experts and close cooperation and engagement with private industry. CEOP's teams typically include police officers specialising in countering child abuse, who work alongside social work professionals from the wider child protection community and industry. The work force includes secondees from various organisations. All CEOP partnership activity is overseen by the CEOP Relationship Management group which is chaired by a member of the CEOP Board and involves independent members who bring skills from both the public and private sector. This committee reports formally to the CEOP CEO and the CEOP Board.

## Different approach to missing and abducted children

In developing its approach to missing children CEOP wanted to address a number of key questions:

- What should be done nationally, as opposed to locally?
- How could national resources be best organised to deliver identified objectives?
- How can local services be best supported?
- How can a different approach be delivered through public/private/voluntary sector partnerships?

CEOP was keen to build on its strengths and not duplicate or replicate what already existed. It was important in devising any solution that CEOP's successful business model was not disrupted but marshalled to deliver new services to help tackle this issue. Additionally it was essential that any new services should be cost-effective and delivered within existing national resources.

With respect to missing children CEOP plans:

*'To work in partnership with police forces and other agencies involved with missing and abducted children to support their interventions in delivering better outcomes for the individual child, their family and the public.'*

The activities underlying the three main CEOP objectives of prevent, protect and pursue will be designed to:

- **Prevent** – reducing the numbers of children who go missing and potentially suffer harm;
- **Re-engage** – identify, locate and make contact with those who remain missing; and
- **Re-integrate**– facilitate more opportunities for children to re-unite with their families/carers, where that is their best interests, and to help them access local services that will improve their safety and well-being.

Through CEOP's consultation programme and the development of this report CEOP has identified a number of areas where it feels that it can add value to and better support existing effort in the achievement of its overriding objective to protect children and the activity required to achieve this; these are:

- education and awareness;
- professional development;
- improved online resources;
- strategic knowledge development;
- tactical support and coordination for cases that have a national or international complexion; and
- child rescue alert.

CEOP also identified three key threat areas that may cause children to go missing and where - because of the cross-boundary and, sometimes, cross-jurisdictional issues - there is an overwhelming need to provide national overview and oversight of these matters:

- child sexual exploitation;
- child trafficking; and
- abduction.

## Education and awareness

With regard to broader education activities on missing children, particularly in relation to runaways, organisations such as the Children's Society<sup>194</sup> and Barnado's have developed bespoke education material aimed at young people, helping to raise awareness of the risks of running away, in addition to information about accessing help and support. Stakeholders were not able to identify any proactive national campaign for the dissemination of such education materials to children.

CEOP will expand its current programme to include missing and abducted children and provide the first nationally available series of resources to help tackle this problem. The team has already developed a video resource relating to missing children. The video is aimed at raising awareness of the general issue relating to missing children. Each year the team will aim to develop two new resources, based on the outcomes of themed assessments in the key threat areas that CEOP will focus on.

In responding to missing children, the Children and Young Person's team will review its networks through which it delivers its *ThinkUKnow* training to include areas where access to the most vulnerable children and young people could be more effectively achieved. This will include young people in local authority care, whether in institutional care or foster homes, and those accessing key services delivered by local NGOs. Professionals working around this target group, whether in police forces, children's services, the health sector or local NGOs, will be particularly encouraged to become CEOP Ambassadors.

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<sup>194</sup> Such as the 'My Life' resource pack developed in partnership with DfE; as described on page 30

## Professional development

Training for the police service has historically concentrated on the missing episode itself. CEOP plans to develop new training courses that will aim to complement this existing training, by concentrating on the causes of children going missing, as well as best practice once they have been found. These courses will equip local practitioners to better identify vulnerable children and put in place measures to protect and safeguard them. They will also help develop approaches that allow services to learn from missing cases to design future preventative action and interventions.

CEOP's Professional Development work has consisted of developing and delivering a specialist training programme designed specifically for child protection officials, with a particular focus on law enforcement. The programme's courses broadly covered issues of child sexual abuse and offender management. CEOP has collaborated with the University of Central Lancashire to develop its professional development programme, the *CEOP Academy*, into a certified post-graduate qualification. In addition to the courses, CEOP also holds regular seminars to raise awareness bringing together police and other child protection workers. These seminars have included subjects such as 'child abduction' and 'female sex offenders', and bring in expert speakers and trainers from the UK and abroad.

Given CEOP's success in training child protection police officers and workers across sectors, CEOP will develop training on missing and abducted children according to needs and offer its delivery at national level. A series of specialist courses on child sexual exploitation, child trafficking, child abduction and parental abduction will be developed over time to be included within the CEOP Academy Programme. By providing training at the national level, individual police forces and local authorities would no longer be required to develop bespoke training at local level, saving costs.

## Improved online resources

One of the issues identified through this report is the need to join up the excellent advice and services which children and families can access through the internet. The online environment can be a daunting and confusing place, especially for those who are in a vulnerable position or are worrying about a child who has gone missing. Additionally, it is constantly evolving and changing and it is important for help and advice to be in many places on the web, rather than just on a traditional website.

CEOP will build on its one stop shop approach to online safety to incorporate help and advice for missing children and their families. However, this will not be a case of CEOP simply replicating that advice, but it will be an active signposting of and direction to trusted sources such as the NSPCC Childline service, Missing People, PACT and local organisations. CEOP's successful CLICKCEOP mechanism is already in many online fora, particularly social networking and instant messaging, allowing it to extend its reach beyond those who just visit its website.

It will work with partners to see how missing children appeals on and offline could be better supported and coordinated, with the potential to reach many more people, but most importantly to further reach out to young people who are missing and help to reassure their parents/carers that

help for them is available. Part of this will be the assimilation of the Missing Kids website and CEOP will work with partners to improve its reach and effectiveness.

## Targeted intelligence collation, analysis and assessment

A child who goes missing is primarily a matter for local services to react to and to manage the investigation and search. However, it is evident that there are specific threats to children that cause them to go missing, or are a consequence of the missing episode itself, which have a cross boundary, jurisdictional or even international characteristic. In these cases it is important that such threats are reacted to within this context and that a national overview of these problems is essential. This is particularly important when it comes to developing an understanding of the victimology and offending behaviour. It is only with this understanding that policy and operational response can be properly shaped at local, national and international level. The three areas where CEOP believes that better intelligence collation and analysis can assist with the development of such an understanding are:

- sexual exploitation;
- child trafficking; and
- abducted children.

Through regular information exchange with the NPIA's MPB and intelligence collections from police forces, local children services and children's charities CEOP will develop a more in depth knowledge of these issues, a greater understanding of how they link to a missing incident and an increasing awareness of the role of offenders play in resulting harm. In addition, it will consider extending its online reporting systems for these threats to encourage individuals with information to come forward, particularly children, where perhaps they might not do so using traditional avenues. This will build on the success CEOP has demonstrated in encouraging reports of sexual abuse and exploitation about predators that use technology to interact with children. CEOP will publish themed assessments on these specific threats to help inform government and policing policy and thinking on measures to reduce risk to children and to tackle offenders. CEOP will also include information on missing children as part of its annual assessment of the overall threat to children, posed by those who would seek to abuse or exploit them.

## Tactical support and coordination

Primacy for the investigation and the search for a missing child will always remain with the relevant police force in the UK, or where a child goes missing outside the UK with the responsible authority in the country where the incident occurred. Responsibility for a missing child's welfare rests with the relevant children's service.

However, it is clear that there is wealth of expertise, advice and support that can be brought to bear to support the investigation into and the search for a missing child. This does not all rest in one organisation or in one sector, or entirely in the UK. It is dissipated across many organisations and professions, across the UK and in other parts of the world. Additionally, there are many ways to

enhance the search for a missing child by working with the voluntary and private sectors, in particular new technology companies.

Hitherto no one UK agency has had responsibility for identifying the various expertise and support that can be accessed in the event of child going missing or being abducted, nor the different tactical approaches that can be brought to bear in such cases. No one agency was responsible for coordinating the delivery of this support to senior investigating officers in the UK or elsewhere. Where a UK child goes missing abroad it is important that there is a single law enforcement to law enforcement relationship that can provide consistent and accurate support and advice, as well as an efficient conduit for the provision of tactical resources.

CEOP will create a directory for a range of specialist expertise that could be called on in the event of a disappearance of a child, where the responsible police force or law enforcement agency requests such assistance. It will provide tactical advice on the deployment of such resources and the approaches that a Senior Investigating Officer may want to consider. CEOP will act as the law enforcement single point of contact for incidents involving a UK child who goes missing abroad, working with UK government and police to deliver the best possible support to the affected family and those charged with recovering the child safely.

An important part of these tactical resources will be the further development of Child Rescue Alert (CRA) as an essential tool of a senior investigating officer's toolkit in responding to critical incidents. CEOP will work with partners in the voluntary and private sector to improve the effectiveness and reach of CRA, and could involve better use of online environment to publicise cases. This will also involve better coordination of traditional media appeals and campaigns.

CEOP will support police forces by bringing to bear its expertise and techniques in appropriate cases of long-term missing children, from conducting open source research into the potential whereabouts of a missing child through to the use of its online platform to reach out to missing children.

## Outcomes

### **Prevent - education and awareness**

1. To develop educational resources on to help prevent the causes of why children go missing for children, families and schools.
2. To target delivery of the specialist education modules to vulnerable children who may or may not be in mainstream education, such as looked-after children or those with special needs.
3. To consider broadening the youth panel arrangements to include children and young people who have had experience of going missing.
4. To raise awareness for parents and carers of the risks of abduction.
5. To coordinate national awareness campaigns to encourage children and young people to seek help in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner.

### **Prevent, protect and pursue - training and development for child protection professionals**

6. To develop specialist training for child protection and other professionals about missing, trafficked and abducted children.
7. To develop multi-agency capacity-building modules for professionals working with children.
8. To run specialist seminars on issues relating to missing, trafficking and abduction as part of CEOP's regular conferencing activities.
9. To identify and disseminate good practice within police forces, local authorities and other sectors.

#### **Prevent and protect - improving online resources**

10. Develop a one stop approach to online resources for children, families and professionals, working with stakeholders both nationally and locally, including the use of the Missing Kids website.
11. Build a coordinated approach with partners to public appeals and campaigns on missing children.
12. To support national appeals for missing children launched by other specialist agencies.
13. Work with partners to develop enhanced ways of reaching out to missing children using new media and digital services.

#### **Prevent, protect and pursue - strategic knowledge development**

14. To establish CEOP as the national focal point for tactical and strategic intelligence on children who go missing as a result of sexual exploitation, trafficking or abduction, or who are sexually abused or exploited while missing.
15. To explore the extension of the online reporting mechanism to encompass cases of child sexual exploitation and trafficking.
16. To analyse and build a strategic national picture of children who go missing as a result of sexual exploitation, trafficking or abduction.
17. To share information and knowledge throughout the UK on missing and abducted children.
18. To help inform the development of policy and tactical responses at local, national and international levels.

#### **Protect and pursue - tactical support and coordination**

19. To build and establish CEOP's institutional expertise on the tactical response to missing, trafficked and abducted children.
20. To develop a directory of specialist advice and support in the UK and elsewhere for cases of missing children that have a national or international complexion.
21. To coordinate the provision of specialist tactical support and advice to police forces and other agencies in investigating and responding to missing and abducted children.
22. To act as the UK single law enforcement point of contact for cases where a UK child goes missing abroad.
23. To enhance the operation of the Child Rescue Alert system in partnership with public, private and voluntary sectors partners.

24. To oversee the application of CEOP expertise and techniques to appropriate individual long term missing cases.



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