

A Postcode Lottery

Services to Missing Children
in the UK



PACT

PARENTS & ABDUCTED CHILDREN TOGETHER
AN ASSOCIATE OF ICMC



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Services to missing children in the UK

A report by
Parents and Abducted Children Together (PACT)

Bridge House Trust



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About PACT

PACT (Parents and Abducted Children Together) is an international, non-profit organisation registered both in the UK and the US. It was founded in 2000 by Lady Meyer, wife of the then British Ambassador to the United States, Sir Christopher Meyer. Its patrons are Cherie Blair, wife of the British Prime Minister and Laura Bush, the First Lady of the United States.

PACT's initial mission was to fight parental child abduction across frontiers by raising awareness of this growing, but little-known, problem and by advocating solutions. Parental child abduction remains at the forefront of PACT's concerns. But it has now broadened its mission to include the location and retrieval of all missing children.

PACT's vision is truly international. Much of its work is based on techniques successfully deployed in the US to help bring missing children safely home.

PACT's main focus is advocacy, policy and research. In the UK, PACT works closely with the police, the government, and other non-profit organisations to meet this challenge.

Previous PACT releases:

Victims of Another War: The Aftermath of Parental Alienation. PACT Documentary (2006)

Data Collection on Missing Children: Developments in the EU. PACT Summary Paper (2006)

Every Five Minutes: A Review of the Available Data on Missing Children in the UK (2005)

www.pact-online.org







Executive summary

The voluntary sector plays a pivotal role in providing essential support to missing children. This report provides the first comprehensive map of the different agencies involved and the services they provide. In doing so, this study aims to build a platform for improving the strategic planning and funding for services across the UK.

The study includes voluntary agencies supporting young runaways, throwaways, children abducted by family members and children who are 'otherwise missing' (i.e. the reason is not known). The scope of the services covered in this report is broad including:

- Practical advice and emotional support to children who have gone missing, including signposting to local and specialist services and/or emergency accommodation.
- Sustained, one-to-one engagement with young people to try to resolve the problems that have led to their running away (or contemplating running away).
- Mediation between families and young people, and parents disputing the custody of their children, to prevent children from going missing or being abducted.
- Emergency accommodation, streetwork and drop-in centres to increase the safety and well-being of children away from home.
- A range of preventative measures, including school visits, education resources and internet sites/web forums.
- Practical advice and support for the families of missing children, including parents whose children have been abducted overseas.
- Publicity and case management to try to locate missing children.
- Specialist advice and support on the various causes of going missing, including the legal aspects of international child abduction.

The key to the success of voluntary organisations in supporting young people is:

- Their ability to build trust and close relationships with young people.
- Their independence from statutory service providers, which children themselves value highly (see Morgan, 2006).
- Their flexibility to tailor services to individual cases, including out-of-hours access to services and creative packages of support.



- The knowledge, empathy and passion of individual voluntary sector workers (both paid and unpaid) to deliver the most effective and appropriate service to children and, in many cases, their families.

Yet our study has also found that the impact of the voluntary sector could be greatly increased. There is enormous geographical disparity in the types and levels of services provided to missing children (particularly runaways and throwaways) across the UK. Only a small number of local areas have supported voluntary sector runaway projects, creating a 'postcode lottery' in the availability of services. The services that do exist frequently face the threat of closure because of short-term funding commitments. There are only 10 refuge beds in the whole of the UK. There are critical gaps in the support offered to abducted and/or alienated children and their families.

Both the geographical disparity of voluntary sector provision and the precarious future of 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. National and local charities have developed different service

models for children in crisis – and have all too often been relied upon to provide the funding for individual projects. This situation is rarely sustainable and certainly not geographically equitable.

This study finds that the UK needs to adopt a national approach to securing services to missing children. This will require a:

- National bespoke funding programme
- National co-ordination
- National minimum standards
- National monitoring and evaluation

Recommendations

The main obstacle to securing universal, high quality services to missing children is the lack of clear leadership in central government. The involvement of more than six government departments in dealing with different types of missing children has left the co-ordination of services in tatters. Accountability and any sense of a clear strategic vision for dealing with missing children are sparse.

Recommendation 1

A new national agency should be created to centralise the co-ordination of services to missing children and provide clear leadership and accountability.



The new agency – a **national missing childrens' resource centre** – should monitor local provision against agreed national minimum standards; disseminate best practice and what works; and develop national policies on missing children. Additionally, the resource centre might also allocate national funding to local service providers and become the national focal point for data collection.

Recommendation 2

A national bespoke funding programme should be launched, dedicated to delivering high quality services for missing children throughout all parts of the UK.

The current arrangements for funding services to missing children need to change. At present, voluntary sector services to missing children have to compete for prioritisation amongst many other services for local authority funding. Demand for runaway projects is notoriously difficult to measure using routine data sources. Often it is not until a project actually opens that the extent of the problem locally becomes apparent. The funding of refuge beds desperately needs to be transferred out of single local authority areas where such provision is frequently economically unviable.

Important lessons on the funding of projects and refuge can be learnt from the

US experience. National funding not only offers an equitable geographical distribution of services, but it also provides excellent opportunities for learning what works and for collecting standardised data on the nature and extent of the problem.

Recommendations 1 and 2 form PACT's vision for the future: missing children, throughout the UK, supported by a single national agency with appropriate funds.

In the meantime, more can be done to make sure missing children receive better support within the existing system:

Recommendation 3

The DfES should develop a minimum standard of services for children in crisis, clearly stating what should be provided by both the statutory and the non-statutory sector.

Recommendation 4

The DfES should integrate the minimum standards into the existing arrangements to inspect the performance of local service providers.

Recommendation 5

The DfES should ensure local authorities comply with the

Department of Health Circular LAC (2002) 17.

relied upon to deliver appropriate levels of refuge.

Recommendation 6

The DfES should consolidate and disseminate best practice in developing models of service delivery between statutory and non-statutory agencies for dealing effectively with children in crisis.

Finally, we recommend a key change should be made to the current arrangements for providing strategic oversight on missing children:

Recommendation 8

Key government departments (the DfES and the Home Office) should take over the ownership of the Strategic Oversight Group on missing persons. Improving co-ordination of different services to missing children is a cross governmental responsibility, not an ACPO one.

Recommendation 7

The DfES should review how effective the current funding arrangements are in securing high quality services to runaways, in particular, whether local funding mechanisms can be





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Chapter 1

Introduction

Alongside statutory organisations (police, social services etc.), the voluntary sector is a provider of key and innovative front line services to missing children in the UK.

Whilst recent years have seen major reviews of the role played in this field by statutory organisations (e.g. Perry Nove's strategic review of the Police National Missing Persons Bureau, 2005; the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) *Guidance on the Management, Investigation and Recording of Missing Persons*, 2005; and the Local Government Association and ACPO's *Missing from care: Procedures and practices in caring for missing children*, 1997), the important contribution of the voluntary sector is poorly defined and haphazardly integrated into central strategic planning of service provision.

This review has been commissioned to provide a comprehensive map of the role of different voluntary sector agencies; the specific groups they serve; the connections and dependencies between different agencies (and the statutory sector); and an indication of the sustainability of the services they provide.

The principal aim of this project is to provide a platform for improving the strategic planning and funding of services to missing children. Equipped with a comprehensive understanding of the contributions and connections between different voluntary agencies, key stakeholders will be able to identify core service providers; shortfalls in service provision; and the necessary arrangements for improving and co-ordinating service delivery.



Types of missing children

This study has focused on mapping the provision of voluntary services to three types of missing children and their families: **runaways/throwaways**, victims of **family abduction**, and children who remain missing without explanation ('**otherwise missing**').

The NISMART 2¹ classification includes other types of missing children which have, in the main, been excluded from this study:

- **Non-family abductions and stereotypical kidnapping**

Victims of non-family abduction and stereotypical kidnapping are primarily the victims of crime, resulting from a sexual, financial or revenge motive (Newiss and Fairbrother, 2004), who happen to have been reported missing as a result of the incident. Services provided to these children are principally those of police investigation to recover the child and identify the perpetrator; victim support and crime prevention. These are distinct from services directed to missing children.

- **Missing involuntary, lost or injured**

Some children are reported missing as a result of becoming lost or injured

and being unable to return home. Emergency response services are provided principally by the police to locate and retrieve these children (in some circumstances calling on non-statutory agencies such as local search and/or mountain rescue groups).

- **Missing benign explanation**

Some children are reported missing because of misunderstandings or confusion as to their whereabouts, without the child been lost, injured, victimised or choosing to runaway. Services are provided by the police to locate these children.

The study has included services provided to children who are both reported and not reported missing to authorities. In some cases children may have been reported missing whilst not realising or defining themselves as missing (and visa versa). The provision of services covered in this report includes both eventualities.

¹ The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children used this six-point classification when estimating the prevalence of missing children in the US in 1999 (Sedlak et al., 2002).



Nature of demand for services to missing children

Numerous studies have indicated that the police receive at least 100,000 reports of missing young people each year in the UK (see PACT, 2005 for a review of the various estimates).

The latest estimates from The Children's Society indicate that between 10 and 11% of children in the UK will have run away or been forced to leave home overnight before the age of 16 (Rees and Lee, 2005). The same study reveals that 6.5% of 14- and 15-year-olds ran away in the previous year, suggesting that at least 71,500 young people in this two-year age group run away annually in England alone (ibid.). Only a fifth of young runaways confirmed that they had been reported missing to the police.

Home Office crime statistics show that the police have recorded a sharp increase in offences of child abduction over the last ten years in England and Wales, to a total of over 1,000 offences in 2004/05 (Nicholas *et al.*, 2005). A study of child abductions recorded in 2002/03 indicated that just under a quarter of abductions were perpetrated by parents (Newiss and Fairbrother, 2004). If the same proportion were true today, in the region of 250 cases of parental child abduction would be occurring annually.

The two *Still Running* national surveys have demonstrated the complexity of issues

facing young runaways. Many reported problems at home such as conflict, poor relationships and maltreatment as the key reasons for leaving or being forced out of home, alongside other problems at school or through alcohol and drug use, offending and other indicators of poor personal well-being (Rees and Lee, 2005). A sizeable minority reported sleeping rough, stealing, begging and being harmed whilst staying away.

The *Still Running* reports illustrate that children from all backgrounds go missing, for many different reasons and with different outcomes and risks. Cases range from children running away on a single occasion to repeatedly going missing, becoming detached from society and living on the streets.

Parallels can be drawn with the different types of service provision available to children. These range from:

- primary interventions in the form of preventative work with all young people and their families and communities,
- secondary interventions with children who have run away once or twice and for whom early intervention with specific problems can help prevent an established pattern of running away, and



- tertiary interventions aimed at addressing the often complex needs of children who effectively live 'on the streets'.

Despite continued efforts to offer services in each of these areas (summarised in this report), it is a striking fact that very few children (4% in *Still Running II*) turn to any agency for help whilst they are away (Rees and Lee, 2005).

Whilst fewer in number, children abducted by family members generate an urgent need for appropriate service provision. The recovery of children can be expedited with the aid of specialist legal assistance. Mediation and other dispute resolution services offer important avenues for the prevention of child abduction.



Types of service provision

Together with statutory agencies, the voluntary sector is part of an extended network of service providers responding to different aspects of the missing children phenomenon. This study, together with work done by Barnardo's on services to missing children in the London area, has adopted a four-point classification of the types of services available:

1. Prevention/early intervention services

A range of services are provided by both the statutory sector (in particular Social Services) and NGOs (in the form of national help-lines and local projects) to give support, advice and information to children. These (primary) services focus on preventing missing episodes by offering children the opportunity to recognise and resolve emerging problems which can trigger future running away, for example, breakdown in family relationships, abuse, bullying, drug and alcohol misuse etc.

2. Crisis response services

Crisis response services are targeted at children when they have gone missing. The police are the principal provider of services to locate and retrieve missing

children and social services perform the main child protection function. NGOs provide both national help-lines and local projects which can offer 'drop-in' facilities and refuge to children away from home.

3. Repeat prevention/long-term support services

Some services are available to children who have returned or been found to address the causes of their behaviour and prevent future episodes (secondary and tertiary services). Whilst the statutory sector has a role to play, the voluntary sector provides valuable independent services, designed to engage young people either before or after they become detached from mainstream society.

4. Ongoing response services

Other services are targeted at individuals who remain missing for prolonged periods of time and require ongoing efforts to locate them through, for example, media campaigns, analysis, cold case review, unidentified body matching and public record checking. Specialist legal services are required to resolve overseas parental abductions.



The wider context of service provision

The voluntary sector has a key role to play in each of the four types of service provided to missing children, from prevention initiatives through to crisis response and ongoing response. Figure 1 shows the wider context in which the voluntary sector contributes services, often working in partnership with local statutory agencies and government departments. Co-operation is central to the successful delivery and optimum impact of services, both at the national and local level. Different working arrangements and models of service delivery and intervention are discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

Statutory agencies also have a role to play in each of the four types of services. The police are most visible in their crisis and ongoing role in trying to locate missing children (whether runaways or victims of abduction). They also work with the voluntary sector, referring children to agencies who can help prevent future running away. Social services play a more instrumental part in early prevention measures, particularly in their role as care providers, and in partnerships with local projects. More specialist services, such as counselling for victims of abduction, are provided by the health service.

Figure 1: Existing network of service providers

<i>Local Delivery</i>	<i>National Voluntary Sector</i>	<i>Other National Agencies</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Local authority • National and local voluntary groups • Other local partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NMPH • Reunite • Other help-lines (ChildLine, Get Connected, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PNMPB
Government departments: Home Office, DfES, DCA, FCO, Scottish Executive, NIO		



Government co-ordination of services to missing children

The current network of agencies providing services to missing children has evolved over time. As specific needs have been identified, organisations and projects have been formed to meet them, and funding (from various sources) has been released.

Co-ordination of services to missing children is currently under-developed, mainly because responsibility for different types of missing children is diffused across different government departments:

- The Home Office has responsibility for missing persons and police performance in England and Wales. Policing is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office and the Justice Department in the Scottish Executive.
- The Department of Health has responsibility for social services in England and Wales. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has the same responsibility in the Northern Ireland Executive when power is devolved from the Northern Ireland Office (currently this is not the case). The Health Department has responsibility for social services in the Scottish Executive.
- The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has recently consolidated responsibility for young runaways and throwaways in England and Wales (taking over the various roles previously played by the Department of Health and the Social Exclusion Unit, then part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). Equivalent responsibility lies in the Northern Ireland Office (Northern Ireland Executive when devolved) and the Scottish Executive.
- The Official Solicitor and Public Trustee Office houses the central authority for England and Wales (the International Child Abduction and Contact Unit) dealing with abductions to Hague Convention countries. Equivalent central authorities exist in the Northern Ireland Courts Service and the Private International Law Branch of the Scottish Executive.
- The Child Abduction Section in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office offers help with abductions to both Hague and non-Hague countries.





Chapter 2

Voluntary sector services to runaway/throwaway children



QUICKVIEW: Voluntary sector services to runaway/throwaway children

PREVENTION / EARLY INTERVENTION	CRISIS RESPONSE	'REPEAT' PREVENTION / LONG TERM SUPPORT	ONGOING INVESTIGATION / SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about services • Awareness raising of risks • Help-lines • Streetwork • Community outreach • Therapeutic services • Professional counselling • Peer based support • Family mediation • Family group conferencing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help-lines • Signposting to specialist services • Drop-in facilities • Streetwork • Emergency accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent return interviews ('misper schemes') • Family mediation • Family group conferencing • Long term / short term family / individual work • Advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case file management • Message home • Three-way calling facilities • Publicity



Background

The voluntary sector has long since recognised the need to offer services to children at risk on the streets. During the 1980s and 1990s organisations began to focus on running away as a key mechanism by which children could find themselves on the streets and in need of support and advice.

In 1985, with the support of police, social services and other voluntary organisations, The Children's Society opened the first refuge for young people under the age of 16 in central London (the Central London Teenage Project)². Further refuges were established by The Children's Society in Bournemouth, Leeds and Newport, as well as projects working with young people on the streets in Birmingham and Manchester.

In 1992 the National Missing Persons Helpline (NMPH) opened to support missing people (including runaways and throwaways) and family and friends left behind. These developments were complemented by the first attempts to collect reliable data on the nature and extent of the problem (Newman, 1989; Abrahams and Mungall, 1992; Rees, 1993 and Stein *et al.*, 1994).

In 1999 The Children's Society published the first authoritative account of the problem of runaways across the whole

of the UK (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999). This highlighted the enormous scale of the problem (the study estimated a total of 129,000 incidents of running away overnight each year in the UK) and both the risks faced by runaways and the various problems children were running from.

The plight of runaways became a formal concern of government when the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) launched a *Consultation on Young Runaways* in 2001. The aim was to 'develop recommendations on how to make running away less likely and ensure runaways' short and long term needs are safely met' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001, p5). One year later the SEU published a full report offering a range of recommendations to implement preventative strategies; improve runaways' immediate safety when away from home or care; and to reduce repeat running away and promote the longer-term safety of runaways (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). The same report also announced the funding of over 25 runaways development projects to test, evaluate and disseminate innovative approaches to working with young runaways.

2002 also saw the release of Department of Health guidance under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act, 1970 requiring local authorities to develop multi-agency protocols for the action to be taken

² The first refuges operated outside the law by accommodating young people without parental permission. This situation was rectified in Section 51 of the Children Act, 1989, which came into force in 1991, permitting registered refuge providers to look after a child for up to 14 days without parental consent.



when children go missing from home or from local authority care (Department of Health, 2002). The effectiveness of this guidance is discussed below.

Twenty short-term projects were established across the country during 2003 and 2004 to work directly with young people, using a variety of models of service delivery and intervention. A further seven projects not involving direct practice were also supported. All were funded by the cross-departmental Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU). CYPU also sponsored an evaluation of 19 of the projects by The Children's Society and the University of York, published in 2005 by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (Rees *et al.*, 2005).

Subsequently, the DfES sponsored a smaller number of community-based refuge for

runaways pilots throughout 2004/05 and 2005/06. Two of the pilots were registered refuges and four were projects to build capacity within existing local authority accommodation (McCullough and Smeaton, 2005). However, since funding stopped in March 2006, **only 10 refuge beds are now available in the UK** (see below for details).

Types of services provided

The rest of this chapter describes the range of services currently offered to runaway and throwaway children by the voluntary sector in the UK. These fall into three main categories:

- I Help-lines
- II Runaway projects
- III Refuge.

I Help-lines

Help-lines provide children with an initial point of contact for advice and support on various problems. Children can also be signposted or referred to more specialist and/or local service providers. Help-lines offer three of the four types of services described in Chapter 1:

- **Early prevention / early intervention** – children use help-lines to address problems before they have runaway or been thrownaway
- **Crisis response** – children call help-lines when they have left home or care and are seeking advice and support
- **Repeat prevention / long-term support** – children use help-lines after crisis episodes to seek the long-term solutions to their problems.

The only national help-line that specifically targets children who have runaway is the Runaway Helpline, operated by the National Missing Persons Helpline. Other runaway projects have established local help-lines. Two examples – the ‘Safe@Last’ and ‘Talk... Don't Walk’ help-lines – are outlined below. Some other runaway projects divert their office telephone number to the National Missing Persons Helpline out of office hours.

In addition, there are numerous other national help-lines, not specifically dedicated to runaway or throwaways, but which provide services to children with various problems that may trigger running, or being thrown, away. These are briefly described below.

National Missing Persons Helpline (NMPH)

The National Missing Persons Helpline (NMPH) was established as a charity in 1992 to advise missing people and those who are left behind. The charity provides a dedicated 24 hour, seven days a week help-line to runaways under the age of 18: the Runaway Helpline. Advisors provide support to young runaways and can refer them to local services and/or emergency accommodation providers in times of crisis.

The NMPH also offers services within the ‘ongoing response’ classification (see also Chapter 3). As well as providing a ‘message home’ service for children and families to swap messages whilst away, the NMPH can set up three-way calls between the missing child and parents and/or statutory authorities to facilitate the child’s return. Prevention services are given in the form of a schools pack highlighting the problems which lead to running away and the risks involved.



Young people often go missing in the evenings or overnight. The NMPH provides help-line support to missing children 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Local runaway projects in the voluntary sector provide different forms of support, many operating outside of office hours.

Safe@Last

Safe@Last was established in June 2000 to provide support to children who run away or are forced to leave home in South Yorkshire, North Nottinghamshire and North East Derbyshire. The charity operates a help-line from 9am to 9pm (outside these hours the help-line diverts to the NMPH), seven days a week. Safe@Last is staffed by trained volunteers and supported by a professional early response and ongoing support service to ensure the immediate safety of children. The help-line is part of a runaway project, offering early and repeat prevention services to young people (see Runaway projects below).

Talk...Don't Walk

Talk...Don't Walk is a project dedicated to assisting young runaways in Warrington. It was established by The Relationship Centre (a registered charity) in 2004 as a pilot project, funded through the Invest to Save Budget and with contributions from the statutory and voluntary sector. The

project operates a help-line and also offers confidential advice via the internet and text messaging, weekdays from 8.30am to 4.30pm and weekends 10am to 4pm (outside these hours the help-line diverts to the National Missing Persons Helpline). The help-line is part of a wider runaway project working with young people and parents to resolve the issues causing children to runaway.

Non-runaway dedicated help-lines

Table 1 shows other help-lines providing advice and support to children, though not dedicated specifically to runaways or throwaways. These tackle a range of issues which can prevent children running away, or can resolve difficulties which have caused children to run away. These include, for example, family problems, bullying, sexual health or relationship issues, abuse, drugs and emotional problems.

Whilst the services are not specifically targeted at runaways or throwaways, both Get Connected and ChildLine present figures on their websites to show that 3% of calls are from runaways (the ChildLine figure includes homelessness as well).

Most of the help-lines offer 'signposting' to direct children to local services where they can receive face-to-face assistance. Effective signposting depends on these organisations



Table 1: Other non-runaway dedicated help-lines

Help-line	Target	Focus	Providers	Statutory/ government funding
ChildLine	Children and young people under 19, UK	All problems: physical/sexual abuse, bullying, family problems, teenage pregnancy etc.	Trained volunteer counsellors.	10% statutory sources.
Child Protection Helpline (NSPCC)	Children, UK	Child protection, abuse, support to parents and carers.	Trained child protection officers, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	None.
Get Connected	Young people under 25, UK	All problems: family relationships, emotional problems, housing issues, bullying, sexual issues etc.	Trained volunteer help-line workers, 1 to 11pm, 7 days a week.	None.
Connexions Direct	13- to 19-year-olds, living in England	All aspects of adolescence: education, careers, health, housing, relationships, rights etc.	Experienced advisors 8am to 2am, 7 days a week.	DfES funding.
Shelterline	All ages, UK	All housing problems, homelessness.	Trained housing advisors, 8am to midnight, 7 days a week.	21% government grants.
Samaritans	All ages, UK	People experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.	Trained volunteers, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	6% government grants.
Brook	Under 25, UK	Information on sexual health advice and contraception and signposting to local services.	Trained advisors, 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, plus 24 hour recorded information.	Proportion of funding from Department of Health.
Careline	All ages, UK	Crisis counselling for all problems: anxiety, bereavement, bullying, child abuse, depression, drug/alcohol addiction, family and marital relationships, homelessness etc.	Trained volunteer counsellors, Monday to Friday, 10am to 1pm, and 7pm to 10pm.	None.
Frank	All ages, UK	Drugs information and advice, signposting to local and/or specialist services.	24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	Home Office/ Department of Health funding.

Source: All information taken from the service providers' websites and annual reports/financial statements available online (June, 2006). Statutory/government funding figures are for the whole organisation, not necessarily funds dedicated to the operation of help-lines.



having access to up-to-date and comprehensive information on local facilities.

Table 1 also shows the sources of funds received by organisations operating help-lines. Only Connexions and Frank are fully government funded, with the remainder relying – to varying extents – on charitable donations, trusts, corporate sponsorship and other revenue generating activities. Different funding arrangements are also made in different parts of the UK. For example, the Scottish Executive makes separate payments to ChildLine Scotland.

PACT comment

There is duplication in the focus of several of the non-runaway dedicated help-lines. This is likely to have resulted from the 'evolution' of service provision, across different sectors engaged with different (but overlapping) child welfare concerns. Whilst we fully support the valuable contribution made by all service providers, PACT recommends that future government funding should be directed to organisations providing services in discrete areas without recourse to other sustainable funds.



II Runaway projects

The voluntary sector is a core provider of local runaway projects. Many projects have been established by national charities or local voluntary groups, frequently working in partnership with local social service departments.

Runaway projects principally offer runaway or throwaway children two of the types of services outlined in Chapter 1:

- **Crisis response** – children can seek information, support, drop-in facilities and, in a few cases, refuge when they have gone missing.
- **Repeat prevention / long-term support** – statutory agencies (the police and social services) can refer children, and in some cases children can refer themselves, to local projects to address the long-term problems that have prompted them to run away.

The voluntary sector has a long tradition of engaging face-to-face with children at times of crisis (for example, when they are on the streets). Large national charities have considerable experience establishing projects to address acute problems affecting some adolescents. For example:

- Barnardo's operates over 300 projects across the UK, tackling a large range of issues including sexual exploitation,

abuse, self-harm, domestic violence, substance misuse and support for children leaving care.

- The Children's Society runs over 90 projects nationwide covering social exclusion, disability, the needs of refugee children, children in trouble with the law as well as children at risk on the streets.
- NCH, the children's charity, has over 500 projects across the UK, offering support across a wide range of issues including adoption, disability, family support, education, health and well-being, young carers, children's rights and the care system.
- The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) operates approximately 180 teams and projects throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland to support children and families.

Whilst, in the course of their work, many of these projects will assist children who have run away or are at risk of running away, other projects have been established to deal specifically with runaway children. The CYPU released funds in 2003/04 precisely to promote the development of runaway specific projects. A list of the voluntary sector runaway projects currently operating in the UK is given in the Appendix. The geographical coverage of projects is shown in Figure 2.



Whilst there is a noticeably high 'turnover' of local runaway projects (the sustainability of projects is discussed below), the current list of projects shares a similar profile to the CYPU projects evaluated by the Children's Society and the University of York in 2005 (Rees *et al.*, 2005).

• Models of delivery

Local runaway projects have been developed by both national and local voluntary organisations, often working in partnership with local social service departments. Projects are frequently managed and/or overseen by inter-agency

Figure 2. Runaway projects and refuge in the UK, 2006



groups from both the voluntary and local statutory sector. Diverse funding sources exist such as government funding programmes, national and local charitable funds, and in some cases grants from local statutory agencies including social service departments, local authorities, Youth Offending Teams etc. The Appendix shows only those runaway projects which are run by voluntary sector organisations. Other projects do exist including statutory sector-led projects, for example the Runaways Service provided by Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services, the Runaways Project led by Derby City Council, and the Alternative Solutions To Running Away (ASTRA) project in Gloucestershire.

• **Models of intervention**

Typically projects are small scale, employing only one or two practitioners. These offer a diverse range of interventions across different projects including drop-in facilities; outreach (street) work; counselling and/or advice; independent return interviews ('misper schemes'); advocacy; family support and mediation; refuge (see page 35) and signposting to specialist services. Many projects also provide a range of prevention interventions, mainly in the form of schools packs and education initiatives.

• **Target groups**

Different projects target services at different groups according to local need and the limitations of funding. Whilst a handful offer 'universal' coverage, many projects focus on specific pockets of runaway or throwaway children, including missing from home; missing from care; children deemed to be at high risk; repeat missing; first time missing; females; black and minority ethnic children; and children under a specified age. Referrals from specific sources such as police, social services/local authority care providers, other NGOs and help-lines, families and self-referrals were more common than universal referral policies.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of runaway projects was beyond the scope of this study. However, many projects have collected basic data to illustrate the type of impact their work is having. For example, the 'Talk...Don't Walk' project in Warrington reported a more than 50% decrease over two years (from 2003/04 to 2005/06) in the number of police reported incidents of runaways since the project began. Similar decreases (around 50%) were recorded in the cost of responding to runaway incidents and in the level of crime recorded as a result of children going missing (see McCausland, 2006).

Project workers and charity representatives interviewed echoed the findings of the CYPU evaluation that projects can have



positive impacts on the children concerned. One important benefit of runaway projects is that they offer children a place to turn to that is independent of the statutory sector, which can be crucial to attracting and sustaining their participation. Projects can also provide the intensive support that many children with complex needs require to re-engage them into mainstream society. Runaway projects are recognised as a key element of what are known as ‘children-in-crisis’ services.

PACT comment

Whilst a number of projects have been evaluated, it is currently very difficult to demonstrate with real rigour the effectiveness of specific projects. Previous funding programmes have not made the collection of reliable and robust data a sufficient priority. As a result we do not know which services and models are most effective. There is an urgent need to secure funding for existing and future projects. This should be accompanied by a specific requirement to properly assess the effectiveness of services.

The current national ‘map’ of runaway projects raises a number of critical issues:

1. Geographical disparity in service provision.

Even large national voluntary organisations do not have the resources to operate runaway projects throughout

the UK. The focus, to date, has been on establishing pilot projects to test what works in a small number of local areas. Existing provision is a ‘postcode lottery’; areas with projects target different runaway groups offering different interventions, and some areas appear to have little or no provision at all.

2. Lack of universal provision.

Most projects are restricted from offering services to all children owing to limited resources. Operating with one or two workers, most projects have developed ways of rationing services. Some projects rely on referrals from other agencies, such as the police or other charities/help-lines. These tend to exclude children who are not reported missing or who do not seek assistance from other agencies (which recent research indicates to be the majority of runaways). Self-referral plays a crucial part in trying to engage and support runaways who often have the most complex and acute needs.

3. Limited sustainability of services.

There has been a noticeably high ‘turnover’ of runaway projects throughout the UK. Whilst a number have been in existence for longer, many projects are less than five years old. Project workers and charity representatives highlighted



the difficulties in securing long-term financial commitment to projects. A number of projects which originated from CYPUP funding were not sustained by local agencies once central funding ceased and they had to close down.

A consequence of the high turnover of runaway projects is the difficulty in keeping an up-to-date record of service provision at the local level. This is important because without such a record national help-lines cannot signpost or refer children to their nearest and most appropriate service provider.

4. No minimum standard of 'crisis' service provision.

Central government has devolved the funding of child services to local authorities under the terms of the

Every Child Matters programme (see below). Whilst there are numerous requirements on different agencies to deliver the five key *Every Child Matters* outcomes (including the safety of children), minimum levels of service provision have not been prescribed. As a result, acute services for children in crisis are vulnerable to cuts and neglect. This is discussed below.

5. No central guidance on best practice.

Despite the evaluation of the 19 CYPUP projects (Rees *et al.*, 2005) and other projects by national charities, there is still no central guidance on best practice to develop runaway projects. This gives local authorities without projects little encouragement or assistance to develop services in their own areas.



III Refuge

A refuge is a safe place for children to turn to when they have run away or been thrown away from home and find themselves on the streets or otherwise at risk. Refuge offers two of the service types described in Chapter 1:

- **Crisis response** – refuges provide an immediate place of safety when children are away from home, and they can work to reconcile children with their family or carer if possible or appropriate.
- **Repeat prevention / long-term support** – children can use their time in a refuge to address the causes of their running or being thrown away, and to resolve issues which may lead to future missing episodes.

Despite the DfES trial of six community-based refuge schemes in 2004/05 (ending in March 2006), there are currently just 10 refuge places across the whole of the UK for children at risk on the streets:

- 6 beds in a London refuge run by St Christopher's Fellowship and the NSPCC,
- 1 bed in Torquay run by The Children's Society
- 3 beds in Glasgow run by the Aberlour Childcare Trust.

The Children's Society is campaigning for a national network of safe, emergency accommodation. It is recognised that not all runaways and throwaways will require or utilise refuge – in many instances children can be adequately provided for by local authority services, independent runaway projects or help-lines. However, some children – including those most at risk on the streets – may well be better served by having access to refuge facilities. The Children's Society is conducting a needs analysis to inform the debate about the national demand for refuge.

Different types of refuge

Whilst children may be referred through a help-line or project, a key feature of refuge is the ability of children to access facilities themselves. Children who may not wish to contact other agencies (either statutory or voluntary) are provided with a direct access place of safety. There are two different types of refuge (Smeaton, 2006):

1. 'Fixed refuge' offers accommodation in a fixed, confidential location in a building operating 24 hours a day solely as a refuge. Fixed refuge is usually located in an urban area where demand for such provision is sufficient.
2. 'Flexible refuge' covers arrangements to accommodate a child when the need is identified, without a 24 hour a day



fixed facility. Foster carers who have received training to support runaways can provide flexible refuge. In some instances, projects may provide a 'crash pad' model of flexible refuge.

Refuge is different from other forms of emergency accommodation (for example, that provided by local authorities) in that it offers a child the opportunity to access a place of safety without the necessity of service providers to obtain parental consent. Section 51 of The Children Act 1989 allows for refuges to offer a safe place for children to stay for up to 14 days without parental consent when a child is deemed to be at risk of significant harm. Similar provision is made under Section 38 of the Children (Scotland) Act, 1995, albeit the duration of refuge is limited to seven days extendable to 14 days only in exceptional circumstances. This is a valuable resource to children who have run away

to escape harmful situations at home or who would not seek assistance if parental consent was required.

Findings from *Still Running II* shows that only 4% of children running away overnight accessed support from an agency (either statutory or non-statutory). Why is this figure so low? Children can, and do, get support from family and friends, but more needs to be understood about why young people do not turn to the agencies established to help them. One possible reason is the lack of knowledge amongst young people about the types of services that are available. Many local runaway projects have limited means of advertising their services and consequently lack the 'brand recognition' that may make them attractive to children. Nationally co-ordinated provision may help with the promotion and uptake of local services.



Funding for services to runaways and throwaways

Many of the project workers – providing help-lines, runaway projects and refuge – contacted in the course of this study voiced concerns that the services they offer lack long-term funding commitment. Whilst national and local charities have developed a range of projects in different parts of the country, they have all too often been relied upon to fund them as well. Contributions from local authorities, government departments (for example, the DfES still provides funds to the London refuge and the Scottish Executive part-funds the Running: Other Choices refuge in Glasgow) and other partners are often small and/or short-lived, making the future of services insecure and geographically imbalanced.

The Railway Children, a registered charity, began its work with street-children over 11 years ago in India. It gives funding and other forms of capacity building, such as training, networking and strategic advice, to partners offering early interventions for street-children. Railway Children spends 20% of its annual £1.67m income (received from companies and individuals in the UK railway industry, Comic Relief and

other trusts) on UK projects. It currently supports eight projects providing a range of services to missing children in England and Scotland, and is developing projects in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Recent years have seen a move away from central government funding of particular vulnerable groups of children. Instead, budgets have been allocated to local authorities with the requirement that they achieve the same outcomes for all children. The Children Act 2004 provides the statutory framework within which local authorities in England and Wales³ and their partners have to deliver the five key outcomes central to the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* programme. These five outcomes are:

1. Be healthy
2. Stay safe
3. Enjoy and achieve
4. Make a positive contribution
5. Achieve economic well-being.

This approach has led to an array of mechanisms for local governance:

- Children's trusts should be in place in all local areas by 2008 to ensure that local

³ The Children (Scotland) Act, 1995 imposes a specific legal duty on local authorities in Scotland to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in their local area. New guidance has instigated a similar approach to the situation under Every Child Matters in England and Wales. Chief Officers (of local health, police and local authorities) have the responsibility to deliver individually and collectively effective mechanisms for protecting children, alongside reformed Child Protection Committees charged with driving forward a multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for children (see Protecting Children and Young People: Child Protection Committees, Scottish Executive, 2005).

agencies work together to plan and deliver services for children to meet the five outcomes⁴.

- Each local area is required to produce a Children and Young People's Plan. This is a single, strategic, overarching plan outlining where outcomes need to be improved and how and when these improvements will be achieved (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk). The plan must be based on comprehensive assessments of local need.
- The 2004 Act also requires each local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). This is *'the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations in each local area will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in that locality, and for ensuring the effectiveness of what they do'* (HM Government, 2006, p46). LSCBs are part of the wider context of children's trust arrangements with a particular focus on promoting the 'staying safe' outcome. LSCBs do not have the power to direct local agencies; rather their role is to co-ordinate multi-agency working and to monitor and evaluate the impact of interventions in securing the welfare of children. Government guidance stipulates that LSCBs have a proactive role to play in targeting

particular groups of children who are vulnerable, including 'children who have run away from home' (ibid., p49).

- The monitoring role of LSCBs is part of a wider regime to inspect children's services. Various inspection arrangements have now been consolidated into Joint Area Reviews. These should be undertaken in every local authority area before the end of 2008 (Ofsted, 2005).
- Arrangements are being made for children's trusts to provide Targeted Youth Support to children most at risk of not achieving the five key outcomes. These include a single point of contact and a support package drawing on the range of mainstream and specialist services.

As a result of the *Every Child Matters* programme, we are concerned that critical services – particularly those independent of the statutory sector which are so valuable to children in crisis – risk being given a low priority in the overall planning and commissioning process.

Runaway children – particularly those most detached and in need – remain a hidden problem, often because they are not reported missing and/or they do

⁴ The Children Act 2004 actually imposes no statutory duty for local authorities to establish a Children's Trust, preferring an 'organic' development of arrangements to improve joint working, rather than a prescriptive model (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk).



not typically access mainstream services. Demand for the types of services outlined in this chapter may be routinely underestimated in most local authorities' planning processes. In our consultation, many project workers reported difficulties in responding adequately to the number of referrals they were receiving, even when referral practices were restricted to police or social service reported cases (the so-called 'tip of the iceberg'). Logically, the commissioning of services is dependent on the evidence of sufficient demand. In the case of runaways, it seems that services are needed first and foremost to uncover a demand that is only partially visible but very definitely present.

Even before the introduction of the *Every Child Matters* reforms not all

local authorities had complied with the Department of Health guidance issued in 2002. This required the development of multi-agency protocols for responding to children missing from home or care. Whilst not making voluntary sector service provision compulsory in this area, the guidance did set out a range of duties on local authorities (a number of these are shown in Figure 3). This was issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act, 1970 which requires compliance with the guidance unless there are exceptional circumstances. Even so, recent surveys show that only 89 of the 150 local authorities have passed The Children's Society's *Safe and Sounds Test*, based on only three elements of the Department of Health guidance.

Figure 3: Department of Health guidance

The Department of Health Circular LAC (2002) 17 requires local authorities and police forces to (amongst other items):

- Ensure that appropriate multi agency protocols are in place on the action to be taken when children in local authority care go missing from their placements and develop similar protocols covering the circumstance where children and young people go missing from home.
- Audit the need for, and availability of, services for children and young people in their area who are at risk of going missing from home or from care.
- Consider whether it is necessary to develop their services to respond to the needs of young people who go missing from care or run away from home.
- Prepare a strategy for the delivery and development of services for children and young people who go missing from home or from care.

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- Collect and share relevant information: the development of a co-ordinated response will require information relating to all incidents of young people going missing from home and local authority care to be centrally collated and shared between partner agencies.
- Monitor unauthorised absences from foster and residential homes centrally. This data is required to help local authorities identify placements and young people with particular difficulties and to plan appropriate measures and responses.
- Review services annually. Local authorities and the police together with senior staff from all partner agencies are advised to undertake annual strategic reviews of patterns of going missing from home and from foster/residential placements.
- Ensure that every case involving a child or young person going missing [reported to the police] is considered for referral to social services for an initial assessment of need or if necessary, for enquiries to be made under S47 of the Children Act 1989.

Source: Department of Health Local Authority Circular LAC (2002) 17: *Children Missing From Care and From Home – Good Practice Guidance*.



Chapter 3

Voluntary sector services to family abducted and otherwise missing children



QUICKVIEW: Voluntary sector services to family abducted and otherwise missing children

	PREVENTION / EARLY INTERVENTION	CRISIS RESPONSE	'REPEAT' PREVENTION / LONG TERM SUPPORT	ONGOING INVESTIGATION/ SUPPORT
FAMILY ABDUCTED CHILDREN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to parents reporting fears of abduction • Awareness raising of long-term impact of parental abduction • Awareness raising of long-term impact of parental alienation • Family mediation • Dispute resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate family support and advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family counselling/ dispute resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case file management • Sightings register • Publicity • Family support
	OTHERWISE MISSING			

This chapter examines voluntary sector services provided to:

- children abducted by family members, in particular the support given to families who have a child abducted overseas, and
- otherwise missing children, namely services provided to families whose child has gone missing and there remains no confirmed reason for the disappearance.



Services to children abducted by family members

Child abduction by family members principally arises from a breakdown in the relationship between the parents of a child (Greif and Hegar, 1993; Plass, 1998; Hammer *et al.*, 2002 etc.) NISMART 2 findings indicate that only 4% of family abducted children were living with both parents at the time of abduction (Hammer *et al.*, 2002). Divorce, separation and disputes over the custody of a child are all common features in the circumstances of many family child abductions (Boudreaux, Lord and Etter, 2000; Lowenstein, 2002). In some instances, abductions may occur to remove a child from an abusing or violent parent (Weiner 2000; Lowenstein, 2002).

The rate of overseas child abduction is dramatically higher when couples of different race, ethnicity or culture separate, compared to couples of the same background (Hegar and Greif, 1994). The incidence of children being removed to one parent's country of origin appears to be steadily increasing (Reunite, unpublished).

The voluntary sector has responded to the problem of family child abduction in two ways:

1. Preventative measures

The voluntary sector plays a key role in offering counselling and dispute resolution (including mediation) to parents whose relationship is under strain. For example,

Relate provides relationship counselling, sex therapy, mediation, and advice both face-to-face and over the phone throughout the UK. Parentline Plus operates a national 24-hour help-line providing information and support to parents in the UK.

There are also a host of local projects, for example, the South London Family Centre, which specialises in family mediation services to African Caribbean families. Many not-for-profit mediation organisations are part of a network called National Family Mediation. Nearly all of the 60 projects within the network are registered charities. Many receive partnership grants from the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) or from local authorities, and nearly all have contracts with the Legal Services Commission to provide family mediation (see www.nfm.u-net.com).

Other agencies offer more specialist services, for example Women's Aid is a national charity with a 24-hour help-line for women and children experiencing domestic violence. Fathers Direct provides a national information centre to support fathers and enhance their relationships with their children.

Reunite is the only voluntary organisation in the UK dealing with individual cases of international child abduction. Part of their remit is to provide advice and



support to parents who suspect their child may be at risk of abduction from their estranged partner (so-called 'prevention cases'). Reunite provides Child Abduction Prevention Guides, offering information on the legal procedures and practical steps to take if a child is in danger of abduction.

PACT plays an important role in trying to raise awareness of the problem of parental abduction, including the impact on both parents and children. PACT has recently campaigned to highlight the destructive impact of parental alienation (in the form of a DVD, '*Victims of Another War*') which can occur in child abduction cases.

2. Crisis/ongoing services

When a child is abducted overseas, Reunite is the sole voluntary provider of support to the left-behind parent and family.⁵ Reunite's key services are the provision of:

- Advice, information and support to parents, family members and guardians whose children have been abducted (or who fear abduction).
- Advice and information to parents who have abducted their children.
- Advice and assistance in international contact issues and cases of 'permission to remove'.
- Information on legislation, procedures, articles and reports on the means of resolving cases of international child abduction in different countries (particularly Muslim states).
- Specialist advice and training to lawyers, government departments and other professionals.
- A directory of national and international lawyers specialising in abduction and child custody cases.
- Research on the effects of international child abduction and different means of preventing and resolving cases.

Reunite operates a 24-hour a day, seven days a week, help-line. Reunite has recently begun offering mediation services specifically to address custody disputes involving children brought into the UK. The programme supports the travel and accommodation of the left-behind parent to and within the UK, and offers specialist mediation to facilitate a mutually agreeable settlement between parents prior to legal ratification.

Reunite is part-funded by the Home Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for Constitutional Affairs, and also relies on project-based grants from trusts and other charities and independent fundraising.

⁵ *Parents and Abducted Children Together works to improve strategy and policy for dealing with missing and abducted children, rather than providing assistance with individual cases.*



PACT comment

Whilst the number of children abducted by family members each year is low compared to the number of runaways, there is some evidence that this is a growing problem in many countries (see PACT, 2005). The provision of services in this area is still patchy. PACT would urge the development of services in three key areas:

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

This study has not considered in any detail the voluntary sector services available to missing children who are the victims of crime. If children remain missing both they and their family will be able to draw on the services of the National Missing Persons Helpline (see below). If children have been abducted, victimised then located, a range of specialist services (most likely in both the voluntary and statutory sector) might be appropriate depending on the nature of the incident and the needs of the children and their family. Victim Support is the main voluntary sector organisation, which provides free and confidential support and information to victims of crime in the UK.



Services to otherwise missing children

In this report – as in other studies – we have used different categories of missing episodes, including runaways and throwaways, victims of family and non-family abduction etc. However, it is often not possible to know with complete certainty which type of episode is involved, until the child has returned. When a child remains missing, there may simply be too little information to categorise his or her disappearance. The child, in effect, remains 'just missing'. In other cases, children may not consider themselves to be missing and the report of their disappearance may be the product of a misunderstanding.

The common factor in all these cases is that, whilst the nature of the disappearance may be unclear, the child remains missing. In this report, these events have been grouped together as 'otherwise missing' cases. One of the main activities of the only voluntary sector agency dedicated to assisting missing

people in the UK, the National Missing Persons Helpline (NMPH), is to respond to such cases.

The NMPH offers both 'crisis response' and ongoing services to families of otherwise missing children. NMPH provides practical and emotional support and advice to families and friends as a disappearance continues. In some cases an older child may be located and choose not to return home or have any contact with his or her family. In these instances, the NMPH can offer continued support to families even after a missing episode has been resolved.

The NMPH also takes an active role in trying to locate missing children. The charity has established a number of outlets for publicising cases of missing people (such as a regular page in the Big Issue) and operates a sightings register, passing information to the police when appropriate.





Chapter 4

Summary: optimising the voluntary sector contribution



This report has outlined the numerous services which the voluntary sector provides to missing children in the UK. The voluntary sector has a key role to play in each of the four types of service described in Chapter 1: prevention/early intervention, crisis response, repeat prevention/long-term support and ongoing response.

Voluntary sector organisations offer:

- Practical advice and emotional support to children who have gone missing, including signposting to local and specialist services and/or emergency accommodation.
- Sustained, one-to-one engagement with young people to try and resolve the problems that have led to their running away (or contemplating running away).
- Mediation between families and young people, and parents disputing the custody of their children, to prevent children from going missing or being abducted.
- Emergency accommodation, streetwork and drop-in centres to increase the safety and well-being of children away from home.
- A range of prevention interventions, including school visits, education resources and internet sites/web forums.

- Practical advice and support for the families of missing children, including parents whose children have been abducted overseas.
- Publicity and case management to try and locate missing children.
- Specialist advice and support on the various causes of going missing, including the legal aspects of international child abduction.

Key to the success of voluntary sector organisations in supporting young people is:

- Their ability to build trust and close relationships with young people.
- Their independence from statutory service providers (which children themselves value highly, see Morgan, 2006).
- Their flexibility to tailor services to individual cases, including out-of-hours access to services and creative packages of support.
- The knowledge, empathy and passion of individual voluntary sector workers (both paid and unpaid) to deliver the most effective and appropriate service to children and, in many cases, their families.



Whilst the impact of the voluntary sector should not be underestimated, this report has also highlighted two critical issues arising from the current 'map' of service provision to missing children:

1. There is enormous geographical disparity in the types and levels of services provided to missing children (particularly runaways and throwaways) across the UK. Receipt of services amounts to a postcode lottery.
2. The services that do exist frequently face the threat of closure because of short-term funding commitments.

Both the geographical disparity of voluntary sector provision and the precarious future of many individual projects are the result of

the planning and commissioning of services for children in crisis being devolved to the local level. Local demand for services can be obscured by the lack of clear data and these crucial services have not been considered a priority. National and local charities have developed different service models for children in crisis – and have all too often been relied upon to provide the funding for individual projects. This situation is rarely sustainable and certainly not geographically equitable.

The UK should adopt a national approach to securing services. This will require a:

- National bespoke funding programme
- National co-ordination
- National minimum standards
- National monitoring and evaluation



National bespoke funding programme

Whilst the arrangements to commission children's services locally are still taking shape under the *Every Child Matters* programme, there are already concerns that the system will not deliver the types of services described in this report. These concerns are based upon a number of factors:

- Services for children in crisis are a very small – but important – part of the wider provision of children's services. Some provision may be available from statutory sources (principally social services) but there is no guarantee that projects operated by independent agencies in the voluntary sector will be funded.
- The commissioning of services is dependent upon identifying local need and demand. Demand for independent children in crisis services is not always visible in standard data sources.
- Other need – for example, the need for refuge – is likely to be regarded as economically unviable at the local level. This ignores the fact that demand still exists, albeit across larger geographical areas. For runaways, the supply of services is not presently coterminous with the level of demand.
- There is no indication that local authorities which do not fund voluntary

sector projects to runaways will be the subject of criticism or even failure in the inspection process.

Services to missing children are too important to be left to the vagaries of local planning. A national funding programme, specifically for services to missing children, would ensure a more universal geographical coverage of services. National funding would also provide a focus for the co-ordination of services; monitoring; and the dissemination of best practice.

Important lessons can be learnt from the system developed in the United States. The US government operates a national funding programme for the provision of basic centres (including emergency shelters); transitional living programmes (providing longer term residential support for older children); street outreach work (including working with children on the streets at risk of sexual exploitation and other risks); and a network of support, including a national runaways help-line, referral database and information exchange. The US model recognises the necessity to ensure provision to missing children in all areas and the crucial need for this to be co-ordinated nationally. More details can be found in the recent *Safe and Sound: Lessons from America* report (The Children's Society, 2006).



National co-ordination

Co-ordination of services to missing children remains extremely poor. The Department of Health, the Social Exclusion Unit (then part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) and the Department for Education and Skills have all, at different times in the last five years, played a role in developing services for young runaways. Currently the responsibility lies with the DfES. The Home Office retains policy responsibility for missing people in general, working with ACPO to deliver an effective police response. The DCA and FCO have specialist interests in the problem of international child abduction.

At present there is little strategic planning or direction to address the multifaceted problem of missing children. National co-ordination is needed to address the following issues:

- How much demand is there for refuge, and how and where should it be provided?
- What is the best practice for establishing runaway projects so that they work to optimum effect with other local agencies?
- How can projects be used as a common source of data on services users who often remain obscured from other data sources?
- How can the police and other statutory agencies work with the voluntary sector to secure the best response to children reported missing?
- How can all agencies constantly improve and learn from each other and beyond?
- What is the minimum level of provision that should be made available to missing children in all areas of the UK?
- What arrangements should be put in place to provide a national up-to-date database of local services that can be used by help-lines for referral purposes?
- How can duplication be avoided and efforts concentrated on services which deliver outcomes directly to children?

Co-ordination at a national level requires resources – full-time staff, sufficient funding and senior management commitment. We believe a new body – a missing persons National Resource Centre – should be established to provide this co-ordination. A National Resource Centre would answer directly to government but work side-by-side with the various organisations delivering services to missing children (see recommendations).



National minimum standards

The services available to children who go missing will remain a postcode lottery until there is an agreed and enforceable set of national minimum standards. These would set out a clear and comprehensive statement of what must be provided, to whom and by whom.

National minimum standards need not be overly prescriptive on how services are

delivered (although best practice models are clearly required), and need not restrict local agencies from addressing local needs in innovative ways. Minimum standards should be subject to evaluation and revision and could be 'scaled up' if basic needs remain unmet.

National monitoring and evaluation

National co-ordination and national minimum standards should be overseen and informed by a national programme of monitoring and evaluation. This function would:

- Ensure local areas are complying with national minimum standards.
- Provide the up-to-date database of local services, critical for effective signposting and referral practices.
- Evaluate local service delivery and disseminate best practice.

- Develop common data collection protocols across different service providers to improve local and national data on missing children.

Effective monitoring and evaluation is essential for ensuring accountability and driving strategic direction. We believe this function would be ideally located within a new agency dedicated to improving the co-ordination of services to missing children.



Chapter 5



Recommendations

This report presents a map of how different voluntary sector agencies provide a range of services to different types of missing children in the UK. The contribution of the voluntary sector is a pivotal and essential cornerstone to the support missing children need. Without it, the plight of missing children would be far greater.

Yet our study has found that the impact of the voluntary sector could be greatly increased. Only a small number of local areas have supported voluntary sector runaway projects, creating a 'postcode lottery' in the availability of services. Many of these projects fail to secure funding and

end up having to close. There are only 10 refuge beds in the whole of the UK. There are critical gaps in the support offered to abducted and/or alienated children and their families.

One of the main obstacles to securing universal, high quality services to missing children is the lack of clear leadership in central government. The involvement of more than six government departments in dealing with different types of missing children has left the co-ordination of services in tatters. Accountability and any sense of a clear strategic vision for dealing with missing children are sparse.

■ Recommendation 1

A new national agency should be created to centralise the co-ordination of services to missing children and provide clear leadership and accountability.

The new agency – a **national missing childrens' resource centre** – should monitor local provision against agreed national minimum standards; disseminate best practice and what works; and develop national policy on missing children. Additionally, the resource centre might also allocate national funding to local service providers and become the national focal point for data collection.

■ Recommendation 2

A national bespoke funding programme should be launched, dedicated to delivering high quality services for missing children throughout all parts of the UK.



The current arrangements for funding services to missing children need to change. At present, voluntary sector services to missing children have to compete for prioritisation amongst many other services for local authority funding. Demand for runaway projects is notoriously difficult to measure using routine data sources. Often it is not until a project actually opens that the extent of the problem locally becomes apparent. The funding of refuge beds desperately needs to be transferred out of single local authority areas where such provision is frequently economically unviable.

Important lessons on the funding of projects and refuge can be learnt from the US experience. National funding not only offers an equitable geographical distribution of services, but also provides excellent opportunities for learning what works and for collecting standardised data on the nature and extent of the problem (The Children's Society, 2006).

Recommendations 1 and 2 form PACT's vision for the future: missing children, throughout the UK, supported by a single national agency with appropriate funds.

In the meantime, more can be done to make sure missing children receive better support within the existing system:

■ Recommendation 3

The DfES should develop a minimum standard of services for children in crisis, clearly stating what should be provided by both the statutory and the non-statutory sector.

■ Recommendation 4

The DfES should integrate the minimum standards into the existing arrangements to inspect the performance of local service providers.

■ Recommendation 5

The DfES should ensure local authorities comply with the Department of Health Circular LAC (2002) 17.



■ Recommendation 6

The DfES should consolidate and disseminate best practice in developing models of service delivery between statutory and non-statutory agencies for dealing effectively with children in crisis.

■ Recommendation 7

The DfES should review how effective the current funding arrangements are in securing high quality services to runaways, in particular, whether local funding mechanisms can be relied upon to deliver appropriate levels of refuge.

Finally, we recommend a key change should be made to the current arrangements for providing strategic oversight on missing children:

■ Recommendation 8

Key government departments (the DfES and the Home Office) should take over the ownership of the Strategic Oversight Group on missing persons. Improving co-ordination of different services to missing children is a cross governmental responsibility, not an ACPO one.





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Appendix: Runaway projects in the voluntary sector

PROJECT	PROVIDER	DESCRIPTION
South Coast Runaways Initiative, Torquay	The Children's Society	The SCRI provides a drop-in centre, counselling service, school visits, advice and information.
Looked After Missing Persons (LAMP), Birmingham	The Children's Society	LAMP provides independent visits to discuss the reasons for running away with young people, and to highlight the dangers of doing so. The service works on prevention initiatives and develops individual care plans. LAMP provides outreach work.
WAVES, Weymouth	The Children's Society	WAVES provides a drop-in centre (with a drug counsellor, health clinic and advocacy services), counselling service, home and school visits, family mediation and parenting work.
Safe in the City, Manchester	The Children's Society	Safe in the City provides a drop-in centre, home and school visits, and return interviews, with an emphasis on child sexual exploitation work.
Lancashire Young Runaways Project, Lancashire	The Children's Society	LYRP provides advocacy, advice and support to young people running away from care placements.
West Sussex Runaways, West Sussex	The Children's Society	West Sussex Runaways project is piloting return interviews with private care homes in one town in West Sussex.
Missing in Yorkshire, Bradford and Kirklees	Barnardo's	Services in Kirklees & Bradford offer short term individual/group work to young people aged 16 and under, who go missing from home or the looked after system. It is recognised that these young people are vulnerable to offending, substance misuse and exploitation and/or abuse through prostitution.
Barnardo's Against Sexual Exploitation (BASE), Bristol	Barnardo's	The project targets young people up to the age of 18, male or female, missing from care or home, living in the city of Bristol.
Buckinghamshire Young Womens Service, Buckinghamshire	Barnardo's	Working with young women who are being abused through sexual exploitation or who are at risk of such abuse. There is a specific emphasis on going missing and substance misuse. The service raises awareness of local professionals.



PROJECT	PROVIDER	DESCRIPTION
Safe4U, Leicester; Leicestershire and Rutland	Barnardo's	The Safe4U Young Runaway project provides a post running away service for 10 to 16 year olds. The service gives young people a chance for them to discuss the reasons that caused them to run away and to be referred on to other services for longer-term support. Referrals mainly come from Leicestershire Constabulary after a young person who has been reported missing to them has returned home.
Safe Choices, Hull	Barnardo's	Safe Choices works with vulnerable young people, mostly 16 years and under, who have been reported missing and whose lifestyles place them at risk. They can access both practical and emotional support to help reduce these risks and develop a more settled lifestyle.
Merseyside 5A, Wirral	Barnardo's	Merseyside 5A service takes referrals of under 18s missing from home and missing from care. The project offers independent return interviews, signposting to other services and one-to-one support.
Aberdeen Young Runaways, Aberdeen	Barnardo's	Aberdeen Young Runaways service works with other agencies to identify children going missing from care and provide information and support to resolve causes and highlight the risks and dangers.
Linksfild Residential, Aberdeen	Barnardo's	Provides up to 5 residential placements for children aged 9-14 years who display challenging behaviour, and offers educational and family support. The Young Runaways Service offers support to accommodated young people who go missing from placements in Aberdeen.
SE one Service, South London	Barnardo's	A specialist child sexual exploitation project working in South London, with young people aged 12-17 years, including those missing from home or care, irrespective of gender. Offering one to one client work, prevention group work, professional training and advice and consultancy.
Safe@Last South Yorkshire, North Nottinghamshire and North East Derbyshire	Safe@Last	Safe@Last provides a free help-line service, independent return interviews and education/ prevention material to local schools.
Liverpool Young Runaways, Liverpool	NCH	The Liverpool Young Runaways project provides in-depth support and advice to children who have run away in the Liverpool area, and works with parents and carers.



PROJECT	PROVIDER	DESCRIPTION
Re-run, Dorset Runaways Service, Dorset	Re-run	Re-run provides outreach services to children who have runaway in Dorset (excluding Bournemouth and Poole).
Running: Other Choices (ROC), Glasgow	Aberlour Child Care Trust	ROC provides independent return interviews, outreach work, advocacy, mediation, support, information, counselling and short-term refuge for under 16 runaways.
Streetwork UK, Edinburgh	Streetwork UK (Ltd and registered charity)	Streetwork provides crisis interventions making sure young people are safe and helping them to access emergency accommodation. The project undertakes prevention work on drugs, crime and sexual health.
The London Refuge London	St. Christopher's Fellowship in partnership with the NSPCC	The London Refuge - St Christopher's Fellowship provides accommodation for young runaways between the ages of 11 and 16.
Base 51, Nottingham	Charitable Trust and Limited Company (H.I.N.T.)	Base 51 provides a drop-in centre, health clinic, housing support, counselling, family support and rough sleepers support for 12- to 25-year-olds.
Talk...Don't Walk, Warrington	The Relationships Centre	Talk...Don't Walk provides a free, confidential help-line service, and advice via text, webchat or email to young people in the Warrington area. The project also works face-to-face with children and parents to resolve issues causing running away, and has a wide ranging programme of preventative interventions.
Home and Away, Nottingham	NSPCC	The Home and Away project deals principally with first and second time runaways referred to them by the police. The project focuses on working with children and families to prevent future running away and to resolve causal factors.





