



Beyond 'Every Five Minutes'

A Blueprint for Action on Missing Children

A report by
Parents and Abducted Children Together (PACT)



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About PACT

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

PACT started out to fight parental child abduction across international frontiers by raising awareness of a growing, but little-known, problem and by advocating solutions. Parental child abduction is still a priority. But PACT has broadened its mission to include all children who go missing for whatever reason.

PACT operates internationally. Much of its work is, for example, based on techniques successfully deployed in the US to rescue missing children. It has been active in France and at the EU in Brussels.

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

One of the ways PACT helps the police trace missing and abducted children is by promoting the Child Rescue Alert system and the UK Missingkids Website and by funding the production and distribution of posters of missing children.

www.pact-online.org





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Executive Summary

In its report *Every Five Minutes*, published in October 2005, PACT examined data on missing children in the UK. The report concluded that, while there was a major social problem, the inadequacy of the data made it impossible accurately to capture its full scale and nature. Such information as existed was drawn from disparate and uncoordinated sources that lacked common definitions and a uniform statistical base.

PACT further concluded that the lack of comprehensive data was a serious impediment to action. It made it difficult to measure the effectiveness of current policies and, in particular, to devise specific approaches to the problem's different strands.

The remedy would necessarily involve additional funds from central government to improve coordination between the centre and local agencies, notably the police; and between the agencies themselves. But the very absence of comprehensive data had created a vicious circle, undermining the case for further government resources to remedy the situation.

In this latest report, *Beyond Every Five Minutes*, PACT advances a blueprint for action to be based on reliable, comprehensive statistics, centrally coordinated, for the whole of the United Kingdom. This would have the additional advantage of meeting the European Commission's call for a national focal point in each member-state to organise and improve data collection.

In Chapter 1 the report sets out current sources of information on missing children and their limitations.

Chapter 2 sets out a menu of seven options for improving information on missing children.

Finally, Chapter 3 sets out three fundamental recommendations:

- I. A single organisation should be set up comprising representatives drawn from central government, local authorities, the police and the voluntary sector:

2. Its remit should be:
 - a. To coordinate the collection of data across the UK on the basis of common definitions.
 - b. To devise policies, which will avoid duplication of effort and provide a uniformly high standard of service across the UK for all types of missing children.
 - c. To promote and exploit to the full the Child Alert System and the Missingkids Website as indispensable tools in the location and rescue of missing children.
 - d. To offer practical support to families and a national free-phone number for children in distress.
 - e. To establish priorities for research programmes.
 - f. To publish an annual report, summarising developments, supported by statistics.
3. For the organisation to achieve its objectives, relevant government departments must provide sufficient resources on a sustained, predictable and multi-annual basis.





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Introduction by Perry Nove, CBE, QPM

With the exception of those persons or families whose lives have been changed by personal experience, few members of the public realise how complex the phenomenon of Missing Persons is, and how challenging it is for those who deal with it on a daily basis.

The extent of the involvement of the voluntary sector is not generally known either, the presumption being that Missing Persons are primarily the responsibility of the police.

There are many reasons why the phenomenon is so complex, including the fact that the majority of adults reported as missing are unlikely to be at serious risk and remain missing for comparatively short periods of time. Neither are all children and young persons who have been reported as missing inevitably at risk. Sometimes they are temporarily absent from their usual place of domicile.

Not all reports of missing persons are made to the police in the first instance. Many are made to the voluntary sector - but fundamentally all reports wherever received necessitate an immediate risk assessment to delineate those cases which require an immediate police response.

The dynamic between the statutory and voluntary organisations is therefore complex and critically both an inter-relationship and an inter-dependency.

Some of the organisations in the voluntary sector have a particular focus and have played an important part in raising levels of awareness and working to identify strategic solutions and remedies.

PACT is an organisation that is concerned specifically with missing and abducted children. Their primary focus is strategic and they have made a major contribution to both the body of knowledge and to forward thinking over a number of years. In this their latest Report they set out very clearly a number of impediments to improving the holistic response to missing persons caused by the inadequacy and inconsistency of the data that government, the police and others collect and rely on to make important decisions about resource allocation.



Effective strategic management processes demand in the first instance that decision makers develop a vision and then address the difficult decisions about direction and balance that have to be taken. The next imperative is to ensure that resource allocation decisions reflect and support the strategic intention. Monitoring and evaluation eventually follow to demonstrate that a strategic effect was (or was not) achieved. Clearly this sequence is confounded by poor information at any point in the strategic management cycle.

PACT rightly identifies that existing information is drawn from disparate and uncoordinated sources and additionally that the data cannot be held to be robust because of variations, inconsistent quality standards and recording policy.

In this well researched and thought-through Report they set out a strategic remedy - which in my professional view - would make a significant beneficial difference not just to how the missing persons phenomenon in the UK is managed but also to how it could be developed.

In a Review (of the strategic arrangements within the police service) that I did for the Home Office in 2004/5 I pointed out how modestly the statutory arrangements for managing the phenomenon were resourced and how precarious the funding of the voluntary sector was. To the credit of those engaged in managing the phenomenon a number of the problems have been tackled and some improvements in process, governance and funding have since occurred.

Doubtless, a fresh debate will arise on the merits of the sensible solution proposed in this report and inevitably how the proposals could be funded. But regardless of any answer to the funding issue, the predicate problems of data collection and analysis require a long over-due solution.

This is not only achievable in my view, but it could possibly be resourced from within existing government funding, provided that policy and funding were aggregated across government departments and the police and a common way forward was agreed.

The pain and trauma suffered by individuals and families when their loved ones are reported missing cuts across all social boundaries and in an advanced democracy it is right that all of us should expect that the combination of statutory and voluntary organisations dealing with case work and strategy should be effective. Much however

remains to be done - and the simple solutions set out in this excellent Report are both achievable and affordable. Government and others need to give the proposals the most careful consideration.

September 2007

Perry Nove, CBE, QPM, retired in 2002 as the Commissioner of Police for the City of London after a 41 year career in the police service. In 2004/5 he conducted a strategic review for the Home Office of the national arrangements within the police service for managing missing persons data.





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Chapter 1

Existing Sources of Information on Missing Children – Strengths and Weaknesses



The problem of missing children is complex. They go missing for many reasons: run away; thrown away; abducted; injured or killed, by accident or criminal intent. Each of these categories needs its own policies and remedies.

In Britain today there is not even agreement on how to define a missing child. The police¹ define a missing person as: *'anyone whose whereabouts is unknown whatever the circumstance of disappearance (. . .) will be considered missing until located and (his/her) wellbeing or otherwise established.'* But this is only a generic definition making no distinction between adults and children, still less between different categories of missing children.

As a result it is impossible either to be precise about the scale of the problem – how many children go missing in each category and why – or to devise effective policies. Current sources of information, though valuable, fall far short of what is needed. Today's statistics are collected from widely disparate sources, with different methods of collection over different timescales, and using different definitions of what constitutes 'missing' and a 'child'. There are no official, nationally gathered statistics on the number of children who go missing.

¹ ACPO Guidance (2005) – Association of Chief Police Officers Guidance



Police Missing Persons Reports

Police missing person reports are a unique source of information. Unlike any other source in the UK, official or otherwise, they cover all types of cases of the NISMART II categories:

- runaway/throwaway
- non-family abduction
- family abduction
- missing involuntary, lost or injured and
- missing benign explanation.

But, the absence of central collation not only diminishes the value of police reports as an accurate source of national information; but also makes it difficult to break down the figures, category by category and region by region.

More specifically:

1. The police can only record cases reported to them. It is difficult to know the extent of under-reporting for each category. It is, for example, reasonable to assume that most 'throwaway' incidents are not brought to police attention given the parents' role in the disappearance.
2. It may be that other cases of missing children are not reported to the police: they may not last long enough or be considered serious enough; or the families involved, regardless of the type of disappearance, may be unwilling to contact the police, as in the case of those with a criminal background.
3. Equally, many disappearances of only a very short duration, but still reported to the police, will not be officially recorded because the missing child will have been found before recording could take place. (The so-called cancelled before circulation cases).
4. Conversely, the police practice of recording incidents, not cases, can lead to overcounting when the same child repeatedly goes missing (one who goes missing four times in a year will appear on police records as four separate incidents). The ability to link individual children with multiple incidents is an important tool. Lancashire Constabulary, for example, use their Sleuth software system to focus on repeat runaways, using an automated link between different recorded disappearances of the same individual. Unfortunately, this level of analytical capacity is still not commonplace in UK police forces.
5. Despite ACPO² Guidance (2005) setting out missing persons policy and procedure, the difficulties described above are compounded by each police force operating its own system for holding information.

² ACPO = Association of Chief Police Officers



NISMART I and II

In the US considerable effort has been made to clarify definitions and collect data.

Between the 1930s and the 1970s a substantial amount of academic research was carried out, followed in 1975 by a National Statistical Survey on Runaway Youth.

In 1984, the US Congress mandated the Department of Justice (through The Missing Children's Assistance Act) to conduct periodic studies to determine, for a given year, the actual number of children reported missing. These studies, called the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART), were undertaken by university-based researchers. They provided the first comprehensive, national data on the incidence of missing children.

NISMART I (published in 1990) provided estimates for 1988 and divided missing children's incidents into five broad categories: Runaway; Thrownaway; Non-family abduction; Family abduction; and Lost or otherwise missing.

NISMART II (published in 2002): provided estimates for 1999. The improved understanding of missing incidents led researchers to revise the categories used in NISMART I as follows: Runaway/Thrownaway; Non-family abduction; Family abduction; Lost or otherwise missing; Missing Involuntary, Lost, or Injured; and Missing Benign Explanation or Otherwise Missing.



In some forces information is stored electronically, in others in paper files. Forces using paper-based systems are hampered by the onerous task of collating information. Those with electronic systems have, in many cases, developed their own bespoke IT, although a growing number are starting to share applications. For example, 17 forces are now using COMPACT to help manage their missing persons cases.

6. Whether information is recorded on paper or electronically, police forces often fail to use common methodologies and coding practices about disappearances. This obviously limits the ability to establish why a child goes missing and the outcome of the case. In particular, geographical coding can tell us from, and to where, a child has gone missing. This helps with 'hotspot' identification, such as care homes with high rates of young runaways.
7. More fundamentally, police statistics focus only on the 'flow' of missing children, i.e. how many children are reported missing but later return or are found. There is no reliable or publicly available information on the 'stock' of missing children – the number

of children who remain missing at any given point in time, particularly the long-term missing.

8. The ACPO Guidance can in some cases cause confusion because it allows for children who go missing from care to be classified initially as 'unauthorised absentees'. The Guidance does not say at what point the child should be moved into the 'missing' category. Conversely, there are cases categorised by the police as 'missing' even though the whereabouts of the child are actually known (for example, some parental abduction cases involve a child being taken to, or retained in, a location known to the person reporting the incident)³.

Even a simple count of the annual number of missing children recorded by all police forces in the UK has, to date, not been published.

The figures shown below (Figure 1) derive from studies which attempt to interpret the data gathered from a small number of forces to arrive at a comprehensive figure for the UK. The difficulties are obvious.

The ACPO statistic, for example, is the result of two sets of data which start from a different base line; i.e. the Metropolitan

³ Police forces use the 'Misper' classification on the Police National Computer (PNC) to record a missing person's report, but these are automatically deleted from the PNC after 10 weeks, unless the originating force requests that the record be kept.

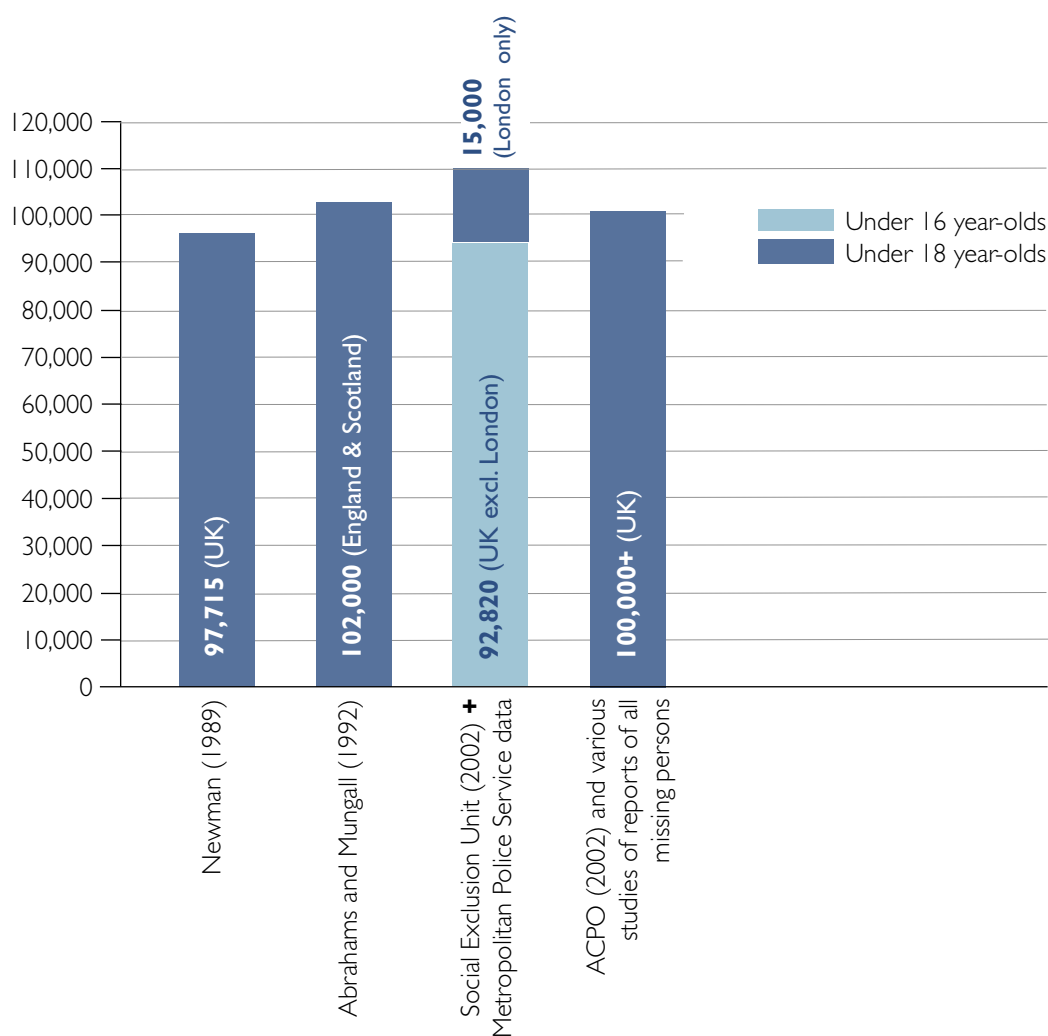


Police count includes children under 18-years of age while the provincial forces' count includes only those up to 16.

Other studies (e.g. Newman, 1989; Abrahams and Mungall, 1992; Social Exclusion Unit,

2002) have similar weaknesses since they use reports from a limited number of police forces to extrapolate figures for the whole of the UK. As a result, each study produces a different result⁴.

Fig. 1 Various studies estimating the number of missing children, based on police reports



⁴ See PACT's previous study, *Every Five Minutes*, for a more detailed review

Police National Missing Persons Bureau (PNMPB)

The primary role of the PNMPB is to maintain a national index of British nationals missing – at home and abroad – and of foreign nationals believed to be missing within the UK.

ACPO (2005) *Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons* states that 'Notification of all outstanding missing persons must be sent to the PNMPB within fourteen days.'

The PNMPB produces an annual count of the number of cases received and the number which have been cancelled, broken down into three age categories (under 14, 14 to 17, and 18 or over) for males and females (see Table 1 below).

The PNMPB is currently examining the feasibility of taking daily downloads of

missing person's reports from the Police National Computer (PNC) to obtain a national picture of police cases. Whilst the information is limited to the small number of variables entered onto the PNC, this is a valuable initiative worthy of further exploration.

Some children and adults go missing and never return. These account for only a small fraction of the overall missing person population. However, they can have the most severe impact on families and friends left behind (in some cases for many years). Although the PNMPB produces annual statistics of the cases which are reported to them, to date, no data on this 'stock' (a year-on-year count) of long-term unresolved cases is made available. In other words, it is currently not possible to know how many children have been missing for over one year.

Table 1 Average number of missing persons reports received/cancelled annually by the Police National Missing Persons Bureau

Age group	Male		Female	
	No. of reports		No. of reports	
	Received	Cancelled	Received	Cancelled
Under 14	177	120	201	134
14 – 17	357	348	601	553
18 +	1265	1116	731	615

Notes: Average is based on records for 4 years
 Missing person is defined as missing 14 days or longer
 Not all forces submit all of their reports to PNMPB.

Source: PNMPB website, September 2007



Missing People (formerly National Missing Persons Helpline) data

Missing People is a voluntary organisation which offers help, support and advice to missing people and their relatives or friends. It maintains several 24-hour helplines, for runaway children and for adults who go missing.

Missing People maintain a database of missing children and adults reported to them either directly by the public or by the police (the latter falls under a new national arrangement called the National Protocol

Agreement (NPA)⁵). The cases recorded by *Missing People* can include each of the five NISMART categories.

Hitherto, *Missing People* have not routinely released information on the cases they have recorded. But, their data has been used in a study of missing children and adults by the University of York (*Lost From View*, Biehal, Mitchell and Wade, 2003). It provides the only insight into all categories of missing children but is not nationally representative.

5 The National Protocol Agreement was signed on 21st December 2006 between the Association of Chief Police Officers and Missing People to exchange information, handle cases and respond to the issue of missing people. It enables the police to access Missing People services such as emotional support to the families or carers of a missing person, publicity, poster production/distribution and enquiries to support an investigation.



Surveys of runaway and throwaway children

Of all the NISMART categories, information on runaway and throwaway children is the most reliable and comprehensive in the UK. Previous studies sponsored by The Children's Society (Newman, 1989; Rees, 1993; Stein, *et. al.*, 1994 etc.) paved the way for the first large-scale nationally representative survey of young people's experiences of running away (published as

Still Running, 1999). A second survey was published in 2005 (*Still Running II*)⁶.

These surveys have provided a reliable indication of the scale of the problem (around one in nine young people report running away overnight before the age of 16) as well as a comprehensive insight into the causes of running away and experiences whilst away.

The Children's Society reported the findings of their second national survey of young runaways in 2005, entitled *Still Running II* (Rees and Lee, 2005). The survey involved over 11,000 young people, mostly aged 14 to 16, in mainstream schools, special schools and pupil referral units, in 25 areas of England.

The survey used the following definition of running away: '*young people who had been away for at least one night on the most recent occasion they ran away or were forced to leave home, and first ran away before their sixteenth birthday*'.

Key findings from the survey:

- Around one in nine (11%) of young people run away overnight before the age of 16.
- Around 100,000 young people run away in the UK each year.
- The large majority of young runaways are in the 13 to 15-year-old age group.
- Females are significantly more likely to run away than males.
- Problems at home, such as conflict, poor relationships and maltreatment, were the key reasons for running away.
- A quarter of young runaways felt they were forced to leave home.
- Around one in six (16%) of young runaways slept rough on the most recent occasion they were away.
- One in eight runaways had resorted to survival strategies such as begging and stealing whilst away from home.
- Around one in 12 (8%) of runaways said that they had been hurt or harmed on the most recent occasion they ran away.

N.B. The full report can be downloaded at www.childrenssociety.org.uk

⁶ More information can be found in PACT's report, entitled *Every Five Minutes*.



Information on international child abduction

The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, 1980, provides rules for tackling parental child abduction across frontiers. Its primary aims are to discourage the abduction of children and to provide a straightforward procedure to ensure the prompt return of the child/ren to the country of habitual residence. Today, 61 Countries are signatory to the Hague Convention.

In the UK three organisations collect information on international child abduction:

1. The Official Solicitor and Public Trustee (cases falling under the Hague Convention).
2. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (cases with countries which have not signed the Convention).
3. Reunite.

Though international, these cases, for the most part, fall within the NISMART category of 'family abduction'.

1. Official Solicitor and Public Trustee

The Official Solicitor and Public Trustee (OSPT) is part of the Ministry of Justice. OSPT houses the International Child Abduction and Contact Unit (ICACU), the Central Authority in

England and Wales for abductions to and from Hague Convention signatory countries. Staff at the ICACU record incoming and outgoing cases of international child abduction on two separate spreadsheets, used for compiling statistics, including basic details of the child (name, age and sex) and the country to which, or from which, the child has been abducted.

The OSPT publish an annual report which provides the number of new cases recorded by the ICACU in the previous financial year as well as the number of 'active' (or open) cases. An Annex to the report contains details on the outcome of cases in which an order was made during the financial year. The outcomes include whether the child was returned (judicial or voluntary return) or not (judicial refusal); whether access to the child was judicially granted, refused or agreed between the parties themselves; as well as other inconclusive outcomes. No information on the child or the abductor is published in the annual report.

2. Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Child Abduction Section



(CAS) was created in 2003 to provide specialist expertise to consular offices assisting British nationals overseas. The CAS deal only with 'outgoing' cases, (i.e. abductions out of the UK), to non-Hague countries. They offer advice, lists of lawyers, translation services and practical assistance.

The CAS staff enter cases reported to them onto COMPASS – an online case management system used by FCO staff worldwide. Details of individual cases are entered using a small number of drop-down or free text codes including the name of the child, age, sex, nationality and the country to which he/she has been abducted. Some additional information is recorded in a free-text description field. A status code records whether the case is 'active' or 'filed' (i.e. closed). Internal reports are compiled every quarter, showing the status of cases by country involved. This valuable information is not published.

3. Reunite

Reunite maintains a database of both incoming and outgoing cases of international child abduction reported to them. Free text information on the characteristics of the child (including age and sex); his/her nationality as

well as that of the abductor; and the country to which, or from which, the child has been abducted is recorded.

A valuable source of additional information recorded by Reunite is the type of each abduction; namely, whether it was perpetrated by a primary carer or a non-primary carer; whether it was an abduction (removal from the country of habitual residence) or a wrongful retention (failure to return the child after an access visit); or whether it was a prevention case. Separate fields denote whether the case was reported to the police and whether the child was returned, although these are not always completed.

Reunite's database is designed for operational purposes rather than for statistical output, though Reunite do produce regular bulletins of the number of abductions by type and by country involved. These are not routinely published, though they are available on demand.

By definition, all three sources of data on international child abductions (CAS, ICACU and Reunite) only record cases reported to them. This is not the full measure of all abductions out of the UK, some of which are never reported.



The cases recorded by the CAS and the ICACU are, in principle, non-Hague and Hague cases respectively. Those recorded by Reunite cover both categories. This is because both agencies advise parents to inform Reunite, just as Reunite

recommends that parents should inform the relevant government agency. At present there has been no attempt to match the cases held by each agency to produce a single list for any given year.

Information on domestic child abduction

Whilst Reunite occasionally record some cases of domestic child abduction (cases where the child has not been removed from the UK), the main source of information comes from the police recorded crime statistics. The Home Office publish an annual count of the number of child abduction offences recorded by the police every year as part of the Crime Statistics series. Whilst this allows a broad measure of annual trends, there are a number of serious drawbacks:

1. The Home Office data combine both family and non-family (stranger) abductions into one overall category of child abduction.
2. The count includes attempted abductions as well as actual abductions.
3. Offences ending in more serious crimes (such as abductions leading to rape or homicide) are not recorded as abductions since under the Principal Recording Rule only the more serious offence is recorded.
4. Incidents of abduction may not be recorded by the police if they do not meet the legal definition of 'child abduction' set out in the Child Abduction Act 1984⁷.
5. The police can only record offences which are reported to them.

⁷ Section 1 of the Child Abduction Act, 1984 deals with parental child abduction and makes it 'a criminal offence for any person connected with a child under the age of 16, to take or send the child out of the United Kingdom (for a period exceeding one month) without the consent of any other person who has parental responsibility for the child.' Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act deals with persons 'other than the child's mother, father or others covered in Section 1, who without lawful authority or reasonable excuse ... takes or detains a child under the age of sixteen'.

This means that the recording of offences of child abduction will only include victims who are younger than aged 16 and that abductions by parents will only be recorded if the child (under 16) is taken out of the United Kingdom and only if the incident lasts longer than one month.



Conclusion

Taken together, the definitional and statistical defects described above have direct and negative policy repercussions. Without reliable estimates of the number of missing children in each category, it is impossible to devise effective policies at national or local levels. Furthermore, without an accurate understanding of whether figures are rising or falling, it is hard to judge whether such policies as are in place are proving effective or not.

In recent years there has been substantial progress in formalising the arrangements for responding to missing people. ACPO released guidance to police forces in 2002, which was substantially revised in 2005. It included protocols on risk assessment, information sharing with *Missing People*, and a national reporting form and data standards. Further protocols have been agreed on how best to respond to children missing from care.

But there has been no systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of these initiatives; and, in particular, no survey of those who have used the services provided by the police, local government and voluntary sector to

trace a missing child (whether family and friends, or missing children themselves).

The situation will not improve as long as our evaluation of current services and policies is based, as it is today, on local projects primarily focussed on runaways, which use their own definitions and methods.

If the plight of young runaways has received sustained attention, a wider commitment to dealing with all missing children has remained elusive. Despite the best efforts of PACT, *Missing People*, individual police forces, and ACPO, there has been only limited political interest in missing children. Government responsibility is dispersed across several government departments. Resources have been limited to the provision of immediate 'front line' services. As a result, the information available on missing children has arisen in a piecemeal fashion, from discrete studies and from data collected in the course of providing these 'front line' services.

The next chapter sets out options for remedying these weaknesses.



Table 2. Existing sources of information on different types of missing children

Categories of missing	Data source	Strengths	
All types (runaways/ throwaways; family and non-family abductions; missing involuntary, lost or injured; and missing benign explanation)	Police missing person reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes all categories of missing. Data available in different geographical areas. 	
	PNMPB data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes all categories of missing. Centralised collection of cases. Should allow a 'stock' figure to be calculated. 	
	<i>Missing People</i> data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes all categories of missing. Centralised collection of cases. Cases not reported to the police sometimes included. 	
Runaways/throwaways	<i>Still Running</i> surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High quality surveys: reliable and representative findings. 	
International child abduction	FCO data (unpublished)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count of active and filed cases involving abductions to non-Hague countries. 	
	OSPT Annual report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count of new and active Hague Convention cases in last financial year. Reasonable indication of annual trends for Hague Convention cases. Outcome of cases given in Annex. 	
	<i>Reunite</i> (unpublished)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes a variety of searchable codes, including type of abduction. Prevention cases as well as actual abductions. Records abduction by type. 	
Domestic child abduction	Crime statistics (published by the Home Office)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual count of child abduction offences recorded by the police. Broad view of annual trends. 	



	Weaknesses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different coding and recording practices. • Different IT systems. • Only cases reported to the police. • No national collation, analysis and publication. • No breakdown by category. • Outcome data are rarely collected. • Incidents not cases are recorded.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only cases reported to the Bureau by other forces. • Only outstanding for more than 14 days (sometimes earlier if circumstances deemed appropriate). • Anecdotal evidence that force compliance in submitting cases may be patchy.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only cases reported to <i>Missing People</i>. • No routine collation and publication of statistics.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee that these surveys will be repeated at regular intervals. • Relatively expensive. • Some concern about coverage of 'hard to reach' young runaways.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only non-Hague Convention cases. • Limited to cases reported. • Limited information (age, sex, nationality, country abducted to) recorded in searchable code format. • Data not currently published.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only Hague Convention cases. • Limited to cases reported. • No detailed information on nature of cases or characteristics of children/abductors.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most codes are completed using free text necessitating data cleansing prior to analysis. • Data not currently published but made available on request. • Limited to cases reported.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No separation of offences committed by strangers and by family members. • No separation of actual abductions from attempted abductions. • Only offences recorded by the police meeting the legal definition of child abduction. • Serious offences involving abduction excluded as a result of the Principal Crime Rule.





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Chapter 2



Options for Improvement

In Chapter 1 we examined the strengths and weaknesses of existing sources of information on missing children and highlighted the key knowledge gaps that result. This chapter sets out seven options for improving information. These should be viewed as a menu from which a permutation of options can be selected.

A brief summary of each option is given in Table 3 (pages 40-41). But the strategic objective is the same: to create a coherent and comprehensive approach to the problem of missing children in the UK.

1. Improve existing data

Police missing person reports

Police data is the most valuable source of information because all NISMART categories of missing children are recorded.

But, as discussed in the previous chapter, there are weaknesses in the system that only a national database will remedy.

This will require the establishment of the following, with resources to match:

a) *Consistent recording practices*

- Each police force should adhere to the same practices when recording the disappearance of a child.
- No force should delay recording the disappearance of a child after initial reporting.
- Police forces should standardise the practice of recording a disappearance when the actual location is known (e.g. family abduction) or when a particular outcome is suspected (e.g. abduction or other serious crime).
- The practice of recording a child missing from care as an absconder should be uniform.

b) *Common data fields*

- All police forces should record information using common standards.

Even forces using paper-based systems are now required to adopt the ACPO national reporting form (ACPO, 2005). This needs to be monitored and enforced.

- In addition to key information such as age, sex and ethnicity, the type of disappearance (using an agreed definition) and the outcome (e.g. returned of own accord, found by police, found dead etc.) should be included.
- Technology that can link multiple disappearances to the same individual, such as that pioneered by Lancashire Constabulary, should be implemented nationally.

c) *Electronic transfer of data to a central dataset*

Technical and administrative resources are needed to transfer data from all police forces – on all missing children reports – to a central dataset. Progress is already been made with the National Protocol Agreement between police forces and *Missing People*. But more needs to be done.

d) *Analysis and report writing*

Resources are also needed to analyse police data and to write high quality and regular reports.



If further investment were to be provided to ensure that all police forces employed consistent practices in recording cases, it would be possible to produce a national count on the number of children who go missing every year. Similarly, comparison between geographical areas, trend analysis and information on different categories of missing would be greatly improved.

Missing People data

Missing People receives information on hundreds of missing children every year. The data collected should be routinely analysed and published. There would be benefits in presenting this information alongside an analysis of police missing person reports.

2. ‘Triangulate’ international child abduction data

Cases of international family child abduction are currently recorded by three separate agencies: Reunite (dealing with abductions to both Hague and non-Hague countries), the OSPT (Hague countries) and the FCO (non-Hague countries).

An annual computation of the number of cases could be easily made by matching the information of the three datasets (‘triangulation’).

This would require data-sharing and confidentiality protocols to be agreed between the three agencies. A technical means of matching cases would also need to be identified. This option would provide improved information on the trends in this category of missing children.

At the same time, improvements should be made to the recording practices of each agency, to provide more detailed information on individual cases.



3. Improve Home Office data on child abduction

The Home Office provides the only count of the number of child abductions each year (provided the cases meet the legal definition for recording by the police – see Chapter 2). But, the count is incomplete. As already noted, abductions which lead to assault or murder are categorised by the more serious crime. In these cases it is essential that an abduction ‘flag’ is attached to the file.

Home Office statistics are not sufficiently detailed to indicate the type of abduction involved; family abduction, stranger abduction, successful abduction, or attempted abduction.

A Home Office report in 2004 (Newiss and Fairbrother, 2004) showed that it is possible to provide more information on police recorded child abductions.

4. 'Piggyback' questions onto other surveys

There are opportunities for acquiring better information on missing children by inserting questions into surveys measuring other issues.

For example, large-scale surveys using representative samples of *households* could be used to ask family members about their experience of having a child go missing. In the case of runaways – though obviously not those in care or institutions – this would provide a useful supplement to self-reported disappearances in surveys of young people (such as *Still Running*).

The 'piggybacking' of questions onto household surveys conducted repeatedly at regular intervals would have the added benefit of providing information on trends. It might also provide information on categories of missing children for which little other data is available, such as 'missing, lost or injured'.

Resources would be needed to identify appropriate surveys, to 'buy' questions, and to negotiate data ownership and security. Additionally, resources would be required to analyse the data collected and to present the findings.



5. Collect information from runaway projects

A *Postcode Lottery* (PACT, 2006) provides, for the first time, a detailed account of the various voluntary sector projects which offer support to runaway and throwaway children. Our study found that there is a wide geographical disparity in the types and levels of services offered – hence the title of our report.

We concluded that there is an urgent need for a new national approach to coordinate and fund runaway projects and other voluntary sector services to missing children. Such an approach would also allow for the standardisation of data collection.

In the U.S. the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) of 1974 provides grants to community-based non-profit and public organisations to support emergency shelters for young people (under 18); counselling services; long-term residential assistance; and a national runaway switchboard⁸.

In 2003, Congress voted \$130 million for runaway and homeless youth programmes and \$20 million for the Street Outreach

Programme. These measures have helped thousands of children.

The US national Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS) provides all projects with an automated tool for capturing information on the number of young people they serve, their demographic details and the services they receive. As a result it is possible to analyse regional trends and demand for services. It also makes planning, funding applications and local education initiatives possible.

One problem with surveys and existing data sources is their inability to capture detailed information on runaway children in high-risk situations. In some cases, children are continuously missing, effectively living on the streets or moving from one temporary shelter to another. Their circumstances make them unlikely to be included in a sample of households or to be reported as missing to the authorities (Smeaton, 2005). Improved data collection from runaway projects or from out-reach workers would fill some of this gap in our knowledge.

⁸ See the report by The Children's Society *Safe and Sound: Lessons from America, 2006*.



6. Commission *ad hoc* research studies

Some specialised knowledge gaps will be best addressed by commissioning individually designed research studies. These will typically involve questions to which the answer will not necessarily emerge from routine statistics.

Projects might include:

- A study of the risk factors associated with international family child abduction.
- A study to estimate the number of long-term missing children (the 'stock') and to profile those who disappear in this way.
- An evaluation of the services offered by the police and other agencies in responding to children who go missing.
- A study of the cost of, and impact on, families and the wider society of children who go missing.



7. Commission a bespoke large-scale survey on missing children

The most comprehensive and ambitious option for improving data collection is to follow the U.S. example by commissioning a large-scale survey solely dedicated to missing children.

It would involve designing a questionnaire and drawing a sample specifically for the purpose of illuminating the scale and nature of the missing child phenomenon.

A core element of the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART) was a national household survey of adult caretakers and youths. This was conducted in 1999 as part of NISMAART II. Over 16,000 adult primary caretakers and 5,000 youths living in the same households were interviewed.

But, even the U.S household survey had its limitations:

- The incidence of abductions by a stranger or slight acquaintance, with the intention to hold for ransom, kill or keep the child permanently ('stereotypical kidnappings'), could not be reliably estimated because of the low overall number of such disappearances. A separate survey of law enforcement agencies was undertaken to provide the relevant data.
- Children not living in households (for example street children and homeless families), or those living in households without a telephone, could not be included in the survey. A separate study of staff in juvenile facilities, including detention centres, homes, residential treatment centres and shelters was conducted.
- The incidence of international family child abduction could not be estimated using the household survey because of the low overall number of such disappearances. Estimates of this type remain outside the scope of the NISMAART.

To conduct large-scale surveys of this nature requires considerable resources – both to manage the design, administration and analysis of the survey and to pay for the fieldwork. Staff at the National Institute of Justice who commissioned NISMAART II estimated the overall cost of the project (including the law enforcement survey and the juvenile facilities study, as well as the household survey) to be in the region of \$3.4 million (approximately £1.8 million). Given the scope of the three elements, it should be assumed that the household survey accounted for considerably more than half of this budget.



Table 3. Options for improving information on missing children, by key knowledge gaps

Option	Description	Resources	
Improve existing data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police missing person reports <i>Missing People</i> data 	<p>Police data include all categories of missing children reported to the police. Central collation and analysis of reports would provide national data.</p> <p>Analysis and reporting of cases received by <i>Missing People</i>.</p>	<p>A national dataset of reports of missing children made to the police would require consistency in recording practices, common data fields, the (electronic) transfer of cases to a central dataset, and staff to undertake analysis and write reports.</p> <p>The necessary resources would be needed to undertake analysis and write reports.</p>	
'Triangulate' international child abduction data	Matching of cases recorded by <i>Reunite</i> , OSPT and FCO.	Would require data-sharing/confidentiality protocols and technical means of matching cases, as well as analysis and report writing.	
Improve Home Office data on child abduction	Better breakdown of police recorded crime category of 'child abduction' to distinguish between family from non-family abductions, and successful from attempted abductions.	Resources to analyse police crime data and to report the results.	
'Piggyback' questions onto other surveys	The inclusion of questions on missing children into other surveys.	Resources would be required to design questions, select appropriate surveys, buy questions, negotiate data ownership, analysis and write reports.	
Collect information from runaway projects	Introduce standard data collection procedures for local runaway projects, as part of central coordination.	Design and rollout of standard data collection software. Central analysis and presentation.	
Commission <i>ad hoc</i> research studies	One-off research studies commissioned to fill specific information gaps.	Would require identification of research priorities, and a budget either for commissioning these studies or for salaries of in-house staff.	
Commission a bespoke large-scale survey on missing children	A single nationally representative survey to capture reliable estimates of different types of missing children.	Comparatively expensive. Would require full feasibility study, and budget for survey design, fieldwork, analysis and report writing. Likely to involve long timeframe.	



	Contribution to filling key knowledge gaps		
	How many children go missing?	Why do they go missing?	What's the solution?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ National estimates ✓ All missing children types ✗ Only cases reported to the police ✓ Trends could be compiled if undertaken annually ✗ Not all cases are reported to <i>Missing People</i> ✓ Trends would be limited to cases reported to <i>Missing People</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Analysis by type of missing children ✓ Analysis by outcome ✗ Complexity of cases might be difficult to capture in common data fields alone – Depends on the quality of data available for analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highlight different geographical rates of going missing ✓ Identify different 'hotspots' ✓ Analysis by individuals and incidents – Depends on the quality of data available for analysis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Total of cases reported to any of the three agencies ✓ Trends could be compiled if undertaken annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Would require longer-term development of each agency's recording practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Would require more in-depth research of the data
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ National total of police recorded 'child abduction' (with limitations) ✓ Trends could be compiled if undertaken annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Much improved understanding of police recorded child abductions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Would depend on the level of data available and probably require more in-depth research
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Should provide representative survey data ✗ Limited by sample design (e.g. households) ✓ Could provide new information e.g. parental reporting of their children running away – Trends would be dependent on the inclusion of questions in continuous surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Could provide high quality information on specific areas of interest, e.g. motivations for running away ✗ Likely to be limited by length of overall questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Possible source of information if questions ask specifically about impact of interventions/policies ✗ Likely to be limited by length of overall questionnaire
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Data on runaways using services ✗ Not necessarily representative of all runaways ✓ Using the same software would enable annual trends to be compiled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Opportunity for collecting additional in-depth information which would contribute to knowledge of causes, risks and outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Excellent source of information on service uptake and impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Unlikely to be designed to provide national estimates ✓ May target specific categories, such as child abduction obscured by Principal Counting Rule and long-term missing 'stock' ✗ Unlikely to be repeated to provide trend information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Useful for exploring nature of specific types of missing children, e.g. risk factors associated with international family child abduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Could be used to evaluate impact of police, <i>Missing People</i> and other service providers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Nationally representative estimates, though some types of missing children may be beyond the scope of the survey (e.g. child abductions) – Trend data would depend on the frequency with which surveys were repeated (at additional cost) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ High quality and detailed data should be available on different categories of missing children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Would depend on the scope of the survey, but should be good opportunity to explore perceptions of what works





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Chapter 3



Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Although improvements have been made, responsibility for missing and abducted children is fragmented and disorganised. This is as true for the government and public authorities as it is for the voluntary sector. It is a deplorable state of affairs for an advanced 21st century society.

PACT believes that there are three fundamental, interlocking problems that need to be addressed urgently.

First, in government there is a lack of leadership and no clear chain of responsibility. This is because too many departments are involved and none takes overall responsibility for coordinating policies and distributing funds, the foundation of a coherent response to the problem of missing and abducted children.

Second, there is poor coordination between the police, Whitehall and the voluntary sector. It is compounded by inadequate coordination within each of these groups. This leads to the erratic and inefficient allocation of resources from Whitehall; wasteful duplication of services and research by NGOs; and disparate standards for data collection on missing children across the police forces of the UK.

Third, and more fundamentally, there is a reluctance across all sectors to treat missing children as a discrete and unique problem, which cannot be folded into the larger issue of missing persons as a whole.

As a result, there are no comprehensive and reliable data on missing children for the UK. We can only guess how many go missing or why. This in turn undermines our ability to draw up effective policies.

The heart of the matter is to establish the scale and nature of the problem. The first requirement is a nationally agreed definition of the different categories of 'missing' and a uniform way of reporting for all police forces, NGOs, and relevant agencies. This will enable the creation of a comprehensive national database providing sufficient breakdown and detail. Only then will Whitehall, the police and the voluntary sector be in a position to devise coordinated, effective strategies for tackling the problem.

In PACT's view, the best and most ambitious solution is to create a national resource centre. Such a centre would draw on the experience of the tried and tested National Center for Missing and Exploited Children,



which has been in existence in the United States for over 20 years. Financed by the US Congress, the Center, working closely with law enforcement agencies, brings together data analysis, policy formulation and research. Together with a nation-wide Child Alert System and the universal use of the Missingkids Website, it has rescued hundreds of children over the years, as well as making a significant contribution to child welfare.

These successes are the result of a recognition over 30 years ago in the US administration and Congress that among the

totality of missing persons, children present a unique problem different in kind from that of adults. This has led to the creation of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)⁹; the setting up of a national toll-free telephone line for missing children; emergency shelter programmes; the commissioning of periodic, in-depth studies on the phenomenon of missing children through NISMART¹⁰; and effective cooperation between law enforcement bodies, child welfare agencies, and the non-governmental sector.

⁹ NCMEC, which serves both as a clearinghouse and as a source of support and assistance to those trying to find and recover missing children, was created as a result of the Missing Children's Act, 1984.

¹⁰ National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children.



Recommendations

There has to be a step-change in attitude towards the problem of missing and abducted children. This means creating a single agency dedicated to children who go missing whatever the circumstance, which brings together the resources of the government, police, local authorities and voluntary sector.

Its remit should be:

- a. To coordinate the collection of data across the UK on the basis of common definitions.
- b. To devise policies, which will avoid duplication of effort and provide a uniformly high standard of service across the UK for all types of missing children.
- c. To promote and exploit to the full the Child Alert System and the Missingkids Website as indispensable tools in the location and rescue of missing children.
- d. To offer practical support to families and a national free-phone number for children in distress.
- e. To establish priorities for research programmes.
- f. To publish an annual report, summarising developments, supported by statistics.





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Appendix 1

The Missingkids Website



Originally created by the US-based National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), the Missingkids website is a unique, state-of-the-art, searchable database, which provides a single repository of

help and hope for endangered children at home and around the world.

It enables police forces instantly to disseminate to colleagues at home and abroad photographs of, and information on, missing children and the adults known to be with them when they disappeared.

To date, the Missingkids Website is operational in 14 countries. It was first introduced to England, Wales and Northern Ireland in June 2000, and to Scotland in June 2004. It is managed by the Police National Missing Persons Bureau (PNMPB) and is part of the police 'Guidance on the Management,



Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons', 2005.

All the national sites are linked to a global network enabling their access worldwide. The technology also includes age progression techniques which have been successful in identifying and retrieving children years after their disappearance. In the US the website gets 2.8 million hits a day. One in six children featured on it is rescued as a direct result of someone recognising the child and providing useful leads to the police that led to the child being found.



The Missingkids website is a remarkable collaboration between the Police, NGOs, and the private sector to bring our children home.

The other advantage is the ability to download and distribute posters. Research has indicated that the majority of people who provided information on a missing child have initially seen the child on a poster, or in a newspaper.

This is why PACT has launched a series of campaigns to get the website and the posters better known and better distributed in the UK. The business community has given us enormous support by offering us the opportunity to display our posters

free of charge. Our latest initiative is with Electronic Health Media (EHM) who have agreed to put pictures of missing children on the TV network they supply to hospitals and surgeries in the hope that someone will recognise that child's photograph and call the police with information.

PACT believes that once all police forces actively use this site to input their own cases, this will provide a remarkably useful data source on a specific category of missing children.



Posters of missing children are widely displayed throughout the UK



Photographs of missing children are shown on the EHM network in hospitals and surgeries.



Posters are displayed in Tesco supermarkets throughout the country.



Posters are displayed on over 500 Emcor vans.



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Appendix 2

Child Rescue Alert



The Child Rescue Alert is a groundbreaking initiative to save children who have been abducted.

The scheme is based on an American concept called Amber Alert, which was introduced in Texas in 1996 following the kidnapping and brutal murder of 9-year old Amber Hagerman in Arlington, Texas. Her tragic death had such a profound impact on her community that it prompted local police forces and broadcasters to develop the AMBER (America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response) plan. It is also a tribute to Amber Hagerman.

The plan is simple: as soon as a child is abducted and is thought to be at risk of serious harm or death, police forces alert radio and television stations. They, in turn, interrupt their programmes to broadcast information about the missing child using the Emergency Alert System (EAS), which is typically used for warning the public of

severe weather emergencies. The Amber Alert System was soon adopted across the nation and by 2006 it had saved the lives of over 200 children.

In November 2002, the Sussex Police launched their own version of AMBER, which they called 'Child Rescue Alert'. It was soon rolled out nationally and is now part of the police 'Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons', 2005.

An Alert is activated only when it is feared that the abducted child (under 16 years old) is in imminent danger of serious harm or death and that there is sufficient information to enable the public to assist the police in finding the child.



Mr and Mrs Dowler, the parents of missing school girl, Millie Dowler, with Chief Constable Denis O'Connor at the launch of Child Rescue Alert in Surrey.



Child Rescue Alert has the added value of sending a strong message that crimes against children will not go unpunished and that the police, broadcasters, NGOs, and the public will work together to apprehend predators.





Appendix 3

The National Protocol Agreement

The National Protocol Agreement (NPA) between police forces in England and Wales and *Missing People* was signed in December 2006.

The NPA creates a single national mechanism for data exchange between *Missing People* and the police, creating a gateway through which the police can access services from *Missing People*.

Missing People services include family support, publicity, identification and enquiries to support the search for a missing adult or child.

The benefits of operating under this agreement include:

- Enabling *Missing People* to proactively offer a range of services which helps police forces save time and money.
- Helping to create a comprehensive record of people who have been reported missing in the UK to allow cross matching with unidentified bodies and people, and to identify previous or linked disappearances.
- Establishing an information exchange mechanism enabling *Missing People* to alert police to information they may otherwise be unaware of.
- Working toward the safety of those persons who are considered to be at greater risk of coming to harm or of causing harm to others and helping to protect the vulnerable.
- Facilitating the provision of data which will form the basis of more reliable statistics and further research into causes and solutions.
- Leading to the development of evidence-based policy and prevention strategies, and a higher resolution rate of missing person cases.





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