

Vulnerable Children and Young People

Young Runaways



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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Introduction

1. Research has shown that one in nine (11%) children in Scotland ran away or were forced to leave home before the age of 16.¹ Nine thousand young people run away in Scotland each year. One in seven of those young people will have been forced to leave. Running away is a teenage phenomenon but of those who run away approximately one in five will do so before the age of 11.
2. This is a Scotland-wide problem. The rates of running away are broadly similar in urban, town and rural areas. There is also little difference in the levels of running away between different ethnic groups. While girls are more likely to run away than boys, boys are more likely to start running away at an earlier age.

Definitions

3. Running away is difficult to define and may mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this document a young runaway is a child or young person under the age of 18 who spends one night or more away from the family home or substitute care without permission or who has been forced to leave by their parents or carers. However, a number of young people may abscond for shorter periods of time on a regular basis. The age and circumstances of the child or young person will be a key factor in determining the appropriate response from agencies. The welfare of the child or young person must be the primary consideration and in some cases therefore concerns may be raised about the safety of the child or young person after a shorter absence.

Why is running away such a concern?

4. Running away puts children and young people in danger and is often a sign of underlying problems in a child or young person's life. These may include involvement with substance misuse, trouble with the police or difficulties at school such as truancy or exclusion. Sometimes children's difficulties are as a result of being the victim of physical/emotional/sexual abuse or violence. In some instances it may already be clear that a child or young person is in need. But in many instances these problems may be hidden. **The fact that a child or young person has run away should alert agencies that there may be underlying problems and that the child or young person and his/her family may require support.**
5. We know that running away is associated with a number of short-term risks including sleeping rough, involvement in crime, sexual exploitation and substance misuse. Research has indicated that around one in six young people who had been away overnight reported being either physically or sexually assaulted whilst away from home while more than a quarter had slept rough on at least one occasion. Key findings from the *Missing Out* research into young people under 16 who run away or are forced to leave home is attached at **Annex A**. Even when a child or young person is not exposed to immediate danger running away can be a frightening and upsetting experience for the child or young person and for their family. There are also implications for the long-term outcomes for children and young people who run away in terms of increased levels of homelessness, social exclusion and unemployment. These

¹ From research commissioned by Aberlour Child Care Trust, Extern and the Children's Society carried out in partnership with the University of York in 1999/2000.

long-term outcomes could be addressed if we identify children and young people at risk and provide them with appropriate support.

Prevention

6. The majority of children and young people who run away do so because of problems at home although personal problems and problems at school are also significant for many children and young people. Young runaways are generally running from a problem in their lives rather than in search of excitement. Support to address that underlying problem will be required to prevent the child or young person from running away. It is important therefore that the needs of young runaways are not seen in isolation.

Running away from home

7. The majority of young runaways have run from their family home. The most common reasons that children and young people give for running away from home are arguments and conflict with parents or stepparents, neglect and rejection, experiences of emotional or physical abuse or to seek respite from parents' personal problems such as alcohol/drug dependency or mental health problems. Research has shown that a high percentage of young runaways are from stepfamily backgrounds. Running away is closely associated with problems at school and children and young people who run away are more likely to be unhappy at school and to have missed time due to truancy or exclusion.

Stepfamily Scotland

Running away is closely linked to relationship issues within families. Children from all types of families run away, however, children living in stepfamilies and lone parent families are more likely to run away than those living with both birth parents.

Stepfamily Scotland has produced a set of five complementary information leaflets for young people in stepfamilies. The leaflets have been designed to identify the feelings, situations and issues faced by young people and to explore their feelings and the range of choices available. The leaflets set out key points of information relevant to the situations identified.

8. Children and young people who run away from home may not previously have had any contact with statutory agencies. This does not necessarily mean that they will not be experiencing significant problems in their life. The fact that they have run away should alert agencies that support may be required.
9. Problems within the family may be even more significant for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people. Coming out can lead to young people being thrown out of home and cut off from parental support. Research with lesbians and gay men has shown that one-third had to leave their home when their sexuality became known.² Young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people may also be more at risk of violence once they have left home and may be unwilling to access provision which does not take specific account of their sexual orientation.

² *Obtaining a Fair Deal; Pride in Housing*, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, 1997

10. Running away causes emotional stress to a child or young person's parents or carers. In an analysis of calls to the helpline Parentline Plus, 85% of those calling about running away were either anxious, stressed or depressed (compared to 70% of all callers).³ The main cause of parental anxiety is fear about their child's safety. Parents are concerned about danger from other people, the environment their child may be in when they run away, and their child's emotional state.⁴

Children and young people in substitute care

11. While most young runaways run from their family home a higher proportion of young people in substitute care (40%) run away compared with those who have never been in care (9%) and children in care are more likely to run away repeatedly.
12. It is important not to overemphasise the link between being in care and running away as some children may have started to run away from home before their entry into the care system. However, the quality of care experienced by children is clearly important in relation to rates of running away. The Executive is seeking to improve the experiences of children looked after away from home. New resources are being provided for throughcare and aftercare to help young people to move into independent adult living and for improving the educational attainment and qualifications of looked after children. For some children, however, it is the fact that they are looked after away from home or that limits are being placed upon their freedom (possibly for the first time) which results in them running away. It is important therefore that agencies work together to identify those children who are most vulnerable, to ensure their immediate safety and to consider the need for appropriate support to prevent a pattern of repeat running developing. This support should include helping children being looked after away from home develop alternative coping strategies to those that result in them running away.
13. A range of options could be considered to provide additional information and support to young people who run away from care. These could include providing all young people with a 'Looked after Children' pack or equivalent which will include information on the dangers of running away, where to go for support, if feeling in crisis and contemplating running away. Befriending services can also play an important role in providing young people with support. Who Cares? Scotland is an organisation that is uniquely placed to provide that advocacy service, as it has workers throughout Scotland who provide support to young people in care, including in residential settings. The Executive has been able to identify £60,000 per annum in each of the next two financial years to allow Who Cares? Scotland to develop and secure the services that it provides to very vulnerable looked after young people.
14. In thinking about the needs of children and young people being looked after away from home it is important not to overlook the needs of young people in foster care. These young people will have similar needs for information and support. Support also needs to be provided to the carer to allow them to deal with any crisis points appropriately and to continue to provide support to a child or young person if they have run away from home.

³ Analysis of calls to Parentline Plus, April-September 2001

⁴ Focus groups with parents, conducted by Barnardo's on behalf of SEU

Services

15. The experiences of each child or young person who runs away or is forced to leave will be different and there is no single model of provision which will meet the needs of all runaways. Young people may require different services dependent upon their location, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation as well as any special needs which they may have. A range of services and service providers (both statutory and voluntary sector agencies) are required including:

- telephone helplines;
- outreach teams which identify and support children and young people;
- family mediation and counselling services;
- centre-based provision; and
- universal services delivered via the health and education services.

This list is not exhaustive and other services may be developed to meet the child's needs dependent upon the issues identified.

16. Young people often experience crisis points late in the evening, outside standard office hours. It is important that support, delivered by a range of service providers, is available when required as delay can often result in the young person being placed at risk. This could be provided through helplines, better prioritisation of calls on police time, local authority out-of-hours services, outreach teams, voluntary sector provision and a better developed approach to emergency refuge provision.

17. Young people who have run away say that they did not have anyone to talk to about their problems or enough information about where to go for help. Research has suggested that increased information about local services, which might help to address the underlying problems identified by young people, would be helpful.

18. Children and young people often welcome the opportunity to discuss issues via a telephone helpline. The use of a helpline allows the child or young person to remain anonymous and to retain control of the discussion. They may choose to terminate the discussion at any time. It is important that children and young people know that they can contact a helpline and that these are freephone numbers. **Consideration should be given to increasing the advertising for such helplines in areas where young runaways or other vulnerable children may congregate such as railway and bus stations.** The Scottish Executive will discuss practical ways of taking this forward with the national helpline organisations.

ChildLine Scotland

ChildLine Scotland is a free 24-hour confidential helpline for children and young people. ChildLine has a very high recognition rate amongst children and young people.

Parentline Plus

Offers support to anyone parenting a child – the child's parents, stepparents, grandparents and foster parents. Parentline Plus runs a 24-hour confidential freephone helpline.

Message Home

Message Home (provided by the National Missing Persons Helpline) is a free 24-hour confidential helpline for anyone who has run away or left home. Its freephone number is in every BT telephone call box in the UK. It provides a means of communication between missing people and those who are missing them, and callers can seek confidential help and advice.

Get Connected

Get Connected is a free UK-wide helpline that finds help and support for young people. The helpline worker listens to the young person then talks through the range of options and suggests services which may be able to help. Get Connected can then provide a free connection to the service.

19. Helplines are an important element in supporting children but they should be part of a range of available services. There remain concerns that some children who want to contact a helpline are unable to get through and that their call goes unanswered. Helplines are often useful as an initial point of contact for children and young people but it is important to ensure that children and young people are then able to access further support locally as required. Helplines should have the ability to put children and young people in contact with appropriate local services and these services need to have the capacity and resourcing to provide support. **The Executive has already announced additional support for helplines that provide counselling and support for children (ChildLine and Parentline). This includes an extra £500,000 over two years to allow ChildLine Scotland to open up a new call centre and increase by up to 60% the number of children they are able to help.**
20. While some parents never report their child as being missing to anyone, parents and carers are more likely to report their child as missing to the police than to other statutory agencies. Given their presence on the streets, the police are also more likely to come into contact with young runaways (irrespective of whether they have been formally reported as missing) than other agencies. The police therefore have a key role to play in identifying, and providing immediate support, to children and young people. A number of police forces have appointed a dedicated officer for runaways and feedback suggests that this is helpful in addressing repeat running away. This would be a positive step for all police forces to implement.

21. It is important that support for the child or young person does not ignore the wider family context. There is a need to offer advice and support to parents who are experiencing difficulties with their children. Family conflict has been identified as the primary reason why children and young people run away from home. Running away puts children and young people in danger but it is also a time of anxiety and fear for many parents. It has been suggested that many parents find it difficult to determine whether their child is experiencing normal teenage angst or is at risk.

Running Other Choices

The Aberlour Childcare Trust's Running Other Choices Project in Glasgow has been developed to work with young people under the age of 16 who run away. The Project seeks to build relationships with young people who have run away, and their families, to assist them in finding solutions to the circumstances which have caused them to run away from home and to find alternatives to running.

Refuge provision

22. Children who are in need because they have run away from home may have an immediate need for somewhere safe to stay. Some young runaways may be able to return home immediately while in other instances it may take some time to consider the needs and best interests of the child.
23. Section 38 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 enables local authorities to provide short-term refuge in designated or approved establishments and households for children who appear to be at risk of harm and who can request refuge. A refuge does not need to be a dedicated centre. There are other models for providing support to young people, for example with foster carers or in other local authority accommodation. The aim is to provide somewhere safe to stay and access to advice and help for a short period in order to resolve the crisis, to reconcile him or her with family or carers or to divert the child or young person to other suitable services or accommodation.
24. The extent to which local authorities are currently making use of Section 38 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is not clear. However, there is concern that the needs of children and young people for refuge are not being adequately met. **An assessment of how local agencies are meeting the needs of young people for refuge in their area and levels of demand should be conducted as a matter of priority by the Scottish Executive. Additional work is also required on models of good practice in the provision of refuge. Following this work additional guidance should be provided on the provision of refuge support for children and young people in Scotland.**

25. The Executive has identified funding of up to £600,000 through the Youth Crime Prevention Fund for a fixed-term pilot project to assess the effectiveness of a residential refuge for children and young people who have run away or been forced to leave home. The service would be linked with Aberlour's Running Other Choices Project which currently operates across Glasgow and East Renfrewshire.

Information

26. It is important that agencies have readily accessible information on the numbers of young people who go missing. Poor data collection and monitoring makes it difficult to provide an accurate picture of how many children are missing and the outcomes for those children – whether they have been found or not. It also makes it difficult for information to be shared between different agencies or across local authority/police boundaries. The National Missing Persons Bureau holds a database of all missing people reported to the police outstanding after 14 days. However, it does not pick up those children and young people who go missing, perhaps on a regular basis, for a shorter period of time and the information is not available to other agencies. Improved access to information would help to identify local patterns in running away.

Children who cannot return home

27. A proportion of children – especially older children – do not run away from home but are forced to leave by their parents or carers. There are also a number of children for whom it is not safe to return home. For some older children running away is a transition to independent living. Children who cannot return home often need support to prevent them becoming homeless or drawn into high-risk activity.
28. The final report of the Homelessness Task Force, published in February 2002, recognised that access to accommodation and appropriate support services is often a key issue for older children who cannot return home. The Task Force made specific recommendations to strengthen the legal rights of young people assessed as homeless, to improve the support of affordable, entry level, ready access housing for young people seeking their own accommodation for the first time, and to ensure provision of advice, throughcare and aftercare services to prevent homelessness amongst children and young people who have been looked after away from home. All of the Task Force's recommendations have been endorsed by the Executive and are being implemented by a wide range of agencies. Delivery of the recommendations is being monitored by the national Homelessness Monitoring Group.

Guidance for professionals

29. A child or young person who has run away should have the opportunity to discuss with a professional their reason for running away, the risk of it occurring again and what action needs to be taken to reduce the risk, including the need for additional support.

30. The planning and development of services for young runaways should be taken forward within the wider children's services planning process. Local protocols should be developed to support young runaways and to identify and agree the roles of different agencies. Guidance on the content and development of local protocols is attached at **Annex B**. Education professionals have an important role in the provision of information to children and young people and in identifying young people at risk (given that not all parents will report their child as missing). Progress reports on protocol development, monitoring and evaluation will be considered as part of the child protection reform programme.

Legislative framework

31. Information on the legal position relating to young runaways and the responsibilities of statutory agencies is provided separately to assist professionals working with children and young people.

Annex A

SOME OF THE KEY FINDINGS IN *MISSING OUT*⁵ ON THE POSITION IN SCOTLAND**How many run away?**

- 6,000-7,000 children under 16 run away every year for the first time
- 9,000 run away each year, including those who run away more than once
- Each year there are likely to be 11,000-12,000 incidents of running away across Scotland
- One in seven young people who run away from home are forced to leave before 16 years of age
- A quarter of young runaways will run away three times or more
- Over half of those who run away three times or more run away for the first time before the age of 11

Who runs away?

- There is little difference in the rates of running away between urban, town and rural areas and similarly little difference between different ethnic groups
- Running away is a teenage phenomenon but approximately one in five run before the age of 11
- Females are more likely to run away than males although males are more likely to start running away at an earlier age
- Young people in substitute care are over represented amongst runaways. 40% of those who have been in care at some point in their lives had run away compared to 9% of those who had never been accommodated
- It is estimated that of those young people who run away and who have never been in care, over half of them will not have had any involvement with social work prior to running away

The risks of running

- Around one-sixth of young people who run away are at risk of being either physically or sexually assaulted
- Over a quarter will sleep rough on at least one occasion
- One-third will stay with friends and a quarter with relatives
- Approximately one in seven will need to resort to stealing and/or begging to survive
- Over two-fifths are likely to experience one of the following risks – rough sleeping or staying with a stranger, the use of risky survival strategies or physical/sexual assault

⁵ *Missing Out (2001)* Report commissioned by Aberlour Child Care Trust undertaken by York University

Why do children and young people run away?

- To get away from arguments and conflict with parents or stepparents
- Abuse or neglect
- To escape or gain respite from conflict between parents or parents' own problems such as drug/alcohol dependency
- Personal problems such as depression, loneliness and anxieties about the future; coping with bereavement; peer influences; trouble with the police or their own alcohol or drug problems
- School difficulties such as being bullied, truancy and fear of parental reaction and trouble at school. Running away is closely associated with difficulties at school

What children and young people say would help

- Accessible information about local advice and support services need to be available in places where children and young people meet
- Advice counselling and family mediation before or at the time of running away – particularly help during divorce, separation, family re-constitution and persistent family conflict. Also help for drug/alcohol misusing parents
- School-based preventive services including discussions about problems in family life
- 'Refuges' for those under 16 where they can have space to plan a supported next step
- More and better supported emergency accommodation for 16/17 year olds with no stable home base

Annex B

GUIDANCE FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH YOUNG RUNAWAYS**Introduction**

This Guidance is for police, health, social services, education and all other agencies and professionals that may work with children and young people.

Local protocols – development**Principles**

- Children and young people's welfare and safety must be the paramount consideration when decisions are made about them
- Children and young people have the right to be protected from abuse and exploitation
- Children and young people have the right to safety, stability and security of care
- Children and young people have a right to express their views and for their views to be taken into account when decisions are made about them
- Agencies should work in partnership with children and young people
- Agencies should work in partnership with parents/carers
- Agencies should work in collaboration to protect and support children and young people
- Children and young people have a right to express concerns in confidence in so far as their safety and that of others is not compromised
- It is important to recognise the responsibilities of those with parental duties for children and young people including local authorities where they are acting in *loco parentis*

Local protocols should be developed for handling cases involving young runaways. It is important that any protocols are placed within the wider spectrum of services for children in need. Child Protection Committees should have a key role in the development and monitoring of any protocols.

Protocols should be developed involving representatives from:

- local authorities (education and social services);
- health services (including hospitals (A&E));
- the police;
- the criminal justice service;

- Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration;
- relevant voluntary agencies; and
- the local inter-agency domestic violence forum.

Child Protection Committees may wish to involve other agencies with a relevant interest in this issue, including relevant local and national voluntary organisations (where they have a local presence). Consideration should be given to involving other relevant professionals such as local Sheriffs and the Procurator Fiscal. Children and young people who have experience of running away or being sexually exploited through prostitution, and who are willing to help and advise, should also be involved, as appropriate. Young people may require support to allow them to contribute.

There are two groups of children and young people who need to be considered in the preparation of a protocol: **children and young people living at home** and **children and young people being looked after away from home**, and while there will be a degree of overlap different approaches may be required to address the needs of these two groups of children and young people. It will be important to consider whether the protocol meets the needs of both of these groups of children and young people.

Local protocols – content

Prevention

Local protocols must:

- **Recognise that children and young people who run away are often experiencing serious problems in their lives.** Children and young people are more likely to be running from something rather than for excitement. Research has suggested that children and young people who run away are more likely than other children and young people to be involved in substance misuse, are more likely to have been in trouble with the police or to be experiencing difficulties at school. Support to address these issues can help to pre-empt problems before a child runs.
- **Consider how to signpost children and young people to information on local services available to help them.** Research has suggested that children and young people would welcome opportunities to access advice, and an opportunity to talk to someone, on issues around family conflict, parental separation and divorce, substance misuse (including misuse by members of their family) and mistreatment. Children and young people need information on the alternative options to running away.
- **Include guidance on the sharing of information between agencies.** The need to ensure proper protection of children and young people requires that agencies share information promptly and effectively when necessary. Current guidance on sharing information is contained in *Protecting Children – A Shared Responsibility*.

- Confirm that when discussing issues with children and young people the practitioner must be clear about how information will be dealt with and any limits to confidentiality.

Specifically, protocols for children being looked after away from home must also:

- **Stress that all children and young people in residential care should be provided with advice on sexual health, drug misuse and other matters relating to their personal safety and welfare.** Staff (including foster carers) should be equipped to discuss matters of sexuality and sexual health, drug or alcohol misuse, running away, offending or other high-risk behaviour with the children and young people in their care and to respond to children and young people's concerns. Children and young people should be able to discuss these issues in confidence, provided there are no concerns about their safety. It must be made clear to the child or young person that staff are obliged to seek advice and help for the child or young person if anything that is said suggests that the child or young person may be in need of protection.
- **Emphasise the need to assess the risks of running for each child being looked after away from home.** This could be included within a wider care plan addressing any risks to the child or young person and their needs in an holistic manner. The risk assessment should include information on past patterns of behaviour and a priority rating if the child or young person goes missing. Some authorities operate a red/amber system to indicate the different levels of risk. The priority rating should reflect the child or young person's age, vulnerability and past involvement in high-risk activity. The risk assessment should also include information on when the police should be informed and action to be undertaken in seeking to find the child or young person. The assessment should be reviewed regularly and updated to reflect changing circumstances.
- **Encourage children and young people's residential units, in partnership with the police, to consider what protective action should be taken to ensure that vulnerable children in their care are not targeted by adults (or other children and young people) in the community who might wish to exploit them or involve them in high-risk or criminal activities.** Consideration should also be given to appropriate action to be taken if there are concerns about a child or young person's associates. It may be helpful to include children and young people in this discussion to help them to take responsibility for their own safety.
- **Include information on when a child or young person in substitute care who has gone missing should be defined as having run away.** This may differ according to the age and vulnerability of each child and should be considered when assessing the risk of running away.

- **Include guidance on when the police should be notified about the child or young person's absence.** This may differ according to the risk assessment for each child or young person but once a certain period of time has elapsed all unauthorised absences should be reported to the police.
- **Confirm who else should be informed about a child or young person's absence,** such as parents, other family/social worker.

Immediate safety

If a child or young person goes missing the primary focus of any response must be to ensure the immediate safety of the child or young person. If a child or young person goes missing from home then parents or carers are more likely to report the child or young person as missing to the police than to any other agency. The police and outreach teams may also come into contact with children and young people who have run away from home but have not been reported as missing.

Local protocols must:

- **Recognise that children and young people who run away will need somewhere safe to stay.** For many children and young people this will involve staying with friends or family. However, this will not be an option for some children and young people and consideration should be given to the provision of refuge for children and young people. The decision to run away is often spontaneous and children and young people often leave without suitable clothing, money or a plan about where to stay. It is important therefore that children and young people are able to access support, notably somewhere safe to stay, outside normal working hours.
- **Recognise that not all parents will inform the police or other statutory agencies that their child has run away and other professionals will need to be aware of the need to pick up changes in the child's behaviour which may indicate that he/she is at risk.**
- **Include guidance on actions once a child or young person is located.** This should include information on who should be informed of the child or young person's return. It should also address the question of who should have responsibility for returning the child or young person to their home (if return is considered to be in the child or young person's best interests). If a child or young person has run away from home this will generally be a member of the child's family. However, consideration should be given to who has responsibility in situations where this is not possible or where it is not appropriate for the child or young person to return.

- **Include guidance on the needs of young runaways normally resident outwith the local authority area.** Where necessary the local authority in which the child or young person is found should provide overnight accommodation for a young runaway prior to discussion with the child or young person's home local authority about responsibility for the child or young person's return or accommodation.

Specifically, protocols for children or young people being looked after away from home must also:

- **Outline the responsibilities of individual agencies and clarify the responsibilities of different agencies in attempting to locate the child or young person and return them to their home or care placement.** Generally the initial responsibility for children and young people in substitute care will lie with the local authority acting in *loco parentis* but any risks to the child or young person or the worker will need to be considered before any action is undertaken.
- **Clarify the format and type of information to be provided by local authorities to the police.** Information to be provided could include a photograph of the missing child or young person; an indication of the priority attached to this case and an outline of the action already taken.

Support for the child

Local protocols must:

- **Confirm that every child or young person who runs away should have the opportunity of discussing with a professional the reasons for their running away, the risks of it occurring again and what action needs to be undertaken to reduce the risk.** Ideally, discussions should be held before the child or young person is returned to their care placement (if return is judged to be in the child or young person's best interests) and should not be held in the presence of the child or young person's parents or carers. Children and young people should have the option of discussing their reasons for absconding with someone independent. If a child or young person is looked after, responsibility for ensuring that this opportunity is provided, will rest with the local authority. Where children and young people remain at risk within their homes or their communities, the police and social work services should ensure that enquiries are made about the risks and action is taken to protect the runaway. This may require a criminal investigation, child protection enquiries or discussions with other professionals who are involved with the child or young person. It may not always be possible to resolve all of the child or young person's concerns, however, it is important that the issues are explored and fully considered.
- **Recognise that the interview with the child or young person may identify child protection issues or a need for information on sources of support or advice.** Where children or young people remain at risk within their homes or their communities, the police

and social work services should ensure that enquiries are made about the risks and action is taken to protect the runaway. This may require a criminal investigation, child protection enquiries or discussions with other professionals who are involved with the child or young person. It may not always be possible to resolve all of the child or young person's concerns, however, it is important that the issues are explored and fully considered.

- **Recognise that children and young people who run away are often experiencing serious problems in their lives.** Research has suggested that children and young people who run away are more likely than other children and young people to become involved in substance misuse, are more likely to have been in trouble with the police or to be experiencing difficulties at school. Some children and young people who run away may also be experiencing abuse and it is important that consideration is given to the provision of support for these children and young people and/or their family to help to address these underlying issues.
- **Recognise the need to consider whether any support is required for the child or young person or the wider family.** The importance of welcoming a child or young person back into the home should be stressed to the parents and family. Consideration should be given to developing with the child or young person a plan to reduce the likelihood of further episodes of running away. Family support may also be required to address the underlying issues which may have resulted in the child or young person absconding.
- **Remind professionals of the need to be aware of signs that the child or young person may have been involved in high-risk activity or abuse during their absence.**
- **Emphasise the importance of information both in identifying children or young people at risk and in building up a profile to help determine the priority rating for an individual child or young person in substitute care should they abscond again.** It is important that statutory agencies share information about children and young people who run away to ensure that children and young people in need are identified. Information may also help to identify any area-wide patterns in absconding. Aggregate information will also be helpful in service planning.
- **Recognise that for some children and young people running away will be a transition to independent living.**
- **Stress the importance of welcoming a child or young person who returns to a residential establishment having previously run away.**

"When you return you sometimes feel people are angry with you and it makes you not want to talk about where you were or what happened to you."

"I remember one time I returned from being on the run. All the staff were really pleased to see me. They asked me if I was alright and gave me hugs. It made me feel welcome. But it only happened the once."

Comments from young people involved in FACE

FACE (Fighting Against Child Exploitation) is a young people's forum set up in partnership with young people. It is joint funded by Barnardo's Scotland, Dundee City Council Social Work Department, the Corner Young People's Health and Information Project and the WEB project through monies from X-Plore (SIP).

FACE aims to empower young people whose lives have been affected by Child Sexual Exploitation to raise awareness of the issues. It seeks to help young people talk and get adults to listen.

Examples of Good Practice

Grampian

A protocol for dealing with missing persons from residential establishments and foster care placements has been developed by the Directors of Social Work Departments of Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils along with the Chief Constable of Grampian Police. The protocol sets out the roles of the different agencies and a series of actions which should be considered by the police and social work departments when a child or young person is reported missing.

The protocol builds upon research undertaken by Barnardo's on Young Runaways in Aberdeen commissioned by Grampian Police.

Glasgow

Glasgow Child Protection Committee set up an interagency working group to develop procedures and guidance for working with vulnerable children and young people. As part of their work they recognised the need to improve and formalise information sharing in relation to missing young persons. A small group was set up involving the police, social work, Barnardo's street team and out-of-hours Social Work Standby to produce a pilot protocol for the sharing of information.

The group produced a protocol which was piloted in June 2002. The protocol involves the sharing of information about a missing young person between social work, police and Barnardo's.

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