



## RESPONSE TO A CONSULTATION OF WORKING TOGETHER FOR PEOPLE WHO GO MISSING IN SCOTLAND

December 2015

### Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation on ‘Working together for people who go missing in Scotland’ and value the greater consideration of children and young people in the strategy. This issue is particularly relevant to looked after children and care leavers who are over represented amongst people who go missing. We have significant concerns, based on our research and engagement with the sector, about the causes and consequences of going missing for this group.

### Key Points

- Looked after children and young people are over-represented amongst children who go missing in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Research from 2001 suggested that 40% of those who had been in care at some point in their lives had run away, compared to 9% of those who had never been accommodated. Importantly, running away was not always directly linked to young people’s experiences of being looked after, nor to the quality of care they received.
- Looked after young people told peer interviewers that the primary reasons for running away were: authority and power; friction; isolation and environmental issues.<sup>2</sup>
- Children who go missing are at significant risk of harm, and are likely to be exposed to alcohol and drugs, criminal and sexual victimisation (such as prostitution, sexual exploitation and sexually transmitted diseases) and arrest.<sup>3</sup>
- Repeated missing episodes are a strong indicator that a young person may be at risk of, or is being, sexually exploited.<sup>4</sup>
- There could be a stronger connection with Scotland’s National Action Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation.
- Under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Police Scotland are a corporate parent and have specific duties in regards to the wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers.
- There could be a more explicit connection to the Named Person, Child’s Plan, wellbeing indicators and information sharing protocols in light of the new Statutory Guidance for Part 4, 5 and 18 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> Wade, J. (2001) [Missing out: Young Runaways in Scotland. Executive Summary](#). London: Children’s Society.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, J, Rahilly, T, Hunter, H, Bradbury-Jones, C, Sanford, K, Carruthers, B and Ibrahim, N (2012) [Children who go missing from care: A participatory project with young people as peer interviewers](#), NSPCC, Quarriers and the University of Dundee.

<sup>3</sup> Wade J, Biehal N, Clayden J, Stein M. (1998) *Going Missing: Young People Absent form Care*. Chichester: Wiley.

<sup>4</sup> Jay, A. (2014) [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham \(1997-2013\)](#), P.38.

**1. What are your views on the proposed Purpose of the Strategy?**

We welcome the focus on the ‘reduction of harm’ related to people who go missing. The description of the strategy is clear and concise. We would recommend including something specific around prevention as an aim though as this is central to the strategy.

**2. Are we right to have a national definition?**

We support the use of a national definition. This will facilitate communication across different stakeholder groups and different regions within Scotland. The successful use of a national definition will depend on: a shared understanding of the terminology; shared understandings of why people go missing; the consequences of going missing and how best to respond when someone goes missing.

**3. What are your comments on the proposed definition above?**

We suggest including an additional category: ‘The person is at risk of exploitation’. While this may be considered to be covered in the third category (‘the person is at risk of harm to themselves or another’), we feel that, given the strong link between exploitation and going missing<sup>5</sup> (particularly for teenagers and young adults in general, and looked after children and care leavers in particular), this separate category is warranted.

**4. What works well in the Strategy?**

There is a good grasp of the wide range of issues surrounding people who go missing. In relation to children, we are particularly pleased to see the recognition of the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that lead to missing incidents that are often overlooked. The endorsement of return interviews is welcome and recognition of providing timely support. The strategy identifies links to other relevant pieces of legislation and guidance. It is coherent and the inclusion of illustrative case studies aids understanding of the issues faced. There could be a more explicit connection to Scotland’s National Action Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation.

**5. What could we do better or differently in this strategy?**

The strategy recognises the diverse reasons why people may go missing, and the diverse contexts from which they come. We feel more could be done to outline the different risks faced by particular categories of individuals. Given that our focus on looked after children in Scotland, we would recommend considering the risks faced by children and young people in various placement types (looked after at home and accommodated). We would also encourage consideration of children placed outwith their local authority. Children in these placements may ‘run home’ which can be considerable geographical distances. Although we acknowledge that this may inform a specific practice note on Looked after children and care leavers to support the implementation of the strategy.

Police Scotland are now a Corporate Parent under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. As such they have particular duties with regard to looked after children and care leavers as outlined in Part 9 of the Act. This Strategy is an excellent example of how many of these duties can be met, including being alert to risks faced by these young people, assessing wellbeing needs, and collaborating with other corporate

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<sup>5</sup> CELCIS (2013) [\*The Sexual Exploitation of Looked After Children in Scotland A scoping study to inform methodology for inspection\*](#), Glasgow:CELCIS.

parents.<sup>6</sup> We would like to see explicit acknowledgement of the Corporate Parenting role, and links made between this strategy and corporate parenting where relevant.

There could be an explicit reference to Children's Services Plans as set out in Part 3 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. This presents a potentially important avenue for the success of this strategy in terms of children and young people. Part 3 outlines new arrangements for Children's Services Plans, which should set out how public bodies will safeguard, support and promote the wellbeing of children and young people in a particular Community Planning Partnership area. We would recommend that Part 3 of the Act be referenced in the strategy, and thought is given to how its enactment can facilitate the strategy.

## **6. What will be vital to the implementation and success of the strategy?**

Good collaborative working, information sharing, good data and monitoring and evaluation, involvement of young people, and ongoing coaching and mentoring will all be important to successful implementation of this strategy.

For corporate parents, such as Police Scotland, Celcis suggest taking the following steps to achieve successful collaboration:

1. *Assess the need for partnership* - A corporate parent identifies an objective, the achievement of which requires the resources / expertise / input of one or more other corporate parents
  - a. Identify relevant partners - The corporate parent identifies relevant partners, and summarises what they hope those partners will bring (to the collective endeavour). This step will be made easier if all corporate parents publicise (for example through their website) their current corporate parenting activities, what they can do as a corporate parent, and who to contact with corporate parenting queries
  - b. Identify and record the potential benefits for each corporate parent potentially involved in the collaboration.
  - c. Approach the other corporate parents identified at stage 1a and present your case for joining forces / collaboration.
  
2. *Build the partnership*
  - a. Identify common interests and shared goals - partners in the collaboration consider their areas of shared interest and work together to develop shared goals for the collaboration. At this stage each corporate parent should be confident that their role in the collaboration fits with their primary function and remit.
  - b. Clarify roles - Each partner in the collaboration should have a clear idea of what their role in the collaboration is, what resources they are expected to bring and their area of influence
  - c. Construct relationships - Agree on any ground rules and governance mechanisms. Open, frank and frequent discussion nurtures trust and builds working relationships. This can also be achieved by ensuring there is a shared understanding of the purpose of the collaboration, by dividing the workload

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<sup>6</sup> See Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/8/part/9> and the associated statutory guidance  
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00483676.pdf>

fairly, by sharing credit for achievements, by addressing power imbalances and cultivating a clear sense of leadership.

3. *Manage negotiations and social relations*
  - a. Achieving agreement - Use problem-solving techniques to reach agreement on relevant issues.
  - b. Implementation - Each partner completes the actions they agreed to.
  - c. Delivery - the partners work together successfully to deliver on the endeavour.
4. *Evaluate the partnership (process and impact)*
  - a. Feeding back and learning - The collaboration should be seen as an iterative process, with ongoing feedback and evaluation so that troubleshooting can happen in a timely fashion and the impact of the collaboration can be assessed.
  - b. Termination if appropriate - If the collaboration was for a short term project or one off event, it can come to a close once the desired outcome has been achieved.

Good data and monitoring are important. Having a detailed profile of who goes missing and where from will support preventative efforts. Given that corporate parenting duties extend to care leavers up to the age of 26, it is important that efforts are made to track this group in their post care experiences, which will require good collaboration with local authorities.

Involvement of young people will be key in preventative and supportive efforts. A 2012 study undertaken through collaboration between the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Quarriers and the University of Dundee, investigated the experiences of 28 young care experienced young people who had experience of going missing while in care. They had been in placements across the UK, and the placement types included foster care and residential care. Feeling disempowered and isolated were identified as important reasons why these young people went missing. Many participants also felt there was a lack of support once they returned from having been missing. Their advice to social care workers aligns with the aims of this framework and emphasises the need to involve young people in decisions made about them.<sup>7</sup>

## **7. Do you see any challenges to implementation of this strategy?**

This framework relies on engagement and collaborative working across a number of stakeholders and organisations. Implementation will be more difficult if there is a lack of buy in from local authorities and other key stakeholders, a lack of ongoing coaching and mentoring for key personnel. Resourcing may also be seen as an issue for some stakeholders.

## **8. What issues are raised by this strategy for people with protected characteristics?**

Many looked after young people have one or more protected characteristic, and so are already at risk of stigmatisation and/or discrimination. Additionally, the 'looked after' label has been shown to be associated with stigma and discrimination. Authority and

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<sup>7</sup> Taylor, J, Rahilly, T, Hunter, H, Bradbury-Jones, C, Sanford, K, Carruthers, B and Ibrahim, N (2012) [\*Children who go missing from care: A participatory project with young people as peer interviewers\*](#), NSPCC, Quarriers and the University of Dundee.

power imbalances have been identified as reasons looked after young people may go missing from care (in the small scale qualitative study from 2012 undertaken by NSPCC, Quarriers and the University of Dundee discussed above). Therefore, preventative efforts and return interviews must be handled with great sensitivity to the particular contexts of looked after young people.

Looked after young people are at greater risk of going missing than their non-looked after peers. Going missing has been identified by Barnardo's as one of a number of 'key indicators' of vulnerability to sexual exploitation, based on experience from their work with young people affected by childhood exploitation.<sup>8</sup> However, it should be remembered that children may go missing for a number of reasons and that thresholds for reporting children as 'missing' may vary between different types of placement.

A report on child sexual exploitation of looked after children in Scotland highlighted that going missing was a risk factor for sexual exploitation.<sup>9</sup> Within the same report, a case audit of 75 looked after children reported going missing was more common for children who were:

- older (13+)
- within a residential placement
- known to (or suspected to) be regularly truant
- known to (or suspected to) have poor school attendance
- known to (or suspected to) have underage sex
- known to be (or suspected of being) involved with gangs,
- known to (or suspected to) misuse alcohol
- known to (or suspected to) misusing drugs
- known to be (or suspected of being) exposed to grooming,

Unaccompanied asylum seeking young people are a subcategory of looked after young people who may be at particular risk of going missing and subsequent (as well as prior) exploitation. A survey from 2009 of 202 local authorities across England and Wales, conducted by the Care Leavers' Association (CLA), revealed that 90% of young people missing from care were unaccompanied asylum seeking children, despite making up only 10% of those in care (in that survey).<sup>10</sup> Comparable Scottish figures are not available; however, these findings suggest that this is an area of particular concern. Unaccompanied asylum seeking young people may have been trafficked for the purposes of exploitation (sexual or drug cultivation for example). Their traffickers may encourage them to seek asylum and subsequently will aim to gain control over them again for the purposes of exploitation (e.g. sexual, drug cultivation and distribution).<sup>11</sup> These young people will have few, if any, local networks (such as relatives or friends) that children's services can approach to gain information as to their possible whereabouts. The strategy should ensure a connection with Scotland's National Action Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation and guidance developed on prevention of human trafficking.

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<sup>8</sup> Barnardo's. (2009) [\*Whose Child Now? Fifteen years of working to prevent the sexual exploitation of children in the UK\*](#). Ilford: Barnardo's.

<sup>9</sup> CELCIS (2013) [\*The Sexual Exploitation of Looked After Children in Scotland A scoping study to inform methodology for inspection\*](#), Glasgow:CELCIS.

<sup>10</sup> Care Leavers' Association (2009) *Press Statement:Missing without a trace: 145 young people go missing from care in the last year*, <http://www.careleavers.com/cla/189-missing2009>

<sup>11</sup> Tickle, L (2009) *How can we stop looked after children going missing?* Community Care <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2009/01/22/how-can-we-stop-looked-after-children-going-missing/>

**9. Are there likely to be negative implications as a result of the strategy, particularly with regard to children’s wellbeing?**

The strategy should be used in conjunction with ‘Getting it Right for Every Child’ to ensure that unmet need is identified. The wellbeing of children and young people could be adversely affected if needs are identified through return interviews but not met. It is critical that children and young people have safe spaces to talk about going missing and the reasons for it. Then some young people may require further support to minimise the risks of going missing in the future.

**10. Are there any other equality issues we should consider?**

We would recommend undertaking a Child Rights Impact Assessment to fully consider the implications.

**11. What are your views on the proposed Objectives and Commitments?**

We strongly agree with the inclusion of the use of return interviews after a child has gone missing. We are pleased that there is recognition of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors for children going missing which can equally raise safeguarding concerns. Research has indicated that they can be a very important safeguard.<sup>12</sup> It is essential though that identified needs are fully addressed in a Child’s Plan. In line with GIRFEC principles, children and young people need the right support at the right time. Going missing is often a clear sign that a child or young person is unhappy and support is required. Although there will be a role for a named person, it should be recognised that some children and young people may not want to talk to a teacher (most likely to be their named person) about why they went missing and what happened. Equally, many Named persons may not feel equipped to talk about the issues potentially raised. Therefore, we would highlight the research base that evidences the valuable role of the third sector and direct link to a voluntary support service with the necessary expertise.

**Q12. What are the challenges to delivering these Objectives and Commitments?**

This Strategy is commendable. The challenge will be ensuring this strategy amongst many others is given the level of importance it deserves. Despite the prevalence of children going missing and safeguarding issues surrounding missing incidents, this area has often lacked political will and leadership. In relation to children’s wellbeing, linking to Children’s Service Plans and Corporate Parenting Plans (under the 2014 Act) may provide an important lever.

**Q13. What are your views on the Supporting Actions and are there any additional actions that would support delivery of the Strategy?**

We think the structure of the strategy works well with the supporting actions. We would be keen to emphasise that the ‘Local partnership’ fully involves the third sector. Voluntary agencies are key to providing the necessary support to the missing persons and their families as set out in the content of the strategy.

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<sup>12</sup> Hill, L, Taylor, J, Richards, F and Reddington, S (2014) [‘Nobody runs away for no reason’: Understanding safeguarding issues when children go missing from home](#), *Child Abuse Review* (Early online view)

Thank for considering this response. We welcome further discussion about any aspect.

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