



Supporting young people who run away or go missing

A briefing for Lead Members for Children's Services



The aim of this DCSF briefing is to help Lead Members for Children's Services (LMCSs) fulfil their political leadership responsibilities in relation to runaway and missing children. A new national indicator on missing from home and care was introduced in April 2009, and new statutory guidance has clearly set out how central government expects local areas to safeguard all children who run away and go missing, and to redress the imbalance that currently exists between services offered to runaways from the looked-after population and those who run away from home. Working proactively to reduce instances of running away, and the number of individuals who repeatedly run away will also have a wider positive impact on young people, reducing absences from school, improving their prospects of being in education, training or employment, and reducing the likelihood that they will engage in other risky behaviours such as committing crime and misusing substances.

Useful links and where to find out more

www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/safeguardingandsocialcare/safeguardingchildren/youngrunaways/youngrunaways/

www.npia.police.uk/missingpersons

A key role for LMCSs

Lead Members have an important political strategic and community leadership role for their council and can use this effectively to support the drive to improve their local area response to runaway and missing children and young people.

How can LMCSs do this?

GET INVOLVED – ensure you and other members have a good understanding of the patterns of running away in your area, and how the statutory and voluntary services are working together to safeguard those children who do run away.

Checklist for LMCSs

- ✓ Do you have good links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), through the Director of Children's Services, and are you assured that they are monitoring work to improve service provision for young runaways?
- ✓ Are you well briefed on how many young people run away from home and care, the characteristics of those young people and any significant patterns in their behaviour whilst away?
- ✓ Are you and other elected members sufficiently briefed to understand why responding swiftly and effectively when a young person runs away is a key element not just in ensuring the young person is safeguarded, but also why it needs to be linked with work to raise aspirations and improve life chances?

HELP PARTNERS WORK TOGETHER

– get senior level ownership and clear accountability from partners, such as the local police force and Primary Care Trust for the outcomes for young people you are working towards.

- ✓ Are there champions for runaway and missing children at a high level within the council, Primary Care Trust, police force and/or Local Strategic Partnership?
- ✓ Do the relevant sub group of the LSCB have senior representation from all partner agencies and is it linked to other key partnerships (LSP, Children and Young People Strategic Partnerships etc)?
- ✓ Is the statutory Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) being used to prioritise runaway and missing children, and link it to other LAA indicators including safeguarding, educational attainment, emotional and behavioural health of children in care, reducing those not in education, employment or training, substance misuse, and youth offending and re-offending.

MAKE SURE SERVICES ARE EFFECTIVE

– ensure progress on preventing running away, and in particular repeat running is performance managed and that resources are used effectively.

- ✓ Are you using the overview and scrutiny process to bring in other partners and find out what they are doing in relation to running away?
- ✓ Has the council underpinned work to prevent running away, and reduce repeated instances of running away with joint commissioning and partnership funding (such as with the local police force)?

4 Supporting young people who run away or go missing

- ✓ Is there a local action plan in place setting out how improvements in responding to runaway and missing children will be delivered? Has this been reviewed against the self assessment of services that underpins the new national indicator and actions planned to address any weaknesses?

CHAMPION PREVENTION – ensure the prevention of running away underpins the local strategy and is a core element in programmes for young people.

- ✓ Is there strategic leadership of Personal, Social and Health Education to ensure higher priority in all schools and colleges, with clear links to governors; statutory duty on safeguarding and wellbeing?
- ✓ Is running away prevention mainstreamed through Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS) and systems that deliver Targeted Youth Support (TYS)?
- ✓ Is work around family mediation, and specific family based issues that can lead to running away included in the parenting strategy?

LISTEN AND SPEAK UP – engage with your local communities, ensuring the local strategy and commissioning of services is informed by the views of young people, parents, carers and community representatives.

- ✓ Are there adequate mechanisms in place to get the views of young people about running away, and their general emotional wellbeing?

Why does running away matter?

Running away is strongly linked with poor outcomes, not just in the short term, but in the long term. Young runaways are far less likely to attend school and be in education and training beyond the age of 16. They are far more likely to

be involved in substance misuse and get involved in criminal activity. Running away matters as it:

- impacts on the most vulnerable young people;
- puts young people at enormous risk of significant harm;
- limits educational opportunities and attainment;
- contributes to worklessness and poverty;
- carries avoidable costs to the police and other public services.

The stark facts

- It is estimated that approximately 100,000 young people run away overnight from their home or care every year.
- 16% of young runaways sleep rough whilst away from home.
- 8% of young runaways say that they were hurt or harmed whilst away.
- 90% of children subjected to sexual grooming go missing at some point.
- 12% resort to survival strategies such as begging and stealing.
- 1 in 10 runaways are under 11.
- Research suggests that running away is not linked to economic deprivation, young people are just as likely to run away in relatively prosperous areas as in the poorest communities.

Who is at risk of running away?

- young people in care;
- young people who have been sexually exploited;
- young people with problems at home, especially:
 - where the relationship between the young person's parents are breaking down; or
 - where there is known conflict with step-parents;

- young people who have mental health problems;
- young people who are bullied at school; and
- young women from some ethnic minority groups.

What needs to be in place to improve local performance and reduce running away?

High rates of running away are not inevitable, and with effective prevention and early intervention, rates of running, and repeat running can be dramatically reduced. In some local areas, where there are specific projects (both statutory and voluntary) focusing on identifying young people who have run, or are at risk of running, it is estimated that instances of running have fallen by over 70 per cent. Areas, which have been most successful in reducing rate have had the following place:

- senior champions and strong leadership within both the local authority and the local police force;
- joined up working between all statutory and voluntary sector service; with good use of assessment tools such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF);
- good use of local data about running, identifying trends and patterns, to help with assessing need and targeting;
- early intervention and preventative work with at risk groups of young people;
- multi agency workforce training on issues related to running away, such as mental health and sexual exploitation;
- active integrated youth support services in the statutory and voluntary sector; and
- support for parents and carers in managing difficult relationships with their children.

What works in reducing repeated instances of running away?

- ensuring that return interviews are carried out promptly, allowing young people the opportunity to talk about the reasons why they ran; and
- acting on the outcomes of that interview, helping the young person, their family or their carers overcome those problems.

How can work on running away support other LAA priorities and targets?

- **Education:** Action to reduce instances of running away is likely to increase these vulnerable young people's attendance at school and help meet education and NEET targets.
- **Safeguarding:** Young people who run away are at enormous risk of harm, both from themselves and from others. Tackling the problems that lie behind the behaviour can help to reduce instances of self harm, and other injuries, sexual exploitation, and minimise the likelihood that the young person's problems will escalate.

A few words from young people themselves

"No-one runs away for no reason."

Amie, 13, Surrey

"My stepdad used to give me real hidings. At first I slept at friends' houses and once I had to sleep in a shed for three nights. I stopped going to school – I couldn't do any work, I couldn't concentrate, that's why."

Debbie, 14, Dorset

"Sit and talk to them and ask them why they ran away and investigate it."

Kellie, 12, Newcastle



You can download this publication online at:

www.dcsf.gov.uk/ecm

Search using the ref: 00355-2010DOM-EN

PPBHP/(4315)/0310

© Crown Copyright 2010

The text in this document (excluding the Royal Arms and other departmental or agency logos) may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context.

The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document specified.

Where we have identified any third party copyright material you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

For any other use of this material please contact the Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU or e-mail: licensing@opsi.gsi.gov.uk

75% recycled

This publication is printed
on 75% recycled paper



When you have finished with
this publication please recycle it