

Young Runaways

Report by the
Social Exclusion Unit





OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

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November 2002

This report meets the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU's) remit from the Prime Minister to develop recommendations designed to:

"make running away less likely and to ensure that runaways' short- and long-term needs are safely met."

In March 2001, the SEU published a consultation paper on children and young people running away from home or care. This consultation paper outlined the characteristics of runaways and of running away incidents, and asked a number of questions about how services for runaways should be developed and managed in the future.

Over 180 individuals and organisations responded to the SEU consultation. Responses were broadly positive. Many felt that the issue of running away was a significant problem that had not been previously recognised or addressed adequately.

The SEU prepared this report in consultation with an advisory group consisting of all the relevant government departments and organisations from the public, voluntary and community sectors. The SEU also consulted with parents, children and young people, including runaways themselves, visited over 30 local projects across the UK, commissioned additional pieces of research from Parentline plus and Barnardo's, conducted surveys of the police and social services and carried out international research on running away.

The SEU's remit covers England only. However, the SEU has been working closely with colleagues in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland where work has started focusing on young runaways.

- The Scottish Executive has established a Working Group on Young Runaways and Children Abused through Prostitution to consider support for children, guidance for professionals and effective early intervention to prevent abuse and exploitation before it happens.
- The Welsh Assembly Government has commissioned research into the extent of current service provision for young runaways in Wales. The outcome of that research is being considered by the Assembly and they plan to develop guidance for agencies in Wales.
- In Northern Ireland, work is in progress to produce guidance for health and social services staff to build a regional approach to working with children who run away from either home or care. This work was informed by recent research in Northern Ireland.¹

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FOREWORD



It's shocking that 77,000 children and young people run away every year including nearly 20,000 who are under 11 – and they sometimes place themselves in real danger. Running away can also mean they are at greater risk of social exclusion later in life. They are sending us a clear message – that they need help dealing with the problems in their lives.

This is why I asked the Social Exclusion Unit to find ways to prevent children and young people from feeling that they have no alternative but to run away. I also asked them to ensure that, for those that do still decide to run, they have somewhere safe to stay in the short term, and support to help them deal with their problems in the longer term.

As a result of this report, specific, practical action will be taken to strengthen our response to the needs of runaways and their families both before and after they run. The report sets out a vision for runaways to ensure that children and young people at risk of running are identified and given access to the right services; that runaways have someone to talk to and a safe place to go; and that young people and their families get access to follow up help and support after running away.

The report has also shown how things can go wrong for a very specific group of children and young people at risk. Last month I announced the development of a Green Paper on Children at Risk. The Green Paper will look at some of the key issues raised in this report that affect a much wider range of children and young people.

I believe that the action set out in this report represents a significant step forward in preventing running away and protecting those who do. I welcome both this report and the wider work this Government is undertaking on the needs of vulnerable young people. I am confident that together these measures will ensure that, in future years, fewer children and young people will feel they have no other option but to run away. For those that do run, they will find services that respond to their needs and keep them safe.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Blair". The signature is written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a solid black horizontal line that underlines the name.

Prime Minister

November 2002

SUMMARY

The problem

1. Running away is a dangerous activity that puts children and young people at risk. It is a problem that affects approximately **one in nine** young people before the age of 16 years, from a broad range of backgrounds. Children and young people, male and female, from rural and urban areas, from white, black and minority ethnic communities, and from wealthy and poor areas, all run away. Approximately **20,000 runaways** a year (around a quarter) are **under the age of 11**.
2. Running away is an important **signal that something is seriously wrong** in a young person's life. Children and young people who run away, or are forced out of home, are often struggling with problems. The majority of runaways have experienced family conflict or family break-up, whilst some young people are running away because they are depressed, or because they are being bullied at school. Children in care may run away because they are unhappy in their care placement, or because they want to return to their families.
3. Runaways are young people with a **range of problems**. They are:
 - five times more likely than their peers to have drug problems;
 - three times more likely to say they are in trouble with the police;
 - three times more likely to be truanting; and
 - seven times more likely to have been physically abused.
4. Most children and young people who run away do not stay away for a long time. Most remain in their local area and end up with extended family or friends. For these young people, advice, counselling or support services should help them to return home. **Some runaways**, however, are more likely to experience **serious problems**. These are:
 - younger children;
 - repeat runaways; and
 - young people running from care.

Why running away matters

5. **One quarter** of runaways will **sleep in unsafe places**, putting themselves at serious risk of harm. As many as **1 in 14** children and young people who run away, around 5,000 a year, survive through **stealing, begging, drug dealing and prostitution**. Runaways with the most problems are likely to run to city centres and spend time on the streets, sleep outside, or stay in other unsafe places, such as with adults who may exploit them. These young people will need more intensive support – services that can locate and make contact with them, and then either help from social services, a safe place to sleep and/or help negotiating a return to home or care.

6. Adults with serious problems have often run away as children. If they had received help when they had run away, or they had not run away at all, their **later problems** may not have developed. For example:
- young people who run once are nearly three times more likely and repeat runaways are six times more likely to use solvents in their life than those who never run;
 - nearly half of sentenced prisoners report having run away as children; and
 - nearly half of homeless young people at Centrepoint ran away as children.

Preventing running away

7. Not all children and young people who experience problems in their lives end up running away. Children and young people are **more likely to run away when:**
- they have no one to talk to;
 - they don't know what else to do;
 - they don't know where to go for help; or
 - the help they need is not available.
8. There is a broad range of services designed to provide young people with information and the opportunity to talk about their problems in confidence – including helplines, school counselling services and new Connexions Personal Advisers. But many young people are not aware of these services, or are not being referred for help. Most young people who run away have had no contact with services before they run. Young people and families are **not getting access to support services** before, and even when, they hit crisis point. Most young people who are at risk of running away need general preventive services and need mainstream services to work better. The forthcoming Green Paper on Children at Risk will focus on these wider issues, including the identification, referral and tracking of children at risk and the provision of mainstream and specialist services to them.

To address the problems which can lead to running away the following action will take place:

- planning for runaways as part of new local preventive strategies;
- more effective early identification of young people with problems, including those at risk of running away;
- better monitoring and management of incidences of young people running away from care;
- better care planning which meets the individual needs of children in care; and
- better family support to prevent family breakdown.

To reduce running away the action to follow from this report will be:

- the development of a schools pack on running away;
- more information and support for teachers to enable them to talk about running away; and
- local information campaigns focused on running away.

Ensuring the immediate safety of runaways

9. Runaways need help to meet their immediate needs and ensure that they are safe when they are away from home, and to identify whether there are longer-term support needs if they do go home or back to care. They need services that can:
 - locate and make contact with them, or which they can access easily while they are away;
 - help them negotiate a way home;
 - provide a safe place to stay overnight;
 - get access to social services if they are at serious risk; and
 - link them into longer-term support if needs are identified.
10. However, it can be **difficult for services to respond effectively** to runaways. Runaways generally need help at unusual times and out of hours. Services may only have a very short window of opportunity to respond, and the young people may be very mistrustful of the police or social services.
11. Responsibilities and responses for runaways are also not clearly defined and planned, and services do not provide a strong enough safety net. Runaways fall through the gaps between services and find themselves in danger. Many runaways find:
 - they are unable to access help when they need it;
 - they do not know which agencies to contact when they have run away;
 - they are not being referred effectively between organisations; and
 - they can receive an inconsistent and confusing response.

To improve runaways' immediate safety when away from home or care the action to follow from this report will be:

- better use of foster carers to provide emergency accommodation for runaways;
- a pilot programme to develop and test out community-based emergency accommodation options for runaways;
- an increase in the capacity of helplines to respond to runaways;
- a clear police lead at local level on runaways;
- named lead individuals in every local authority to lead on runaways;
- fewer unnecessary calls to the police about young people missing from care; and
- improved access to electronic information records for local police forces.

Reducing repeat running and improving longer-term safety

- 12.** Most runaways receive little or no help and support once they return to home or care. One consequence of this is a high incidence of repeat running. It is estimated that around one in eight of all runaways (approximately 10,000 a year) run at least three times. Follow-up schemes provide runaways with an opportunity to talk about their reasons for running away, and can link runaways and their families into longer-term help if they need it. The ASTRA project has shown that such help can **effectively reduce** the numbers of young people who run away repeatedly **by up to two-thirds** and has also achieved a 21 per cent reduction in the number of runaways arrested.

To reduce repeat running and improve the longer-term safety of runaways, the action to follow from this report will be:

- better access for all runaways to appropriate and timely follow-up interviews, and particularly for the most vulnerable. Co-ordination to be led by the Connexions Service for runaways aged 13 and over and by local authorities for younger runaways; and
- common approaches and systems for assessment agreed locally, to ensure that runaways with serious problems get appropriate and timely access to local authority services.

Making the transition to independent living

- 13.** For some **16–17-year-olds**, running away is the first step in the transition to **independent living**, particularly since older runaways are more likely to have been forced to leave home by their parents or carers. Runaways over the age of 16 have more options than younger children. They can access accommodation and limited benefits in their own right, and they are able to live independently. However, many young people who leave home suddenly, even if they are eligible for services, lack skills or support, and find procedures complex and difficult to understand. This report is focused mainly on under 16-year-olds but highlights a number of wider initiatives which will ensure a more appropriate response to the needs of 16–17-year-olds.

To assist 16–17-year-olds who have run away or been forced out of home, the report has identified the need for:

- more appropriate supported accommodation;
- better access to information about financial support; and
- improved access to learning or training.

Making change happen for runaways

14. Responsibilities for runaways currently fall across a range of government departments. In future, action will be **co-ordinated nationally** by the Department of Health, to ensure that the immediate safety needs of runaways are met.
15. The recommendations in this report add up to a **package of specific measures** for runaways, and highlight some of the gaps in wider prevention approaches which need to be filled. The most effective response to runaways will be to ensure that at a **local level**:
 - a safety net is in place;
 - there is better joint working; and
 - there are clearer responsibilities.
16. There are currently very few services for runaways in England. This report identifies the need to build expertise on how to develop, manage and run services for runaways in the future. A start will be made with funding from the Children and Young People's Unit for **over 25 runaways development projects** which will test out innovative approaches to working with runaways. The development projects will run until the end of 2003/04, and will enable us to learn what works best.

This report outlines how responses to runaways will be improved with:

- Department of Health having national responsibility for runaways;
- local agreements in place between agencies to cover children running away from home and care;
- development funding to test out, evaluate and disseminate learning about working with the most vulnerable runaways; and
- an established advisory group to develop monitoring and evaluation.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Summary

- Each year, approximately 77,000 young people under the age of 16 run away overnight. One-fifth say they were forced to leave.
- The peak ages for running away are between 13 and 15 years, but about a quarter of runaways are under the age of 11.
- Runaways aged under 11 years are more likely to have experienced physical abuse at home.
- Nearly half of young people in care have run away at some point in their lives. However, many of these young people began running before they entered care.
- Children are more likely to run away if they live in lone-parent families or with a step-parent.
- Runaways are more likely to truant from school, have problems with drugs and be in trouble with the police.

Numbers of young people who run away

- 1.1** **There has been little national research on the problem of running away.** The largest and most recent national survey was conducted with nearly 13,000 young people by the Children's Society in 1999 (see Annex A). This research estimated that **each year 77,000 young people in the UK under the age of 16 run away overnight**. Because many young people run away more than once, this equates to **129,000 running away incidents each year**².
- 1.2** The same research found that running away is most common among young teenagers. The peak ages for running away are between 13 and 15 years. However, there are also significant numbers of very young children who run away. It is estimated that a quarter of all runaways each year in the UK, around **20,000 children, are under the age of 11**³.
- 1.3** A lack of research means that it is difficult to get a clear idea of the numbers of 16–17-year-olds who run away, particularly since, for some, running away can be a step towards independent living or homelessness.
- 1.4** There is no reliable information on trends in rates of running away over time.

Definitions

'Running away' is difficult to define and means different things to different people. A parent, for example, may say that their child has run away, while the child may think that he or she was forced to leave. The police may see a child as a missing person, social services as a child 'at risk', a children's home as someone who is 'absent without permission', benefits staff as an 'estranged young person'. To an outreach service, a runaway may be homeless, while a drop-in centre may not know that they have run away at all.

This report uses a broad definition of 'running away' to mean 'a child or young person under the age of 18 who spends one night or more away from the family home or care without permission, or has been forced to leave by their parents or carers'.

The definition of a runaway used in this report does not include unaccompanied asylum seekers arriving from overseas.

Characteristics of runaways

- 1.5** Runaways are a diverse group of young people⁴. Research highlights the fact that rates and patterns of running vary greatly between particular groups of young people⁵.
- 1.6** **Girls** are slightly **more likely** to run away **than boys**. 11.5 per cent of all girls are likely to run away once, compared to 8.5 per cent of boys. Patterns of running between boys and girls are different. Boys are more likely than girls to run away at an early age, are more likely to run away repeatedly, and are more likely to stay away for longer periods⁶.
- 1.7** Figures show that **black and minority ethnic** children are less likely to run away. Rates of lifetime running away have been estimated as over 10 per cent for white young people, 7.5 per cent for young people of African-Caribbean origin, and 5.5 per cent for young people of Indian-Pakistani-Bangladeshi origin. Young people from black and minority ethnic communities run at similar ages to white children and have similar rates of repeat running⁷.
- 1.8** Many **lesbian, gay and bisexual** young people report running away, particularly following bullying at school or conflict with their family.
- 1.9** There are similar rates of running away for young people both from **rural** and **urban** areas⁸.
- 1.10** Around half of all runaways run away only once. A further quarter run away twice, while **one in eight runaways have run at least three** times. Young people who run away at a younger age are more likely to become repeat runaways⁹.
- 1.11** Most runaways would say that they have run away. Around **a fifth**, however, say that they **were forced to leave** by their parents or carers. 16–17-year-olds and young people living in London were more likely to say they had been asked to leave¹⁰.
- 1.12** Young people living with a **lone parent** are **twice as likely**, and those living with a parent and **step-parent** are **three times as likely** to run as young people living with two birth parents¹¹.
- 1.13** Young people who have spent time in care are more likely to run away than young people who have only lived at home. It is estimated that **nearly half of young people in residential or foster care** have run away at some point in their lives (compared to nearly one in ten of young people living with families). However, many young people in care who have run away had an established pattern of running away before they entered care¹².

Elizabeth's Story

"I am Elizabeth and I'm 14 years old. I ran away from home because my mum was being horrible to me and she got upset with me. I came back and then ran away again. I moved away from my mum and I'm living with my dad.

"My mum was making me feel bad about myself. I went to school and I was the only dyslexic kid there and I felt totally out of place and she said it's your fault because you're dyslexic. Her boyfriend, that she's now split up with, he kept hitting us for no reason, for anything.

"When I ran away I was by myself. I went to the Social Services but I couldn't be bothered to wait around so I went home with my friends and stayed with them. I carried on with school because I hadn't moved that far away. I wasn't scared but I was worried about what I was going to do.

"To anyone who's thinking about running away, don't do it. If there's a good reason for it then do it but if there isn't, don't. And go and get some help. When I ran away, I felt lonely, upset, I felt out of place, it was horrible, not having my family around me. Some of my friends know that I ran away and some say 'you stupid fool, why did you do that?'

"I didn't tell my dad why I ran away because it would make things worse for my mum. It's not what you do. My friends looked at me different. When they talk about running away, they come and talk to me first and managed to change their minds. I could help them. I don't care about my mum but as long as my brother and sister are OK, it's alright with me."

(Interview with a runaway by young people from Children's Express on behalf of the Social Exclusion Unit)

Problems experienced by runaways before they run

1.14 Young people who run away are more likely than their peers to have serious problems. They are more likely to be involved with illegal drugs or alcohol abuse than other young people. They are more likely to be in trouble with the police or to have a criminal conviction, and are more likely to be regular truants or to be excluded from school. A substantial minority of young people who run away report that they are being physically abused. They are also more likely to have sexual health concerns, such as pregnancy or problems with their sexual relationships.

Drugs and alcohol

1.15 When asked why they had run away, occasional runaways were almost five times more likely, and repeat runaways were nearly ten times more likely, to say that they were having problems with illegal drugs than young people who had not run away¹³. Occasional runaways were three times as likely, and repeat runaways six times more likely, to report problems with alcohol¹⁴. Nearly one in five parents calling Parentline about runaways said that they thought the young people were using drugs¹⁵.

"My daughter (15) is out of control and drinking heavily. The police found her on the streets of London and brought her home after two days. She is violent to me and threatening to kill me. She wants to live with her granddad but he can't cope with her either."

(Call to Parentline Plus)

Involvement with crime

1.16 Young people who had run occasionally were three times more likely, while repeat runaways were seven times more likely, to say that they were in trouble with the police than young people who had not run away¹⁶. Parentline found that parents of runaways were nearly three times more likely to have concerns about stealing or shoplifting than those of other young people¹⁷. In addition 12 per cent of the parents or carers ringing about runaways reported previous police involvement, primarily for crime and drugs.

Truancy and school exclusion

1.17 Research has found that the proportion of runaways under the age of 16 who said that they had truanted “often” was three times higher among occasional runaways and nearly seven times higher among repeat runaways than among young people who had never run away. The same pattern can be seen in terms of school exclusions, with occasional runaways three times more likely, and repeat runaways nearly five times more likely, to report that they had been excluded from school¹⁸. Parents told Parentline that nearly one in three runaways were truanting, which compares with nearly one in ten of other young people. In addition, runaways were nearly four times more likely to be in trouble at school than other young people.

“I missed school and got caught. My parents were telling me what an embarrassment I was and how they were ashamed of me so I thought it would be better if I left.”

(Young person reported in *Still Running*)

Physical abuse

1.18 Research suggests that a substantial minority of runaways are running away from physical abuse. Occasional runaways under the age of 16 were seven times, and repeat runaways were seventeen times, more likely to say that they had been “hit a lot” by their parents¹⁹. Those running away before the age of 11 were generally more likely to have experienced physical abuse in the family.

“I was living with my mum. She’s an alcoholic, and I was helping to look after her and me at the same time, like look after the house, do the cooking, clean up, and I was doing meals for my mum and, you know, stuff like washing clothes, but at the same time I had to go to school as well. Then my mother started hitting me, ‘cause she went through a really bad period, she relapsed and she started getting really violent. So then one day I ran away.”

(Female quoted in *Hidden Truths*²⁰)

Sexual health

1.19 Parents have told Parentline Plus that many young people who run away have problems with their sexual relationships.

“My daughter (16 years) has had numerous problems, been heavily into drugs and has left home for the last 6 months. She is pregnant and living with a man who was in prison.”

“My daughter (16 years) left home a week ago and I don’t know where she is. She had an abortion in February and left school – I think I’m going to call the police.”

(Calls to Parentline Plus)

CHAPTER 2

WHAT CAUSES YOUNG PEOPLE TO LEAVE?

Summary

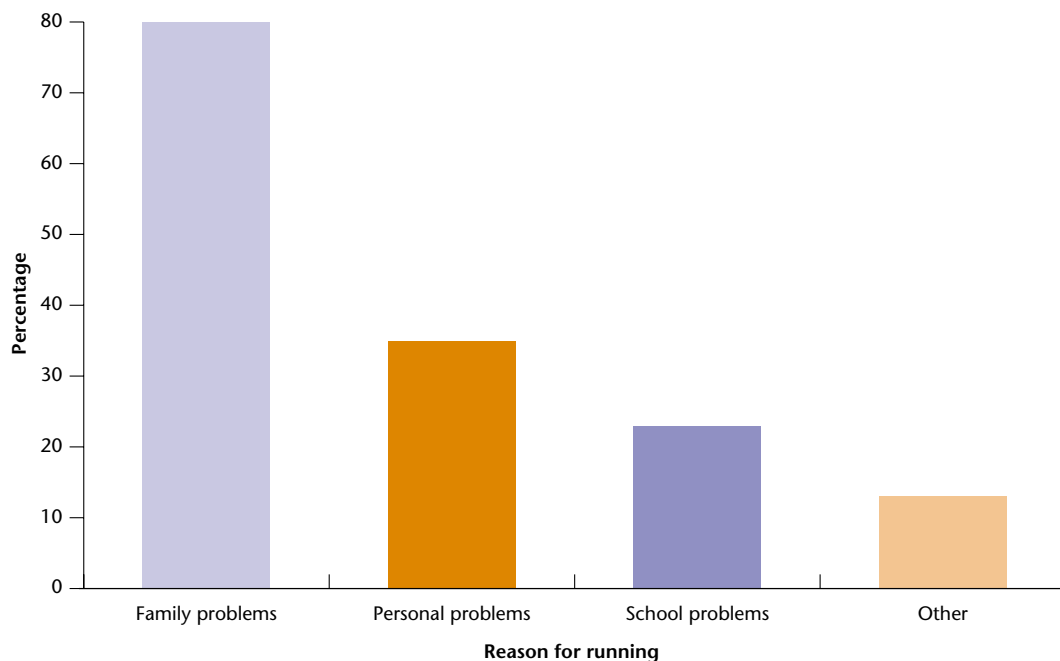
- A problem in the family, particularly the break up of a family, is the main cause of running away.
- Personal problems, including difficulties with relationships and substance abuse, and problems at school, including bullying and truancy, are the other main reasons for running away.
- Young people in care run away because they are unhappy in their care placement or because they are influenced by the culture of individual children's homes.
- Good relationships with family and friends provide a strong safety net, which reduces the likelihood that a young person will run away.

The causes of running away

2.1 Runaways are a varied group of young people. The previous chapter has shown that there is a wide range of factors which can lead to running away. The Children's Society *Still Running* research, however, has broadly categorised these factors as three main triggers for running:

- family problems;
- personal problems; and
- problems at school.

Graph 1: Young people's reasons for running away (n=approx 13,000)



- 2.2** While it should not be seen as a ‘trigger factor’ in the same sense, at least half of young people in the care system have at some point run away.

Family problems

- 2.3** Problems within the family are the main cause of running away. In research with almost 13,000 young people, over 80 per cent of runaways cited family problems as their main reason for running. This national research is supported by smaller studies. A questionnaire with 36 runaways in Derby, for example, found that half cited family problems as the main factor which led to their running away²¹.
- 2.4** Changes to the family, including family break-up or the arrival of a step-parent, are a particularly significant trigger for running away. The separation of parents, the formation of a stepfamily, or the difficulties that some lone parents face following a separation are points of high-tension and stress for young people which can lead to running away²².

“My son (15) ran away to find his birth father, which he managed to do, but his father doesn’t want him and I’m not sure if I want him back as he causes so many problems and may cause a divorce in my new marriage.”

(Call to Parentline Plus)²³

- 2.5** Young people living with a step-parent or lone parent are significantly more likely to describe themselves as having been forced to leave than those living in two parent families²⁴.

“My dad kicked me out. He says, ‘When I get home from work, I’m going to get you in a car and leave you on your mother’s doorstep and see what she can do.’”

(Young person in *Running the Risk*²⁵)

- 2.6** Particular issues for some young people running away from Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi communities appear to be inter-generational conflict and forced marriage²⁶. ChildLine has found that often 16–17-year-olds call them to talk about family tensions which can arise from their having a boyfriend or girlfriend from a different ethnic or religious group and can lead to running away²⁷. A recent Parliamentary working group indicated that forced marriage can be an issue that leads to running away, particularly for women whose families are from the Indian sub-continent.
- 2.7** For lesbian, gay and bisexual young people ‘coming out’ can lead to young people being thrown out of home and cut off from parental support²⁸. Research with lesbians and gay men has shown that one-third had to leave their home when their sexuality became known²⁹, while research by Stonewall has found that almost a fifth of young lesbians and gay men had been verbally or physically abused by family members³⁰.

Personal problems

2.8 The second most common reason young people gave for running away was personal problems (one third of all runaways). Research found that young people were often reluctant to give details about the sorts of personal problems that had led them to run. However, the most frequent factors mentioned included:

- depression;
- problems with relationships and problems with peers; and
- bullying and harassment.

2.9 Many runaways say they have problems with their emotional and social well-being, from saying they feel sad through to depression, self-harming and suicidal feelings. One survey found that in a sample of 69 runaways under 16 years old, 17 per cent spoke about mental health issues, predominantly depression amongst girls and anger or violence amongst boys³¹. Research in Derby found that nearly half of runaways ran away because they were sad or depressed³².

“I got fed up and was really upset about being bullied for being fat.”

(Still Running)

2.10 Higher running away rates have been found among children in special schools³³.

School problems

2.11 Nearly a quarter of runaways surveyed in *Still Running* cited school problems as contributing to their running away. School problems rarely seemed to happen in isolation however, and were often linked to problems at home or personal issues.

2.12 Young people reported truanting, feeling lonely or being shouted at by teachers as factors that led them to run.

2.13 Bullying at school is a particularly important trigger factor for specific groups of runaways. Young lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are more likely to experience both verbal and physical bullying at school³⁴, while racist bullying is also a serious problem.

“My daughter (15) ran away last night as she wanted to avoid going to school today. There was going to be a meeting to thrash out her problems at school. She has been badly and consistently bullied.”

*(Call to Parentline Plus)*³⁵

Young people running from care

- 2.14** While young people running from care make up only a small proportion of runaways, children in care are more likely to have run away than children living with families and are also more likely to run repeatedly³⁶.
- 2.15** While almost half of all young people in care are likely to have run away, many started running before they entered the care system. Research has found that only half of the young people in care surveyed who had run away had run from care on the most recent occasion³⁷. There are also large numbers of young people who move in and out of care for short periods – in 2001, for example, a fifth of children leaving care had been in care for two weeks or less, and nearly half had been in care for less than six months³⁸. So it can be misleading to draw a sharp distinction between runners from home and runners from care.
- 2.16** The background and circumstances of the majority of children who enter care mean that they are more likely to run away. 43 per cent of children come into care because of abuse or neglect³⁹. Evidence suggests that many suffer from mental health problems⁴⁰, and that potentially life-threatening but treatable conditions are being under-diagnosed⁴¹. Children in care are 13 times more likely than others to be permanently excluded from school⁴², and six out of ten children in care say that they have been bullied in school⁴³ as compared to roughly one in ten of all children⁴⁴.
- 2.17** However, research on young people who go missing from care indicates that there are some additional factors, specific to the care system, that can increase the likelihood of running away⁴⁵.
- Young people in care may not wish to be separated from their families, and may run back to their families in the hope that they might be able to stay⁴⁶.
 - Some young people may have had little previous experience of boundaries being set for their behaviour, and may not accept them from residential care staff or foster carers⁴⁷.
 - Where a young person is unhappy in their placement they are more likely to run away⁴⁸. This may be because they fail to address a young person's needs or create a mix of young people that is difficult to manage successfully.
 - The care environment itself has a large impact on the likelihood of a young person running away. There are wide variations in both the number of children going missing in different authorities and the numbers going missing from individual children's homes⁴⁹. Research suggests that the culture of individual establishments is likely to have a strong impact on rates of running. In units where there is evidence of little structure and staff authority, children feel that they can come and go as they please. In contrast, children's homes in which there is evidence of strong leadership with well-supported staff, tend to have lower rates of running away⁵⁰.
 - In some residential homes with high rates of running there can be a culture of running away and young people can feel an obligation to fit in with the group. Alternatively, life can be made unpleasant for those who do not conform, leading to young people running away to escape the pressures of the children's home⁵¹.

Geri (16) had had a pattern of going missing from past foster placements (some with relatives and family friends) and from a short stay unit. She had been away weeks at a time and slept outside, begged and stayed with strangers. On entering her present unit nine months previously, she experienced bullying. Her response was to run away and she stayed with a new acquaintance for three weeks. Once tracked down by her keyworker, he agreed to negotiate her return and tackle the bullying. A formal complaint was made out and, once the bullying stopped, she settled and no longer felt the need to 'run away'. She still went missing occasionally, but saw this as 'staying out' until the early hours and, more often than not, her late nights were negotiated with staff.

(Quoted in *Going Missing*⁵²)

What can reduce rates of running?

2.18 Not all young people who experience problems will end up running away. Extensive research which has followed children from early on in their life, has identified factors which increase and decrease a young person's chances of developing problem behaviour⁵³. Balanced against problems which can lead to running away, there are a number of factors that reduce the likelihood that children will run away. These factors are likely to include:

- strong relationships with family, friends, peers and teachers;
- knowing what you are allowed to do, including parents and teachers who set clear boundaries;
- social and learning skills, including problem-solving skills and ways of coping with difficult situations;
- close parental involvement in a young person's life; and
- a strong and supportive community.

CHAPTER 3

WHY DOES RUNNING AWAY MATTER?

Summary

- For a significant minority of young people, running away is a high-risk activity.
- Running away often precedes problems in later life such as drug abuse, homelessness or involvement in crime.
- Each year one in seven runaways, over 10,000 young people, are physically hurt or sexually assaulted while they are away.
- Running away often precedes problems in later life such as drug abuse, homelessness or involvement in crime.
- A quarter of runaways report being hungry or thirsty while they were away, while around a third said that they had felt frightened or lonely.

3.1 For a minority of runaways, running away can be dangerous and is also a signal of later problems. Running away can mean they:

- are running away from serious problems, such as physical or sexual abuse;
- face high risks while they are away from home or care, through sleeping in unsafe places, involvement in crime, or sexual exploitation; or
- are more likely to experience social exclusion in the longer term, through longer-term drug-use, poor educational attainment, or involvement in crime.

3.2 Runaways are a diverse group of young people. It is difficult to generalise about, and predict, which runaways are most vulnerable, or most in need of help. However, there are some groups of runaways who appear at greater risk:

- **younger children**, who are more likely to be running away from abuse and who are more vulnerable on the streets;
- **young people who run away repeatedly**, who are more likely to be running from serious problems and more likely to sleep in unsafe places; and
- **young people running from care**, who are more likely to be involved in crime before they run, more likely to run away repeatedly, and more likely to sleep in unsafe places and resort to risky behaviour while they are away.

Risks to young people when they run away

- 3.3** For a number of runaways, the act of running away itself puts them in danger. While they are away, substantial numbers of runaways sleep outside or in unsafe places. Runaways who sleep outside are more likely to resort to crime or be sexually exploited in order to survive⁵⁴, and may also be physically assaulted.

Sleeping in unsafe places

- 3.4** Research indicates that around a quarter of all runaways under the age of 16 (nearly 20,000 young people each year) sleep outside or in unsafe places while they are away⁵⁵. In most cases this is not through choice, but because they are unable to negotiate a stay with family or friends and they do not have the money to find anywhere else⁵⁶.

Crime

- 3.5** Some runaways risk becoming involved in crime while they are away. Research suggests that nearly 10 per cent of runaways who had run away for two nights or more survived by stealing. A third of runaways who slept outside have said that they stole, begged, or sold drugs or sex for money while they were away⁵⁷. Young people who slept outside while they were away were far more likely to resort to crime in order to survive⁵⁸. However, runaways are more likely to come to the attention of the police because they are in danger rather than for committing an offence⁵⁹.

“I did a bit of nicking from shops, but nothing I didn’t really need. Not clothes or anything, just food and a couple of magazines. It’s not very easy, because I was dirty and you get followed around all the time by store detectives. So I only did it occasionally.”

(reported in Centrepont *Nowhere to Hide*)

Physical and sexual assault

- 3.6** National research has estimated that each year one in seven runaways, over 10,000 young people, are physically hurt or sexually assaulted while they are away⁶⁰. Local studies confirm that substantial numbers of runaways are at risk of assault – interviews with 21 runaways in Derby, for example, found that nine had been physically hurt or sexually assaulted when away.
- 3.7** Many young people are vulnerable to sexual exploitation when they run away, either by a stranger or by someone already known to them. One study of runaways, for example, found that one in seven young people provided sex to survive while they were away from home⁶¹. The Barnardo’s Young Women’s project in the London Borough of Islington has estimated that nearly half of the girls they see are at high risk of sexual exploitation⁶².

“This pimp who I got into a car with he tried it on with me so I ran off and the police were watching him. But he picked one lass up before and he stripped her down naked, but she won’t give a statement at all because she’s scared that it might all come to court and she doesn’t want to stand in court ‘cause they might not believe her. He’s going to pick all the runaways up.”

(Quoted in *Hidden Truths*⁶³)

Young people's views and experiences

- 3.8** Even when runaways do not come to actual harm, the experience of running away can be frightening and upsetting. A quarter of runaways reported being hungry or thirsty while they were away, while around a third said that they had felt frightened or lonely⁶⁴.

"It was frightening walking around 'cause you'd see some man walking past and all these things would be going through your head".

(Petra, 14, quoted in *Home Run: Families and Young Runaways*)

- 3.9** Young people themselves think that running away is a dangerous thing to do. Young people have said that the most commonly perceived risks are being attacked or raped and drug or alcohol use, alongside what they would do in order to fund drug addiction such as stealing or prostitution. In addition, young people are worried about ill health, both physical and mental, while away⁶⁵.

The impact on parents

- 3.10** Running away causes emotional stress to a young person's parents or carers, particularly since running away can expose the difficulties some families face in parenting teenagers. In an analysis of calls to the helpline Parentline Plus, 85 per cent of those calling about running away were either anxious, stressed or depressed (compared to 70 per cent of all callers)⁶⁶. Parents report feeling overwhelmed by the chronic nature of their family difficulties, feeling stuck and alone, and unable to cope. Only a quarter of callers to Parentline Plus had reported their child as missing to the police⁶⁷ and only 8 per cent discussed their child's safety.

"Whenever we (parents) confront him about his behaviour he runs away."

(Call to Parentline Plus)

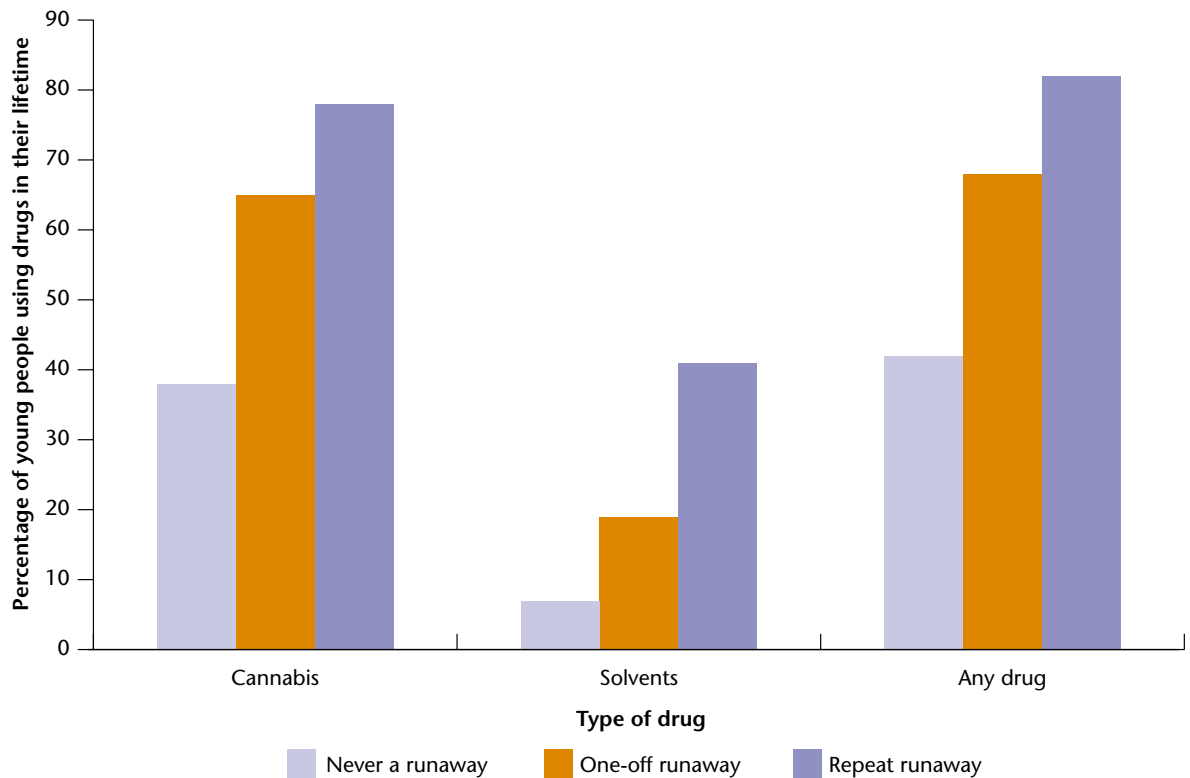
Longer-term risks associated with running away

- 3.11** Many young people who run away seem likely to go on to experience problems in later life. For some, this may be because running away is associated with a range of other issues, such as absence from school or drug use, that can lead to longer-term problems. For others, the running away episode itself may be the route into problem behaviour. In either case, there appears to be an association between running away and later social exclusion, but because of the number of factors at work it is difficult to establish strong causal links.

Drugs

- 3.12** Young people who have run away appear more likely to misuse drugs in the longer term. Rates of lifetime drug use among repeat runaways are generally two to three times those of young people who have run away occasionally, and two to eight times those of young people who have never run away. The relative rates of lifetime use are particularly high for crack, heroin, and solvents⁶⁸.

Graph 2: Percentage of runaways using drugs in their lifetime (aged 12 to 30)⁶⁹



Crime

3.13 There is an association between running away and longer-term involvement in crime. For example, nearly half of sentenced prisoners report having run away as children⁷⁰.

Homelessness

3.14 Running away is reported as a common experience of young people who go on to become homeless in the longer-term. Many of the risk factors associated with homelessness among young people are similar to those associated with running away⁷¹. Nearly half of homeless 16–17-year-olds interviewed at Centrepont projects, for example, have had experience of running away⁷². Homelessness studies suggest that running away at a young age is a strong predictor of later homelessness⁷³.

Runaways in the US

The US is one of the few countries to have a substantial body of research evidence on young runaways. While it is not possible to draw direct comparisons between the US and UK data, it is useful to highlight the experiences of young runaways elsewhere.

Background

- Official figures estimate that at least 500,000 young people under the age of 18 in the US run away each year⁷⁴, though some organisations estimate that the true figure may be much higher⁷⁵. This suggests that running away affects a similar proportion of young people in the US as in the UK.
- The profile of young runaways in the US is similar to the UK in many ways. The majority of runaways are aged 14–17, though around 40 per cent are 14 years old or younger⁷⁶. Shelters report a higher proportion of females than males, while the reverse is true for youth on the streets⁷⁷. Black/African American youths appear to be disproportionately represented⁷⁸. More than one in five young people who arrive at shelters come from foster care, and more than one in four have been in foster care the previous year⁷⁹. 40 per cent of runaway youths come from families on benefits (c.f. 22 per cent of youths in general population)⁸⁰ and runaways come disproportionately from step-parent households⁸¹.

Problems experienced by young runaways before they run

- Estimates suggest that between 60 and 75 per cent of young runaways have reported serious physical or sexual abuse, with sexual abuse being more prevalent amongst young females⁸².
- Young runaways are six times as likely to have used cannabis and 35 times as likely to have used cocaine than those who don't run away⁸³.
- A high level of psychological disorders were found amongst runaway youths. In one study, the rate of major depression, conduct disorder, and post traumatic stress syndrome amongst runaways was found to be at three times the rate of youths who have not run away⁸⁴.

Risks to young people when they run away

- Research shows that 20–40 per cent (depending on the area) of young runaways will become involved in high-risk behaviour including drug use, prostitution, pornography, or starvation on the streets⁸⁵.
- Small scale research found that 24 per cent of runaways in one New York shelter had reported suicide attempts. Similarly, in a Los Angeles shelter study 18–24 per cent of runaways had reported depression and suicide attempts, 28 per cent of these more than once⁸⁶.
- It is estimated that 5,000 runaway and homeless youths in the US die from assault, illness and suicide each year⁸⁷.
- The US National Runaways Switchboard have estimated that every year 200,000 runaways become involved in drugs and prostitution, and 33 per cent of females become pregnant.

Longer-term risks associated with running away

- Runaways are 43 times more likely than the average teenager to be HIV-positive⁸⁸. Several studies find high rates of unintended pregnancy amongst runaways. According to one study more than half of homeless adolescent girls, and two-fifths of females in a shelter reported becoming pregnant⁸⁹.

CHAPTER 4

SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, THEIR FAMILIES AND CARERS BEFORE THEY RUN

Summary

- Effective support can help to prevent running away but few young people get any help before they run.
- Young people who have run away say that they did not have anyone to talk to about their problems, they did not have enough information about where to go for help and that running away seemed like the only option.
- Parents do not feel that they have access to adequate information, advice and support from services when they are experiencing problems with their children.
- The provision of information in schools and the community, on running away and the services that are available, is poor.
- Helplines are a popular means of accessing information but services are currently limited.
- Support services that could help to prevent running away, such as family support, are scarce and hard to access.

Why is running away the response?

- 4.1** Children with problems react in a number of ways and only some of them will run away. The incidence of running away, however, is a clear indicator that general prevention services are not addressing children and families' problems early enough. When asked why they had chosen to run away, children and young people identified three main factors.
- 4.2** First, many young people and their families have said that they had had **no one to talk to about their problems**. Around 30 per cent of young people interviewed as part of a national survey of experiences of running away said that they felt that an opportunity to talk to someone about their problems in a supportive and confidential environment would have helped to prevent them from running away⁹⁰. These young people primarily need help dealing with their emotions and feelings.
- 4.3** Second, young people said that they ran away because **they did not know what else to do**. They had no information to help solve their problems, they couldn't see how to change their situation and they did not know where to go for help and information if they needed it. Many young people have said that running away seemed to them to be their only option.
- 4.4** Third, young people and their families **are not getting support with problems that might cause them to run**. We know that significant numbers of young people are running in response to serious problems – family conflict, drug and alcohol abuse, depression. Few runaways and their families appear to have had any contact with services that might help with these problems before running away⁹¹.

- 4.5** The rest of this chapter considers the support currently available to young people and their families in these three areas.

Opportunities to talk

- 4.6** Many young people who have run away say that having the opportunity to talk to somebody about their problems would have helped to prevent them from running away. Talking to someone can be important support for those young people with less acute emotional or mental health needs or those who need help with other more practical problems. Young people have said that being believed and being taken seriously, trusting the person, and having control of the conversation are critical⁹². Young people found it most useful to talk to their peers.

“Everyone tells you to stand up to your problems but it is hard to do, what support do young people have to do it?”

(Young person told the Social Exclusion Unit)

“I’ve had quite a few social workers. There’s been a couple that have been really good and I’ve got on really well with but then they’ve all left ‘cause they’re sick of the system ... they’re a lot more friendly to me, a lot more down to earth and natural, the good ones. And if I actually say that I would like something they will do all they can to try and put it into practice.”

(Quoted in *Hidden Truths*⁹³)

- 4.7** Parents also want someone to talk to.

“After my daughter’s first sexual experience with a boy, she ran away for four days then the boy dumped her. She suffers from panic attacks whenever she is grounded. We all want to sit down and talk to someone about the issues.”

(Parent to Parentline Plus)

Connexions

- 4.8** The Connexions Service aims to be delivered everywhere across England by 2003. It has been established to provide integrated information, advice, guidance, support and personal development opportunities for all 13–19-year-olds in England. Each young person who needs it should have access to a Connexions Personal Adviser who will be based either in schools, one-stop-shops, in the community or linked with existing youth services.
- 4.9** The support young people receive from the Connexions Service will vary according to their needs. Vulnerable and disadvantaged young people will have more intensive support to overcome the difficulties they face. There are already good practice examples from areas with established Connexions Partnerships, with evidence that the service is helping to improve the engagement and achievement levels of groups who are at risk such as care leavers, young offenders, homeless young people and teenage parents⁹⁴. However there is still more to do to improve partnership working and ensure that partners work together to provide effective support for those who need it most, including young people at risk of running away.

The Youth Service

4.10 The Youth Service will play a central and fundamental role in the delivery of Connexions, particularly by engaging with and supporting the most vulnerable young people, through outreach and community-based projects. Youth workers will contribute to Connexions by acting as personal advisers, supporting the involvement of young people in Connexions and providing a range of cultural, community and sporting activities to promote young people's personal and social development.

School-based support

4.11 Many young people have access to confidential advice and counselling services within schools. It is difficult to estimate the proportion of schools that provide these types of support. Services include:

- **learning mentors** – as part of the Excellence in Cities programme these have been introduced in over 25 inner-city local education authorities (LEAs) to help young people overcome barriers to learning;
- **whole-school pupil support schemes** – exist in some schools as part of their anti-bullying strategies;
- **independent organisations** – provide counselling, mental health support or pastoral care within schools; and
- **peer support schemes** – both inside and outside schools, can support young people to help each other deal with the problems that can lead to running away.

4.12 The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is currently developing multi-agency Behaviour and Education Support Teams (BESTs). BESTs are being piloted with designated primary and secondary schools in 33 of the 34 LEAs that are participating in the Behaviour Improvement Programme – a programme that is being run as part of the Street Crime Initiative. The purpose of BESTs is to promote emotional well-being, positive behaviour and school attendance among children and young people, and help in the identification and support of those with, or at risk of developing, emotional and behaviour problems.

4.13 BESTs will work to:

- provide schools with access to a multi-agency support service that can provide individual and family input as necessary to children and young people showing signs of emotional behavioural problems;
- support and enable schools to develop a range of strategies to promote emotional well-being, positive behaviour and attendance;
- work with school staff and other professionals to develop their skills and confidence in managing behaviour and attendance, and promoting emotional well-being;
- ensure that families and children with a range of needs have access to on-going support, either by members of the BEST or where appropriate more specialist agencies; and
- ensure that all children who would benefit from BEST support are identified, offered a service (with target timescales), allocated a key worker where appropriate and monitored.

How talking helps

4.14 Research has demonstrated the impact of school-based schemes. Over 80 per cent of young people who seek help from peer support schemes find themselves better able to cope with bullying afterwards⁹⁵. An evaluation by the NSPCC⁹⁶ of their school counselling and support services illustrated that school counselling services can significantly improve the academic performance of pupils and the general school atmosphere. They found over two-thirds of head teachers thought that the counselling service had a positive impact on bullying and aggressive behaviour. Over three-quarters of head teachers thought that the service had a positive impact on pupil's attitudes and had improved school attendance. One child said: "After meeting with NSPCC I didn't fight any more, didn't get angry with my parents⁹⁷."

Place 2 Be

The Place 2 Be provides a professional emotional and social health service in primary schools to help children with difficulties that they experience. Problems range from everyday problems with friends, family and school, to more serious difficulties such as divorce, physical or sexual abuse, bullying, low self-esteem, loss or bereavement.

The Place 2 Be uses trained counsellors and is set up within schools in special rooms equipped with art and play materials. It offers weekly one-to-one counselling, group sessions and a weekly drop-in service, Place to Talk.

Significant positive change is reported in over 50 per cent of children seen, and positive change in a further 35 per cent. Schools value this service and report a reduction in the numbers of pupils excluded from school and in those requiring statements of special educational needs (SEN) because of behaviour or emotional difficulties. Teachers feel supported and children's concentration and attention can be refocused on their learning with a consequent improvement in achievement. Children and their parents are able to access appropriate support without long delays, in a familiar and normal setting.

The project is funded through a variety of sources including the Department of Health, the Children's Fund, Local Strategic Partnerships, local education authorities, charitable trusts, businesses and individuals, and in 2002 operated in 74 schools across nine authorities.

Anti-Bullying Campaign, Acland Burghley School, London

The Acland Burghley School Anti-Bullying Campaign (ABC) trains one group of young people to offer a counselling service to other students on bullying, and other issues such as making friends in secondary school and even school phobia.

The service is open to any student. It operates three lunchtimes a week, and individual sessions are then scheduled during the lunchtime. The scheme has had a significant impact on the school by encouraging students to develop their own solutions to bullying and other problems.

Benefits are also evident for the counsellors themselves, who gain a sense of achievement and responsibility, improved ability to express themselves, and increased social skills and confidence.

Knowing what else to do

- 4.15** When asked why they had run away, many young people said that they had little or no idea about where they could go for help when they were having problems. In the absence of anything else, running away seemed like the only option.
- 4.16** Parents told the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) they wanted to be able to talk to someone who could direct them to help for their problems⁹⁸. Parents are most likely to turn to family and friends for help, but many would like to be able to get information from GPs or teachers.
- 4.17** Information on available services is important but needs to be linked to work that will help young people to use this information effectively⁹⁹. Young people and parents need a set of skills which will enable them to feel more confident about seeking help, talk about their problems and believe that their situation can and should be changed.

Information in schools

- 4.18** Most children will receive information about the underlying problems that might lead to them running away while they are in school. The main vehicles for delivering these messages in schools are Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship lessons.
- 4.19** While schools have a duty to increase knowledge and skills on certain key issues which can contribute to running away, such as bullying, relationships, drug and alcohol abuse and family conflict, there are no specific requirements relating to running away.
- 4.20** Teachers themselves can feel poorly equipped to teach sensitive subjects. Research for the Rough Sleeper's Unit found that, while teachers had information relating to homelessness, "some were afraid that raising the subject more comprehensively might expose them to requests for help or advice that they would be unable to meet"¹⁰⁰.
- 4.21** There are a number of ways in which teachers can get more support to help them teach about running away:
- DfES has developed a detailed anti-bullying pack. In addition information about a range of resources is available on **teachernet, the learning and development website** for teachers of PSHE¹⁰¹. The website contains access to a wide variety of resources, best practice, training opportunities, lesson plans, and initiatives, and can direct teachers to more information on specific issues, such as schools packs or voluntary sector projects;
 - a number of organisations have produced **resource packs** on issues related to running away for use in both primary and secondary schools; and
 - some **external agencies** help deliver PSHE lessons. However, these rarely focus specifically on running away, but some focus on family conflict or homelessness (issues related to running away).

Barnardo’s have produced *Things We Don’t Talk About*, a pack designed for use with girls and young women to discuss abusive relationships, sexual exploitation and abuse. The pack aims to help young women understand and value themselves, and take responsibility for their lives through developing skills and confidence. It includes a video, cassette tape, worksheets and information.

Shelter have produced *Housemate*, a resource pack including a video aimed at building knowledge and understanding of issues around homelessness and housing for primary and secondary school pupils. It includes issues such as ‘Why are people homeless?’, ‘Who are homeless people?’ and ‘Finding a place to live’.

NSPCC have produced *Family Life Education*, a pack designed for use with secondary school pupils which focuses on relationships within the context of family and parenting. Thirty-one lessons are suggested, with plans and activities. A related primary school pack ‘Take Care’ focuses on learning the skills to deal with difficult situations, ensuring children know where to go for help.

Helplines

4.22 Telephone helplines are widely used by young people who are thinking about running away or who have already run. Three national helplines¹⁰² said they received, in total, around 4,500 calls per week about being homeless or running away¹⁰³. An estimated 3,000 of these calls were from children under the age of 16. Parentline Plus receives around 50 calls a month related to running away.

4.23 Telephone helplines play an important role in providing help to young people at risk of running away and provide a variety of services as shown in the table below. They also provide important support to anyone in a parenting role.

Table 2: Summary of services offered by the 3 main UK national helplines for young people

Helpline	Counselling	Put a young person in contact with another service	Getting a service for a child at risk	Family mediation/ 3 way calling	Passing on a message home
ChildLine	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ when requested
Message Home Helpline	Volunteers are trained to use counselling skills but are not counsellors	✓	✓	✓	✓
Get Connected	✗	✓	✓	✗ Would refer to Message Home Helpline	✗ Would refer to Message Home Helpline

4.24 Telephone helplines appeal to many children and young people more than other services. There are two 24-hour freephone services for children and young people in the UK who may be at risk of running away: ChildLine and the Message Home Helpline (part of the National Missing Persons Helpline). All helplines:

- offer direct access, without the need for a young person to go through an adult or agency to access help;

- provide the confidentiality and anonymity that young people say they need;
- allow a young person to control a situation and dictate when to end the call and how much information to give;
- can be particularly important in rural areas that might have few other support services available, or for young people, such as disabled children, who may find it hard to access other services; and
- do not require a young person to label themselves and their problem.

4.25 Some helplines are well-known:

- ChildLine has a 90 per cent recognition rate among 11–15-year-olds, and a 48 per cent recognition rate among under 11s¹⁰⁴.

4.26 The role of helplines in providing support to runaways while they are away from home, including issues around linking runaways to other services, are dealt with in more detail in Chapter 5.

Internet-based help

4.27 In addition to telephone services, a number of organisations are also developing helpline-style advice and information over the internet. Youth Link in Birmingham, for example, has developed a web-based support service, while the NSPCC has developed the there4me site, which offers young people one-to-one real-time counselling with a trained adviser.

Youth Link, Birmingham/there4me.co.uk

Youth Link (www.the-childrens-society.org.uk/youthlink), run by the Children's Society, and there4me.co.uk, run by the NSPCC, are internet sites which provides advice and information to young people. Both offer interactive services with an on-line adviser.

Youth Link provides on-line advice and information and offers users the opportunity to e-mail a worker about their problems. Project staff will endeavour to respond within 24 hours.

there4me.co.uk, after being successfully piloted in the north east, is now available to young people aged 12–16 across the British Isles. It allows young people to talk about things that are worrying them, particularly abuse either at family or peer level, as well as racism, or bullying. there4me.co.uk gives young people access to a message board, where they can post messages about a broad range of subjects, a private in-box, which works like an e-mail system, and 121, a direct on-line conversation with an NSPCC adviser. Both services have a high degree of confidentiality.

Evaluations of both Youth Link and there4me.co.uk have been very positive. In January 2002, there4me.co.uk received, per week, an average of 26,000 visits and conducted an average of 596 user sessions. When asked, eight out of ten users said they liked the site, seven out of ten said they had found the advice provided helpful, and six out of ten said that there4me.co.uk had given them an opportunity to talk about their problem for the first time.

Information in the community

- 4.28** Well-targeted information campaigns have been shown to have a significant impact among young people. The recent national media campaign to reduce teenage pregnancy, for example, achieved a recognition rate of 70 per cent among 13–17-year-olds, with a strong recall of the key messages.
- 4.29** Parents are likely to receive most of their information about running away from within the community. A number of organisations are using community-based services to provide accessible advice and information to parents. The Lord Chancellor’s Department are currently piloting family advice and information networks (FAINs), based in solicitors’ offices. They are designed to link couples experiencing relationship problems to counselling and advice services, particularly marriage guidance and relationship support services. The community education development centre (CEDC) Parentaid project is working to produce local parental support directories to be used by schools in 120 local authorities and is also running a training and development programme for local authority staff¹⁰⁵.

Identification and tracking

- 4.30** There is a need to target counselling and advice, better information and wider support services on the young people who most need help.
- 4.31** The Cross Cutting Spending Review on Children at Risk examined best practices in local partnership delivery of integrated children’s services, and identified barriers to better co-ordination. Two key recommendations were:
- to better focus mainstream children and young people’s services to ensure they could respond better to those most at risk; and
 - early identification of risk to ensure preventive services were available before children, young people and families hit crisis.
- 4.32** As a result of this work, local preventive strategies will be developed to improve the way that children are supported during difficult periods in their lives by services, including mainstream services for education, social care, health and criminal justice. Guidance for these strategies will highlight the need to cover services for runaways.
- 4.33** As part of the preventive strategies, every area should have in place effective systems to identify children and families needing support, to exchange information between agencies and track the progress through agency referrals.
- 4.34** For 13–19-year-olds the Connexions Service will help to identify young people at risk, broker and co-ordinate the help they need, and monitor their progress. The Connexions Client Information System (CCIS) will allow Partnerships to keep track of young people, allowing improved information sharing between and within Partnerships and so reduce the number who fall through the net of agencies or who are ‘lost’ when they move between partnership areas.
- 4.35** The Children’s Fund was set up as a similar service for children and young people aged 5–13. To date, however, the Children’s Fund has emphasised the need for local autonomy (local solutions to local problems) and has been used more to support local projects than as a way of developing and testing a comprehensive system of support for children.

Getting access to more specialist support

4.36 A significant proportion of runaways will need access to more specialised support. In particular, runaways and families are likely to need access to family support and mental health support to address more serious emotional and behavioural problems.

Family support

4.37 Family conflict and family breakdown are the most common reasons why young people run away. Family support services that work either with young people, their parents, or both, have been shown to be effective in reducing family conflict and breakdown and minimising the risk of abuse and neglect. They provide a range of services, including parenting support, or marriage and relationship support.

“I couldn’t have stayed with my mum any longer. If I’d had help at home, I might have stayed. I might have changed my mind a bit but I didn’t have any help. I would have liked help from someone who knows what I’d been through.”

(Elizabeth talking to Children’s Express)

4.38 There is a range of family support programmes that have a positive impact on reducing family tension and conflict. They use a variety of different approaches, from family mediation and family therapy services, to getting the family to work as a group to develop solutions to their problem, and providing short-term opportunities for a young person to have a break from home. In all programmes, however, the emphasis is on preventive work that will reduce the need for more acute services further down the line.

Family Solutions, Hounslow, London

Family Solutions is a partnership between the London Borough of Hounslow social services department and NCH Action for Children. It offers a range of services to young people aged 10–16 years and their families aimed at preventing family breakdown and the need for local authority accommodation.

These include:

- **Rapid Response**, which guarantees a 24-hour response time to referrals from social services. Families are offered up to three months help to enable them to find a solution to their current difficulties or to assist a young person in returning home from local authority accommodation;
- **Family Group Conferencing**, which promotes the use of networks of family and friends to identify problems and solutions for those young people at risk of being accommodated by the local authority;
- **Young people and substance misuse**, a service to address the social and health implications of drug and alcohol use among young people and families in contact with Hounslow’s Children and Families Social Services Department; and
- **Parents Group**, which offers a structured group work programme to enable parents to explore issues around parenting and to learn to cope and act in ways that will improve their home situation.

Family Solutions has been shown to have a positive impact on reducing family conflict and breakdown. Out of 99 closed Rapid Response cases, 70 young people remained at home, 6 returned home after being accommodated and 15 remained in care. Overall more than seven out of ten clients found the Rapid Response service either helpful or very helpful.

Support Care, Bradford Social Services

Bradford Support Care provides planned, part-time fostering placements for 0–18-year-olds through Bradford social services. The aim of the scheme is to create a breathing space for families when they are experiencing difficulties, to prevent family breakdown, and offer realistic alternatives to full-time residential or foster care.

Young people are offered a range of flexible placements, from day care (which is particularly useful for those excluded from school), to regular weekend, midweek or occasional holiday breaks. The placements are voluntary, time limited and form part of social care plans and longer-term work.

Support Care is seen as a non-stigmatising and helpful service by users, and staff have found that even the offer of a placement can help families to resolve problems. The scheme has also helped to retain foster carers who were thinking of leaving by offering them a more flexible fostering option and has had no difficulty in recruiting new carers.

Time to Talk – Blackpool Mediation Service

Time to Talk was established in January 2002. It offers mediation to any family experiencing conflict, by giving them the opportunity to discuss their differences and find solutions to their problems. The main target groups include families where relationships are breaking down, young people displaying anti-social behaviour that are referred to the project by the Youth Offending Team, pregnant teenagers, runaways and homeless young people, and young people experiencing conflict with their parents.

The mediators are all trained volunteers. Any family with a child or young person (0–18 years) in conflict with their parents can access the mediation, including young people who are no longer living at home. Links are being developed with the police who currently return runaways to home or care.

Initial evaluation results are positive; one family felt they had been helped more in two sessions of mediation than by other interventions over the previous three years. Cases are followed up three months later to assess whether further assistance is needed.

- 4.39** Parenting support is provided by both the statutory and the voluntary sectors. It includes parenting courses, 'befriending', and one-to-one counselling of parents. The Government is preparing a National Framework Document on Parenting Support for publication in early 2003. It will set out examples of good practice and seek to raise the priority given at both a national and a local level to early preventive work with parents.
- 4.40** The Government has announced¹⁰⁶ an extra £25 million over three years for services designed and delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector to help parents improve their parenting skills. Parents and carers may need support to help prevent the circumstances that could lead to young people running away; also to support families where a runaway has returned to the parental home. Despite this funding, however, there will still be gaps in parenting support.
- 4.41** A range of voluntary sector service providers are supporting both married and unmarried couples to strengthen their relationships before problems arise, to put them in a better position to cope with pressure and change. Services available include counselling, telephone helplines, mentoring schemes, and websites offering life advice for couples. The Lord Chancellor's Department provides £5 million a year in grants to a range of these voluntary sector service providers, through its Marriage and Relationship Support grant fund.

4.42 The Youth Justice Board¹⁰⁷ recently found that parenting classes provided by Youth Offending Teams halved the number of parents who fought with their children whenever they tried to talk to them.

Mental health

4.43 For young people experiencing more acute mental health problems, specialist services will be necessary. The Department of Health has a new target to improve access to crisis and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Since 1999, £105 million of additional funding for CAMHS has been made available but there are still problems in securing access.

“Lisa (13) first contacted Message Home when she was missing from foster care. Lisa has a history of self-harming and feeling suicidal. She contacted the Helpline to help her get medical attention. She is a very vulnerable young person and she continually runs away.”

(Case study from Message Home Helpline)

Children in care

4.44 The Quality Protects (QP) programme has a key role to play in reducing the number of young people running from care. QP is a five-year programme launched in 1998 to transform the management and delivery of children’s social services. Its objectives include: increasing the participation of children and young people in decision making; reducing the number of placement moves; and enhancing educational attainment. Effective QP initiatives do have an impact on running away – in Nottingham, for example, work to improve the quality of residential and foster care placements has led to a steady decrease in the number and frequency of young people running away. The same has happened in Oxfordshire through moves to increase staffing levels in residential units. In Derby QP money was used to fund specific research on runaways from care.

4.45 The forthcoming Department of Health Guidance on Children Missing from Care is intended to standardise and improve practice for children running from care by outlining how local authorities should respond when children in care go missing.

4.46 The SEU is shortly to publish a report on raising the educational attainment of children in care. This will make practical recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the care system for all children including runaways. The Department of Health is also carrying out a review of foster care and placement choice (Choice Protects).

Gaps in prevention

4.47 There are clearly many services offering support to young people, their families and carers before they reach crisis point. The high numbers of young people running away, however, highlight the need for better preventive services.

4.48 The evidence indicates that early prevention is very important but there are serious gaps in current provision. In particular, many family support services have closed because of resource pressures.

4.49 Not enough parents and young people with problems have someone to talk to.

- Many young people run away because they feel they **have few opportunities to talk** to anyone they trust about their problems. Nearly two-thirds of runaways who were admitted to the London Refuge said that they had not approached anyone for advice before running away¹⁰⁸.
- One-third of **parents** told the National Family and Parenting Institute they **did not know where to go for help with family problems**¹⁰⁹. Those in touch with professionals also often find that they do not help them to deal with their problems.¹¹⁰

4.50 Information is not being delivered effectively enough to those who need it.

- The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) has expressed concern that the quality of curriculum planning for **PSHE** is poor and that insufficient information is provided for teachers on learning objectives, appropriate teachers and learning methods¹¹¹.
- Though the majority of young people at risk of running away could potentially be picked up by school-based services, there are also a minority of young people who are either missing from the school roll or who do not attend regularly, and who will need different access routes into services.
- 67 per cent of parents already in contact with **agencies** felt that they were **unhelpful**. Many felt that a crisis had to arise before any action was taken¹¹². Parents ringing about runaways told Parentline Plus that they had sought help from a wide variety of agencies in the past, including social services, schools, GPs, Educational Welfare Officers and the police¹¹³. All but four of the 228 callers felt that they had not been offered adequate support, or that this support had not been helpful.

4.51 Despite the high levels of use and high recognition rates, helplines have some problems which include:

- not every child who wants to use a telephone helpline is able to do so at the first attempt. The percentage of calls answered by helplines varies from about one-third at ChildLine, to over 80 per cent at Get Connected;
- not all callers get through to the helpline best placed to help them;
- young people phoning helplines may not be put into contact with local services because the helpline may not be aware of the services which exist. Some helplines find out about locally available services through the UK Advice Finder, a subscription-based directory that contains information on over 13,000 organisations across the UK. However, the services on this directory are not externally quality checked, and some helplines do not feel comfortable about using it. There is no other database that is shared between helplines with accurate, up-to-date information about services.

4.52 Many children and families who contact support services do not find them helpful or adequate.

- The National Family and Parenting Institute found that **family support services** were **concentrated on crisis level** support rather than on preventive work, and were often stigmatised, associated with social services or as a result of parenting orders. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) also found that families were accessing family support services too late to provide the best chance of preventing family breakdown or social exclusion¹¹⁴.

“One day I thought well, you know, I’ve really had it – I did have a social worker who was supposed to come and see me but she never came for ages, so I was virtually on my own. So then one day I ran away.”

(Female quoted in *Hidden Truths*¹¹⁵)

- **Specialist services**, such as CAMHS, Drug Action Teams or Youth Offending Teams do good work with particularly vulnerable parents. **Provision, however, is patchy.**
- For young people experiencing more acute mental health problems, **specialist services can be difficult to access** both by the young person and family and by other services (such as Connexions, schools or social services). In a study by Parentline Plus¹¹⁶, parents and carers mentioned 35 different agencies with which they were in contact about their child’s mental health. Many found the process of seeking help frustrating and negative, and felt that no one agency could tackle or often even identify the many factors that have affected children’s emotional and mental health. Parents were often sent from one organisation to another seeking a solution.

Actions

To reduce the number of young people who run away the following action is needed:

- better planning to prevent running away as part of new local preventive strategies;
- more effective early identification of young people with problems, including those at risk of running away;
- better monitoring and management of incidences of young people running away from care;
- better care planning which meets the individual needs of children in care;
- better family support to prevent family breakdown and conflict;
- more information in schools about running away;
- more information and support for teachers to enable them to talk about running away; and
- better access to information for communities and parents on the causes of running away.

CHAPTER 5

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN THEY RUN AWAY AND HOW DO SERVICES RESPOND?

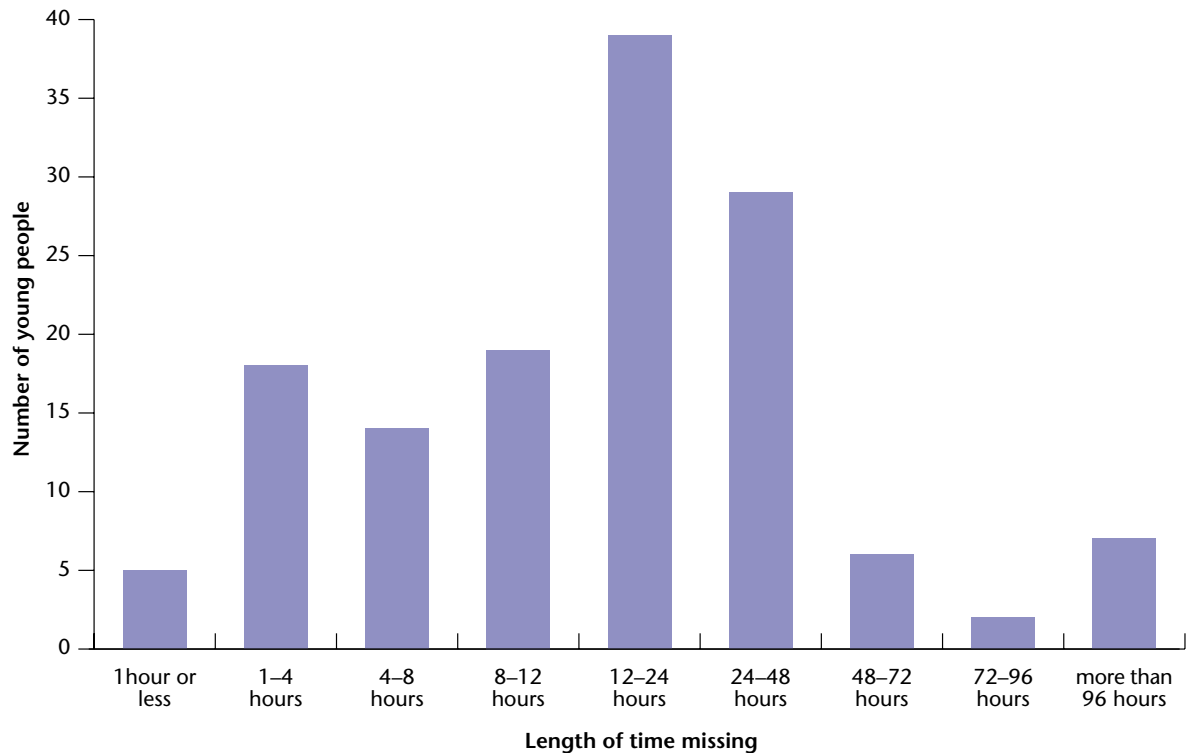
Summary

- Some runaways need help to return home safely, including services that can locate and make contact with them, help from social services and a safe place to sleep.
- Runaways are often unable to access the services that they need. Access to drop-in centres, outreach workers, helplines, local authority social services and appropriate overnight accommodation is particularly problematic.
- Although there are some examples of good work, poor joint planning, poor data collection and weak communication between agencies mean that runaways are falling through the net at local level.

How long do runaways stay away for?

- 5.1** Most young people end up staying away for between one and three nights when they run away, but some stay away for longer. In particular:
- runaways from black and minority ethnic communities¹¹⁷; and
 - children who are forced to leave home¹¹⁸.
- 5.2** Most runaways are only away for a short time before they return to home or care or before they get involved in something dangerous. There is only a short window of opportunity for services to intervene before young people are exposed to danger or before they return to home or care where their problems may continue to go unnoticed.

Graph 3: Missing persons under 16 years reported to One Division, Hampshire Constabulary, November 01 – April 02 (n=139)

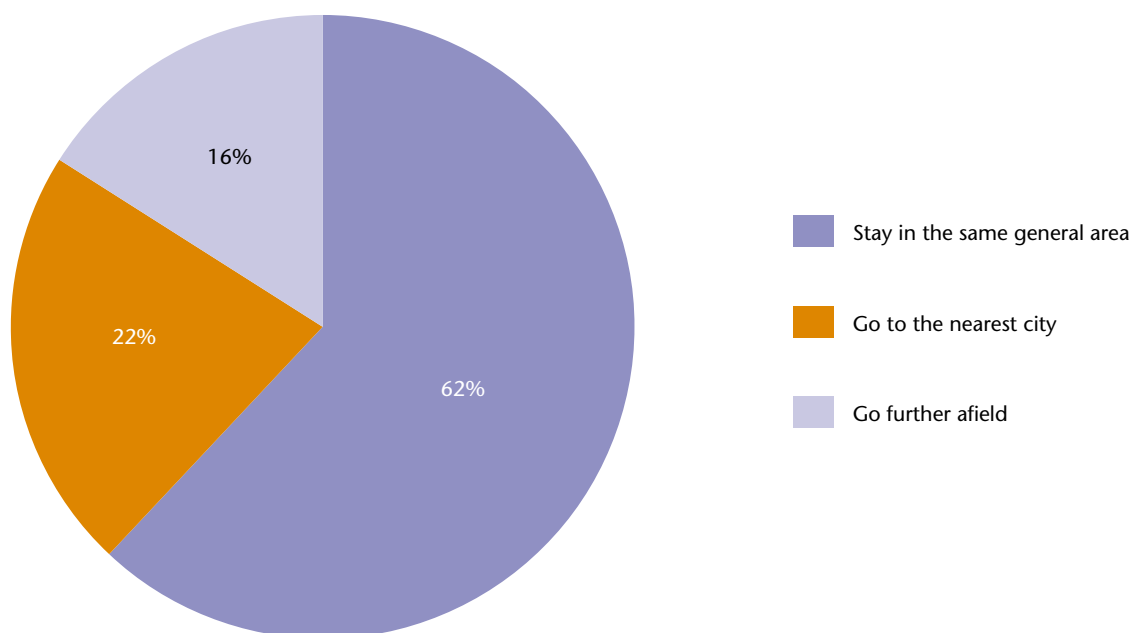


Where do young people go when they run away?

5.3 Most young people who run away do not travel long distances. Research shows over three-fifths stay in the same general area (the same county or city), a further fifth go to the nearest city. Only one-fifth of runaways travel far afield¹¹⁹.

5.4 Some young people do travel longer distances when they run away. As a group, these young people are also more likely to be mistrustful of social services, schools and teachers and the police than other runaways¹²⁰ and are generally more keen to stay anonymous. They include:

- those running away from risky home situations;
- repeat runners;
- young people running away from care;
- young men;
- 16–17-year-old runaways;
- runaways from some Asian communities, and in particular young women seeking to escape from forced marriages¹²¹; and
- lesbian, gay and bisexual young people¹²².

Graph 4: Where young people go when they run away

What time do young people run away and need help?

5.5 Runaways are likely to seek help at times when many services are unavailable. The peak time of calls to helplines, for example, is between 4pm and 11pm, while research by ChildLine has found that runaways are significantly more likely than other groups of young people to require help at night¹²³. Peak times for calls to local authorities about runaways tend to be around 10pm or 11pm¹²⁴.

What do young people need when they run away?

5.6 Most runaways need general information, emotional support, counselling and advice from people who understand them and their situation to encourage them to return home quickly¹²⁵.

5.7 Some runaways will need more intensive support because they are more vulnerable or because they are more likely to take risks while they are away. They are young people:

- running away from risky home situations;
- under the age of 13 years;
- who have run repeatedly; or
- running away from care.

5.8 They will need help to meet their immediate needs and ensure their safety, and to identify whether there are longer-term support needs if they do go home or back to care. They need services that can:

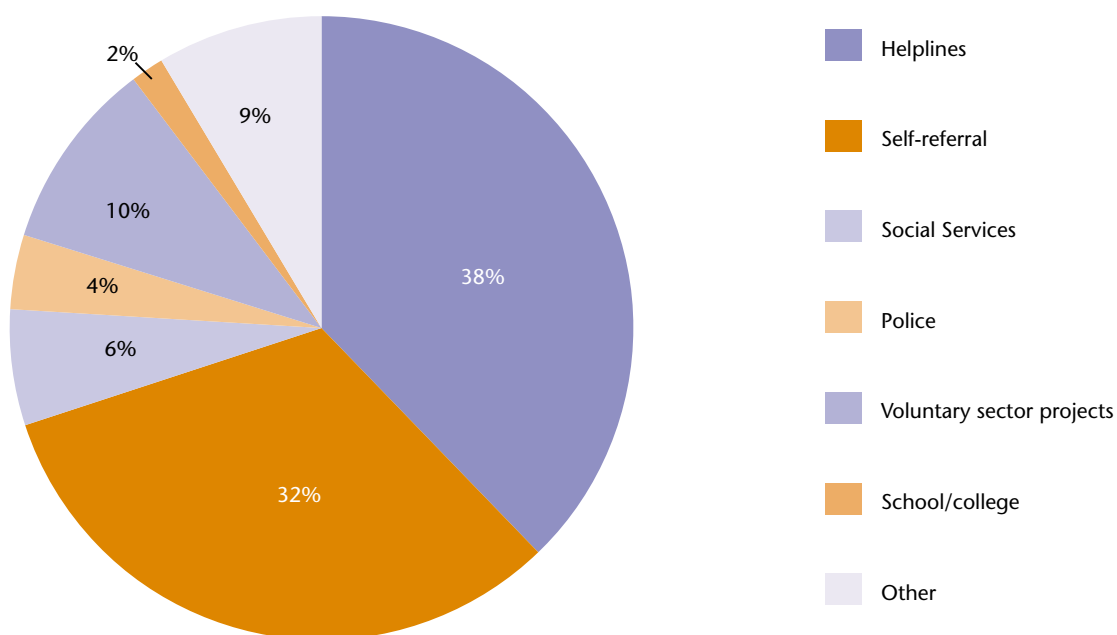
- locate and make contact with them, or which they can access easily while they are away;
- help them negotiate a way home;

- provide a safe place to stay overnight;
- get access to social services if they are at serious risk; and
- link them into longer-term support if needs are identified.

Making contact with runaways

5.9 Many children and young people who run away turn to the voluntary sector for help, usually via helplines, but also through young people’s centres where they are available.

Graph 5: Ways in which young people access the London Refuge April 2001 – September 2002 (132 admissions)



Calling helplines

5.10 Most helplines offer children and young people support and advice and can also deliver a message home, letting parents or carers know that their child is safe. In 2001, over half of the cases dealt with by the Message Home Helpline requested this service.

5.11 A particular issue for runaways while they are away from home is the time that they have to spend getting through to a helpline, whilst possibly being in an unfamiliar or unsafe place.

Drop in centres

5.12 Young people also contact drop-in services and advice centres when they run away. These projects can provide runaways with practical help, such as a hot meal, a shower, or clean clothes. They can also provide counselling and mediation services designed to enable runaways to return home.

5.13 However, the numbers of projects aimed at providing help for runaways are limited. Connexions Partnerships found that only three areas had dedicated runaways services and two had pilot projects¹²⁶. Where services do exist runaways are unlikely to be able to access help out of hours because of limited opening hours.

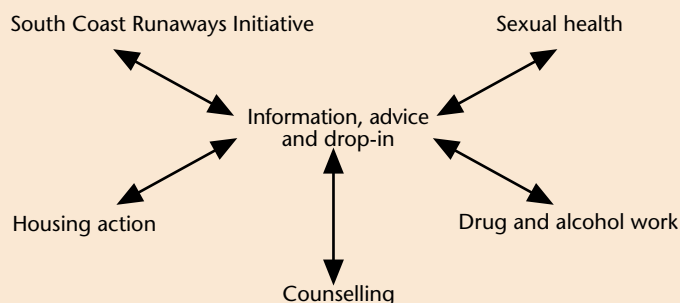
South Coast Runaways Initiative, Checkpoint, Torquay

Checkpoint is a drop-in centre based in Torquay that provides services for children and young people aged 13–25. It is funded by a range of organisations, including the Children’s Society, Torquay Council, and the South East Devon Health Authority.

Checkpoint aims to promote and safeguard the well-being of children and young people at risk of social exclusion. The centre provides young people with advice, support and services, as well as undertaking outreach work.

Checkpoint is based on a ‘hub and spoke’ model that allows young people to access specialist services, such as the South Coast Runaways Initiative, in a friendly way through a central drop-in centre.

The range of services provided are shown in the diagram below:



In total, Checkpoint saw 913 named individuals in 2000/01. The South Coast Runaways Initiative saw 48 young people. Of these 48, 19 returned home, two were accommodated by the local authority, 14 were re-established within the community, four were re-established with extended family, three remained runaways and the status of six was unknown.

Reports to the police

5.14 The police have a critical role to play in both finding and ensuring the safety of runaways. The police:

- have a **24-hour street presence** and feel they are the agency most likely to find a runaway, whether they have been reported as missing or not¹²⁷;
- receive **missing persons reports** from parents and carers; and
- assess the priority of the incident and may mount an **investigation** to find a child.

5.15 Parents or carers are more likely to report their child as missing to the police than to any other service¹²⁸. Local police forces receive an average of 35 missing person reports concerning under 16-year-olds each week¹²⁹. But, Parentline Plus found that only approximately one quarter of all runaways are likely to have been formally reported to the police as missing¹³⁰.

“He’s run away a couple of times but I’ve managed to find him. This time I can’t and I’m so angry with him. I haven’t told the police and now I’m worried they’ll be angry with me for leaving it so long.”

(Parent talking to Parentline Plus)¹³¹

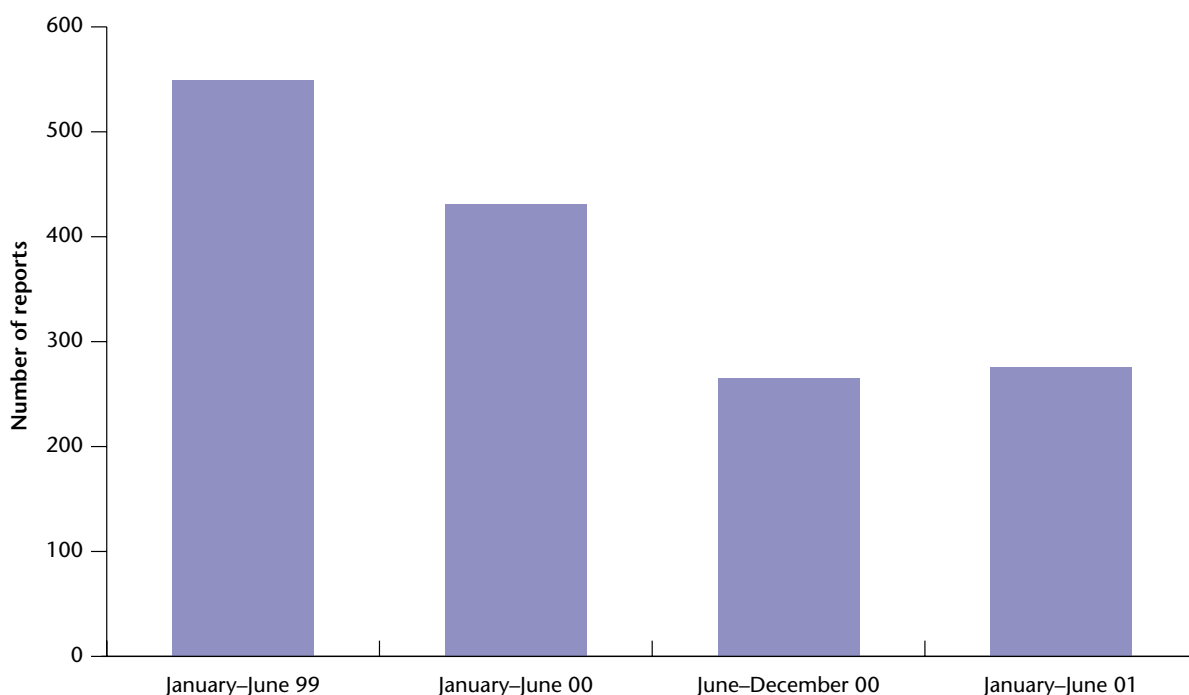
5.16 The police are less likely to respond to some groups of runaways, particularly young people running repeatedly from care. Police feel that current procedures encourage local authority children’s homes and foster carers to over-report young people as missing in order to ‘play it safe’. For example, Leicester Constabulary found that 90 per cent of missing persons reports from local authority children’s homes were resolved within two hours by the young person returning of their own accord¹³².

5.17 As a consequence of repeat running and over-reporting, the police can delay their response to young people running from care on the basis that the young person’s absence is likely to be temporary. Police are also likely to devote less time to such cases – one study found police likely to spend an average of 48 minutes taking a report on children missing from local authority children’s homes, compared to 79 minutes for all other categories¹³³. As a result, there is a risk that some serious incidents of young people going missing from care may fail to receive an adequate response from the police.

“Too early reporting and subsequent waste of police time undermines officer care ... This can lead to cases where significant risk [is] being undervalued because ‘it’s just another care home kid’.”
 (Police response in Social Exclusion Unit [SEU] survey)¹³⁴

5.18 Over 80 per cent¹³⁵ of surveyed police forces were found to be working with local authorities to reduce over-reporting. They had developed joint agreements with local authorities to improve the risk assessments carried out by residential care workers and get agreement about which cases should be referred to the police. Such agreements, or protocols, have often proved effective. In Leicester a joint agreement between the police and social services departments about which young people will be reported to police has resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in missing from care reports to the police. There are concerns, however, among police forces that residential care workers and foster carers are not receiving sufficient training on how existing agreements should be applied¹³⁶.

Graph 6: Police missing persons reports from Local Authority Residential Care in Leicestershire (protocol introduced December 1999)



- 5.19** It can be useful for agencies to agree practical arrangements such as who is responsible for transport. Only a quarter of forces surveyed had an agreed system in place to clarify who should return a runaway. While the police seem generally happy to return young people to home or care within the local area, far fewer seem prepared to provide transport for runaways outside of the local area¹³⁷. Police usually ask either other police forces or parents and carers to return a young person when they have run far away from their local area. Brokering these arrangements in the absence of any agreed procedures can be time-consuming and difficult out of hours.
- 5.20** Joint guidance by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Local Government Association (LGA) issued in 1997 advises that agreements (or protocols) should be drawn up between social services and the police to agree ways of dealing with young people who go missing from care¹³⁸. The protocols can:
- help focus attention on those most at risk;
 - clarify roles and responsibilities;
 - reduce inappropriate calls to the police;
 - lead to a quicker and more effective response; and
 - improve consistency.
- 5.21** Despite these benefits, however, few local areas have developed protocols to cover young people running away from both home and care.

Contact on the street

- 5.22** Some runaways end up spending time on the streets when they run away. As well as being identified by the police, some of these young people may be contacted by detached workers or outreach teams.
- 5.23** Outreach staff work hard to establish credibility with young people spending time on the streets, and may be more successful in engaging with young people than social services or the police. The main aim of detached workers and outreach workers will be to remove runaways to a place of safety. But in many cases, contact is on a one-off basis, while in others it can take repeated tries before a worker can successfully engage with a young person. Appropriate centres and places of safety are scarce and access to overnight accommodation limited.
- 5.24** Where detached workers or outreach services do exist they can make contact with considerable numbers of runaways. The Base 51 project in Nottingham contacted 30 young people on the streets in the six months between September 2000 and February 2001. While many city centres have some form of outreach service, however, the number of services targeted specifically at runaways is very limited.

Base 51 under-16s Outreach/Streetwork project, Nottingham

The Base 51 Outreach/Streetwork project offers support and advice to young people under 16 years on the streets of Nottingham city centre, who have run away, are homeless or who are spending a lot of time on the streets. The project is funded by Nottingham City Council and the Health Action Zone (HAZ). It provides a drop in centre five days a week giving support on housing issues, healthy affordable food, free laundry and showers.

The Base 51 outreach team will make contact with a young person to try and find out where they have run away from, why they are on the streets, and what their options are. They will consider the young person's circumstances, and issues such as their age, vulnerability, previous experiences of running away, and any concerns about sexual exploitation or substance misuse. The primary aim is to ensure that young people contacted are 'safe' – workers will therefore encourage a young person to contact their family or social services and, wherever possible, help them to return home. They will also refer young people back to the Base 51 drop-in centre, for ongoing support and follow up work.

Most young people the project has contacted and supported through the programme are no longer sleeping in unsafe places or running away repeatedly. Since the project started in 1997 over 80 under 16 year olds have been contacted and helped.

Difficulties in finding a safe place to stay

- 5.25** There are some runaways who are unable to find a safe place to stay with friends or family. Research has found that a quarter of runaways, around 20,000 under-16-year-olds each year, end up sleeping outside or in unsafe places¹³⁹. The London Refuge has found that young people are most likely to hear about the refuge from helplines. The second most likely route is word of mouth¹⁴⁰.
- 5.26** Individual smaller studies support these national figures. Interviews with 21 runaways in Derby, for example, found that, while 12 had stayed with friends or a boy/girl friend and three had stayed with extended family, four young people had slept outside¹⁴¹.

Where do runaways go when they sleep outside?

- 5.27** Few voluntary sector projects are able to offer runaways any overnight accommodation once they have identified a need. The South Coast Runaways Initiative found that just over a third of runaways aged 14–17 were unable to return home and were in need of accommodation. They were unable to negotiate accommodation for over half of them. Some of these young people stayed with newly-made friends, whom the project felt were unsuitable and many of whom were exhibiting high-risk behaviour. Others slept outside in a tent or on a bench. One female described her experience of staying with newly-made friends as: "awful, but a good learning experience and I don't want to do it again" (young woman to South Coast Runaways Initiative).
- 5.28** When runaways sleep outside, they are unlikely to be sleeping in city centres or traditional 'rough sleeper' areas. The last rough sleeper counts carried out by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies, for example, found only two under-18-year-olds sleeping rough¹⁴². Instead, runaways are more likely to be sleeping close to home in out-of-the-way locations such as garden sheds, garages or fields.

“Well, I find somewhere warm first, and if I can’t find somewhere warm I hide and sleep in a ditch or somewhere where there’s bushes and stuff or in a wood – somewhere I can get warm if I’ve got nowhere to go ... The first time I slept out I think it was when I was nine, the first time I actually slept out on a night when I was on the run. I ran away, followed a river wharf ... I kept on walking round because it was freezing and I went into this hut and I slept in there and I got caught – a man came in with a torch and he heard me and he took me into the house and got me a cup of tea and rang the police up and told them.”

(Quoted in *Hidden Truths*¹⁴³)

5.29 Other than friends and family, there are two main accommodation options for young people who run away: accommodation provided by local authorities and accommodation provided by the voluntary sector.

Accommodation provided by voluntary sector organisations

5.30 There are three main types of accommodation on offer by the voluntary sector:

- runaways refuges;
- overnight accommodation with the consent of parents or carers; and
- for older runaways, emergency hostels, shelters and short-term accommodation.

5.31 Under the Children Act (1989) **designated refuges** can provide emergency accommodation for young people under 16 without the consent of their parents, provided they appear to be at risk of harm. Young people may stay in a refuge for a continuous period of up to 14 days, and for no more than 21 days in a three-month period, though most end up staying for shorter periods¹⁴⁴. Since 1991, there have been five refuges in operation in England. At present, however, only one refuge is still operating. This refuge in London has only eight beds but it has rarely been full.

Designated refuge: The London Refuge

The London Refuge provides emergency accommodation for young runaways. It also aims to work with children and young people to address the issues that have led them to run away from home or care, to enable them to go back home or to extended families. The Refuge is managed by the St Christopher's Fellowship and joint funded by the NSPCC, the Department of Health, the Children's Society, Westminster City Council and London local authorities through the Quality Protects initiative.

The London Refuge is the only refuge in the UK and operates from a confidential location in London. It is able to care for children for up to 14 days who have run away from parents, guardians, children's homes or foster placements, although most young people use the Refuge for much shorter periods of time. The Refuge has a maximum capacity of eight beds and has trained staff to help young people to sort out their problems and reintegrate them back into the family. The target age group is 11–15-year-olds, although 16–17-year-olds are accepted if they are vulnerable, on a care order, or if there are child protection concerns.

Child protection concerns, conflict and arguments at home were given by young people as their main reasons for running away. Following their stay in the Refuge, almost half of children returned home or went to stay with their extended family and nearly a quarter were discharged to, or accommodated by, their local social services department.

During the six-month period April 2002–September 2002, 112 young people were admitted to the Refuge and of these admissions:

- 52 per cent were from London boroughs;
- 47 per cent were from out of London boroughs;
- 31 per cent ran away from abusive situations;
- 67 per cent were girls;
- 68 per cent were young people from black and minority ethnic groups;
- 66 per cent of the young people were known to social services; and
- 20 per cent were not attending school.

All young people who have used the Refuge are asked to complete a feedback form. The majority of feedback is positive. Young people find the Refuge both a safe space and helpful resource.

- 5.32** Respondents to the SEU consultation felt that there was a strong need for a number of fixed, permanently staffed regional refuges which young people could access directly.
- 5.33** As there is only one fixed refuge currently operating, it is difficult to assess the impact of their service. Staff working in projects providing overnight accommodation firmly believe that providing accommodation linked to intensive help, and particularly crisis family mediation, is most effective in encouraging young people to return to home or care.
- 5.34** The numbers of runaways requiring emergency accommodation are likely to be low, and fixed, residential runaways refuges can be expensive, factors which have led to the closure of a number of refuges in the past. The Leeds Refuge, which provided accommodation and support for six to eight young people at a time, cost a total of £540,000 per year, while the London Refuge provides accommodation for eight young people at a total cost of around £700,000 per year.

- 5.35** Respondents to the SEU consultation also felt that fixed refuges should be supported by a network of local provision based on existing services. Further evidence suggests that these could be more community-based options that would be more flexible and cost-effective, and would be better integrated with mainstream services.
- 5.36** There are a limited number of projects that provide **overnight accommodation with the consent of parents or carers**. The Home and Away project, for example, works with both 13–21-year-olds and their families in Brixton, London.

Home and Away project, Brixton, London

The Home and Away project is a Catholic Children's Society project, which was set up in 1991. It receives its core funding from and works in partnership with Lambeth Borough Council. The Home and Away project provides a range of services to young people (13–21) and their families from Lambeth specifically around homelessness and housing crisis. Almost two-thirds of their clients access the services directly with the majority of the remainder via social services or the housing department.

Home and Away offers the following services – through drop in, direct access basis or via other agencies:

An advice centre: offering advice on securing accommodation and benefits to homeless young people.

Housing support: arranging tailored support packages for young people who have already accessed accommodation with the aim of keeping them in these tenancies and preparing young people for independent living.

Crisis (Social Work) and Reunification Service: work with young people and their families at crisis point. The work varies from a single session that usually takes under two hours to a 12-week continued contact with one young person and their family.

Supported accommodation service: this can be split into three types, emergency foster care accommodation, a supported lodging service, and a supported shared house. These are accessed from the project's crisis social work service. The emergency foster care accommodation is provided by two local authority registered foster carers. In the last year the 10 young people obtaining these placements stayed for 24 nights in total.

In addition to the services that Home and Away offer they also work in partnership with the Safe in the City (SITC) initiative and now have a Connexions Personal Adviser working from the project. The SITC workers are able to maintain links with schools and undertake outreach work in the local area in addition to the centre-based services that Home and Away offer.

- 5.37** Runaways over the age of 16 can access a range of **emergency hostels, shelters and short-term accommodation**. Some hostels, however, may be reluctant to accommodate under-18-year-olds if they feel that other residents may present a risk. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that some 16–17-year-olds may not feel safe or comfortable staying in mainstream homeless hostels or shelters.
- 5.38** There is also emergency accommodation aimed specifically at young people over 16 years of age. Safestops, for example, have been established in London and Manchester and provide emergency accommodation linked to a family mediation service for vulnerable young people. There are also a range of hostels in London aimed at 16–25-year-olds. Another option for 16–17-year-olds is the Nightstop model, which is available in over 30 locations across the UK. Under existing legislation under 16-year-olds are not able to use this accommodation without parental permission.

Accommodation for over 16-year-olds: North East Nightstop Agency, Newcastle

The North East Nightstop works across the Durham, Sunderland, Gateshead, Northumberland, Tyneside and Derwentside areas to provide emergency accommodation and support for young people aged 16–25 who otherwise would be at risk of homelessness. Nightstop usually offers a single night placement in a volunteer's own home. Some homes are available for specific groups of young people – pregnant women, those with children or young males for example. Nightstop currently has 32 host families on the books. Hosts are screened according to social services guidelines and are given comprehensive training before joining the programme.

Young people can access Nightstop directly or via a local agency. Word of mouth is the most powerful source of publicity for the Nightstop. When a referral is received, a risk assessment is carried out, covering areas such as offending behaviour, drug or alcohol addiction, mental health status and child protection issues.

Nightstop hosts have the final choice as to whether they accept a young person for a night and can select the type and regularity of guests they have staying. The host is paid £10 for the first night and £5 for subsequent nights. When Nightstop can't offer a place it will try to secure an alternative where possible, usually in a homeless hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation.

Nightstop also works with young people to secure more permanent placements, although they are welcome to continue using Nightstop until these are sorted out.

In 2000, of just under 700 requests received, approximately one third were placed.

- 5.39** Refuges and hostels can also provide services that are aimed specifically at encouraging runaways to return to home or care, or where this is not possible, to move on to appropriate accommodation. Most offer an opportunity for a young person to talk to trained workers in confidence. Some offer mediation with family or friends in order to help a young person return or negotiate an alternative place to stay. Others will advocate on the young person's behalf for help from other agencies.

Accommodation provided by local authorities

- 5.40** Local authorities have a duty to provide services for children in need, including overnight accommodation where necessary. The number of runaways who end up sleeping in unsafe places while they are away, however, suggests that runaways who need it are failing to access local authority emergency accommodation. There are a number of likely reasons for this.
- 5.41** First, there is currently a widely recognised **shortage of local authority accommodation** for children and young people. Placements in children's homes are scarce in many areas and there is currently a national shortage of around 6,000 foster carers in England. Local authorities may agree that a young runaway is at risk and needs a place to stay, but may have no suitable accommodation available.

"Very rarely is there spare capacity, we increasingly have to buy in foster placements."

(Social services representative in social services survey)

- 5.42** Despite the general pressure on placements, most local authorities have the capacity to provide emergency overnight accommodation for children and young people under the age of 16 who have run away and who are unable to return to a parent or carer in the short term. Authorities might be able to offer an emergency placement in foster care or a children's home¹⁴⁵.
- 5.43** Most local authorities say that they would prefer to use foster carers rather than beds in children's homes to accommodate runaways¹⁴⁶. This was felt to be less disruptive to other children than accommodation in a children's home, and better suited to the needs of most runaways.

"Some foster carers are designated for short term or emergencies. Children's homes deal with the longer term and cannot accommodate emergencies."

"Should an emergency arise out of hours, the emergency duty team or fostering out-of-hours team will always have a list of carers who have vacancies or the flexibility to take on another child."

(Social services representatives in social services survey)

- 5.44** Second, even though accommodation may be available, **runaways may have difficulties in accessing it at points of need** because they need to go through a standard social services' assessment process. As discussed in 5.49 initial assessments can be difficult to secure.
- 5.45** Third, **local authorities can be reluctant to accommodate runaways** because they may not be persuaded that their intervention is necessary. This can be a particular problem in the case of older runaways, or young people who have run away repeatedly. Linked to this is a fear among local authorities that accommodating a runaway, even for a short period of time, may lead to them having to take on longer-term responsibilities towards that young person. Projects working with runaways have found that the initial response of social services departments when confronted with a runaway is often to send them home without an assessment. Some projects have said that this response has included young people on the child protection register.

"There is a continual problem with obtaining social services assistance where there is a suggestion that parental responsibility remains with a parent or guardian ... A 15-year-old boy attended the front office having been sleeping outside for two nights. He refused to go home. Social services were contacted and I was informed to allow the boy to leave as he could look after himself and that social services would not assist. I spent approximately 30 minutes on the phone to persuade social services attendance."

(Police response in SEU survey)¹⁴⁷

Difficulties in accessing social services' help

- 5.46** Local authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are 'in need' and provide a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.
- 5.47** Agencies with serious concerns about a runaway's safety will attempt to contact the relevant local authority social services department or the police. ChildLine have found that "by far the largest number of children who needed referring to the emergency services from ChildLine's HQ were those who had run away"¹⁴⁸.

5.48 The proportion of runaways who are referred to social services by projects or other services will vary. Cheshire Constabulary have referred almost 80 per cent of runaways under the age of 14 to social services as ‘children in need’.¹⁴⁹ The South Coast Runaways Initiative at the Checkpoint Project in Torbay assessed nearly a third of runaways as being children in need. Over two-thirds of the 122 young people admitted to the London Refuge in 2001 were already known to social services as children in need.

5.49 All social services departments are short-staffed and have to prioritise the cases to which they are able to respond. The average national vacancy rate for children and families field social workers is currently 11 per cent¹⁵⁰, and the Green paper on Children at Risk will look at this issue in more depth. Even for the runaways who are highly likely to need local authority intervention it can be difficult to contact local authority social services departments when they most need help.

“If you’re having to deal with babies with broken legs and teenagers running away, then you do prioritise – that may not be right but it’s a reality of the situation at present.”

(Social worker, SEU survey of social services departments)

Safe in the City Hackney cluster scheme, London

Key objectives of existing project

Safe in the City helps to develop local agreements with specialists in family support, training and personal development in eight London boroughs to create ‘cluster schemes’. These are prevention schemes aiming to provide a broad-ranging and comprehensive service to vulnerable young people. Runaways are a priority group for accessing the cluster services.

Learning to work together – a case study of the Hackney Visions cluster scheme

In Hackney the cluster scheme – Hackney Visions – has in the past experienced teething problems setting up an effective referral system with social services. They overcame these with a number of meetings to establish lead managers, the development of a joint agreement and by spending time together to understand each other’s pressures and responsibilities.

5.50 Most local authority social services departments use Emergency Duty Teams (EDTs) outside normal working hours, when runaways are most likely to need help. They are often very short-staffed, covering a large geographic area and may only have an answer machine taking calls¹⁵¹. These teams are expected to get involved where immediate action is necessary to protect a child, or where they have other statutory duties that require an immediate response.

“It’s often a question of judgement. A social services response might not be the best way forward for these young people ... [it] can be quite distressing – it might not be what they need.”

(Social worker, SEU survey of social services departments)

5.51 Where they do make contact with EDTs, organisations can find it difficult to elicit a helpful response. Nearly half of police forces surveyed said that their local social services department was generally unable to assist when they found a runaway out of hours, and nearly a fifth said that the emergency response depended on available resources¹⁵².

“There is a perception among front-line officers that other agencies take advantage of the fact that the police operate round the clock and rely on them to plug their resources out-of-hours.”

(Police response in SEU survey)¹⁵³

- 5.52** The limited resources and response from EDTs clearly frustrate social services departments themselves, and organisations who locate runaways at risk out-of-hours can feel that they have little practical help to offer them. The police, for example, may find themselves ‘babysitting’ runaways in police stations for long periods of time, while helplines may tell runaways to go to hospital A&E departments, police stations or other 24-hour services until social services can respond.
- 5.53** Organisations like ChildLine¹⁵⁴, however, recognise that there are positive cases of good co-operation with EDTs. Their Yorkshire and North East base estimated that more than three-quarters of their requests for help were responded to effectively, although the outcome of many did not become known. They said: “In many cases, the good work often goes unreported” (ChildLine report to SEU).

Lack of a safety net

- 5.54** Young people who run away do not fall clearly under the responsibility of any one organisation and are currently falling through the gaps. There is currently a patchwork of services that aim to meet the needs of young people when they run away. However, there are a number of problems that hamper effective joint working between these different agencies. Voluntary sector agencies experience difficulties contacting social services, particularly out-of-hours. Even when they do make contact, there is no common understanding as to what the service response to runaways should be. In some areas, services appear unclear about their responsibilities towards runaways. In others, they can be reluctant to respond.
- 5.55** Local authorities have a number of planning requirements relevant to runaways:
- all local authorities have a duty to plan services for children in need through the development of Children’s Services Plans. The *Guidance on Children’s Services Plans*¹⁵⁵, which states that local areas should demonstrate inter-agency planning and services for those who find themselves homeless and without support, makes specific reference to runaways; and
 - *Working together to safeguard children*¹⁵⁶ states that social services departments should agree criteria with other local services and professionals as to when it is appropriate to refer to social services in respect of children in need.
- 5.56** Despite this guidance, however, it is clear that most local authorities have not taken measures to plan services specifically for runaways. Only 1 out of 23 authorities surveyed considered the needs of runaways as a specific group within their Children’s Services Plan. In another three authorities, Children’s Services Plans made reference to children running from care¹⁵⁷.
- 5.57** Local areas often lack basic information on the numbers of children running away or going missing which can mean they are unaware of the scale and pattern of the problem and make planning an appropriate response difficult.

- 5.58** Most police forces do not keep accurate or comprehensive data on the numbers of missing persons cases they deal with. Problems include:
- even where cases are fully recorded, few records are computerised;
 - police forces often do not have an accurate picture of the numbers of young people missing in their area and whether or not they have returned;
 - it is difficult for police to share information across police authority boundaries, and to know whether a child that they find has been reported missing in another area; and
 - current recording methods are time-consuming.
- 5.59** There is work underway at national level to tackle problems around data collection and monitoring. Forthcoming guidance from the Association of Chief of Police Officers (ACPO) will emphasise the need for police forces to record all missing person cases on the Police National Computer as soon as possible, and within 48 hours at the latest. In addition, forces will be required to notify the Police National Missing Persons Bureau at New Scotland Yard of all missing persons within 14 days, or earlier if they feel that a case warrants more urgent attention.
- 5.60** A new Invest to Save Budget project has also recently begun to develop a new system of central recording and handling of all missing persons cases, based around a protocol on information sharing between the police and the National Missing Persons Helpline. As well as creating better arrangements for information sharing within and between agencies, this should also in the longer term increase the number of appropriate and timely responses, on the basis of need, to all runaways.

“This [the lack of computerised records] is a major obstacle to the recording, assessment, investigation and analysis of all missing persons, especially children. The high level of repeat [runaways], different offices, agencies involved, result in wasted or at least misdirected enquiries.”

(SEU police survey¹⁵⁸)

- 5.61** Local authority children’s homes are required to record all incidences of absconding and the circumstances around each incident, while fostering services are required to make sure that all foster carers have clear written procedures for use if children go missing¹⁵⁹. At the same time, Department of Health *Guidance on Children’s Services Plans*, suggests that local authorities should develop information systems to record the incidences and patterns of running away. Every local authority is required to submit an annual statistical return to the Department of Health about children missing from their agreed placement for one night or more.
- 5.62** Despite these reporting requirements, it is clear that many local authorities do not have a clear picture of the numbers and patterns of looked after young people going missing in their area and information is not collected on a sufficiently consistent and reliable basis¹⁶⁰. The National Missing Persons Helpline’s *Missing from Care* project has found a wide diversity of practice among local authorities in terms of the data they collect and record on young people who go missing from care, and little analysis of this data.
- 5.63** There are no reporting requirements relating to young people who run away or go missing from home. A limited number of local authorities have commissioned specific research in order to assess the size of the problem which in the case of Derby stimulated real change in local working. Most areas, however, have little idea about how many young people are running away or their patterns of running.

Creating a Safety Net: Derby

In 2001, Derby City Council Youth Service commissioned research to investigate the number of young runaways in Derby City, look at the experiences of young people who run away or are asked to leave, their reasons for running, and their behaviour while they were away. The research highlighted that there were significant numbers of young people running away from home and care and that there were few services in place to support them. A steering group on runaways was established which included the local authority, police and key voluntary sector agencies.

Young runaways have now been included as a specific issue in the Derby City Children's Service Plan developed by the council's Social Services Department. The runaways co-ordinator has said that it now feels "as though the city and not just concerned individuals wanted to respond to this problem". Runaways will also shortly be built into the police-led Crime & Disorder reduction plan.

Project workers in Derby feel that good networking has been essential to the success of the project. In addition, a local agreement has been negotiated which covers both children running from home and care. This has led to a faster and more appropriate response to young runaways who are children in need.

Actions

To reduce the number of runaways who are in danger when they run and to improve the access they have to services, the following action is needed:

More safe places to sleep and practical help such as food and clothing through:

- better use of foster care; and
- more community-based emergency accommodation.

The development of a comprehensive safety net of services which are accessible to runaways and responsive to their needs through:

- improved responses by helplines;
- improved local agreements between local agencies on runaways from home and care to ensure better working arrangements;
- clearer local responsibilities;
- improved information-sharing between agencies;
- a reduction in inappropriate referrals to the police from local authority children's homes; and
- improved data collection and case management by the police.

Better access to social services when necessary through:

- clearer and better understood thresholds for intervention; and
- more effective systems for assessment and referral, particularly out-of-hours, agreed with local voluntary and statutory partners.

CHAPTER 6

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN THEY RETURN?

Summary

- Most runaways return home of their own accord and receive a positive welcome from their families or carers.
- A significant proportion of runaways under the age of 16 cannot return home because of the threat of abuse, neglect or severe family conflict. They often enter care as a result.
- On their return, runaways who run from home are poorly supported by services. Runaways who run from care are more likely to receive help but follow up support is often of poor quality. Access to support services, such as family mediation, is a key problem.
- As a result of poor support, many runaways repeatedly run away. One in eight runaways have run three or more times. Where it does exist, follow up support makes a real difference, reducing the incidence of repeat running by up to two-thirds and reducing the number of runaways who have been arrested by 21 per cent.

Experiences of returning home or to care

- 6.1** Most runaways return safely to home or care within 48 hours and two-thirds of runaways decide to return home of their own accord¹⁶¹. Most return because they are cold, hungry, tired or frightened, or because they miss their families and feel sad or guilty about having run away¹⁶². Of those that do not return home voluntarily, most are found or returned home by their family (16 per cent), the police (9 per cent) or other agencies (3 per cent)¹⁶³.
- 6.2** A significant proportion of runaways under the age of 16 will be unable to return home because of the risk of abuse, neglect or severe family conflict and will end up being accommodated by the local authority. Local studies indicate that this is the case for around a quarter of runaways under the age of 16.
- Street outreach teams run by the Base 51 project in Nottingham City Centre found that a quarter of the runaways that they worked with between September 2000 and February 2002 were placed in care after intervention from the outreach team.
 - 2001 figures from the London Refuge show that just under a quarter (28) of young people staying at the Refuge left to go into local authority care¹⁶⁴.
- 6.3** Families and foster/residential home carers respond to children who have run away in a variety of different ways. Most parents or carers are relieved when a young person returns. For many young people and their families, the running away incident helps them to sit down and attempt to resolve their problems.

- 6.4** While many runaways come home to a positive welcome, some may be punished for having run. For example, work with women from some Asian communities suggests that the loss of community respect brought about by a running away incident can lead to harsh punishment and a further separation between the young person and their family¹⁶⁵. Young women seeking to escape from forced marriages often actively avoid contact with their community and travel long distances to other parts of the country in fear of their families who want to locate and return them home¹⁶⁶.

“Bounty hunters¹⁶⁷ exist in communities across the country and they are renowned for using strong arm tactics to achieve the desired results. ... [one girl] alleged that ... the bounty hunter had threatened to cut her throat if she went missing again and, most recently, to being held for two days, locked and guarded, in a room at a location she did not know.”

(Report by police in response to written consultation 2001)

- 6.5** Young people who return home are unlikely to receive any form of follow-up support. Those running from care are more likely to receive help but it is often of poor quality. Without support, a significant proportion of runaways are unable to resolve the problems which they face and run away again and again. Research has found that one in eight young runaways run away three times or more¹⁶⁸. One police division found that two-thirds (367) of all their missing persons reports related to one children’s home and to only 22 children¹⁶⁹.
- 6.6** Research by Parentline Plus suggests that repeat running has serious consequences for parents and carers. The parents of repeat runaways say that they feel powerless, with no sense of what to do, and no idea of who could provide them with help¹⁷⁰.

“My stepson (10) is caught in a huge net with many loopholes allowing him to slip through and be shunted from pillar to post. He is constantly running away, being disruptive and the situation is spiralling down.”

(Parent calling Parentline Plus)¹⁷¹

- 6.7** Foster carers and residential staff say that runaways who repeatedly run away from care sometimes stretch their patience. As a result they are more likely to receive a negative response when they return¹⁷². A negative response from carers, in turn, tends to reinforce a tendency to run away. One study has concluded that the best experience of returning home was: “a warm welcome and sensitive follow up directed at identifying and resolving any underlying difficulties that may have prompted the action.” (Quoted in *Going Missing*)¹⁷³.

Follow up support

The role of local authorities

- 6.8** Local authorities have no responsibility to follow up instances of young people who run away from home, and few see it as part of their job to do so. Good practice guidance published by the Local Government Association and Association of Chief Police Officers suggests that local authorities should ensure that all young people who have **run from care** should be interviewed by an **independent** person within 72 hours of their return. The interview should provide the young person with an opportunity to talk about the reasons which led to their running away and to raise issues about their carers or the care environment, including allegations of abuse or harassment. Independent return interviews for children who have gone missing from care will become a requirement in forthcoming Department of Health guidance.
- 6.9** Research suggests that very few local authorities currently provide such independent interviews for young people running from residential care¹⁷⁴. The number of young runaways from foster care receiving a follow-up interview is likely to be even lower. A number of authorities reported that the police carried out these interviews.

“Interviews are not that formal – the social worker will do some.”

“Our procedures require this [return interview] but practice is not always consistent and interviews are probably not held as often as we would like them to be.”

(Social service responses to Social Exclusion Unit [SEU] research)

The role of the police

- 6.10** The police currently play a key role in providing follow up support to young runaways who have been reported as missing. Once a missing person has returned home, the police have a duty to visit the home and confirm that the young person is actually back and is safe.
- 6.11** In addition to this basic check, it is standard police policy¹⁷⁵ to conduct a welfare interview in the presence of a responsible adult, such as the child’s parents. The interview should identify the reasons the young person had for going missing, any risk factors associated with the running away incident (for example possible pregnancy, drug abuse, etc.), and the likely involvement of the child or young person in crime, either as a victim or offender. Four out of five police forces say that they conduct these interviews on a routine basis. However, all forces acknowledge that, despite force policy, some missing people are not interviewed on their return¹⁷⁶.
- 6.12** If conducted sensitively, return interviews by the police can be a good opportunity to give a young runaway an opportunity to talk and to draw in other services as needed. However, in practice the quality and usefulness of return interviews conducted by the police is limited. Interviews can focus on the risk of criminal behaviour rather than the young person’s reasons for running. Young runaways are often mistrustful of the police and this means that it can be hard for officers to get an accurate picture of their reasons for going missing.

“These interviews are invariably in uniform which has its own barriers to many vulnerable children ... they may even be more destructive to a child’s rehabilitation and confidence.”

(Police force response to SEU research)

6.13 Police forces acknowledge that, in the cases of repeat runaways, the welfare interview is “**a significant drain on resources**” and “**often a fruitless task**”¹⁷⁷ and police officers express frustration at the limited value of these interviews. Few police receive training on how to conduct return interviews and they say they feel ill equipped for the task. Only three out of the 20 police forces surveyed provided any training for officers on how to carry out interviews. These constraints mean that interviews often take the form of a “**word in the back of the car**”¹⁷⁸ and do little to link young runaways into wider and more intensive support services.

Missing persons schemes

6.14 Some local areas have developed missing persons schemes designed specifically to provide support to young runaways once they return. These schemes vary from area to area, but most schemes share the same basic components:

- runaways, often those who have run away on more than one occasion, are referred to the scheme by a variety of agencies, including the police, social services, schools, GPs and families;
- a project worker then makes contact with the young person, either directly or through their family, and offers to meet with the runaway;
- if the young person consents, the project worker meets the young person to explore the problems that led them to running away. The meeting is undertaken on a confidential basis;
- this initial contact may be enough to prevent the young person from running away again, however, in some cases project staff may work with the young person for a longer time-period; and
- project workers can also play a brokering/advocacy role, trying to link young people with necessary support services, such as family mediation, drug or alcohol treatment, or longer-term counselling.

6.15 In some areas the schemes are managed and run by local authorities or have been set up as partnerships between Connexions, the Children’s Fund, the voluntary sector and the police. However, most of the schemes that are currently in place are run by the voluntary sector usually with the close involvement of the police.

6.16 Missing persons schemes have been shown to have a significant and positive effect in preventing young people from running away again. The Alternative Solutions to Running Away (ASTRA) project in Gloucester, for example, has been shown to reduce incidences of repeat running by two-thirds and has achieved a 21 per cent reduction in the number of runaways who have been arrested. An evaluation of a scheme in Coventry concluded: “**There is no doubt that the system has reduced the number of repeat runaways** by dealing effectively with each missing young person in a bid to prevent similar incidences.” Coventry found that their missing persons scheme works particularly well if the young people are referred quickly after a running away incident. The scheme, while it is effective with most repeat runners, was less successful with young people with a history of involvement in crime or who are involved in the criminal justice system. These young people will need more intensive support.

6.17 Parents also say that they find missing persons schemes helpful¹⁷⁹. Although they often have some initial reservations, parents were often relieved that someone is offering to help their child, and there were very few instances where parents refused to allow project workers to help a runaway.

- 6.18** Missing persons schemes are also broadly welcomed by the police. In reducing the numbers of young people who run away repeatedly, the schemes result in considerable savings in police time and resources.
- 6.19** Currently, there are very few of these missing persons schemes in existence. Only ten schemes have been identified across England¹⁸⁰. These schemes do not reach all young runaways within their respective areas since they are often reliant on information from the police, which is rarely comprehensive.

The ASTRA project, Gloucester

The ASTRA project provides support, advice and information to young people aged 18 and under who have run away from home or care in Gloucestershire.

Young people can access the project directly or via their families, social workers, parents, schools, or GPs. The majority, however, come through Gloucestershire Police who pass on missing persons reports to the project for all young people who run away.

The primary aim of the project is to reduce the incidence of persistent running away. To achieve this, the project offers one-to-one support for all young runaways who access it. Project workers will listen to the young person's problems in confidence. If the young person agrees to work with the project, ASTRA workers will develop an action plan with the young person setting out the steps needed to help resolve their situation. The project has developed good links with other local organisations, which will accept young people from ASTRA for services such as counselling.

The ASTRA project is open between 9.00am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday. Gloucestershire Constabulary, Gloucestershire County Council's education and social services departments and four of the six district councils contribute to its funding. The project is overseen by a multi-agency steering group, and is governed by a local protocol agreement between the different agencies.

Since it was established in 1997, Gloucestershire Police estimate nearly a two-thirds reduction in repeat runaways being reported missing again following ASTRA's involvement and a 21 per cent reduction in runaways being arrested by the police. The children and young people who have come into contact with ASTRA workers are also very positive. ASTRA is now extending its work more widely across the county of Gloucestershire.

Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions

Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions, in partnership with West Midlands Police, identified high numbers of young people running away in two particular areas. These high numbers were having an adverse impact upon the ability of the police and social services to respond effectively to the problem of runaways.

West Midlands Police currently carry out return interviews for all young people who have returned after being reported as missing. They have found, however, that the majority of young people divulge little information to the police in these interviews, mainly because they do not trust uniformed police officers, they are fearful of arrest or prosecution, and they do not respond well to interviews carried out in the presence of their parent or guardian.

Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions is therefore working in partnership with West Midlands Police and local social services departments to provide a system of return interviews for young people who have run away. The interviews aim to:

- listen to the views of young people and identify why they have run away;
- provide runaways with a key worker who is not perceived as a threat;
- divert runaways from further risk by offering them a range of support measures, including counselling and mentoring; and
- work with young people and their families to prevent repeat running.

Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions Personal Advisers will work with young runaways between the ages of 13–19. However, the Partnership has recently received funding from the Children’s Fund for an additional Personal Adviser to work with runaways under the age of 13.

Access to wider services

- 6.20** Even where follow up support is in place, some runaways and their families/carers need more intensive help from services, such as family mediation or family group conferencing, in order to prevent them from running away again.
- 6.21** The poor provision of family support services and its impact on runaways is considered in Chapter 4. In some instances, even when a local authority has agreed that a runaway who has returned home is in need of support from these services, the support is not forthcoming¹⁸¹.
- 6.22** A number of organisations have developed different ways of accessing services which are not reliant on a local authority’s assessment of a child’s needs, in order to improve their availability.
- The London Refuge is currently in the process of developing a direct link to the Safe in the City cluster scheme which provides a range of family support services.
 - In North Lincolnshire, local organisations, who are in contact with runaways, have developed a common method of deciding which support services are needed by runaways who have returned home. This “common assessment tool” has had positive effects – local organisations refer appropriate young people to social services and young people access services more

quickly. In 1996, two-thirds of young runaways referred to social services were getting no help. In 2002, over 90 per cent of runaways were getting the services that they needed. Just under half of these were receiving help from social services.

- 6.23** Good practice shows that action is most effective when local agencies agree systems setting out when to refer young people to social services for assessment and when to refer them to other more appropriate services.

Actions

To improve the support runaways receive when they return home, the following action is needed:

- for all runaways who need it, a timely opportunity to talk confidentially about their reasons for running with a suitably trained professional who will also broker access to further services if this is necessary; and
- more consistent access to services for runaways through improved information sharing between local authorities and other agencies.

CHAPTER 7

MAKING THE TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENT LIVING

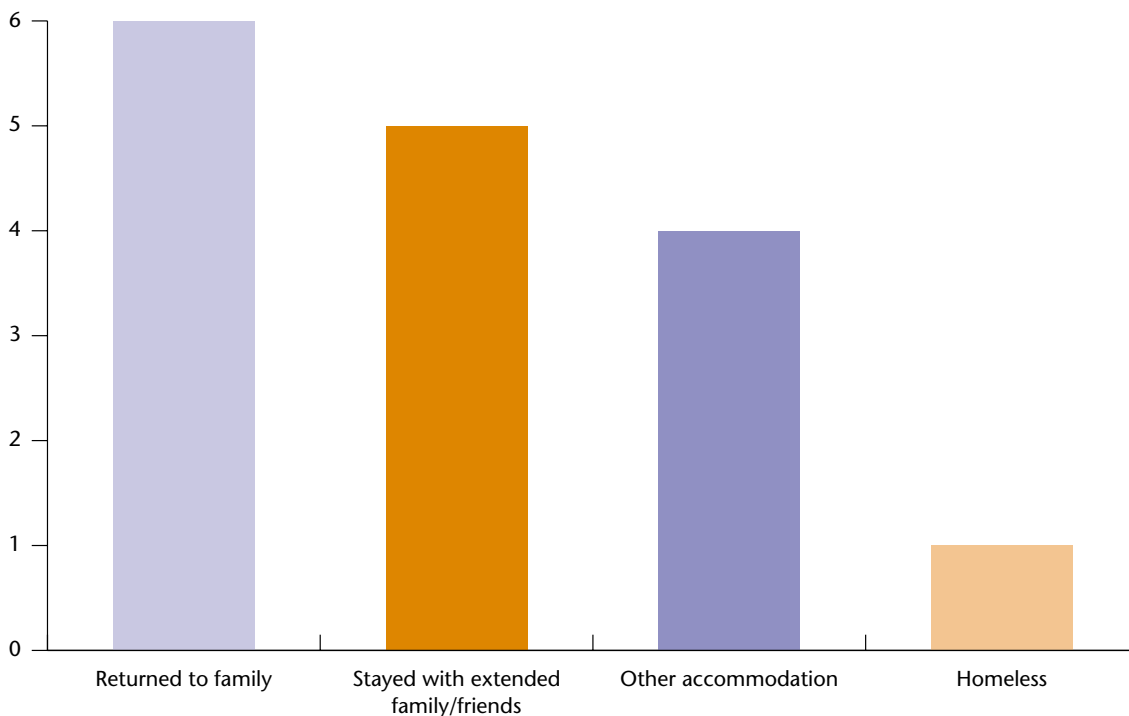
Summary

- Running away is the first step towards independent living for a high proportion of 16–17-year-old runaways.
- 16–17-year-old runaways are more likely to sleep in dangerous places, travel longer distances and have mental health, drug and alcohol problems.
- 16–17-year-old runaways may find it easier to access emergency accommodation than those under the age of 16. But accommodation is often provided without the additional support they need.
- Although eligible for a range of support services, 16–17-year-old runaways often lack the skills or help to access services.
- 16–17-year-old runaways can have problems accessing appropriate accommodation, financial support, and education or training.

Running away – a transition to independent living

- 7.1** 16–17-year-old runaways are less likely to return home than other runaways and are more likely to use running away as the first step in the transition to independent living. Research shows that of 16 runaways aged 16–17, six returned to their family, five went to live temporarily with a sibling, girl/boyfriend, four moved into other accommodation, and one became long-term homeless. Alone in London found that, over a twelve-month period, approximately two-thirds (six) of the 16–17-year-olds they assisted were referred on to hostels¹⁸².

Graph 7: Destinations of a sample of runaways aged 16–17 (The Children’s Society)



7.2 Returning home is often not an option for this group. Centrepoint, for example, has found that over 80 per cent of the 16–17-year-olds with whom they had contact left home for reasons beyond their control¹⁸³.

“I’d put up with it, but it was getting to the stage where we couldn’t even be in the same room. So in the end, he (referring to father) just kicked me out.”
 (Phil, runaway, aged 16–17)

7.3 16–17-year-old runaways have distinctive patterns of running in comparison to other runaways. They tend to travel further way from their home areas than runaways under age 16¹⁸⁴. They are also more likely to use out-of-hours services¹⁸⁵ and to have behavioural, mental health, or alcohol and drug problems¹⁸⁶. Those who do return home often leave again soon after, when the same problems arise¹⁸⁷.

7.4 Legally, 16–17-year-olds can live independently and can access housing in their own right. Under the law, they have access to some financial benefits and education is no longer compulsory.

7.5 The differing legal status of 16–17-year-old runaways and the fact that, for many, running signals the transition to independent living, means that this group have distinct needs in comparison to runaways aged under 16. In order to make a successful transition to independent living 16–17-year-old runaways are likely to need:

- safe and stable accommodation and services to help them develop skills to move to independence;
- financial support; and
- access to education or training to develop the skills to help them reach their potential.

- 7.6** The rest of this chapter examines the extent to which current support services for 16–17-year-old runaways are able to meet these needs.

Stable and supported accommodation

- 7.7** Responses to the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) consultation suggested that the lack of accommodation options for 16–17-year-old runaways is a key issue, because 16–17-year-olds are twice as likely to sleep in dangerous places as younger runaways¹⁸⁸. Centrepoint found that nearly half of newly homeless 16–17-year-olds arriving at their night shelter at Berwick Street, London had slept outside¹⁸⁹.
- 7.8** 16–17-year-old runaways find it easier to access emergency accommodation than those who are under the age of 16. Most local authorities say they provide short stay emergency accommodation to 16–17-year-old runaways¹⁹⁰. 18 out of 23 local authorities said that accommodation could be arranged through the housing department, two said they had accommodation available for 16–17-year-old care leavers, and two said that they would possibly use Bed & Breakfast accommodation or their homelessness unit. Only one area said there was no emergency accommodation, however, in this case young people were referred to the YMCA. Recent changes to homelessness legislation now extend the priority to homeless 16–17-year-olds (see text box on page 66).
- 7.9** Although most 16–17-year-old runaways have no experience of independent living, accommodation is frequently provided to this group with little or no accompanying support¹⁹¹. Alone in London found that the majority of young people whom they referred to hostels were not provided with ongoing family and mediation support.

“If you are 16 and have lived with your parents all your life, you’ve been wrapped in cotton wool all your life. Then, if you’re straight into the big bad world, there should be support, help you budget. Stuff you’ve never had to do while living with your parents.”¹⁹²

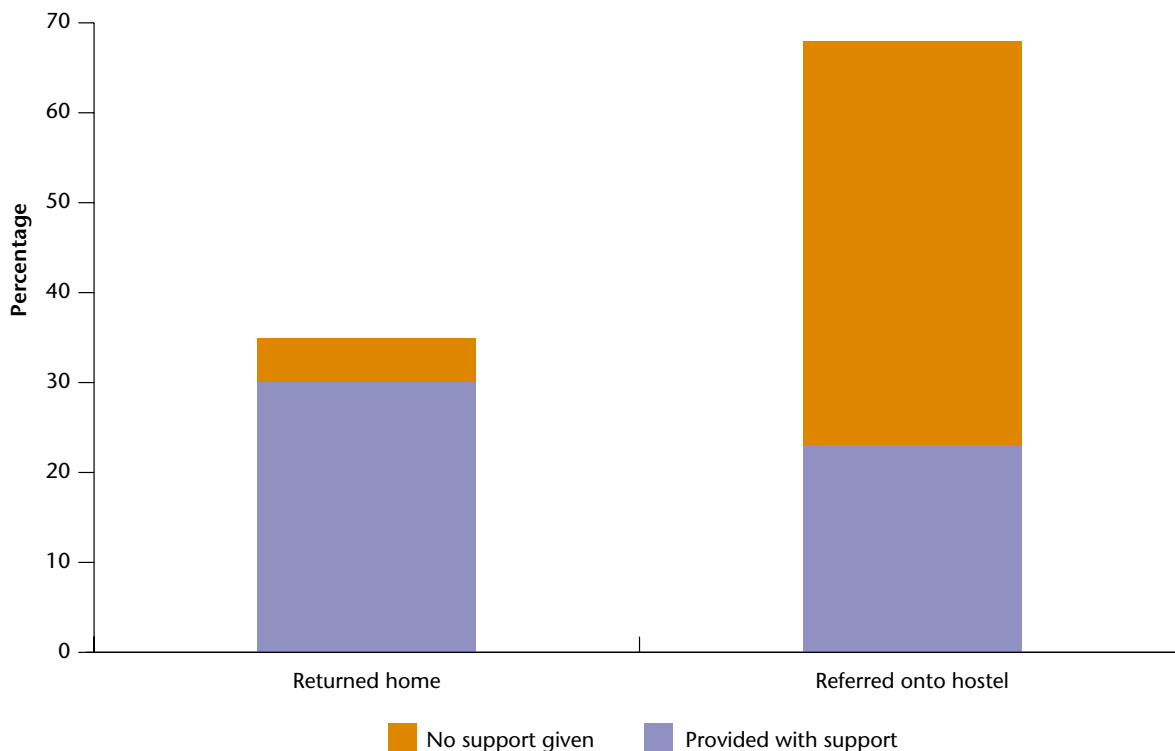
(Maria, runaway, aged 16–17)

- 7.10** A number of recent pieces of legislation aim to ensure that 16–17-year-old runaways who have suddenly left home as well as young people who have left care can access more comprehensive support.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000)

Implemented in October 2001, this Act placed new and stronger duties on local authorities to support care leavers until they are at least 18, and to be in contact with them until they are 21 years old. Local authorities have to assess and meet the needs of young people aged 16–17 years old who have left, and are still in care. A Young Person’s Adviser and Pathway Plan will be provided for all young people with an entitlement to services under the Act. Each Plan will cover housing, education and employment, health and well being, as well as financial support and the development of skills to equip them for independent living.

Graph 8: Outcomes for 16–17-year-olds from Alone in London project (November 2000–December 2001)



Homelessness legislation

The Homelessness Act (2002) and an Order to extend the homelessness priority needs categories came into force on 31 July 2002. The Act states that housing authorities must have a strategy for preventing homelessness in their district and for ensuring that accommodation and any necessary support will be available for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The social services authority for the area must respond to any reasonable request for assistance.

The Order has extended the priority need to include homeless 16–17-year-olds, care leavers who are aged 18–20 and some other groups of vulnerable young people. This means that if these young people become homeless through no fault of their own, the housing authority must ensure they have suitable short-term accommodation until a permanent home can be found.

Supporting people

From April 2003, a number of existing arrangements which can be used to provide housing support services to 16–17-year-olds, including Transitional Housing Benefit, will be brought together under the new Supporting People Specific Grant. From April 2003, the Supporting People Specific Grant will cover housing-related support and give local authorities more flexibility over how they provide housing-related support services to young people. Guidance for local authorities on how to implement Supporting People has been published. This can be read on the Supporting People website at www.spkweb.org.uk. Further guidance will be published over the next few months.

Financial support

- 7.11** 16–17-year-olds who run away or who are forced from home often leave home without planning and without money and other resources. They may be entitled to benefits such as Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) or Income Support. However, responses to the SEU consultation suggest that runaways are unlikely to claim benefits. This may be because they are unaware of their entitlement or find the system complicated and confusing. Financial support is important to 16–17-year-old runaways if they are to avoid being forced into sexual exploitation or stealing to survive.

“I had no money, I was upset constantly. I was in bad health and I became a thief and a prostitute.”
(Sarah, runaway¹⁹³)

“They’ve [referring to drop-in centre] helped with benefits and entitlements, it’s impossible for me to know the social security inside out. They’ve helped to give me the confidence to do something about legal options.”

(Emily, runaway¹⁹⁴)

Access to financial support

16–17-year-olds do not have automatic entitlement to JSA unless they fall into a ‘prescribed group’. These groups include young people in the Child Benefit extension period who are estranged from their parent or guardian. Where a young person does not come within a prescribed group then the regulations allow the discretionary award of JSA, but only if the young person can demonstrate that they would suffer severe hardship if it was not paid.

Certain groups of 16–17-year-olds can claim Income Support. These include: lone parents; severely mentally or physically disabled people; regular and temporary carers; pregnant young women; those in full-time education but estranged from their parents/guardians; and young people in custody. Concerns have been expressed about the procedures for accessing benefits for these vulnerable young people, which may involve proving estrangement for Income Support or satisfying the severe hardship provisions for JSA. A failure to obtain Income Support or JSA will make it more difficult to obtain Housing Benefit to secure or retain accommodation.

Access to learning

- 7.12** Runaways often leave home without their qualification certificates, books, course work and identification which can make it difficult for them to access education or training provision. In addition, they may be suffering from problems which mean that they are unable to sustain full-time participation on a mainstream course at the required level and intensity. Financial support for 16–17-year-old runaways can make it difficult for this group to support themselves through education or training. For example, Income Support payments to ‘estranged’ young people in education stops on their 19th birthday irrespective of where they are in their course. The only support then available is JSA. However, in order to access JSA the course must be part-time and the young person must agree to leave if a job arises.

- 7.13** In those areas of the country which are piloting Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA), 16–17-year-old runaways can access a weekly allowance valued at £30 a week for young people on annual incomes of £13,000 or less (a hybrid of personal and parental income). A nationwide EMA scheme is to be introduced from September 2004. The exact details will be decided in the light of evaluation of the pilots, which is continuing. The pilot programme includes projects looking specifically at engaging homeless young people in education. Evidence so far suggests that financial support can be valuable in re-engaging homeless young people, but that it works most effectively in conjunction with other initiatives – personal guidance and an accessible learning programme.
- 7.14** Learning and Skills Councils have a duty to secure education and training for 16–19-year-olds, including runaways, which is suitable for their requirements. From 2003, they will have funding and more freedom to increase the variety of the local provision of post-16 learning.
- 7.15** Being outside education or training between the ages of 16 and 18 years can have serious consequences for the individual and society in both the short and long term. It is a major predictor of later unemployment and, for women, of teenage motherhood¹⁹⁵. Measures to help 16–17-year-old runaways to maintain or re-engage with learning, need to take account of the disruption running away can produce and any conditions attached to financial support or completion of qualifications.

Joining it up

- 7.16** Young people who have left home in an unplanned and chaotic manner will need a great deal of support to move successfully to independent living. 16–17-year-old runaways are more likely to travel further away from their home areas when they run and, as a consequence, may be socially isolated and unaware of local services. They are unlikely to be aware of or familiar with their entitlements to benefits, and many are unlikely to have had any previous experience with local authority services, processes or form-filling for entitlements.
- 7.17** Following the introduction of Connexions in 2001, every young person in England, who needs it, between the age of 13 and 19, including runaways, should have access to a Connexions Personal Adviser. The Adviser can provide runaways with information about accommodation, benefits, education and training as well as broker access to a range of specialist services.

Runaways in the United States – Transitional Living Programmes

In the United States there is a national Transitional Living Programme for homeless young people aged 16–21 years. This is run by the Federal Family Youth Services Bureau and is a core part of the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Programme. Local projects provide a supported structured environment, which may be host homes, group homes or supervised apartments, in which the overall goal is to increase the independent living skills and the ability to be self sufficient. Educational opportunities, post-secondary training or vocational education, assistance with finding a job, career counselling and a job placement may also be provided.

Rights of Passage Programme, Covenant House, New York City (NYC)

The Rights of Passage programme is an 18-month Transitional Living Programme available to 150 18–21-year-olds. The aim of the programme is to enable young people to adjust to the world of work, and includes teaching skills such as interaction with peers, money and time management, setting priorities and goals, and taking responsibility. The young people are not necessarily the most at risk, but are young people needing support, a step-up and a space to talk. Young people are assisted to find jobs and Covenant House (a residential hostel and service provider in NYC) works closely with local employers to take on these young people (usually at entry level) and then increase their skills to upgrade their position. Mentors are a key part of the programme.

The Transitional Living Programme is also linked to Covenant House's Regional Training Centre which provides vocational and educational services designed to prepare young people for independent living. The Regional Training Centre provides services to almost 100 young people each day, including courses in computer and desktop publishing skills, a certified nursing-aid course and screen printing.

Teen Living Programme, Chicago

Work with over 18-year-olds is focused on educational and vocational goals to ensure that young people have the skills to leave the streets and become self sufficient. Once young people have successfully graduated from the emergency shelter, where they can stay for up to 18 months, then they can proceed to the Transitional Living Programme for up to another 18 months. Most older young people self-refer through the drop-in centre or are referred by friends, others come through the police or other agencies.

The main issues for young people using the project are drug and substance abuse, mental illness such as depression, or extreme disengagement and anti-social behaviour. The backgrounds of most of the young people are commonly ones of family dysfunction, sexual/emotional/physical abuse, parental substance abuse, and childhood trauma. Many of the young people have had contact with the welfare or law enforcement systems in the past.

Teen Living Programme's scattered-site transitional housing programme provides young people who graduate from the emergency shelter with a safe, comfortable apartment and intensive support services, including counselling, job and educational assistance, intensive life-skills education and health care. The programme lasts for 18 months and aims to give young people the skills to secure and maintain an apartment and employment. Last year 29 young people were enrolled in the programme.

Action

To increase the number of 16–17-year-old runaways who make a successful transition to independent living the following action is needed:

Better access to appropriate accommodation through:

- closer working between local housing authorities and social services to assess the needs of vulnerable 16–17-year-old runaways;
- local homelessness strategies, which take better account of the needs of vulnerable 16–17-year-old runaways; and
- more appropriate accommodation and housing-related support options for vulnerable and homeless 16–17-year-olds.

Better information and access to financial support with:

- more analysis of how the benefits system might take better account of the needs of 16–17-year-old runaways;
- a review, and possible revision, of the guidance on benefit entitlements for 16–17-year-olds; and
- improved access to consistent advice about the benefit system from suitably trained advisers in Connexions partnerships, and the voluntary and community sector.

Better access and support to restart or continue in education and training with:

- EMA schemes, which meet the particular needs of 16–17-year-old runaways, and take account of interruption which can be caused by a running away incident; and
- more flexible routes back into learning.

CHAPTER 8

SERVICES FOR RUNAWAYS: AN ACTION PLAN

- 8.1** The evidence in this report has shown that there are a significant number of vulnerable young people who run away in response to problems and who are not receiving effective support from a range of services.
- 8.2** There is a need for a **coherent, long-term approach** to runaways. which will result in:
- fewer young people running away in the first place;
 - fewer young people spending time on the streets and putting themselves in danger when they run; and
 - fewer young people running away repeatedly.
- 8.3** In order to achieve real change it is important that services such as police, social services, Connexions and the voluntary sector work towards a shared vision.

A vision for runaways' services

Young people at risk of running are identified and given access to the right services.

- Young people know where they can get help.
- Young people have someone to talk to.
- There are family support services available in all local areas.

Young people who run away have someone to talk to and a safe place to go.

- Local services provide a 24-hour response to runaways, with the support of national helplines.
- There is emergency accommodation available in all local areas to runaways who need it.
- Runaways receive a consistent response from all agencies and are linked effectively to the most appropriate service.

Young people and their families get access to follow-up help and support after running away.

- Runaways are interviewed as quickly as possible on their return.
- Families and children in need receive the support services they require as soon as possible, and within 24 hours are told if they are eligible for the service.
- 16–17-year-olds who cannot go home are given support to make a successful transition to independence.

- 8.4** This will only happen through a change in **how services work together** on the ground and through better co-ordination at central government level. The experience of runaways highlights that services are currently not working together well. Children and young people are falling between services which should be acting as a **safety net** and highlight the current gaps in current preventive and crisis services.
- 8.5** Delivering change for runaways is dependent on both **mainstream** services working more effectively and on some **specific work** targeted specifically at runaways, particularly when and after they have run.
- 8.6** The action plan below sets out what will happen to help runaways most at risk. Recommendations are made in **six key areas**:
- putting someone in charge;
 - preventing running away;
 - ensuring the immediate safety of runaways who are at risk;
 - improving longer-term outcomes for runaways who return home;
 - improving the transition to independence for 16–17-year-olds who cannot go home; and
 - making change happen.
- 8.7** The sections below describe the action which will follow from this report. Details of the action are contained in the table which follows at the end of the chapter.

Putting someone in charge

- 8.8** In the past no one – either in Government or on the ground – has been in charge of the problems for young people running away. This report clarifies **responsibility**.
- 8.9** The Department of Health will take the lead at a **national** level, continuing to work with other government departments and reporting to existing Cabinet Committees on specific aspects of the report. The Domestic Affairs (Social Exclusion and Regeneration) Committee will have oversight of action as a whole.
- 8.10** At a **local** level this report sets out action to ensure that a more comprehensive safety net will be developed. As a result services will contact and respond to runaways more quickly and effectively. There will be named local authority managers and police leads responsible for planning and working with other agencies. Local agreements should also be put in place to ensure that responsibilities are set out clearly and no young person ends up slipping through the net.

Preventing running away

- 8.11** Evidence has shown that runaways are not getting access to the mainstream services that could prevent running away. Running away will be made less likely by incorporating potential runaways' needs in the planning and improvement of generic preventive services. The actions in this report therefore link directly to the wider work being undertaken across Government to bolster preventive support for children and young people and their families, in particular through the Green Paper on Children at Risk.

- 8.12** Local authority Chief Executives have been asked to take the lead in ensuring that local preventive strategies for children and young people are agreed, setting out the roles and contributions of all relevant services. These strategies will aim to improve the way that children are supported during difficult periods in their lives by services, including mainstream services for education, social care, health and criminal justice. Guidance for these strategies will highlight the needs of children and young people at risk of running away, and those that do run away as an area for consideration.
- 8.13** These local preventive strategies will ensure that children with problems, including runaways, will be **identified** earlier and will ensure that they get better access to the services they require.
- 8.14** The report also highlights the need for better and more **family support** services to reduce family breakdown and conflict, and a number of development projects will be testing out ways of providing this. The Green Paper on Children at Risk will also consider how to support families and communities more effectively.
- 8.15** Fewer young people in care will run away because there will be improvements in local authority **record keeping** and better **care planning**.
- 8.16** There will be a range of development projects testing out ways of delivering information to families and young people on the problems which can lead to running away and how to get help.
- 8.17** Young people will be given more information through a **schools pack** on running away. **Teachers** will also be supported to raise the sensitive issues associated with running away with information on the DfES Personal Social and Health Education learning and development **website**.
- 8.18** Ways of giving communities and parents better access to information on the causes of running away and what they can do to prevent it will be tested out through **local information campaigns** as part of the development projects.

Ensuring the immediate safety of runaways

- 8.19** Action will ensure that young people are **safer when they run away** by helping them to make contact with services when they are away and:
- return quickly to home or care; or
 - find somewhere safe to stay; or
 - get help from social services if they are in need; and
 - link them into longer-term support if needs are identified.
- 8.20** Runaways need 24-hour access to help and **someone to talk to**, advice and support when they are scared, cold and away from home or care. Young people need to get through quickly to the helpline which is most appropriate and able to offer the service they require.
- 8.21** Runaways need a **safe place to stay** when they are away and practical help such as food and clothing. This report encourages better use of local authority foster carers to provide emergency accommodation. A pilot programme will also be developed to test out models of community-based flexible accommodation.
- 8.22** Emergency responses will be improved and time will be saved by making sure that services have **clearly defined responsibilities** and **procedures** in place and that people know who should be doing what. Police responses will be made more effective and focused by reducing the over-

reporting of children missing from care is addressed and record-keeping is improved by better joint-working with social services and the voluntary sector.

- 8.23** Runaways who need **social services** and other assistance will be helped by agreeing and clarifying assessment procedures and agreeing locally who can be given help and support.

Improving longer-term outcomes for runaways who return to home or care

- 8.24 Follow-up support** when runaways return to home or care can establish why a young person has run away and can be effective in addressing problems that might cause them to do it again. At present, most runaways do not receive a high quality interview with a suitably trained professional who can help them, and they are poorly supported by services when they return home.
- 8.25** For all runaways from home who need it, Connexions will co-ordinate the provision of a confidential interview if they are 13 or over. The local authority will do so for children under 13 and outline procedures in local protocols. For runaways from care, procedures already state that this should take place within 72 hours of return.
- 8.26** In addition, local authorities should work with other local agencies to develop **common and agreed ways of assessing** the needs of runaways, and referring them, so that runaways get more consistent and faster access to the services they need.

Improving the transition to independent living for 16–17-year-old runaways

- 8.27** Many 16–17-year-old runaways are unable to return home and running away is the first step towards **independent living**. They have distinctive needs as a result of this, which at present are not being well met. Action to address the problem will follow as part of wider Government initiatives to improve information on and access to supported accommodation, financial support and learning.

Ensuring delivery

- 8.28** The lack of services dedicated to runaways will be directly addressed by **new funding** from the Children and Young People's Unit for runaways **development projects**. These projects will test out innovative ways of working with runaways, providing evidence of what works best, and inform the future planning of runaways services.
- 8.29** The Government will help build up a **range of services** for runaways, backed up by better, more focused evaluation and based on information about what works. These will include both better mainstream services and some specialised services targeted on runaways. An independent advisory group will be established to support Government on taking forward the strategy. In particular the group will provide advice on the issue of target-setting, and monitoring and evaluation.
- 8.30** One important vehicle for ensuring that change happens will be guidance to be issued by the Department of Health later in 2002 on children missing from care and home in response to the Children's Safeguards Review (see Annex B). Other important mechanisms will be local agreements and knowing who is in charge.

Action	Detail	Who and When
Putting someone in charge		
GOAL: Everyone knows who is responsible for making sure that things happen.		
1. National co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Health will be the central government lead on runaways. 	
2. Lead individuals in every local authority with responsibility for runaways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every area to have a named manager in charge of runaways issues. Local authorities to identify a named person with responsibility for young people missing from care, and there should also be someone responsible for young people missing from home. These individuals to lead on planning services for runaways, working with and being a contact for other services, particularly as part of local partnerships. 	Requirement and good practice guidance to be issued as part of the Department of Health's (DH) <i>Missing from Care and Home</i> guidance in late 2002.
Preventing running away		
GOAL: Ensure that young people at risk of running are identified and given access to the right services.		
3. Local planning to prevent running away	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local areas to plan for runaways as part of the new local preventive strategies for children at risk. 	Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) guidance will set out the need to address runaways as part of local preventive strategies.
4. More effective early identification of young people likely to run away	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of local preventive strategies, the identification, referral and tracking systems will improve the identification of young people with problems and make it more likely that potential runaways receive the help they need before it is too late. 	Local areas working up systems in line with CYPU guidance from autumn 2002.
5. Better monitoring and management of incidents of young people missing from care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each local authority to collect information on whether there are patterns of young people going missing from particular care placements (foster homes or children's homes) which will help target support on young people who persistently run away from their placements. 	Requirements will be re-stated in the DH guidance on <i>Missing from Care and Home</i> to be issued in 2002 and monitored by new local lead people.
6. More and better family support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of development projects will be testing out ways of supporting parents and families of runaways. Evidence and analysis set out in this report (as well as the development projects) will feed into the Green Paper on Children at Risk to improve the effectiveness of family support services. 	Projects to be managed by CYPU, by April 2004.
7. Develop schools pack on running away	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people will be given more information in Key Stages 3 and 4 about where to go for help instead of, and if they are thinking of, running away. 	By April 2004 Shelter will develop as part of the development projects managed by CYPU.

ActionDetail	Who and When	
<p>8. More information and support for teachers and schools about running away</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers will get more support online (www.teachernet.gov.uk/pshe/) on how they can help prevent running away. Information, including the new schools pack (Action 7) will be available online about the causes of running away, the dangers, and the possible alternatives. 	<p>Information to be available from end of 2002 on the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) learning and development website.</p>
<p>9. Develop local information campaigns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some development projects will test out ways of delivering information to parents, communities and young people, highlighting the reasons why young people run away, sources of help, the dangers of running away, and what to do if someone does run away. 	<p>By April 2004 as part of the development projects managed by CYPUP.</p>
<p>Ensuring immediate safety</p>		
<p>GOAL: Young people who run away will have someone to talk to and a safe place to go.</p>		
<p>10. Develop family-based emergency accommodation options</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage better use of foster carers to provide emergency accommodation for runaways. This work will be informed by a pilot on emergency foster care. 	<p>DH as part of the current <i>Choice Protects</i> initiative. Pilot – part of CYPUP-managed development projects.</p>
<p>11. Develop and test out options for community-based refuge provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding will be provided to develop, evaluate and test out both the delivery and costs of flexible, community-based emergency accommodation for runaways. 	<p>DH developing the programme from 2003</p>
<p>12. Increase the capacity of helplines to respond to parents/carers and runaways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development funding to help child- and parent-focused helplines to work more effectively together, answer more calls from runaways and their families, and ensure better referrals to other services. A working group will be set up. It will review capacity, effectiveness and government support for helplines run by voluntary and community organisations. 	<p>By April 2004 as part of the development projects managed by CYPUP.</p> <p>Active Communities Unit, Home Office by April 2003</p>
<p>13. A clear local police lead to be responsible for young missing persons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Named police posts with responsibility for runaways at the most local level possible, preferably at the Basic Command level, if resources allow, to better link police into local services for runaways, develop specialist skills and knowledge about running away, and give a more consistent and efficient response to runaways. 	<p>Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to issue best practice guidance later in 2002 recommending named posts.</p>
<p>14. Fewer unnecessary calls to the police about young people missing from care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems for reporting children missing from care must be set up to ensure that only those who are genuinely vulnerable are readily identified and reported. 	<p>To be issued as part of the DH <i>Missing from Care and Home</i> guidance in late 2002 and should be supported by better training.</p>

Action	Detail	Who and When
15. Local police forces to develop better accessible and computerised information records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ACPO should spread examples of best practice in case management information systems to all police forces and highlight the benefits. ● ACPO to recommend that each force develop better computerised and accessible information records on all vulnerable missing persons under the age of 18. 	ACPO to disseminate best practice by end of 2002 and incorporate in guidance in 2003.
Providing longer-term support		
GOAL: Young people and their families get access to follow-up help and support when young people return to home or care.		
16. Providing return welfare interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Runaways, particularly the most vulnerable, should be provided with timely and sensitive interviews after running away, to identify any longer-term needs. 	<p>To be co-ordinated by the Connexions Service for runaways 13 years old and over.</p> <p>To be incorporated in Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) Business Planning Guidance at its next revision in 2003.</p> <p>Multi-agency protocols (see recommendation 21) will include information about how interviews for under 13s will be arranged.</p>
17. A common approach to ensure better referrals to social services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To reduce the number of young people who are inappropriately referred to social services, and thus speed up referrals, local authorities should agree common approaches to assessment with local voluntary and statutory partners. ● Local authorities to agree with partners when it is appropriate to refer young people to social services for initial assessments of need and when to refer them to other services for support. 	DH will issue <i>Missing from Care and Home</i> guidance in late 2002 about the importance of local agencies sharing information about runaways.

Action	Detail	Who and When
Helping 16–17-year-olds who can no longer live at home		
GOAL: 16–17-year-olds make a successful transition to independence.		
18. Providing better supported accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure that 16–17-year-old runaways get access to appropriate supported housing, local housing authorities and social services will be encouraged to work closely together when assessing the needs of vulnerable 16–17-year-olds. <p>Local authorities will be encouraged to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adopt homelessness strategies which take into account the needs of all homeless groups and those who are at risk of homelessness, including vulnerable 16–17-year-olds; and ensure that when developing and implementing ‘supporting people’ and homelessness strategies there are appropriate accommodation and housing-related support options for vulnerable and homeless 16–17-year-olds. 	<p>Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and DH to write to local authorities in 2003.</p> <p>ODPM to write to local authorities in 2003.</p>
19. Better financial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement in the financial support systems for vulnerable 16–17-year-olds. A review and possible revision of existing information on benefit entitlements for 16–17-year-olds to make it more accessible and clearer. <p>To enable young people to get access to quality information all relevant Connexions staff should ensure they have a good understanding of the benefit system and ensure that they have contacts with the local Jobcentre Plus.</p>	<p>DfES/Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) working group to deliver interim findings by end of 2002. DWP – following interim findings.</p> <p>Government offices and the CSNU to address through Connexions quality assurance.</p>
20. Better access to learning or training	<p>To help 16–17-year-old runaways access learning, the delivery of Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) should address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> flexible and individual-centred routes back into learning or training; how EMAs can be re-started if education is interrupted by running away; how EMAs will be provided to young people who may change schools or locations; and how information about EMAs will be made available to young people who are currently not in contact with school or are not taking part in education. <p>To increase young people’s opportunities to access mainstream learning and training a more flexible and individual-centred route will be developed. Connexions advisers will advise and support young people to access and return to education and training.</p>	<p>DfES to consider as part of EMA development by September 2004.</p> <p>The Learning and Skills Council and CSNU by September 2004 and follow-up to the proposals for education from 14–19 years olds in the DfES Green Paper <i>14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards</i>.</p>

Action	Detail	Who and When
Making change happen		
GOAL: There is activity in every local area on runaways which is improving their safety and reducing running.		
21. Services to have clear local agreements on duties and responsibilities for runaways from home and care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local areas to have agreements (protocols) between different local services to clarify the various roles and responsibilities they have for young people who run away from care and to be most effective they should also, if reasonably possible, cover runners from home. 	Requirement and good practice guidance for local authorities to be issued as part of the DH <i>Missing from Care and Home</i> guidance in late 2002.
22. Funding to test out how services can work best for runaways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development funding will be used for development projects to test what works for runaways. Projects will focus on prevention, immediate safety, follow-up support, and effective co-ordination services, and will show how to develop services for runaways at a local level. 	Projects will be funded and managed by the CYPUP.
23. Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An advisory group on runaways drawn from both within and outside Government to give advice on taking forward the action plan and to contribute towards the monitoring and evaluation of future services for runaways. 	To be established/ supported by DH.

ANNEX A

STILL RUNNING – THE CHILDREN’S SOCIETY (1999)

In 1999 the Children’s Society published the largest piece of research yet carried out into the issue of young people running away in the UK. It consisted of a survey of almost 13,000 young people in 25 areas of the UK, in-depth interviews with over 200 young people who had experience of running away, and interviews with over 350 key professionals.

Aims

The aims of the research were agreed as follows:

- to estimate the prevalence and characteristics of young people under 18 running away, being forced to leave home, and/or being on the streets;
- to learn more about patterns of running away/on the streets, and returning home; and
- to identify the potential needs of the young people in the target group and to explore appropriate responses to these needs.

Broad methods

The research had two elements.

Firstly, a survey was carried out in 16 areas in England and three areas per country in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. It aimed to quantify the extent of being away from home amongst young people under the age of 16, identify characteristics of young people who run away, and learn more about their reasons for running away and experiences whilst away.

Stratified random sampling was used. In England the country was divided into eight types of areas depending on ethnicity and population density and two areas were randomly selected from each stratum. The survey was undertaken with 14–15-year-olds through 113 mainstream secondary schools, with additional surveys carried out in 6 special needs schools and 9 pupil referral units in half of the areas.

Secondly, interviews were carried out with young people and professionals. The interviews explored the meaning and nature of being ‘on the streets’ under the age of 18, and gathered the experiences and views of young people and professionals who work with them.

Over 500 professionals were contacted in 14 areas through telephone directories and the internet. Over 350 short interviews were carried out, with 100 professionals also contributing to longer interviews. Professionals interviewed included social workers, police officers, probation officers, youth workers, statutory and non-statutory sector housing workers, advice centre workers, and a variety of workers in other agencies.

Just over 200 interviews were carried out in 15 areas of the UK with young people. There was roughly an equal split between males (52 per cent) and females (48 per cent); around half (48 per cent) of the young people were aged 16–17, ten per cent were under 16 and 42 per cent were aged 18 and over; and 12 per cent of the sample were of black, Asian or mixed origin. In most cases, access to interview young people was arranged through agencies including youth advice and drop-in projects, youth and community centres, hostels, street-work projects and children's homes.

ANNEX B

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH GUIDANCE ON CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE AND FROM HOME

In 1997, Sir William Utting's report *People Like Us – The Review Of the Safeguards For Children Living Away From Home* highlighted the need to be concerned about children who go missing. It emphasised that services for missing children should be planned for, and the reasons that children go missing should be identified, so that they can be properly safeguarded.

In response to this review¹⁹⁶ the Government committed itself to develop guidance on the action to be taken when a child goes missing from home and care. The Department of Health commissioned research from York University to provide an evidence base on which to develop further guidance for local authorities, the police and their partner agencies. This research was presented to the Government in 1999. It drew on two major studies – *Still Running* published by the Children's Society in 1999, a UK wide survey of young people who run away, and *Going Missing* a detailed examination of young people missing from care in four local authorities. This research demonstrated that some young people missing from home will have similar needs to those missing from care. The original research document can be found on the Department of Health website at: www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects/work_pro/project_5.htm

The Department of Health's *Children Missing From Care and From Home – A Guide to Good Practice* summarises messages from York University's original research and details the good practice that agencies need to follow in order to respond effectively to missing or "runaway" young people. The DH guidance is issued alongside the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) Young Runaways report.

The SEU's report and the Department of Health guidance both provide similar messages and are intended to assist local authorities, the police and their partner agencies to improve their practice in responding to young people who go missing from care or from home.

Where young people have run away or gone missing from their care placement or home, statutory and voluntary agencies should respond to them in a personalised and non-bureaucratic way. Effective responses will need to be based on common approaches that have been agreed by social service departments, other local authority services, the police and voluntary agencies. It will be important to listen to what young people say and where appropriate, to involve their families in finding solutions so that they do not run away in the future. For some young people, running away will be the result of underlying problems and they will need to be able to access appropriate services to address these. Young people who have run away from care should expect their placing local authority to respond like a concerned parent, attempting to understand the reasons that a young person has run and ensuring that they are able to access appropriate services, which might include independent advocacy.

Local authorities, police forces and their partner agencies must develop strategic responses to young people who go missing from care or from home. It is important that patterns and trends of running away in an area are identified. Where this highlights specific concerns, e.g. running from particular children's homes, then action must be taken to tackle these. Where young people are missing from care, local authorities must demonstrate their commitment to the young people's safety and welfare and act accordingly to ensure that they are found as soon as possible. Agencies offering children's services will need to understand the factors which cause young people to run away and work together to develop and improve their family support services. Any new services

for children who run away, whether from their family homes or from their care placements, should be developed by agencies working in partnership perhaps based on their participation in local Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships.

The Department of Health's *Guidance on Children Missing From Care and From Home – A Guide to Good Practice* will be issued under section 7 of the Local Authorities Social Services Act 1970 which means that, except in exceptional circumstances, local authorities must follow its guidance.

ANNEX C

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACT DETAILS

Advisory Group

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) has worked closely with an external advisory group of organisations from the public, voluntary and community sectors. The SEU would like to thank the following organisations for their advice, knowledge and support throughout the project.

Albert Kennedy Trust
Alone in London
Association of Chief Police Officers
Association of Directors of Social Services
ASTRA
Barnardo's
Centrepoin
ChildLine
Children's Society
Commission for Racial Equality
Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions
Disability Rights Commission
Equilibrium Consultancy
Get Connected
Local Government Association
London Connection
The London Refuge
Message Home Helpline
The Metropolitan Police
National Children's Bureau
National Missing Persons Helpline
National Youth Agency
NCH Action for Children
NSPCC
Parentline Plus
Safe in the City
The Hub
University of York
Who Cares? Trust

Visits

The SEU visited over 30 projects and services in the UK, and some in the US, and would like to thank the following organisations for their hospitality and honesty.

Alone in London, London
Alternative Solution To Running Away project (ASTRA), Gloucester
Anti Bullying Campaign, Acland Burghley School, London
BASE 51, Nottingham
Bradford Support Care Scheme, Bradford
Charing Cross Police Juvenile Protection Unit, London
Checkpoint, Torbay
ChildLine CHIPS Project, London
Colchester Youth Enquiry Service, Colchester
Contact Project, Newcastle upon Tyne
Cornwall & Devon Connexions Partnership, Torbay
Covenant House, New York City, US
Derby City Runaway's Project, Derby
Family and Children's Association: Nassau Haven Crisis Centre, Long Island, US
Family Solutions Project, Hounslow, London
Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership, Liverpool
Greenwich Borough Housing Department, London
Guideline Careers, Nottingham
Highbury Fields School, London
Home and Away Project, London
Leeds Independent Living Team (LILT), Leeds
Leicestershire County Council and Leicestershire Constabulary, Leicester
The London Refuge, London
Maidstone Police and Social Services, Kent
Message Home Helpline, London
National Missing Persons Helpline, London
National Runaways Switchboard, Chicago, US
NCH Eastbourne Youth Support Project, Eastbourne
North East Nightstops Agency, Newcastle upon Tyne
NSPCC School Counselling Support Services Project, Nottingham
NSPCC Warrington Peace Centre, Warrington
Place 2 Be Project, London
Portsmouth Social Services Department, Portsmouth
Project Oz, Bloomington, Illinois, US
Safe in the City, The Children's Society, Manchester
Safe on the Streets, The Children's Society, Leeds
Seamans Society Host Home's Program, Staten Island, US
Sherwin Knight Junior School, Kent
SHINE Project, The Children's Society, London
Teen Living Program, Chicago, US
US Federal Family and Youth Services Bureau, Washington, US
Westgate College, Newcastle upon Tyne
Youth Link Project, Birmingham

Consultation

The Children and Young People's Advisory Forum

Organisations that responded to the consultation document

The SEU would like to thank the individuals, and the following organisations, for their comments and responses to the *Young Runaways* consultation document.

Action with Communities in Rural England
 Base 51
 Bexley Council
 Bradford Metropolitan District Council
 Brighton & Hove Council
 Bristol City Council Neighbourhood & Housing Services
 British Psychological Society
 Cambridgeshire County Council
 Catholic Agency for Social Concern
 Chartered Institute of Housing
 Children Are Unbeatable
 Children's Rights Alliance for England
 Connexions Cornwall & Devon
 Connexions West of England
 Crisis
 Cumbria Social Services Department
 Depaul Trust
 Derby City Council
 Derbyshire County Council
 DrugScope
 Enfield Youth Offending Team
 Essex County Council
 The Home & Away Project
 Joseph Rowntree Foundation
 Lambeth Borough Council
 Lancashire Constabulary
 Learning in the Community
 Leeds Career Guidance
 Leicestershire County Council
 Lincolnshire County Council
 Local Government Association
 London Borough of Barnet
 London Borough of Sutton
 Manchester Local Education Authority
 National Association for Special Educational Needs
 National Council of Women of Great Britain
 National Family & Parenting Institute

National Missing Persons Helpline
Norfolk County Council
North East Nightstop Agency
Northamptonshire County Council
Nottingham City Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Peterborough Health Partnership
Plymouth Area Child Protection Committee
Potteries Housing Association Ltd
Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
SAFE at Last
Salford Social Inclusion Task Group
Save the Children
Special Interest Group Children & Young People, British Psychological Society
Slough Borough Council
Social Exclusion Action Planning Network
Somerset County Council
South Gloucestershire Council
South West England Youth Offending Team
Southend on Sea Borough Council
Suffolk County Council
Sunderland City Council
Sunderland Health Authority
Terrence Higgins Trust
Traveller Education Service & Sheltered Children's Support Service
Vine Project
Voice for the Child in Care
Warrington Community Trust
West Midlands Regional Network
West Sussex Social Services
Yorkshire MESMAC

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5	Derby Runaways Project	Hazel Lymbery	01332 716755	hazel.lymbery @ derby.gov.uk
5	The ASTRA Project, Gloucester	Hattie Darkin	01452 541599	astra@gloscc.gov.uk
6	Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions Rights of Passage Programme, Covenant House, New York City	Jill Harrison Rachel Forsyth	024 7660 7906 (212) 330 0565	jill.harrison@connexionscoc.org.uk Rforsyth@covenanthouse.org
	Teen Living Programme – Chicago	David Myers	(773) 883.0025	Dmyers@teenliving.org
Annex				
E – Good Practice	The National Runaways Switchboard, US	Gordon Vance	(773) 880 9860 x219	g-vance@nrscrisisline.org
Examples for the United States:				
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ANNEX D

SOCIAL EXCLUSION UNIT SURVEYS OF THE POLICE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Survey of the Police

In May 2002 the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) carried out a survey of police forces in England and Wales. The survey was designed to gather evidence on police forces' responses to young runaways, the resources used, and the specific problems they encounter when working with young people who run away or go missing across the country.

A questionnaire was distributed to all police forces through the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Missing Person's Steering Group. In total 28 out of 43 police forces responded.

Survey of social services departments

In June 2002 the SEU carried out a telephone survey of social services departments to learn more about the ways in which social services respond to young runaways.

A random sample of local authorities, to include a range of size, type, geography and location, were selected. The survey took the form of a telephone interview with one or more members of staff. Each authority was asked a number of questions about planning and protocols, emergency duty teams, emergency accommodation and children running away from care. In total 23 authorities participated.

The SEU would like to thank the following police forces and social services departments for their time and openness in responding to the survey.

Police forces

Avon and Somerset
Cheshire
City of London
Cleveland
Cumbria
Derby
Devon and Cornwall
Dorset
Durham
Essex
Gloucester
Hampshire
Hertfordshire
Kent
Lancashire

Local authority social services departments

Birmingham
Blackpool
Cheshire
Darlington
Derby
Greenwich
Lancashire
Leeds
Leicester
Lewisham
Liverpool
Luton
Milton Keynes
Newcastle
Norfolk

Police forces

Leicester
Metropolitan
Norfolk
North Wales
Northumbria
Nottinghamshire
South Wales
South Yorkshire
Suffolk
Surrey
West Mercia
West Midlands
West Yorkshire

Local authority social services departments

North Yorkshire
Northumberland
Peterborough/Cambridgeshire
Portsmouth
Shropshire
Southwark
West Sussex
Wolverhampton

ANNEX E

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES FROM THE UNITED STATES

The National Runaways Switchboard, US

The National Runaways Switchboard (NRS) is a federally-funded national communications system that aims to facilitate connections between young runaways and their families. The switchboard offers:

- a 24-hour confidential, free helpline providing solution-focused crisis intervention;
- referrals to community-based organisations across the country using an online database of more than 16,000 youth-related agencies;
- three-way calling and mediating between youth, parents and agency staff;
- a link to the Home Free transport service;
- a message home service; and
- a prevention and education strand, featuring information and publicity materials on running away and youth homelessness.

The helpline receives over 2,000 calls a week. 57 per cent of callers are runaways, 26 per cent youth in crisis, 11 per cent young people who are contemplating running away, four per cent runaways thrown out of home and two per cent homeless. The majority of callers are aged 15–17 and over 75 per cent of callers are female. Approximately 85–88 per cent of calls get answered.

The NRS has a database of over 16,000 organisations to which they might refer. The database is updated annually and organisations on the database are linked to maps so that volunteers can refer a caller to the nearest service. The database is governed by Affiliation Agreements between the helpline and other organisations are linkage agreements. These help to ensure that organisations provide the services that they said they would provide. They are not used to compel organisations to provide services, nor do they guarantee the quality of any of the projects to which they refer. The quality of the projects to which they refer is instead guaranteed by federal and state funding regulations.

NRS makes extensive use of radio public service announcements to advertise their services. Television public service announcements are expensive but NRS are currently developing an advert.

Local Runaways Co-ordinators, New York State, US

All counties in New York State that receive state funding for runaways and homeless youth programmes are required to appoint a local young runaways co-ordinator. These co-ordinators are responsible for planning and co-ordinating services to young runaways, monitoring services and outcomes for young runaways, and managing service delivery contracts between local projects and the state government.

Runaways co-ordinators in the US do not generally develop formal protocols between local services such as the police or the social services. However, they play a vital role in building bridges between runaways programmes and statutory services, through networking, joint-training and mediation in difficult cases.

Runaways projects in New York State have told us that local co-ordinators have been critical in helping to develop effective working relationships between organisations involved in delivering services to young runaways. They have helped to break down the often antagonistic relationships between the voluntary and statutory sectors, and have enabled organisations to develop a shared understanding of what the response to young runaways should be. In most cases, it has taken considerable time for co-ordinators to establish their credibility and develop these relationships.

Accommodating young runaways in the US: Host Homes, Project Oz, Illinois, US

Project Oz is a 30-year-old project providing a range of services for homeless, runaway and at-risk youths in central Illinois.

The Project Oz Host Homes programme provides emergency overnight accommodation for runaway and homeless young people. These may be young people who have run to the area from elsewhere, or young people who have left home due to physical or emotional abuse, family crisis, or family conflict. Families in the programme make themselves available to shelter runaway and homeless youth for a few nights while counsellors work to negotiate a return home to their immediate families. If the young person cannot return home, the programme seeks to broker an alternative living arrangement with extended family or a close family friend. Project Oz is an official child protection agency (CCBYS) with the power to place young people overnight in licensed premises.

Host families are responsible for taking the child at any time day or night. Most of the crisis calls received come overnight or late in the evening. The host family will provide meals for the young person, and are encouraged to treat the child as a temporary family member, including them in activities (such as a movie) and expecting them to do whatever their own children must do. This type of interaction attempts to provide a sense of normalcy for the child. If they live locally, the young person is kept in school. Legally, young people may stay with a host home for 21 days, but typically will stay for only one to three nights.

The programme has six host homes who are available on a rotating 24-hour schedule. At a minimum, there are eight beds available at any given time. Host homes do not have to be 'traditional' families. They can be single adults, couples with children, divorced parents, or older adults. Each of the homes is licensed by the State Department of Children and Family Services as a foster care placement.

Children can self-refer to the Host Homes programme. The majority of referrals, however, are from the police through the PATH 24-hour helpline. The project has effective working arrangements with the police, who will call Project Oz to police stations to assess any young runaway they pick up. Before being accepted into a host home, young people undergo an assessment interview with a counsellor, which includes a safety assessment covering issues such as violent behaviour, health, drug or alcohol issues, or gang involvement, and a needs assessment. Though the Host Homes programme accepts a very broad range of young people, Project Oz have found that very few placements (estimated one to two per cent) break down due to problematic behaviour by the young person. However, the programme is not used for young people with acute mental health or drug or alcohol problems, who are referred to separate residential programmes.

Host Homes has a more than 90 per cent success rate in reunifying families. Part of this success is due to the Host Homes families, who provide that essential 'cool down' time for the child and parent to be separated, each in their own safe environment. The project checks up with young people three and six months after they finish the programme. Historically, less than 15 per cent of the young people referred will be re-referred within three months following the end of Project Oz involvement.

ANNEX F

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