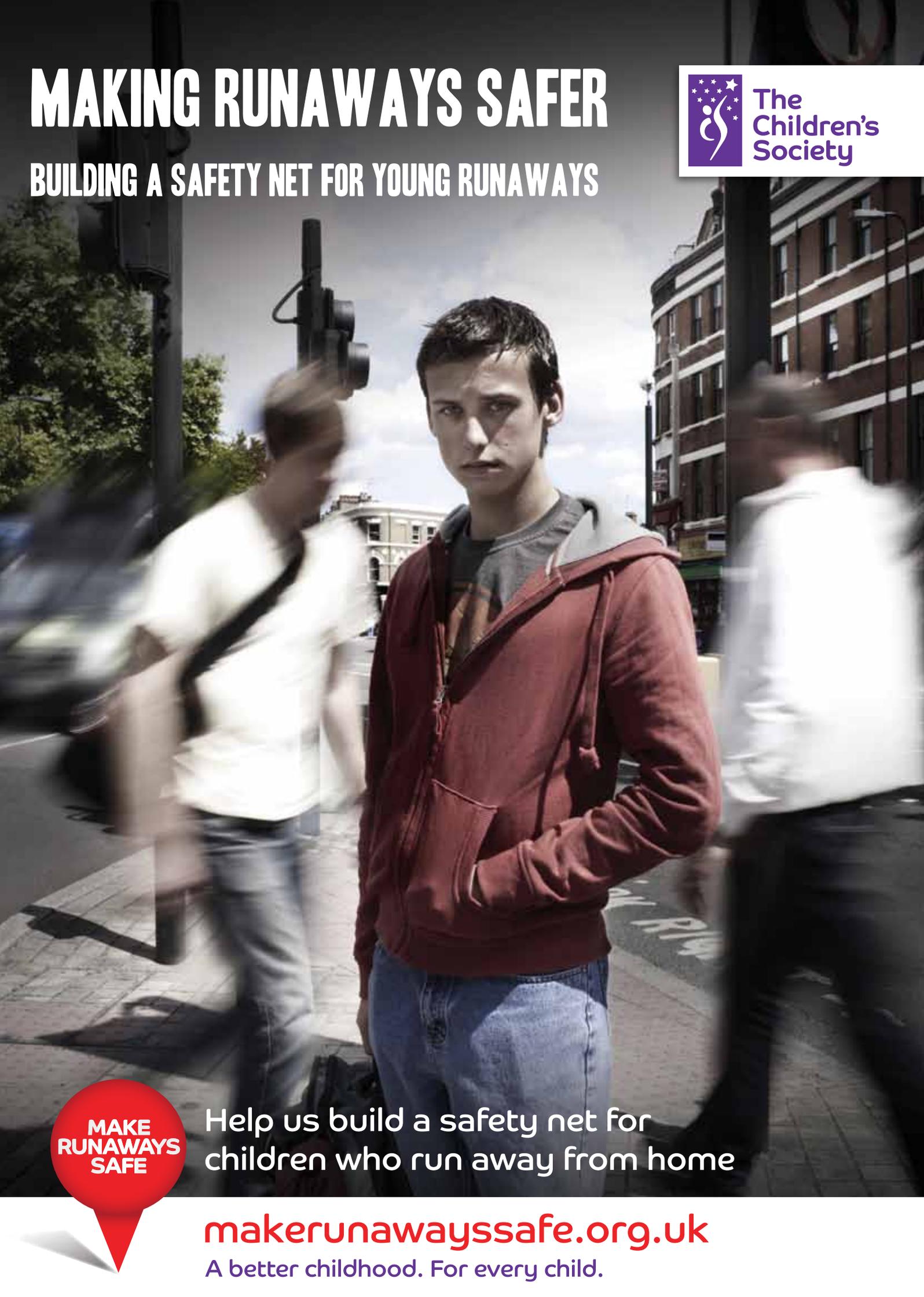


MAKING RUNAWAYS SAFER

BUILDING A SAFETY NET FOR YOUNG RUNAWAYS



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Help us build a safety net for
children who run away from home

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A better childhood. For every child.

Councils who have signed up to **The Runaways' Charter**

Barking and Dagenham

Barnet

Bradford

Bristol City Council

Cambridgeshire

Derby City

Derbyshire County

Devon

East Riding

Enfield

Hampshire

Harrow

Havering

Hertfordshire

Kent County

Lancashire County

Leicestershire

Manchester City

Milton Keynes

Newcastle

North Lincolnshire

North Tyneside

Nottinghamshire

Oldham

Oxfordshire County Council

Reading

Southend-on-Sea

Staffordshire County

Stockport

Stoke-on-Trent Council

Warrington

West Berkshire



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Preface

In 2012 Jade, along with some of the other young people in The Children's Society's SCARPA Project for young runaways, wrote The Runaways' Charter.

They created a document which has been used up and down the country to drive better practice and to encourage supporters to ask their local authority for positive change for young runaways. Without their help, this could not have happened and we would like to take this opportunity to thank Jade and the other young people who helped create The Runaways' Charter.

The Runaways' Charter by Jade

It seems a long time since we wrote The Charter - but I still remember it as a good experience. When we started, we met with other young people. We were supposed to make a list about how we'd like to be treated as a young runaway, based on our experiences.

We wanted The Runaways' Charter to make it easier for other young people to talk to and trust the police and other adults - as they sometimes told us that we'd 'wasted their time'.

The launch of The Charter was great. It made it real, like something was actually going to happen. And a year on, it feels like it has. I feel it's so important for young people, as it now means that many don't have to go through the same experiences as others have before them. Hopefully, it means that young people will be treated differently and the police can be aware of the things that matter to us.

It's great that councils have now started to sign up to The Charter as young people can now be more confident that they will be treated with more respect and understanding. I'm really hopeful that things will change. Of course there will still be young people who run away but The Charter should mean they will feel listened to. It's also really good for children and young people to start to see the police as people who can help them, rather than being there just to deal with criminals.

I want more people to sign this Charter and really believe in what it says - and most of all, to act on it!



Introduction

One year on, The Runaways' Charter has now been adopted by over 30 local authorities and it has changed the way they work with young runaways. We invited those who had adopted The Runaways' Charter to contribute to this report, which aims to help all local authorities understand what practical steps they should take to protect runaways from harm in their area.

The report shows what a difference The Runaways' Charter has made for vulnerable children who go missing. It is designed to inform and encourage those who want to do more and to celebrate best practice.

The Children's Society has been working with, and campaigning for, young runaways for over 25 years. Our research has revealed that 100,000 young people run away each year in the UK and that they are vulnerable to physical and sexual exploitation while away from home.¹ Some young runaways even resort to begging or stealing just to survive.

Children run away from both urban and rural areas and from all backgrounds and families. Running away is often a sign that a young person is facing conflict, neglect or abuse, either at home, in school or among their peers. They

may be running away because of 'push factors' such as problems at home or a parent with substance misuse problems, or 'pull factors' such as being groomed for child sexual exploitation.

Young people who run away or go missing are in vital need of support. However, through our work with these

'I was 13 and my step dad was abusing me, so I ran away. I was scared, upset and confused, I just wanted to get away from him so I left.'

Young runaway³

young people across the country we know that this is not always happening.

We have also become aware that national guidance is not always being implemented and that local authorities need to improve their practice if they are to truly protect and support young people who run away from home or care.

'The worst thing about running away is having nowhere to sleep. One time I ran away with two other kids from the children home. We didn't plan it, we just went, and it was a spur of the moment thing. We had no money so we'd just walk a lot, break into cars and sleep there.'

Young runaway²

What is the Runaways' Charter?

The Runaways' Charter was co-written with young, former runaways we work with, who have direct experience of how wrong things can go when agencies fail to respond to their needs.

It is a commitment by the local authority and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services that they will put young people at the heart of what they do and that they will take steps to **Count, Think, Act** and **Prevent**. The Charter also asks them to challenge attitudes that may be detrimental to how they support young runaways, such as viewing them as 'troublesome'.

This report explores why each section of The Charter is important and describes the progress that has been made in each area over the last year by some of the local authorities who have signed up to it. Underpinning each section is the need for a change in professional attitudes towards young runaways. Without this, there is a risk that young runaways will be unable to trust the professionals who are there to help them.

The Charter also sets out the key actions and responsibilities a local authority must take in line with the statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing

from home and care⁴. So alongside the report, we are also publishing a planning guide: [Developing local safeguarding responses to young runaways](#), which clearly sets out what local authorities should be doing to follow each section of The Charter.

Practitioners working with young runaways have told us that The Charter provides a useful framework around which they can work with their local authority to improve their practice. Local campaigners have also used The Charter as a way of holding their local authority to account.

Our hope is that this report will inspire local authorities and highlight the steps that they can take to make young runaways safe in their local area.

'When you're not talking to your family it's easy to get involved with the wrong people. You look for someone to talk to, that's when older men try to act like your friend.'

Young runaway⁵

'Kent County Council was one of the first councils to sign up to The Runaways Charter because we recognise how important it is to protect these vulnerable young people. This Charter has bolstered the work Kent is already doing to prevent children going missing and keeping them safe. It is important in our view that all councils recognise this group as being at particular risk of exploitation and make sure they have targeted support available to them.'

Mairead MacNeil, Kent County Council Director Specialist Children's Services



COUNT, Think, Act and Prevent

Local authorities should have a clear picture of the numbers of children running away in their area so they can effectively tackle the problem.

Why local authorities should COUNT

There is a lack of reliable and consistent data collection by local authorities and the police on young people who run away from both home and care.

The Runaways' Charter emphasises the importance of collecting data on children who run away but also encourages local authorities to analyse and interrogate this data for patterns. This can help local authorities to identify and target hot-spots for child sexual exploitation and police to catch the perpetrators.

Mapping the problem of running away and the extent of need also helps commissioners to more effectively commission services to support young people who run away.

A robust data collection system ensures that all agencies working with runaways have up-to-date information and can be pro-active in addressing the reasons why young people run away.

How local authorities can COUNT

In response to recommendations by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) inquiry into children who go missing from care, which we supported, the Department for Education (DfE) are currently piloting a new system of data collection for these children.

The statutory guidance⁴ (currently out for consultation) proposes that all local authorities should record all instances where children go missing from care regardless of the length of time. This would also include data on unauthorised absences from care placements and other relevant data on children who run away.

The statutory guidance⁴ states that data about children and young people who go missing from home or care should be included in regular reports to council members, especially to the Lead Member for Children's Services and in reports by the local authority to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB).

'Everything was against me - I had a fight with my family and it was just running through my mind that they didn't want me back - no one wants me.'

Young runaway⁶

North Tyneside Council - Good practice case example

COUNT

North Tyneside Council commissions a runaways' support officer for between one and 1.5 days per week. Their job is to improve the collection and analysis of data around missing children.

North Tyneside has a data collection system specifically for this. They receive reports about children who go missing directly from the police, children's home managers and foster carers. Every week they record and update information about which children and young people go missing, how long they are missing for and what has happened as a consequence of their going missing.

The information then gets passed to the Missing Children's subgroup in the local authority each month and forwarded to the authority's research and intelligence team, who provide a more detailed analysis on a less frequent basis. The data is also shared regularly with the Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services and fed into the Vulnerable Adolescents subgroup of the LSCB.

North Tyneside said:

'The resulting information is proving to be very useful in increasing officers understanding of the subject area, in identifying trends and highlighting particular issues of concern, and over time it will be invaluable in the development of effective preventative strategies.'

North Tyneside are aware that, since the introduction of the runaways support officer and the work they have undertaken, reports of children and young people running away or going missing have decreased. They are currently undertaking work to get a better picture of those young people who go missing more than once.

Since pledging their support for The Runaways' Charter, the profile of young runaways has also been raised in North Tyneside Council, which ensures that they pay greater attention to the issue.

North Tyneside believes that all councils should pledge their support for The Charter as it ensures, in conjunction with other measures, that running away is dealt with effectively and is on the agenda of key strategic groups such as the LSCB and Children's Services Commissioning Boards.

North Tyneside Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Councillor Ian Grayson said:

'The Runaways Charter has ensured support services to vulnerable young people are focused upon this vulnerable group and all that can be done to minimise harm is put in place. We have found in the past 12 months that instances of children going missing have reduced and there is a heightened awareness amongst staff of the importance of this issue.'

Count, **THINK**, Act and Prevent

Local authorities should have a set of protocols and strategies in place that set out a framework for how they will address the issue of running away in their local area.

Why local authorities should **THINK**

Young people run away for many different reasons. As a result, they rarely fit under the responsibility of a single team within a local authority or one local agency.

In order to spot signs of abuse and reduce potential risks for young people who run away, it is vital that all local agencies, including police, health and education are able to highlight and flag up cases to other agencies where they have concerns about a young person's well-being or safety.

Lancashire County Council is part of the co-located multi-agency teams across the county that focus on runaways and child sexual exploitation (CSE). This has allowed the police, social services and The Children's Society (who provide frontline CSE and runaways support in the area) to develop innovative ways of responding to the different patterns of emerging need, such as looking at ways to identify and respond to children who are missing but not reported to the police.

How local authorities can **THINK**

Information about young people who run away must be shared across teams and local agencies so that action can be taken immediately to reduce any risks to the young person. These responsibilities should be outlined in local and regional protocols.

Information sharing can be done most effectively through fully integrated Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) or teams which involve children's social care, police, health services and the voluntary sector sitting together in one location.

To embed multi-agency working across different teams within the local authority, how to identify and respond to runaways should be mentioned explicitly within key strategic documents that sit across teams such as the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Health and Well-being Strategy and LSCB plans. This ensures that running away remains a priority for all agencies concerned with the safety of children and young people and that the local authority can commission services to reflect this.

It is also vital that a named staff member within the local authority has overall responsibility for children and young people who go missing in their area, to co-ordinate activity across different local agencies and ensure running away remains a priority. This named member of staff can also advise practitioners as needed.

Derby City Council - Good practice case example

THINK

Derby City Council employs three independent specialist staff members who work on issues connected with children and young people who run away. Each time a young person runs away, they ensure they receive a safe and well check within 24 hours from the police and provide them with a return interview within 72 hours.

For the past 18 months, Derby City Council Children and Young People's Directorate have been meeting alongside representatives from local schools, health, police, housing, Connexions and Safe and Sound Derby (a local voluntary sector organisation that works with young people who are, or are at risk of, being sexually exploited). This group is called the Missing Children MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference).

They meet monthly to analyse the daily reports compiled by the police on all children and young people who go missing in the area. The group then gives each child a risk assessment and explores what further involvement may be needed to prevent the young person from running away again, including potential work with the whole family. This may involve putting a support plan in place to minimise future risks of running away.

Underpinning this is a multi-agency protocol for children who go missing from home and care which sets out each agency's responsibilities and duties as well as thresholds for referral. This multi-agency approach has decreased the numbers of

children running away, particularly from independent children's homes.

The discussions that take place between all members of the group have resulted in a greater understanding of missing episodes and a healthy, challenging dialogue between agencies which has also improved trust between young people and local authority staff.

Councillor Martin Rawson, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Derby City Council, said:

'We take the safeguarding of our children very seriously in Derby and do all we can to support children and young people who have run away.'

'Signing The Runaways' Charter has led to changes in services for runaways and resulted in even better partnership working between agencies and crucially working with families to reduce the risk of children running away in the future. This preventive approach is proving very successful and has delivered improved outcomes for children and families.'

'Young people can attract attention from paedophiles. People driving past, thinking they can get something from you, they have no respect for you. Nobody knows where you are, if you do get kidnapped how is anyone going to know where you are?'

Young runaway⁷

Count, Think, **ACT** and Prevent

Local authorities should provide information to children, young people, professionals, parents and carers on the risks of running away and where to seek support.

Why local authorities should **ACT**

Disseminating good quality, practical information is vital to ensure that all professionals working with young people, parents and carers understand why young people run away and the risks they face. This allows agencies to intervene early and put in place measures to protect and support young people who run away.

Our research has shown that young runaways are unlikely to seek statutory services to help them when they are at risk. Many of them said that this was because they did not know how to access services or even that they exist⁸.



How local authorities can **ACT**

Local authorities should make age-appropriate information available to young people to inform them of runaways' support services, local helplines or emergency accommodation available in their local area. We are aware of several cases where young people as young as 15 were not given the support that they needed, despite these children asking for help, because they were viewed as old enough to make fully informed choices.

By taking these steps, local authorities can ensure that the whole community is in a position to minimise the risks to young people who run away, as well as ensure young people are equipped with the information to help themselves.

Pledging to The Runaways' Charter is a public commitment that the local authority is working towards the aims of The Charter and so can be used to raise awareness of the importance of tackling running away.

'I find it difficult to ask for help - I don't like to ask for help, it's difficult to say we need help. But knowing they're there, this made it easier to ask'

Young runaway⁹

Oldham Council - Good practice example

ACT

Since signing The Runaways' Charter, Oldham has developed a programme of work run jointly by The Children's Society and Barnardo's that is specifically aimed at training staff in the borough (such as teachers, social workers, family support workers, youth workers and volunteers in clubs) on how to spot the indicators of child sexual exploitation. A significant part of this training is also about young people who run away. Oldham are also planning to run workshops in children's homes on these issues later this year.

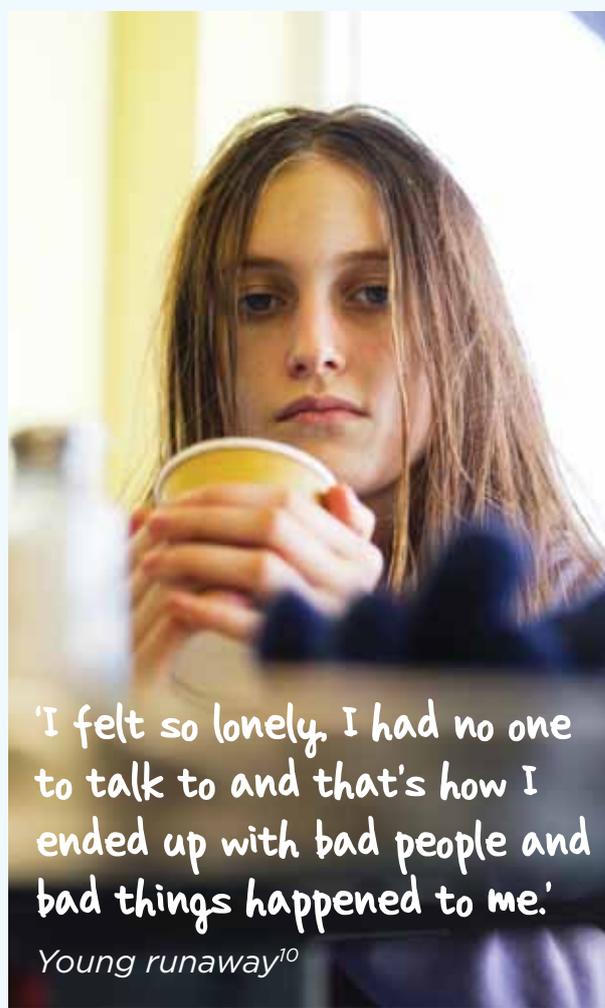
As part of this, Oldham LSCB have produced leaflets with The Children's Society aimed at the public and young people that inform them about the warning signs and risks of running away. The leaflets also provide information about runaways' support services in the local area.

Since implementing the training programme, Oldham has seen an increase in understanding, awareness and discussion amongst frontline staff of running away. Staff now have a greater understanding of the 'push' and 'pull' factors that lead young people to run away, such as parental mental health problems or exploitation, which has provided staff with a greater understanding of how to work with families in order to address these issues.

As a result, Oldham has seen an improvement in the quality of referrals to local runaways' services from the police and that they are taking more immediate action when a young runaway is reported missing to

them. An operational subgroup is in the process of being set up to review each missing child referred by the police.

Since pledging their support for The Runaways' Charter, Oldham has also given runaways increased priority at a strategic level, alongside child sexual exploitation, through the Missing from Home and Child Sexual Exploitation Subgroup of the LSCB. The issue is much higher on the LSCB's agenda and they take regular reports from the subgroup on data and trends on missing and absent children.



Count, Think, Act and **PREVENT**

Local authorities should ensure they prevent repeat instances of running away and treat running away as an indicator of need.

Why local authorities should **PREVENT**

It is important that local agencies work together in partnership with each other, as well as with parents and carers, to prevent young people from running away repeatedly.

As outlined earlier in this report, even one episode of running away should be recognised as an indicator of need and a sign that a young person is at risk of harm. It is not always possible to prevent a child from running away for the first time. But helping young people resolve any problems they may have, prevents them from putting themselves at risk again. Repeat instances of running away can mean that a young person is in significant danger, for example from sexual exploitation.

'They've given me someone to talk to, some support and help. Now if I feel depressed or lonely, instead of running away I try to find someone to talk to.'

Young runaway¹¹

How local authorities can **PREVENT**

An effective way of preventing young people from repeatedly running away is to provide return interviews to all young people who run away. These are vitally important in assessing the well-being of a child who has gone missing.

Return interviews are an opportunity for professionals to understand the reasons behind a child going missing or running away, and put in place an appropriate package of follow-up support which can prevent them going missing again. The statutory guidance⁴ states that local authorities should ensure that all children who run away have access to an independent return interview.

However, research has shown that return interviews are not always taking place for children who go missing from home and care and that when they are, they can be poor quality¹².

A return interview should be delivered by an independent, trained professional whom the young person trusts and is comfortable talking to. Some young people feel that they are unable to open up to a police officer or social worker.

London borough of Havering - Good practice case example

PREVENT

After signing The Runaways' Charter (which is also supported by Havering Children's Trust and LSBC), Havering are re-focussing their Missing Out service to deliver return interviews to children who go missing from home and care.

Havering Council are improving this service in order to help prevent and reduce further incidents of going missing, as well as to ensure the safety of children and young people who do go missing.

In order to meet the challenge of limited resources and the need to support vulnerable young people who run away from both home and care, return interviews are delivered to a targeted group of young people who run away. This will ensure the most vulnerable children and those at greatest risk receive high quality, independent support.

Havering believe that return interviews are best delivered by an independent, specialist, voluntary sector provider whom the young person trusts, so they have commissioned The Children's Society to deliver this service for them.

The service also ensures the council will meet its responsibilities in regards to providing independent return interviews as set out in the new statutory guidance⁴.



'I feel so let down by social services, I desperately needed help and they just placed me in this flat. They didn't call the next day to see how things were they just left me there alone.'

Young runaway¹³

ATTITUDES

Ensuring all professionals who work with young people have respectful and positive attitudes towards young people who run away underpins each section of The Charter.

How runaways should be treated

The basic requests from young people to professionals outlined in The Charter; that they be understanding, trustworthy, honest and respectful and that they take the time to listen and explain things to them, should be fundamental to their roles. Instead, we hear from some young people that they do not feel they are being listened to by the very people that are meant to help them. They are told that they are 'time wasters' or made to feel that they have done something wrong. This makes them reluctant to seek help again, putting them at even greater risk.

Young people need to be able to trust in the people they confide in, feel respected and that they are not being judged. Otherwise they will not feel comfortable disclosing the often very personal and traumatic reasons why they have run away, which could include abuse or exploitation.

All children deserve to be supported to make informed decisions in their lives. Young people who have run away need to feel empowered to do so. This takes time, understanding and patience from the professionals involved. These qualities should be at the core of any support and interventions local authorities deliver to young runaways.

'West Berkshire is committed to The Runaways' Charter as we recognise that children who run away from home are often at serious risk of harm and need good quality help and support. Over the last few years the council and our partners have been working hard to ensure our response to children who run away is as effective as possible.'

Our commitment to The Children's Society Runaways' Charter provides a very helpful framework to continue this improvement to ensure that children in West Berkshire get the best possible support from their local council and its partner organisations. We will also continue to listen carefully to the views of local children to develop our services to be sensitive to their needs.'

Councillor Irene Neill, Executive Portfolio Holder - Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education

Newcastle City Council - Good practice case example

Newcastle City Council have worked hard to ensure that professionals who work with young runaways are aware of the risks associated with running away and know how best to communicate with them.

Newcastle City Council has a Vulnerable Young Persons Panel that assesses referrals from concerned professionals and ensures that a robust action plan of support and intervention is put in place. The assessment includes an opportunity for young people to record how they feel about their current situation. This allows their views to be taken into account during any support they receive.

As well as the Vulnerable Young Persons Panel, the LSBC has a multi-agency MSET (Missing, Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking) subgroup which is chaired by The Children's Society. This group guarantees that the safeguarding of young runaways has a high profile and is taken seriously by all professionals working with young people in the local authority. The group also ensures that professionals

understand the risks associated with running away and the reasons why young people might be running away so they are not perceived as 'time wasters' or 'troublesome'.

The local authority holds targeted events and training with local voluntary organisations who work with young runaways, such as The Children's Society. These aim to spread good practice on how to recognise and respond to running away, and to improve the attitudes of both professionals and the public. The events have been very well attended by a wide range of stakeholders, such as police and crime commissioners and professionals from education, housing, health and the residential care sector.

Councillor Joanne Kingsland, Cabinet Member for Children's Services said:

'Newcastle City Council's pledge of support for The Runaways' Charter has meant that the profile and commitment to young runaways has been raised at both a strategic and operational level, allowing best practice to be embedded right across the local authority.'



Conclusion

This report outlines the good practice that many local authorities have undertaken since signing up to The Runaways' Charter to make runaways safe in their local area. It shows the impact The Charter has made across the country and how it has been a catalyst for change at a local level.

We hope this report will inspire even more local authorities to set up or commission similar systems or services to help some of the most vulnerable young people in their area. Alongside this, they can use our planning guide: [Developing local safeguarding responses to young runaways](#), to assess their progress and help them understand what steps they need to take in future.

-
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 2. Case study from The Children's Society Birmingham
 3. Case study from The Children's Society Birmingham
 4. Revised statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, DfE (2013), London: HM Government – subject to consultation as of June 2013
 5. Case Study from The Children's Society Keighley
 6. Case study from The Children's Society Birmingham
 7. Jennifer Jones, 'I am here today to talk to you about why young people run away', guest blog, The Children's Society Good Childhood Blog [Accessed 08/08/2013] <http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/news-views/our-blog/i-am-here-today-talk-you-about-why-young-people-run-away>
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 10. Make Runaways Safe: Launch report (2011) London: The Children's Society
 11. Make Runaways Safe, the local picture: Findings from Freedom of Information requests to local authorities, Local Safeguarding Children Boards and police constabularies (2012) London: The Children's Society
 12. Pona, I. (2013) Here to listen? Return interviews provision for young runaways, London: The Children's Society and Missing Children (2013) London: Ofsted
 13. Case Study from The Children's Society Salford

THE RUNAWAYS

has committed to:

Count

We have a clear picture of the numbers of all children running away or going missing from care or home in our area, and regularly analyse the data to look for trends and hotspots.

Think

We address the problems of identifying and responding to children who run away in key strategy documents, such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Local Safeguarding Children Board plans and other strategic plans for young people set out by the local authority.

Our Local Safeguarding Children Board has a set of protocols for preventing running away and dealing with incidents when they occur. There is a named person with responsibility for coordinating responses to runaways and missing children and young people.

We make sure that every professional who works to prevent repeated running away and responds to children and young people who run away, has a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities.

Act

We make available to children and young people, professionals, parents and carers, information on the risks of running away as well as information on 'safe places' where runaways can seek support.

Our agencies recognise that young people of 15, 16 and 17-years-old are not adults and should receive a response to keep them safe, just as younger children do.

Prevent

Our agencies work together and work with parents and carers to prevent repeat instances of running away.

We understand that running away is an indicator of need and requires appropriate responses from local agencies, including a police safe and well check and independent return interview. If a child runs away more than once there should be a presumption that they are at risk of significant harm which requires an appropriate response, such as a multi-agency risk management meeting.



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CHARTER



Be understanding, calm and relaxed with us

Don't automatically think we have been 'wasting your time' or have done something wrong. Children and young people can run away for a number of reasons, including abuse, neglect and grooming for child sexual exploitation. Young people are more likely to open up and allow you to help if you treat us with respect and understanding.

Help us trust you and don't judge us

We need a person that we can trust, that listens and doesn't judge - body language is important. It is important to develop trusting relationships - we might be in danger, but we may not feel able to tell you about it if we don't trust you to listen without judgment.

Be straightforward and honest with us

Where the law stops you from keeping things confidential, explain this to us and involve us in the process of sharing information. Be honest with us about what information you are sharing, why you are doing it and who you are sharing it with - we want to know what's being said and to whom.

Listen to us and take us seriously

Please listen to what we tell you and don't assume you know the facts about a situation until you have heard us. Support us when we come to you and talk about what is happening.

Explain things to us. Give us choices and don't force us into making decisions that we don't understand

Take the time to explain to us the reasons why we need to do certain things, such as attend school, rather than simply telling us that we have to. We need to understand the benefits of doing something, rather than simply being threatened with the consequences of not doing it.

Show us respect

If you need to cancel a meeting, tell us why and rearrange to see us.

children who run away from home

[natsayssafe.org.uk](https://www.natsayssafe.org.uk)

For every child.

If you're a councillor, please adopt the Runaways' Charter. To find out more about what this will do for your council, contact the campaigns team at campaigns@childrenssociety.org.uk, on **020 7841 4643** or at Campaigns Team, The Children's Society, Edward Rudolf House, Margery Street, London, WC1X 0JL

More ways to help

1. Join the campaign and share it with your networks
<http://action.makerunawayssafe.org.uk/page/s/petition>
2. Email your council and ask them to adopt the Runaways' Charter
<http://makerunawayssafe.org.uk/>
3. Join our Facebook group – www.facebook.com/childrenssociety
4. Spread the word on Twitter. Use **#makethemsafe** and ask your followers to sign

For further information about this report, please contact:

Natalie Williams, Policy officer

The Children's Society

Edward Rudolf House

Margery Street

London

WC1X 0JL

Email: policy@childrenssociety.org.uk

