Responding to Young Runaways: An Evaluation of 19 Projects, 2003 to 2004

Gwyther Rees, Myfanwy Franks, Phil Raws & Ros Medforth

The Children’s Society / University of York
Responding to Young Runaways:  
An Evaluation of 19 Projects, 
2003 to 2004

Gwyther Rees, Myfanwy Franks, Phil Raws
& Ros Medforth

The Children’s Society / University of York

The views expressed in this report are the authors’ and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education and Skills.

© The Children's Society 2005
ISBN 1 84478 456 8
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank staff in projects for their contribution to this evaluation – completing forms and questionnaires, participating in interviews, and facilitating contact with young people – on top of an already heavy workload.

We would also like to thank young people, parents and carers, and professionals in other agencies who contributed their views and experiences to the project.

Finally, we would like to thank the external academics who provided invaluable advice in developing an ethical framework for this evaluation.

The research team

The evaluation was conducted by a research team which was a partnership between The Children’s Society’s Research Unit and the Social Work Research & Development Unit at the University of York.

In addition to the authors, the following people contributed to this piece of work: Helen Gilchrist, Jo Horton, Karin Williamson, Claire Heathcote and Jean Siakeu.

Professor Mike Stein at the University of York was joint proposer for the evaluation and acted as research consultant throughout the project.
List of figures and tables

Figure 1: Key findings from *Still Running* ...............................................................2
Table 1: Description of the projects participating in the evaluation ........................................9
Table 2: Sources of referral (most recent referral of young person) ........................................15
Table 3: Extent of projects’ involvement with young people ................................................16
Table 4: Ages of young people at point of referral ............................................................17
Table 5: Young people’s situation at time of referral ..........................................................18
Table 6: Reasons for being away from home (current or most recent incident for young people who had run away, stayed away or been forced to leave) ..................................................18
Table 7: Living situation of young people (where known) ....................................................19
Table 8: Initial response to referrals (first referral of young person during evaluation period) ........21
Table 9: Extent of contact with young person in ongoing work ...........................................26
Table 10: Extent of contact with family and other carers in ongoing work ...............................26
Table 11: Extent of contact with other professionals in ongoing work ...................................27
Table 12: Reasons for end of contact with project ............................................................27
Table 13: Summary of tangible positive changes in different broad categories .......................30
Table 14: Categorisation of change in each case ...............................................................30
Executive summary

Introduction
• The issue of young people running away from home has received increased prominence in recent years. It is estimated that there are 129,000 incidents of running away overnight each year in the UK. Research has shown that young runaways can be at significant risk and there are also strong links between running away and a range of problems in young people’s lives at home, at school and in the community. A small practice base of projects working with this target group was developed primarily by the voluntary sector during the 1980s and 1990s.
• The growing recognition of the issue of running away led the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) to make young runaways one of its focus areas in 2001. The SEU undertook a national consultation exercise on the issue and, as a result, published a guidance document in 2002.
• Following the SEU’s work, the cross-governmental Children and Young People’s Unit (CYPU) funded a group of short-term development projects to test out a variety of responses to the issue of young runaways. The intention was to focus on those runaways who were most ‘at risk’.
• The initiative ran from January 2003 until June 2004 and included 27 different projects. Most of these projects undertook direct work with young people, whilst a small number were focused more at a strategic level.
• The CYPU commissioned a research team consisting of a partnership between The Children’s Society and the University of York to undertake an evaluation of the practice-based work with young people funded under the initiative. This evaluation looked at the work of 19 projects.
• The evaluation took a comparative approach – exploring which interventions were more effective with different sub-groups of the runaway population. The aim was to produce learning which would be of value in informing the future development of work with this target group.
• The main components of the evaluation were a monitoring system which gathered data in relation to work with over 1,400 young people in contact with the projects and 62 in-depth multi-perspective case studies.
• The term ‘young runaway’ has tended to be used to describe a variety of situations, including young people who are staying away from home without permission and young people who have been forced to leave home by parents or carers, as well as young people who have literally run away. The evaluation takes account of and explores these distinctions.

Overview of the young runaways projects
• The 19 projects covered by the evaluation were geographically dispersed throughout England. They were based in a diverse range of localities, although there was a relatively high concentration within urban areas.
• The projects were run by a range of organisations and partnerships. Eleven were based within the voluntary sector; four were partnerships between the voluntary sector and social services; two were solely social services initiatives; and the remaining two projects were based within a Connexions service and a youth offending team. Inter-agency working was in strong evidence in most cases.
• The intention of the funding stream was primarily to facilitate developments of additional work in existing projects rather than to establish new projects. Nine of the initiatives were based in established young runaways projects and a further seven were based in other established services working with young people (e.g. a youth offending team). Only three of the projects were entirely new.
• Funding for the initiatives (usually over a 15-month period) ranged from £20,000 to £100,000, so most of the initiatives were relatively small scale, often consisting of a single worker.
• The projects had a range of target groups, referral routes and models of working. Some aimed to work with all runaways in their area whilst others focused on specific ‘at risk’ groups such as young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Referral via police missing person reports was by far the most common access route. Most projects aimed for a relatively short-term crisis intervention
model of working with young people (and often their families). A few initiatives also related to provision of specific services including family work, out-of-hours telephone work and short-term emergency accommodation.

- As the initiative progressed some significant variations to the original project plans were necessary in a number of projects. This was due to delays in setting up the projects and recruiting staff, variations to the anticipated volume of referrals, and the longer-term nature of the needs of some of the young people worked with.

Contacting and engaging with young runaways

- The projects received referrals in relation to over 1,400 young people during the funded period. Direct contact was made with 42% of the young people referred and ongoing contact was established with 19% of young people referred.

- The majority of referrals (63%) were received through police missing person reports, and the next largest referral source (17%) was other agencies, most notably social services. Only 9% of referrals were from young people themselves, and the remaining 11% were from a variety of sources including family and friends.

- Comparisons with known characteristics of the young runaway population as a whole suggest that projects were more likely to receive referrals of older runaways, females, and young people who were defined as having ‘run away’ or ‘stayed away without permission’, compared to younger runaways, male runaways and those who had been forced to leave home. The relatively low proportion of referrals related to young people who had been forced to leave home appears to be attributable to the primary focus on the police missing person referral route – these young people are unlikely to be reported as missing. On the other hand this route was particularly successful at receiving referrals from younger runaways.

- The projects made initial contact with the young person or their parents/carers for just over half of all young people referred. Contact was less likely for police missing person referrals than for other referral routes. It was more likely than average for older young people, females, and those who had been forced to leave home. ‘Gate keeping’ by parents was identified as a key hindering factor to making contact with young people.

- There are some indications that young people in contact with the projects tended to have more extensive running away experiences (in terms of duration and frequency) than young runaways as a whole. This suggests that projects had some success in targeting young runaways who may be most ‘at risk’, as envisaged in the original aims of the initiative.

- Some patterns were also evident in terms of which young people went on to have further contact with projects after initial contact. Young people who had originally been referred by agencies (including police missing person referrals) were less likely to have ongoing contact than young people who had self-referred or been referred through other informal routes. There was also some evidence that a rapid response to the initial referral enhanced the likelihood of ongoing contact. Some of the filtering at this stage was intentional as a result of efforts to target the services at those young runaways most at risk. However the primary reason for lack of ongoing work appears to be that young people declined further contact.

Achieving change

- The projects identified a range of positive changes across a number of broad categories. The main focus of their work was on the underlying issues – problems with family, in care, at school, and in other areas of young people’s lives – which were contributing to their running away. The projects appear to have been able to achieve substantial positive change in 42% of cases where they carried out ongoing work with young people.

- The projects appear to have achieved the most substantial change with first-time runaways and with runaways who had been away from home longer. Achievement of change tended to be less likely with young people who were categorised as having ‘stayed away without permission’ in comparison with those who had ‘run away’ or had been ‘thrown out’. This finding points to some potential differences in working with young people who spend time away from home for different reasons.
• There was also some evidence that characteristics and contexts had some bearing on the likelihood of achieving change. Change was more likely to be achieved with older runaways in comparison with younger runaways. The presence of other issues in young people’s lives such as problems at school and risk of sexual exploitation tended to militate against the achievement of change.

• A number of key factors in relation to the young person, their family and other agencies were viewed by project staff as hindering the achievement of change. Most significant amongst these were factors related to young people’s willingness and ability to engage. These, in turn, were linked to contextual factors such as the type of absence. These contexts and factors affected the likelihood of planned completion of the work and thus of positive change being achieved.

Working with particular groups of young runaways

A more detailed exploration of the work with different groups of young people according to the nature and history of their running away reveals some important patterns in relation to achieving change:

• Through using a short-term crisis intervention model the projects were most able to achieve positive change with young people who were running away or staying away for the first time.

• There was also a substantial amount of success in working with young people who were defined as ‘running away’ repeatedly, but notably less success with those who were repeatedly away from home and were defined as ‘staying away’. There were substantial barriers to maintaining ongoing engagement with this latter group of young people, even though there were often grounds for concern about their safety and well-being both at home and whilst they were away.

• In terms of young people who were forced to leave home, projects achieved substantial change for those aged 16 and over. The evaluation suggests that achieving positive change was more difficult with young people under the age of 16 who had been forced to leave home. The lack of accommodation options and available services for this group of young people (mostly aged 14 or 15) meant that it was sometimes impossible to resolve the issues they faced.

An exploration of work with four sub-groups of young runaways who might be defined as most ‘at risk’ also highlighted important variations in the achievement of positive change:

• For ‘looked after’ young people, younger runaways, and Black and minority ethnic young people there was evidence that projects had been able to achieve substantial amounts of positive change. This had, however, required a context-specific approach using a range of creative ways of making contact with young people and engaging in medium- to long-term work with them.

• For young people at risk of sexual exploitation, achievement of positive change was not generally high, but projects had had notable success in engaging these young people in ongoing work which might in the long term lead to significant outcomes.

• There is a need to further explore the concept of risk for young runaways to ensure that targeted work aimed at ‘at risk’ young runaways is inclusive and reaches the diverse range of young people who might fall into this category.

General feedback on learning from practice

Overview perspectives on the projects provided by staff and external professionals at the end of the funding period highlighted some important learning points in terms of the setting up and initial development of young runaways projects:

• Staff identified the short time scale as a major challenge and this was particularly true for those projects which did not already have an established practice base with young runaways. It was felt that a two-year period would have offered a more realistic time scale.

• The projects drew attention to the importance of strong relationships and established protocols with other agencies and to the resources required to make this happen.

• Projects also commented on difficulties in promoting the services and generating referrals. In some areas considerable obstacles were experienced in receiving police missing person referrals; and in general projects were disappointed about the low level of self-referrals from young people.
• Despite these teething problems the projects were generally viewed by external professionals as having fitted in well to, and often filling a gap in, the existing network of local services. They were seen as having had a tangible impact on the local situation in addition to the direct work with young people.

A number of key issues for future practice development were also identified by project staff and external practitioners:

• There was a high degree of consensus amongst projects about the importance of a rapid response to referrals. In addition, in general, early interventions with young runaways before problems became engrained were seen as a key to effective practice.

• The need for a balance between ‘young-person-centredness’ and working effectively with parents and carers was seen as a key issue for runaways projects.

• The lack of emergency accommodation for under-16-year-olds in most areas and the difficulties that this created particularly in working with 14- and 15-year-olds was highlighted.

• Finally, there was considerable debate about the extent to which it is important that runaways projects are independent, with a tendency towards the view that perceived independence from statutory services was an important ingredient in engaging successfully with young runaways.

Conclusions

In summary the evaluation has highlighted a number of important issues to be considered in developing future practice with young runaways:

• Generating referrals is a major challenge. The police missing person referral route has strengths in reaching a wide range of young runaways, and in particular younger runaways. However there is a need for a wider range of access methods, including outreach work and promotion of direct access by young people, to ensure that projects are accessible to the diverse group of young people who have running away experiences.

• The evaluation has highlighted gate keeping by parents as a potentially significant obstacle to engaging with young people and careful consideration needs to be given in any future developments to ways of tackling this issue without alienating parents.

• Young people’s own willingness to engage has also been shown to be a key issue, particularly for young people defined as ‘staying away’ and young people who are ‘looked after’. There are some early indications of successful practice models with the latter group, but the best means of engaging with the former group requires further exploration.

• A rapid response short-term crisis intervention model seems particularly suited to engaging and achieving change with first-time runaways and can play an important early preventative role. With other groups such as repetitive runaways and some of the high risk groups, a much more long-term approach may be required and this has substantial resource implications.

• Whilst the initiative did incorporate a range of projects, there is still a need for more piloting of practice models in rural areas and with particular ‘at risk’ groups. Linked to the last point a fuller conceptualisation of risk in relation to runaways is required.

• In broader terms, the importance of runaways projects becoming successfully integrated into the local service network for children and young people, whilst retaining perceived independence is an important message for future development.

In conclusion the evaluation highlights three broad themes which are relevant to wider social policy debates in relation to children and young people:

• First, the evaluation has emphasised the importance of early intervention. Running away is a signal that something may be seriously wrong and should trigger a prompt short-term crisis intervention with young people and families. This has the potential to prevent further running away incidents which are known to be associated with more far-reaching problems in other areas of young people’s lives.

• Second, runaways projects have demonstrated the ability to engage with a group of mostly older runaways who were at risk of long-term social exclusion. In particular contexts, the projects had
some success with these ‘youth at risk’, but there were also indications of a sub-group of young runaways who are slipping through the net, and this is an area which warrants more attention.

• Finally, the evaluation has once again confirmed the importance of inter-agency working. Relationships between runaways initiatives, social services and the police have been relatively well explored and have often been clarified through the development of protocols at a local level. There is room for further exploration of the value that a link between schools and runaways projects might have in identifying and tackling the issue of young runaways.
Chapter 1: Introduction

This report is the outcome of an evaluation of the development work of a set of 19 young runaways projects, funded by the cross government Children and Young People’s Unit (CYPU), which operated between January 2003 and June 2004 throughout England. The evaluation monitored the direct work with children, young people and families undertaken by the projects, and also involved interviews with young people, parents and carers, project staff, and professionals in other agencies.

In broad terms, the aim of the evaluation was to explore ‘what works with which young runaways in which contexts?’. It is envisaged that the findings will be of interest to a range of policy-makers, senior managers and practitioners who work with children and young people, as well as to those working specifically with young runaways.

This brief introductory chapter discusses definitional issues, describes the historical background and context to the study, and the aims and methodology of the evaluation.

1.1 What is running away?

The term ‘running away’ has come to be used in the UK to refer to young people who have either chosen to leave home, are staying away from home without parental permission, or have been forced to leave by parents or carers. The term ‘runaway’ is also often used to encompass all the above situations. Generally, but not always, ‘running away’ is used to refer to incidents where the young person spent at least one night away from home. There is some ambiguity about age limits, and inconsistency about whether the upper limit is 15 or 17 years of age. Young people aged 16 and over who are away from home may also fall into the ‘youth homelessness’ category.

It is also important to clarify from the outset the distinction between ‘running away’ and ‘going missing’. Many young runaways are reported by parents and carers as missing to the police, but many are not. In a recent survey in South Yorkshire (Smeaton & Rees, 2004) 65% of young runaways stated that their most recent incident of being away had not been reported to the police and a further 13% were not sure. In addition, many young people who are reported as missing do not fit the above definitions of runaways – for example, young children who are lost, and young people who are routinely reported as missing when they are late returning to children’s homes. Thus, whilst there is clearly considerable overlap, the terms ‘running away’ and ‘going missing’ are not interchangeable.

A list of the meaning of terms as used in this report is as follows:

- The term ‘young people’ refers to all people under the age of 18 years old unless otherwise qualified. The term ‘children and young people’ is also occasionally used for extra clarity and has the same meaning as ‘young people’.
- Where the term ‘runaway’ is used as a single word this relates to all young people who spend time away from home, including the three main groups identified below.
- ‘Running away’ refers to young people who took the decision to leave their home.
- ‘Staying away’ or ‘Staying away without permission’ refers to young people who were away from home when they took the decision not to return as expected.
- ‘Thrown out’ refers to young people who were forced to leave home by parents or carers.
- The term ‘reported missing’ relates to young people who are reported as missing to the police by parents or carers.

1 The CYPU ceased to exist in December 2003. Responsibility for ongoing programmes such as the Young Runaways projects transferred over to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) at this time.
1.2 Background

The recent history of working with young runaways in the UK stretches back to 1985 when The Children’s Society, with the support of social services, the police and other voluntary organisations, opened the first refuge for young people under the age of 16 away from home – the Central London Teenage Project (CLTP). At the time, provision of refuge to this age group was potentially open to legal challenge by parents or carers. However, Section 51 of the Children Act 1989 subsequently made it possible to obtain a certificate to offer refuge to young people without parental consent for up to 14 days. By the time that Section 51 came into force in October 1991 The Children’s Society was operating a further three refuges in Bournemouth, Leeds and Newport (Gwent), and also two projects working with young people on the streets in Birmingham and Manchester.

These practice and legal developments went hand in hand with two early research studies (Newman, 1989; Abrahams & Mungall, 1992) which estimated, on the basis of police missing person reports, that there were in the region of 100,000 missing incidents involving young people under the age of 18 per year in the UK. It was recognised that this probably did not reflect the whole picture as some running away incidents might not be reported.

During the 1990s there were further practice developments. NSPCC and Centrepoint opened a new refuge in London (following the closure of CLTP). This project is still in existence and is currently the only refuge in operation in England. At this time also the ASTRA Project was established in Gloucester to provide independent interviews to young people who had been reported as missing to the police.

Five further research reports were also published during the decade. Rees (1993) was the first study to gather information about running away directly from a representative sample of young people. The key finding was that as many as one in seven young people in Leeds had been away from home (run away or thrown out) overnight before the age of 16. Stein, Rees & Frost (1994) examined the work of four projects working with young runaways, and highlighted the fact that some young people – termed ‘detached’ young people - under the age of 16 spent continuous periods of up to six months away from legitimate carers. Barter (1996) reported on young people staying at the NSPCC / Centrepoint refuge in London. The Department of Health commissioned a major research study into the issue of young people going missing from children’s homes (Wade et al, 1998). Finally, 1999 saw the publication of the first representative national research on running away (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999), surveying 13,000 young people, and interviewing over 200 young people with experience of being away from home (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Key findings from Still Running

- There are an estimated 129,000 incidents of running away overnight in the UK each year
- 77,000 young people run away for the first time each year
- Females are more likely to run away than males
- Most young runaways are teenagers, but around a quarter first run away before the age of 11
- There are significant differences in running away rates according to ethnicity – young people from minority backgrounds are less likely to run away than white young people
- There are also large differences according to family structure – young people living in stepfamilies are most likely to have run away and those living with both birth parents least likely
- Runaways come from a wide range of social backgrounds and there is no strong direct link between economic indicators and running away
- Around a quarter of young runaways sleep rough and one in seven are hurt or harmed whilst away from home

---

2 For a more detailed account of the history of work with young runaways up to 2001, together with a discussion of practice models, see Rees (2001)
The interest generated by the above developments prompted the Social Exclusion Unit to turn its attention to the issue of young runaways. An initial report, drawing findings from the existing research (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001) was followed by a major consultation exercise. This in turn led to a second publication which made recommendations for a policy and practice framework to meet the needs of young runaways (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

Following the publication of this latter report the CYPU announced funding for a set of development projects to work with young runaways. The intention was to provide short-term opportunities to pilot a range of innovative responses. This resulted in the setting up of 20 short-term (12 to 15 months) projects working directly with young people, as well as seven other initiatives not involving direct practice. The CYPU also funded the national evaluation described in this report, which focuses on 19 of the above projects. This initiative is the most substantial single investment in services for runaways in the UK to date. The 19 projects received almost 2,000 referrals in relation to over 1,400 young runaways. It offers a unique opportunity to compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of different models of access and service delivery. These models are described in Chapter 2.

It is important to note that this initiative was launched before publication of the Every Child Matters Green Paper and the subsequent development of an outcomes framework (HM Government, 2004). In relation to this framework, the issue of running away relates most closely to the ‘stay safe’ outcome.

1.3 The evaluation

1.3.1 Aims
The broad aims of the evaluation were to explore the fit between particular kinds of interventions and particular categories of runaways, focusing on two broad themes:

1. Which young people (in which circumstances) are likely to make contact and have a substantial engagement with the different kinds of services.

2. With which young people (in which circumstances) are different kinds of interventions likely to achieve significant outcomes.

The evaluation aims to ensure that the learning from the pilot projects is maximised. By exploring the question of which particular kinds of interventions are better suited to working with different young people in different contexts, it aims to offer a picture of the range of services which might be required to meet the diverse needs of young people within the target group, and the ways in which these might work together to provide a comprehensive and coherent safety net.

The evaluation methodology was primarily concerned with operational messages but, as discussed in the final chapter of this report, has also generated some broader strategic messages, particularly in relation to older young people experiencing multiple problems in their lives.

1.3.2 Methodology
The evaluation is based on realist evaluation principles. This methodology aims to go beyond the question of ‘what works?’ and to explore the issue of ‘what works with which people in which contexts?’. The purpose of this is to build an understanding of context into the evaluation and hence to clarify the extent to which services which are successful in one location with one group of young people might be transferable to other settings. The theoretical aspects of this approach are covered in Pawson & Tilley (1997) and Kazi (2000). Kazi (2003) provides some examples of the application of this approach to the evaluation of individual projects.

A realist evaluation focuses on three key concepts: contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. For the purposes of this evaluation we have used these concepts in the following ways. ‘Context’ is seen as relating to young people’s situations at the point of initial contact with the project, and to historical events and issues. ‘Mechanisms’ refers to project interventions and also to other factors (hindering and enabling) which impact on the context during the intervention. ‘Outcomes’ relates to identifiable

---

3 One project effectively did not participate in the evaluation.
changes following the intervention. A key focus of realist evaluation is to explore the way in which outcomes are affected by different configurations of contexts and mechanisms.

1.3.3 Methods of data collection

The two core elements of the evaluation were the monitoring of all direct work and a sample of in-depth case studies.

Monitoring

The monitoring system gathered standardised information from all projects through four instruments: a referral form, an initial contact form, a profiling form, and an end of contact form. The first was completed on every occasion a young person was referred to a project. The second and third forms were completed at the point of initial contact with young people and/or their parents/carers. The ‘end of contact’ form was completed at the conclusion of work with a young person, or at the end of the evaluation period for work which was still in progress.

Projects had the option to record and return information in a variety of ways – electronically through a customised database or spreadsheet provided by the evaluation team, or on paper. Identical information was gathered in each format. All in all, the final monitoring data set covers over 1,400 young people referred to projects. More details are provided in Chapter 3.

Case studies

To explore the work of the projects in more depth, detailed case study work was undertaken with a sample of cases. The case studies involved gathering information from young people and project staff and (where relevant, possible and ethical) from parents, carers and professionals in other organisations. Information was gathered through audio-recorded interviews (face-to-face and telephone) and self-completion questionnaires. The first stage of information gathering took place at the end of a substantial piece of work with a young person. A second stage of information gathering followed three months later when attempts were made to contact those who participated at the first stage. An ethical policy was developed for the case study component through consultation with a number of experts in social research with young people.

The initial intention was to gather a purposively selected sample of cases from the projects. However, this was not possible for a number of practical reasons. First, there were delays in the implementation of practice in many projects which meant that there were relatively few completed pieces of work which could become case studies until quite late in the evaluation period. Second, there were fewer substantial pieces of work than anticipated when the methodology was designed. Thus the potential sample of cases was smaller than expected and so ultimately all young people who consented to participate were included in the sample. Fortunately the resulting sample was quite diverse and in most respects represented a reasonable spread of young people in comparison with the young people in contact with the projects.

The final sample relates to 62 cases of work with young people. In all these cases the young person and a member of project staff participated at stage one, and in more than half the cases (32) a third perspective was also gathered from a parent/carer and/or an external professional. In many cases there were ethical barriers to gathering a third perspective, including young people not consenting to this, and in addition a number of parents and professionals were approached but did not respond.

There were substantial difficulties in following up young people. Where practically and ethically possible, an attempt was made to contact young people three months after the end of their involvement with the project. In some cases (for example, where previous contact had been via a mobile phone number that was no longer operational) it was not possible to make contact at all. In other cases there was no response to mailed questionnaires. Finally the slippage in the time scales for service delivery noted above meant that in some cases follow-up was not possible because the first stage took place very close to the end of the data collection period. The follow-up data collection included 18 young people and in 10 cases, where relevant, further information was also gathered from project staff. This proportion of follow-up cases meant that it was not possible to integrate this data systematically in the case study analysis. However the follow-up information has been used as supplementary information in some of the case studies presented in Chapter 5.
Other information-gathering

The evaluation also included a range of other information gathering. Project visits were conducted at
the beginning and end of the evaluation period. The initial visit involved a discussion with project staff
about the aims and planned methods of working of the project, and also an exploration of the thinking
that underpinned the proposed work. The second visit at the end of the period included interviews
with as many staff as possible to gather ‘learning from practice’ perspectives. During the course of the
evaluation there were also three events (two national and one in regions) where the evaluators met
project staff to discuss the evaluation. The last of these, in July 2004, included a presentation of
interim findings of the evaluation and the gathering of feedback from staff.

At the end of the evaluation period projects were asked to provide details of key professionals in their
local areas who would be in a position to give an overall external perspective on the projects. As a
result of this a questionnaire was sent to 104 professionals in 15 areas. The response rate to this
survey was 51%.

1.3.4 Analysis

The monitoring data was initially compiled and cleaned in Microsoft Access and then transferred to
SPSS for analysis. The main statistical techniques used were bivariate analysis using chi-square,
Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis and correlation (Kendall’s tau-b) tests. Unless otherwise stated, the
usage of terms to describe results is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly significant</th>
<th>p-value &lt;= 0.01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>p-value &gt;0.01 and &lt;= 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginally significant</td>
<td>p-value &gt;0.05 and &lt;=0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case study data was summarised directly from audio-recordings and paper questionnaires and then
analysed using a customised Microsoft Access database reflecting the analytical framework used for
the research. Thus, the material was organised and summarised thematically across two dimensions.
The first dimension related to chronology and to the key components of the realist approach as
follows: historical context; context at the beginning of the project intervention; events and changes to
context during the intervention; project interventions; enabling factors during the intervention;
hindering factors during the intervention; context at the end of the project intervention; identified
outcomes of the project intervention. The second dimension related to different thematic areas in
young people’s lives as follows: self, living situation; family / carers; other people; education and
training; running away; other problems / issues; the project; and other agencies.

This approach enabled qualitative analysis both within individual cases and across cases for the whole
sample (see Chapter 4), and for specific sub-groups within the sample (see Chapter 5) using matrix
analysis techniques as described in Miles and Huberman (1994).

1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report consists of six chapters:

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the projects included in the evaluation. It describes the origins and
contexts of each local initiative; the projects’ aims, target groups and models of intervention; and other
key information such as resources, staffing and inter-agency working. It also provides a typology of
the initiatives and discusses some of the ways in which projects had to modify their original plans as
they developed.

Chapter 3 looks at patterns of access and engagement. It explores the question of which young
people (in which circumstances) are likely to make contact and have a substantial engagement with
the different kinds of services. The monitoring data is analysed to look at the ways in which different
referral routes and different means of making contact with young people can affect the profile of young
runaways worked with.

Chapter 4 focuses on the ongoing case work done by the projects with young people. It provides
details on the nature and extent of the project’s interventions, explores the extent to which projects
were successful in achieving positive change in young people’s lives, and identifies some of the
factors which helped or hindered the achievement of change.
Chapter 5 builds on the previous two chapters by looking in more detail at the projects' work with particular sub-groups of young people such as younger runaways, young people who are forced to leave home, and young runaways from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. It explores the characteristics of successful interventions with young people in these different groups, and identifies specific barriers to achieving change.

Chapter 6 summarises some more general learning from the projects based on the perspectives of project staff and professionals in other agencies which were gathered at the end of the evaluation period. It looks at some of the issues encountered in setting up and developing the projects, and some of the solutions found to these issues. It also discusses some of the learning about models of working with young people and families and contains suggestions for the future development of practice with young runaways.

Chapter 7 summarises the key points from previous chapters, draws out the implications for future practice with young runaways, and also discusses the relevance of learning from this evaluation for the broader development of policy and practice with young people.
Chapter 2: Overview of the young runaways projects

The young runaway projects on which the evaluation focuses represent a diverse range of practice models and geographical locations. In this chapter we provide an overview of the 19 projects participating in the evaluation, covering target groups, referral routes, models of service delivery and organisational issues. We focus initially on the original plans and then towards the end of the chapter describe some of the ways in which final service delivery varied from the original plan.

An overview summary of the projects including their name, lead organisation, location, target group, referral route and model of delivery is provided in Table 1.

2.1 Origins and context of initiatives

The young runaways development funding initiative was short-term and required a fairly quick start. Funding decisions were announced in late 2002 and early 2003 and projects were expected to start by April 2003 and end in March 2004. For this reason, the preference was for initiatives which could be attached to existing projects or services. Of the 19 projects, nine were based in established runaways projects and a further seven were based in other established services already working with young people. Only three initiatives (Sunderland, Hull and Dorset) were entirely new.

It should be noted that whilst a few of the initiatives were completely funded by the CYPU, most projects also had other funding sources. In these cases, it was not always practically possible to look at the funded work in isolation and so the data set for the evaluation includes some work which was not wholly funded by the CYPU.

The organisations that received funding to run services for young runaways included:

- Two projects (Sunderland and Bradford Crisis Care) were developed solely by local social services departments.
- Four projects (Hull, Lancashire, Manchester and Camden) were partnerships between social services departments and national voluntary organisations.
- Four projects (Leeds, Bradford, Bristol and Torquay) were developed solely by national voluntary organisations.
- Seven projects (Derby, Nottingham, Gloucester (two separate initiatives), Dorset, Central London and London Refuge) were local projects primarily based in the voluntary sector.
- One project (Coventry) was developed by Connexions.
- One project (Enfield) was developed by a Youth Offending Team.

2.2 Inter-agency working

Whether projects were individually or jointly managed, there was usually a strong element of inter-agency working. Many projects had management or advisory groups consisting of representatives from the statutory and the voluntary sectors. Many projects also already had in place, or developed during the course of the work, protocols with other agencies in relation to referrals (in both directions) and partnership working. There was therefore generally a strong level of integration into the existing frameworks of local services for children and young people.

2.3 Resources and staffing

The amounts of funding from the CYPU for the initiatives over a twelve month period ranged from less than £20,000 to around £100,000. Thus most of the initiatives were relatively small scale, some consisting of one half-time practitioner plus management and running costs. Only a few of the larger initiatives involved the equivalent of more than one full-time practitioner.

\(^4\) As explained in the introduction the funding stream included a total of 27 separate initiatives. The evaluation only focused on the twenty projects which undertook direct work with individual children and young people. One of these projects did not participate in the evaluation.
2.4 Target groups

One of the key themes of the Social Exclusion Unit report (SEU, 2002) which prompted this initiative was a focus on those young runaways who were most ‘at risk’. Thus there was an emphasis, in the funding initiative at targeting ‘at risk’ groups. However, the conceptualisation of risk varied between one initiative and another. Some projects accepted referrals from all young runaways within a specific geographical area, although in some of these cases there was targeted filtering at the referral stage. Other projects targeted specific sub-groups of the runaway population. In three cases there was a focus on young people at risk of sexual exploitation, and in two cases all or part of the initiative focused on ‘looked after’ young people. Other ‘risk’ groups identified included repetitive runaways and runaways from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. There was also some variation in target age ranges with some projects focusing specifically on younger runaways, and others having a variety of lower and upper age limits as shown in Table 1. The Bradford/Kirklees project only worked with males, and the Camden project only worked with females. Finally it should be noted that some projects also included in their target group young people who were deemed ‘at risk of running away or being thrown out’, thus introducing an element of preventative work.

Thus there was considerable diversity in the projects’ intended target groups and this presents both opportunities and challenges from an analytical perspective.

2.5 Referral and access routes

In terms of access routes, some projects relied solely on one source of referral whilst others accepted referrals from a range of sources.

For a majority of initiatives, the sole or primary route for referrals was via Police missing person reports (often called ‘Misper’ referrals). The exact means of contacting young people through this route varied between projects. Some projects attempted to make contact with young people by ‘cold calling’ at their home. Others attempted to make direct contact with young people in other settings (e.g. at school). Finally, some projects wrote letters to the young person’s home giving advanced warning of a proposed visit with the option for parents or carers to cancel the appointment. Whichever method was used, the intention of projects using this referral route was generally to provide a ‘return home’ interview as soon as possible after the end of the reported incident.

Most projects also accepted referrals from other agencies, and project proposals often specifically included mention of social services as a key referral source. Some projects also accepted referrals from informal sources such as family or friends. Finally, some of the projects either explicitly accepted self-referrals by young people, or sought to engage with young people through outreach work or the provision of drop-in facilities. These alternative routes clearly provided different challenges in terms of ensuring that referrals were consistent with the intended project target group.

2.6 Models of intervention

The majority of projects planned to focus primarily on a short-term crisis intervention model of working. This model had previously been utilised in a number of runaways projects. The project proposals often specified the intended extent of intervention as being up to six face-to-face contacts. However within this broad description a range of interventions are in evidence with considerable diversity between projects, and between work with different young people within projects.

One particularly notable difference was the extent to which projects intended to engage with the families of young runaways. Some projects adopted a ‘young person-centred’ approach to their work, only engaging with parents and carers in consultation with young people and acting as their advocates. Others explicitly planned to engage with the whole family from the outset.
Table 1: Description of the projects participating in the evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Referral route</th>
<th>Model of delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signpost</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Sunderland SSD</td>
<td>Sunderland</td>
<td>Under 16s who have run away or been reported missing</td>
<td>Misper and youth work referrals</td>
<td>Outreach work and mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Choices</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Hull SSD / Barnardo’s</td>
<td>Hull</td>
<td>Runaways under 16s who are assessed as vulnerable / regularly go missing</td>
<td>Misper and SSD referrals</td>
<td>Intensive one-to-one support, sometimes long term; group work; practical facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAX</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>The Children’s Society</td>
<td>Leeds</td>
<td>Under 16s who have run away or are at risk of running</td>
<td>Primarily Misper referrals</td>
<td>One-to-one support and advocacy; strategy meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing in Yorkshire</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Barnardo’s</td>
<td>Bradford &amp; Kirklees</td>
<td>Male runaways under 17</td>
<td>Primarily Misper referrals</td>
<td>Short-term work with young people and families; mediation; befriending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradford Crisis Care</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Bradford SSD</td>
<td>Bradford</td>
<td>Under 17s going missing from home or care</td>
<td>Misper and SSD referrals</td>
<td>48-hour emergency foster care provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire Young Runaways Project</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>The Children’s Society / Lancashire SSD</td>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>Young people ‘looked after’ or on the verge of being</td>
<td>Misper and family link workers</td>
<td>Intensive short-term intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe on our Streets</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>The Children’s Society / Manchester SSD</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>A number of ‘at risk’ groups of young runaways</td>
<td>Any, including Misper</td>
<td>Independent interviews and follow-up work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derby Runaways Project</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Derby Runaways Project</td>
<td>Derby</td>
<td>Under 18s running away or at risk</td>
<td>Any, including Miper</td>
<td>Short-term intervention primarily focusing on young person; longer term work if required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base 51</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Base 51</td>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>‘Entrenched’ under 18 runaways with complex issues</td>
<td>Drop-in and parents</td>
<td>Individual support through outreach and centre-based work and home visits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued): Description of the projects participating in the evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Referral route</th>
<th>Model of delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ReUnite 2</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Coventry Connexions</td>
<td>Coventry</td>
<td>Runaways aged 13 to 16 who are most ‘at risk’</td>
<td>Misper and Connexions</td>
<td>Rapid response; Personal Advisor working with young person and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASTRA</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>ASTRA</td>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>Under 18s running away or at risk</td>
<td>Telephone service</td>
<td>Out-of-hours service for young people and carers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASTRA</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>ASTRA</td>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>Under 18s running away or at risk</td>
<td>Mainly internal referral</td>
<td>Family work to supplement work with young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASE Missing Children’s Initiative</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Barnardo's</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>‘At risk’ young runaways aged 12 to 17</td>
<td>Any, including Misper</td>
<td>Initial rapid response interview and short-term intervention where required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Coast Runaways Initiative</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>The Children’s Society</td>
<td>Torquay</td>
<td>Under 18 young runaways with specific target on under 13s and those most ‘at risk’</td>
<td>Any, including self referral at drop-in</td>
<td>Independent interviews; crisis and longer-term interventions; mediation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Run</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Dorset Rural Runaways Project</td>
<td>Dorset</td>
<td>Under 18s who have run away in rural Dorset</td>
<td>Any, including Misper</td>
<td>One-to-one intensive support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enfield Young Runaways Project</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Enfield Youth Offending Team</td>
<td>Enfield</td>
<td>Young runaways under 18 who have run away more than once or have stayed away overnight</td>
<td>Misper</td>
<td>Initial interview and short-term crisis intervention work with young people and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Runaways at Risk of Sexual Exploitation Project</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Camden SSD / Barnardo’s</td>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>Female runaways aged 10 to 16 at risk of sexual exploitation</td>
<td>Misper and other agencies</td>
<td>Initial interview, assessment and longer-term intervention where appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection at St. Martin’s</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Connection at St. Martin’s</td>
<td>Central London</td>
<td>Under 18s homeless in central London</td>
<td>Outreach and drop-in</td>
<td>Short-term intervention aimed at safely moving young people out of area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Refuge Family Support Work</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>St. Christopher’s Fellowship</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>10- to 16-year old runaways leaving the refuge</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Family work aimed at reducing number of young people returning to refuge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Apart from when the plan was specifically for out-of-hours work (two projects), the services were not generally available outside normal office hours. One project had project workers available outside hours by mobile phone with the intention that a brief conversation might prevent the need to run away.

In practice the short-term crisis intervention model was extended into longer term support work in many cases. This was particularly true in some projects working with specific groups of young people, including young South Asian women and sexually exploited young women. The reasons for this are discussed further in Chapter 5, sections 5.2.2 and 5.2.4. This longer-term nature of the work was not planned but developed through the pilot work.

There were also different models of intervention based on location. This took the form of assessment and diversion, finding the young people accommodation or returning them to the areas they came from. For instance the aim of Connection at St. Martin’s, based in the West End was to divert under 16s as quickly as possible away from the vicinity where they were deemed to be most at risk and to engage them with agencies in safer areas.

Three agencies only engaged in street-work or outreach and three projects had drop-in services written into their plans.

The majority of projects only did one-to-one work, but a few also offered group work on site. Group work was provided in three projects which worked with particular groups of isolated young people, including south Asian young runaways and boys at risk of sexual exploitation. Some other projects engaged in group work in schools or children’s homes as part of their preventative work.

Five projects offered young runaways independent interviews on their return home or to a children’s home in order to assess the reasons for their running away. This would take place at different lengths of time after the actual return depending on the project.

Not many projects offered counselling per se although some said they used counselling skills in their interventions.

Finally, there was often also an emphasis on preventative work along with safety work, both in terms of finding a safe place and offering safety advice and information in order to reduce risks.

The discussion above relates to the majority of initiatives which aimed to undertake case work with young runaways (and often their families). Four of the funded initiatives (two in Gloucester, one in Bradford, and the London Refuge initiative) do not fit into this category however. These initiatives provided family work, out-of-hours access and short-term accommodation (see below).

### 2.7 Aims of the initiatives

The aims of the initiatives were expressed in the original proposals for funding in quite diverse ways. However some key common themes were:

1. To reduce repeat running away incidents (explicit or implicit in this was resolution of the problems leading to young people running away and/or finding a safe alternative place to live)
2. To raise young people’s awareness of risk and enhance their safety
3. To enable young people to gain access to other services that could offer ongoing support

Other aims included:

4. Empowering young people to make alternative positive lifestyle choices by offering information and advocacy, and by improving self confidence and self-esteem
5. Offering emotional and practical support to young people who have run away
6. Providing a more co-ordinated response across agencies to the needs of young runaways

### 2.8 Typology of initiatives

For the purposes of this report it is helpful to categorise the initiatives into groups according to differences in target groups, referral routes, and models of intervention. Some projects had several strands to their work which fall into the different categories below.
Group A: Universal referral-based projects
These six ‘universal’ initiatives were ones which were not targeted at specific sub-groups of young runaways and, in principle, would work with all young runaways referred to them. Within this group three of the projects (Bradford/Kirklees, Enfield and Leeds) were entirely or almost entirely focused on police missing person referrals. The other three (Gloucester, Derby and Coventry) accepted referrals from a wider range of sources.

Group B: Targeted referral-based projects
The six initiatives in this second group differ from ‘universal’ projects in that they had explicit target sub-groups within the overall runaway population. There are two main sub-groups here.
1. The Camden, Bristol and Hull projects aimed to work with young people deemed to be at ‘high risk’ with a focus on risk of sexual exploitation. Police missing person reports were a primary referral source for these projects, although two of them did also accept referrals from some other sources.
2. The Lancashire initiative, and parts of the Manchester and Torquay initiatives, were focused on ‘looked after’ young people. Again these initiatives (or parts of) had a fairly restricted set of referral sources, primarily relying on the police missing person reports and referrals from carers.

The Manchester project also had several other target groups: Black and minority ethnic young people, younger runaways, and repetitive runaways. A part of the Torquay initiative was also focused on younger runaways.

Group C: Direct access projects
Three initiatives aimed to engage directly with young people through outreach and drop-in provision. These were Connection at St. Martin’s (Central London), Nottingham and part of the Torquay initiative.

Group D: Other models of intervention
Finally, four initiatives had specific models of intervention which set them apart and warrant individual attention.

The ASTRA Project in Gloucester gained funding for two of these initiatives – one providing out-of-hours access to young runaways, and another to employ a family worker to engage with the parents and carers of young runaways. These were both supplements to an existing well-established universal runaways service.

The London Refuge also gained funding for family work specifically with the parents and carers of young people who had left the refuge.

Finally, Bradford Crisis Care operated a 48-hour emergency accommodation model.

Because these models were so specific it is not appropriate or practical to include them in much of the overview analysis presented in the next three chapters. However, summaries of some key learning points from the initiatives are to be found towards the end of Chapter 6.

2.9 Variations to the original plans
We will discuss issues of project development in detail in Chapter 6. However, it is worth noting at this point that not all the initiatives developed in the way anticipated in the original plans. In particular there were four key areas of variation.

First, there were substantial delays to the planned time scales in a number of projects. As a consequence, plans had to be changed and three projects were granted an extended time scale of three months to the end of June 2004.

Second, not all the anticipated referral routes bore fruit and this led some projects to work with lower than expected numbers of young people or to modify their referral processes.

Third, some of the projects accepting police missing person referrals received very high numbers of referrals and this necessitated adapting the ways in which referrals were dealt with.
Finally, some of the projects working with ‘at risk’ groups of young runaways found that it was not possible to operate a short-term model of intervention and ended up being engaged with young people for quite lengthy periods of time.

These issues are covered in more detail later in the report.

2.10 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the work of the projects funded by the initiative.

- The projects were run by a range of organisations and partnerships, and inter-agency working was in strong evidence in most cases.
- Most of the initiatives were relatively small, consisting of a single worker (sometimes part-time) plus management.
- The projects had a range of target groups. Some were universal runaways projects whilst some were focused on specific ‘at risk’ groups.
- There were also a range of referral routes, but referral via police missing person reports was by far the most common.
- Most projects aimed for a relatively short-term crisis intervention model of working with young people (and often their families). A few initiatives also related to provision of specific services including family work, out-of-hours telephone work and short-term emergency accommodation.
- Some significant variations to the original project plans were necessary due to delays in set-up, variations to the anticipated volume of referrals, and the longer-term nature of the needs of some of the young people worked with.
Chapter 3: Contacting and engaging with young runaways

In this chapter we look at the first of the two key evaluation questions:

Which young people (in which circumstances) are likely to make contact and have a substantial engagement with the different kinds of services?

We look at the process of work as involving a set of filters whereby some young people proceed to the next step of engagement and others do not. Thus, we explore, in turn, what factors determine:

• whether a young person was referred to the projects
• whether the projects made contact with them
• and whether this led to ongoing contact.

Before we present this analysis, we begin the chapter by providing a brief overview of the volume of project usage.

3.1 Overview of project usage

3.1.1 Numbers of young people referred

Overall the 19 projects that provided data for the evaluation received referrals in relation to 1,436 young people during the period under study. This ranged from over 200 young people in some of the larger ‘universal’ projects taking police missing person referrals, to as few as 20 in some of the specialist targeted projects.

There were a total of 1,935 referrals, indicating a significant number of multiple referrals. However, 88% of young people were only referred once. The incidence of multiple referrals primarily relates to 40 young people who were referred more than three times during the monitoring period, accounting for 497 referrals. Almost all of these multiple referrals were through repetitive police missing person reports and were recorded in only a few projects.

Table 2 shows the broad categories of referral sources to the projects for the most recent referral of each young person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of referral (most recent referral of young person)</th>
<th>Number of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self (young person)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other informal sources</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police missing person referral</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other agency referrals</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1406</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1436 cases, Missing cases = 30 (2.1%)

Most young people were referred via police missing person reports on the most recent occasion that they were away. The category of ‘other agency’ referrals includes a diverse range of referral sources, with the most prominent being social workers, schools, residential units and local voluntary agencies. ‘Other informal’ sources refers primarily to family and friends.

3.1.2 Initial contact

The projects had at least one (usually face-to-face) contact with 43% of the young people referred. The nature of this initial contact varied considerably from project to project. In some projects it was a brief introductory contact with a view to making a decision about whether to engage with the young
In other projects (especially those accepting direct referrals from young people) the initial contact could be a substantial intervention in itself.

In a further 8% of cases contact was made with a parent, carer or family member.

### 3.1.3 Further contact

Following initial contact, the projects had further contact with young people in 243 cases. This figure excludes two projects who were not able to provide reliable information on ongoing contact. So, taking this into account, the rate of ongoing contact was 19% of those referred to the projects and around 37% of those cases where initial contact was made with the young person or parents/carers.

In half of these ongoing cases, the project’s contact with young people was quite extensive, involving six or more face-to-face contacts, and in 29% of cases there were ten or more such contacts. More details about ongoing work are provided in Section 4.1.

### 3.1.4 Summary

Table 3 summarises the above statistics to show the extent of projects’ involvement with the young people who were referred to them. This table again excludes projects for which full information on ongoing contact was not available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage reached</th>
<th>Number of young people</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referral only</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with family only</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single contact with young person</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing contacts with young person</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1296</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1335 cases (excludes two projects where information was not available). Missing cases = 39 (2.9%)

### 3.2 Profile of young people in contact with projects

The extent to which projects succeeded in reaching all young runaways and specific sub-groups within the runaway population was a key issue which the evaluation set out to address. In this section we begin to explore this by providing a brief descriptive profile of the young people referred to and in contact with projects and, where possible, comparing this profile with findings about young runaways as a whole. It was only practicable to gather data on a small number of characteristics and contexts for all young people referred. These characteristics and contexts were — young people’s age and sex and their current and recent situation at the time of referral.

We also provide a brief profile of other characteristics for the smaller group of young people who had contact with the projects.
3.2.1 Age

The age profile of young people referred to the projects was as follows:

Table 4: Ages of young people at point of referral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 11 years old</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 12 years old</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 to 15 years old</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 17 years old</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 plus</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1377</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1436 cases. Missing data = 59 (4.1%)

Exact figures are not available on the age profile of the young runaway population as a whole, but it is known that around a quarter of young runaways first run away before the age of 11 (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Rees & Smeaton, 2001). However, as there is a significant amount of repeat incidence, the proportion of incidents in the under-11 age group are likely to be in the region of 10% and 15% of all incidents. A rough comparison of this estimate with the above table suggests that the age profile of referrals to the projects was somewhat higher than estimates for the runaways population as a whole.

3.2.2 Gender

Exactly 60% of young people referred to the projects were female. Females were also somewhat more likely to be referred repeatedly than males and 66% of all referrals received related to females.

In comparison, research has shown that females are more likely to run away than males, but that males are more likely to run away repeatedly (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Smeaton & Rees, 2004). It can be estimated that around 57.5% of runaways are female and that 55% of runaway incidents relate to females. Thus, even taking into account the over-representation of females in the runaway population, projects appear to have been more likely to receive referrals of females than males.

3.2.3 Situation at time of referral

Table 5 shows a description of young people’s situation at the time of referral on the most recent occasion that they were referred. These descriptions were categorised by project staff on the basis of information given to them at this stage.

The relatively small number of young people who had been thrown out is notable. Research suggests that around 20% of all ‘running away’ incidents involve the young person being thrown out. Thus it appears that projects are significantly less likely to encounter young people in this situation than those who are running away or staying away.

With the exception of the above, the projects’ services seem well targeted as (excluding missing data) around 85% of referrals related to a current or recent incident of a young person being away from home, and around half of the remainder related to risk of being in one of these situations – many of these having run away or stayed away in the recent past.

The ‘other’ category encapsulates a number of situations, including young people aged 16 or 17 who were homeless, young people who were being threatened with being thrown out of home, young

---

5 These figures exclude one project which only worked with males and one project which only worked with females.

6 Where the information was unknown at this stage other data on the case has been used where possible to reduce the amount of missing data.
people who had been abandoned, young people whose primary carer had been admitted to hospital, and young people whose foster care placement had broken down.

Table 5: Young people’s situation at time of referral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently run away</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently staying away without permission</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently thrown out</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently run away</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently stayed away</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently thrown out</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At risk of running</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1436 cases. Missing data = 63 cases (4.4%)

3.2.4 Further information about the incident gathered at time of initial contact

Some further information was gathered, at the point of initial contact, about the incident which had led to the referral. This related to the length of time away, reasons for being away, and whether the incident had been reported to the police.

Where known, most young people (87%) had spent at least one night away from home. This is somewhat higher than the percentages found in surveys. Of the young people who had been away from home overnight, more than half (56%) had been away for more than one night. This is not significantly different to patterns observed amongst runaways in general.

Data was also gathered about the reasons for the running away incident. The frequency of reasons identified is as follows (more than one response was possible):

Table 6: Reasons for being away from home (current or most recent incident for young people who had run away, stayed away or been forced to leave)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem with parents</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other problem at home</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School problem</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem in residential/foster care</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to be with somebody else</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrown out</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of cases</td>
<td>485</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 545 cases (excludes young people who had not run away and also one project which did not provide this information). Missing cases = 60 cases. Sum of percentages is greater than 100% because more than one response was possible.

The data matches research findings about the primary significance of family-based factors. The incidence of ‘pull’ factors – young people wanting to be with somebody else – is also noteworthy.

We asked, on the initial contact form, whether the current or recent running away incident had been reported as missing to the police. Unfortunately this information was not known in a large proportion
of cases although, where this was known, a significant amount of non-reporting was evident (around a third of young people who were not referred via the police missing person route).

3.2.5 Other profiling information
The profiling form gathered a range of other information about young people and their lives. Not all projects were able to provide this information and so the statistics below relate to 550 young people in 15 projects who were able to participate in this component of the monitoring system.

Ethnicity
There was a significant amount of missing data on ethnicity (13% of cases). However, where ethnicity was known around 89% of young people in contact with projects were white and 11% were of Black and minority ethnic origin. This included 2% who were of Asian origin, 2% who were of Black – African/Caribbean origin, and 7% who were of mixed origin (primarily Black – African/Caribbean and white).

Exact comparisons are not possible but this overall breakdown is not substantially at odds with what is known about the ethnic make up of the population of young runaways as a whole.

Sexuality
The profiling form within the monitoring system included a question about young people’s sexuality. However, in most cases (65%) this information was unknown. Around 33% of young people were identified as straight/heterosexual, less than 2% (eight cases) as either gay, lesbian or bisexual, and a further five cases as ‘unsure’.

There is no reliable UK information on rates of running away amongst young people according to sexuality.

Disability
Amongst the initial contact sample, at least 12% of young people were identified as having a disability but there was a lot of missing data so this is probably an under-estimate. The main identified disability was learning difficulties (10%). Only seven young people (1%) were identified as having physical disabilities, and around 22 (3%) had other kinds of disability.

There is relatively little information about rates of disability in the general population of runaways. A survey of a small sample of young people in special schools in 1999 found higher than average rates of running away (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999). In a general population sample surveyed for the same research project, young people with self-defined learning difficulties were more likely than average to run away. However, this data (based on young people’s own definitions) is not directly comparable to that gathered through the monitoring system.

Living situation
The living situations of young people at the time of initial contact are shown below. The large majority (79%) of young people were living with parents or other family. Seventeen percent were living in the ‘looked after’ system (of which around two-thirds were in residential care and one-third in foster care). This is an over-representation of young people from care compared to estimates (5% or less) of the proportion of young runaways who live in substitute care (Stein & Rees, 2002) and is due to several projects in the initiative being targeted specifically at ‘looked after’ young people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Living situation of young people (where known)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential or foster care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 550 cases. Missing data = 13 cases (3.5%)
Research has shown a strong link between family structure and running away. It has been estimated that, at the age of 15, 52% of young runaways are living with both birth parents, 26% are living in lone parent families and 22% are living in stepfamilies (Rees & Rutherford, 2001). In this sample, the family structure was known in 355 of the 406 cases where young people were living with parents – 27% were living with both birth parents, 54% were living with a lone parent, and 19% were living in a stepfamily. The reasons for this substantial difference, and in particular for the very high representation of young people living with lone parents compared to young runaways as a whole, are not clear.

Running away history
The profiling form asked whether, and how many times, young people had run away before coming into contact with the project. Where the information was provided there was a roughly equal split between the four categories on the profiling form – no times (25%), once (23%), two to four times (24%), five times or more (27%). These proportions of repetitive running away are much higher than in the young runaway population in general (e.g. 12% of young runaways have run away more than three times). This comparison suggests that the projects were relatively more likely to come into contact with young people who had run away repeatedly than with first time runaways.

Involvement with other agencies
The profiling form asked questions about whether young people had contact with other agencies. At least 55% of the young people in contact with projects were also involved with other agencies at the time of initial contact, the most common agencies being social services, education welfare and youth justice (65%, 33% and 20% of cases with agency involvement respectively). A diverse range of ‘other’ agencies were also identified and involvement with Connexions was notable in some local areas. For the remainder of young people in the profiling sample, 21% were known not to have any current agency involvement and in 23% of cases the information was not known.

Other profiling information
The profiling form also included questions relating to issues or problems which young people were facing at home, at school, and in their personal lives. However, workers were not always able to gather all the data covered on these forms. This was particularly true where there was limited involvement with the young person. There is therefore a substantial amount of missing data and we cannot provide a reliable picture of all aspects included on these forms, but there was evidence here of substantial problems and issues in various areas of the young people’s lives, in line with research findings about young runaways in general. Some of this profiling information has been utilised for the analysis in relation to young people in ongoing contact with projects presented in Chapter 4, where there was a smaller proportion of missing data.

3.3 Making contact with young people
We now move on to the issue of what determined whether the project had initial and ongoing contact with young people who were referred.

3.3.1 Characteristics and contextual factors affecting making contact with young people
All of the five characteristics and contextual factors gathered about referrals proved individually to be significant in relation to the likelihood of making contact with the young person:

• There was a strong relationship between age and likelihood of contact with runaways under the age of 11 being by far the least likely (30%) to have contact.
• Similarly there was a strong relationship between the young person’s gender and the likelihood of contact, with females (53%) being significantly more likely than males (47%) to be contacted.
• Young people who self-referred were much the most likely (74%) to have contact with the project, although this is partly because referral and initial contact happened simultaneously in many of

---

7 We refer here to young people who were either contacted at the initial contact stage or at some later stage.
8 Excludes two projects who only worked with young people of one sex.
these cases. More significantly, young people referred through missing person reports were the least likely (39%) to have contact.

- There were differences according to the type of absence. Young people who had been ‘thrown out’ were the most likely (81%) to have contact with the projects and young people who were classified as having ‘run away’ from home were the least likely (42%).
- Finally, young people who had already returned home from an incident of being away at the time of referral were significantly less likely (43%) to have initial contact than young people who were still away (56%) or young people in other situations (64%).

Further analysis (using logistic regression) suggests that some of the above factors are related to each other, and that three factors are the most important direct influences on the likelihood of contact. These are, in descending order of influence, the referral source, the type of absence, and the young person’s gender.

### 3.3.2 Reasons for lack of contact

The above analysis has identified some key factors related to likelihood of ongoing contact, but does not tell us much about the processes involved in responding to referrals and attempting to make contact with young people.

Table 8 shows the response by projects to all first referrals of young people during the evaluation period. By far the largest category was the arrangement of an initial contact meeting. The next largest category (provided with information or advice) refers to circumstances where the project sent leaflets and other information to young people (and in some cases their families) and left it up to the young person whether to make contact. The ‘other’ category includes situations such as: a change in the young person’s circumstances; young people immediately saying that they did not want any services; lack of contact details; and lack of project resources to respond. There were quite a few referrals where the outcome was not clear or where no further action was taken. This category relates mainly to missing person referrals in projects where the volume of referrals was very high.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result of referral</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arranged initial contact meeting</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided with information / advice</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No further action</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred to other agency</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral did not fit criteria</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already working with young person</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1279</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1436 cases. Missing data = 157 cases (10.9%)

Not surprisingly, contact was more likely where a firm arrangement was made as a result of the initial referral than where young people and/or families were provided with information and left to contact the project if they wished. There is some evidence also that contact with young people was more likely where the planned arrangement did not involve contact with family or carers.

There were two main reasons why many arranged meetings did not happen:

- Some projects sent a letter with a suggested time for a home visit. Often parents would telephone the project to cancel the appointment saying that there was no need for contact.
- The young person did not attend an arranged meeting or there was no-one in when the project went for a pre-arranged home visit.

It is also worth exploring some of the issues relating to contact with family but not with the young person. There were a number of characteristics and contextual factors associated with the likelihood
of this outcome of initial contact (i.e. contact made with family but not with young person). It was more likely where the young person was younger and male, if the referral source was a police missing person referral, and if the young person had ‘run away’ or ‘stayed away’ rather than being ‘thrown out’. There is also some evidence that the time lag between referral and initial contact meeting is significant, with direct contact with the young person becoming less likely with a longer time lag.

Information about the reasons for lack of contact with young people in the above cases suggests that the main reasons were parents and carers declining contact because they either felt that there were no issues to sort out, or that the issues were now resolved, or that the young person was already being supported by other agencies. In some cases parents refused further involvement without providing a reason. Nevertheless, in some cases the information recorded by project staff in these cases highlights underlying concerns, as illustrated by the following extract from monitoring notes in relation to a parent who had said there was no need for intervention:

Second time ran away. Both times same reason – excluded from school and did not tell mum. Went to school on Monday but was sent home. Hit some one. Mum does not think that he will run away again but he does stay out late and does not say where he’s going. Stays at friends. [Male, 13, Referred through police missing person report]

3.4 Engaging in ongoing work

We now turn to a consideration of the factors which affected whether the projects undertook further work with young people with whom they had an initial contact. To recap from earlier in the chapter, further work was undertaken in 37% of the cases where initial contact was made with the young person and/or parents or carers.

3.4.1 Characteristics and contexts related to likelihood of ongoing contact

There were relatively few statistical patterns in the likelihood of ongoing contact. Only three factors were significantly related:

- The source of referral – young people who self-referred were significantly more likely (60%) to have ongoing contact than those referred by others (i.e. referrals from agencies, parents, etc.)
- The young person’s family structure – young people living in step-families were much more likely (56%) to engage than those living with both birth parents or lone parents (35% and 37% respectively). ‘Looked after’ young people appeared more likely to engage than those living with family but this difference was not statistically significant.
- The time lag between referral and initial contact had a significant influence on the likelihood of ongoing contact. For young people who had ongoing contact, the mean time lag was much lower (around 12 days) than for those who did not (around 21 days). This suggests that speed of response may be an important factor influencing the likelihood of ongoing contact.

In all other respects (including age, sex, ethnicity, type of absence, situation at time of referral, running away history) there was no discernible connection with the likelihood of ongoing contact.

3.4.2 Reasons for lack of ongoing contact

The reasons for the lack of patterns identified in the analysis in 3.4.1 stem from the different contexts and models of service provision in operation in the projects, which are to a great extent closely linked to the issue of referral sources identified as a key factor above. Detailed analysis of qualitative process data shows that there were different reasons for lack of ongoing contact according to referral routes.

For referrals via police missing person reports and from other agencies, the primary reason for lack of ongoing contact appears to be a choice on the young person’s part. Often the interventions appear to have simply been unwanted or seen as unnecessary by the young people. In some cases this was understandable:

The young person is staying with a friend a few houses away from his mum’s house. The young person’s social worker is aware he is there. The young person informed us he does not want support from our service and he does not want any further contact. [Male, 15, referred by social worker]
But in other cases there were legitimate causes for concern in relation to their running away behaviour:

*Referred by family resource worker who was not able to engage her. Her school attendance at the time of referral was 60%. She was running away to stay with her older sister and her much older male friends. The worker was concerned about her vulnerability in the above situation and the fact that drugs and alcohol were available to her at her sister’s home. She was also receiving gifts from older men. Young person chose not to engage with the project, she did not think of herself as a runaway or that spending time in the company of her older sister and friends was a problem.* [Female, 14, referred via police missing persons report]

For self-referrals on the other hand, there was much more extensive work done at the initial contact stage. These one-off contacts tended to involve substantial advocacy and mediation work on behalf of older young people who had visited the project base. Because of the older age profile the options available to these young people were very different to those for younger runaways. In addition, the ability to do detailed immediate work with young people at the base meant that the initial contact could be much more extensive than during a home visit. Thus often an immediate (at least temporary) resolution of their situation either through parents, social services or emergency housing agencies, was possible (see Chapter 5 for further discussion of work with this group).

### 3.5 Summary

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the work undertaken by projects with individual young people, and of the profile of these young people.

Overall, the projects received referrals in relation to over 1,400 young people during the funded period. Direct contact was made with 42% of the young people referred and ongoing contact was established with at least 19% of referred young people.

We have compared the profile of young people in contact with the projects with some of the information known about the profile of young runaways in general. The evidence suggests that some of the sub-groups of the runaway population with a higher than average likelihood of being referred were: older runaways, females, and young people who had ‘run away’ or ‘stayed away’ compared to young people who had been ‘thrown out’. These patterns are linked to the fact that the majority of referrals came as a result of police missing person reports. Most younger runaways came through this route, and the under-representation of young people who were ‘thrown out’ can be explained by the fact that these young people are relatively unlikely to be reported as missing.

The projects made initial contact with the young person or their parents/carers for just over half of all young people referred. In around a quarter of cases no attempt was made to contact the young person for a number of reasons, including inappropriate referrals, referring the young person on to more appropriate agencies, and lack of resources. A further quarter of referrals did not lead to initial contact because it was not possible to set up a meeting or the meeting was declined by a parent or young person.

Four key factors which made initial contact less likely were: if the referral came via the police missing person route; if the young person had run away or stayed away rather than being thrown out or in some other situation; if the young person was male; and if they were younger. The analysis also highlights the significance of ‘gate keeping’ (sometimes perhaps appropriate) on the part of parents as a key hindering factor in terms of projects’ attempts to make contact with young people.

It should also be noted that the young people in contact with the projects were more likely to have spent at least one night away during the running away incident and more likely to have run away often in the past than runaways in general. This suggests that, overall, the projects have had some success in targeting young runaways who are more ‘at risk’, as envisaged in the original aims of the initiative.

Finally we considered the factors which influenced whether the projects had further contact with young people after the initial contact stage. Three factors which made this less likely were: if the referral was from an agency (including missing person referrals), the young person’s living situation, and if there was a long time lag between referral and initial contact. Clearly some of this filtering was intentional, as a result of efforts to target the services at those young runaways most at risk. However, for missing person and other agency referrals, the primary reason for lack of ongoing contact appears to be that young people declined further contact. For self-referrals, on the other hand, there was much more extensive work done at the initial contact stage and this, in combination with their older age profile,
meant that more than half the cases with only a single contact were immediately resolved, at least temporarily.
Chapter 4: Achieving change

This is the first of two chapters to focus on the second key evaluation question:

*With which young people (in which circumstances) are different kinds of interventions likely to achieve significant change.*

We will address this question using both the monitoring and case study data.

This chapter aims to provide an overview across the whole group of young people with whom projects had contact. Chapter 5 then goes on to discuss in more detail some of the issues involved in working with specific sub-groups of young people.

The first section of this chapter provides some basic summary information about the nature and extent of the projects' contacts with young people and with other relevant people (such as parents, carers, professionals in other agencies).

We then move on to discuss the extent and nature of the changes which the projects were able to bring about in young people's lives.

Finally, we look at the factors which were associated with likelihood of achieving change, considering the influence of contexts, hindering and enabling mechanisms, as outlined in the methodology section in Chapter 1.

A note on terminology is required here. The original evaluation proposal used the term ‘outcome’ to describe the impact or change attributable to projects’ work with young people. The data gathered through the evaluation has focused primarily on key changes observed at the end of the project’s intervention (plus, where possible, a follow-up contact three months later). These changes are, in effect, ‘intermediate outcomes’. To take an example, there were a number of cases where the key presenting issue was that a young person was running away because of relationship problems at home. Often the projects were able to do family work to improve relationships by the end of the intervention. This would plausibly be expected to reduce the likelihood of further running away, but the relatively short time period in which the evaluation was conducted does not allow us to measure this long-term outcome. In order to avoid potential confusion about the term ‘outcomes’, in this chapter we use the word ‘change’ to describe these ‘intermediate’ outcomes.

### 4.1 Overview of the projects’ work with ongoing cases

The statistical data in this section relates to the 243 cases where it is known that projects had ongoing contact with young people (see Section 3.1.3 for further details). Some of the demographic characteristics of this sample were as follows:

- The age profile of these 243 young people covered the full age range worked with by projects. Three percent of the young people were under 11 years of age; 30% were aged 11 to 13; 49% were aged 14 to 15; and 19% were aged 16 and over.
- As with the projects’ user group as a whole, a higher proportion (58%) of these young people were female than male (42%).
- Fourteen percent of the young people were from Black and minority ethnic groups including 20 young people who were of mixed origin, six who were of Black – African/Caribbean origin and four who were of Asian origin.
- At least 14% of the young people were defined as having a disability although there was a substantial amount (40%) of missing data here so the true proportion was probably higher than this. The large majority (27 out of 35) of these young people were defined as having a learning disability.
- Three of the young people defined themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual and a further four were unsure about their sexuality. However, the proportion of missing data (59%) was very high here.
- At the start of the projects’ interventions, 74% of young people were usually living with parent(s); 5% were living with extended family; and 19% were being ‘looked after’, mostly in children’s homes.
4.1.1 Nature and extent of contact with young people and others

The projects had six or more face-to-face contacts with exactly half the young people with whom they did ongoing work. As can be seen below the amount of telephone contact with young people was also quite substantial in a number of cases.

Table 9: Extent of contact with young person in ongoing work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Type</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>2 to 5</th>
<th>6 to 9</th>
<th>10 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone contacts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 243 cases. Missing cases = 28 (face-to-face contact) and 56 (telephone contact).

It is worth reflecting that, as discussed in Chapter 2, many projects intended to focus on short-term interventions (often defined as up to six sessions) but in reality half the ongoing cases involved six or more face-to-face contacts with young people.

The projects did a substantial amount of work with other people connected with the young person. The project had contact with the young person’s family in 62% of cases, and with a substitute carer in 19% of cases. There was some overlap here and in a total of 74% of ongoing cases the projects had at least one contact with a member of the young person’s family and/or with other carers (e.g. residential staff).

Table 10: Extent of contact with family and other carers in ongoing work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Type</th>
<th>None / not applicable</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>2 to 4 times</th>
<th>5 times or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute carers</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 243 cases. Missing cases = 21 to 23 cases per variable.

In addition there was a substantial amount of contact with other agencies. The projects had contact with at least one other professional in 70% of ongoing cases. The most common professionals were social workers (42% of cases); teachers and other educational workers, such as educational welfare officers and learning mentors (38% of cases); Connexions personal advisers (10% of cases); youth justice workers (10% of cases); and housing agency workers (8% of cases). The extent of contact with these groups is shown in the table on the following page.
Table 11: Extent of contact with other professionals in ongoing work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Group</th>
<th>None / not applicable</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>2 to 4 times</th>
<th>5 times or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social workers</td>
<td>Count: 128</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %: 58.2%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers / education staff</td>
<td>Count: 136</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %: 62.1%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connexions PAs</td>
<td>Count: 197</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %: 90.0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth justice workers</td>
<td>Count: 200</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %: 90.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing workers</td>
<td>Count: 201</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Row %: 91.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 243 cases. Missing cases = 21 to 23 cases per variable.

4.1.2 How the work ended

The way in which ongoing contact ended for the ‘end of contact’ sample is shown in the table below. There was a planned completion of work in 36% of cases, and a slightly larger proportion (38%) where either young people chose to end contact or where the project lost touch with them.

Table 12: Reasons for end of contact with project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for end of contact</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completion of planned work</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project closure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing contact</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YP didn’t (any longer) want contact</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost touch with young person</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of circumstance</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent blocked ongoing contact</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 243 cases. Missing data = 25 cases (10.3%)

The ‘completion of planned work’ category refers to situations where the young person and project worker jointly made a decision to end the work in a planned way. This was usually once some or all of the aims of the work had been achieved.

The category of ‘not wanting further contact’ encapsulates several different scenarios. In some cases there were substantial ongoing efforts to engage with the young person which petered out:

*All contact with the young person had been with the support of an adult, the young person did not appear to want to have contact with the project.*

In other cases young people directly told the project that they didn’t want further contact:

*[The young person] declined the offer of further support from our service.*
The common factor in these scenarios was that the project felt that further work would have been useful but the young person did not.

The proportion of cases where the project lost touch with the young person or where there was a change of circumstance is also notable. Losing touch with the young person usually refers to situations where the project made repeated attempts to maintain contact but either received no response or lost track of the young person due to changes of address and so on. ‘Change of circumstances’ includes a number of situations – young people being placed in custody or in a secure unit; young people being moved to a care placement outside the project’s catchment area; young people moving to live with a parent or relative in a different area; and young people leaving the country.

4.2 Identifying change

In the remainder of this chapter we present an analysis of change achieved with young people and some of the factors which affected the likelihood of achieving change. For this analysis we have utilised two different data sets.

In terms of monitoring data, we have analysed 239 ‘end of contact’ forms completed by project staff. These forms contained open-ended questions regarding work carried out, outcomes identified by project staff as a result of this work, and any factors which staff felt had enabled or hindered their work. 220 of these forms relate to pieces of ongoing work (and therefore represent a large majority of the 243 cases of ongoing work described in the previous section). We have also included in this analysis a further 19 forms relating to a single contact with the young person, but which staff felt were substantial enough to complete an end of contact form. We refer to this data set of 239 cases as the ‘end of contact sample’.

We have also analysed staff’s and young people’s perspectives from the 62 case studies. In addition we have made some comment on the perspectives of parents, carers and external professionals gathered as part of the case studies where possible. We refer to this data set as the ‘case study’ sample.

4.2.1 Overview

The ‘end of contact’ form included open-ended questions about project staff’s assessment of the short-term outcomes of their work with young people. This approach was chosen primarily because the diversity and context-specific nature of projects’ work with young people presented major obstacles to the development of quantitative measures of change.

We have undertaken a detailed analysis of staff’s responses to these questions and developed a set of measures of change attributable to the projects’ work. The focus of this analysis is on tangible positive change as discussed below, but it should be noted that in many cases staff also identified other benefits of involvement such as provision of information to young people and families, which may in the long-term have had a beneficial impact.

We initially categorised the positive changes noted into eight categories as follows:

**Category 1: Living situation**

This category relates to the quality and stability of the young person’s accommodation. It does not include outcomes relating to relationships with family or other carers, which form a separate category. Most commonly this category related to finding young people an alternative suitable and safe place to live, but in some cases a negotiated return home from a period away was also identified as a positive change achieved by projects.

**Category 2: Family or carers**

This category relates to the extent and quality of relationships with parents and other family members, or with substitute carers. By far the most common change identified here was a perceived improvement in relationships and/or communication between the young person and their parents/carers or other family members. In some cases, positive changes were also noted in terms of parents developing skills and strategies, or gaining access to support services for their own needs.
Category 3: Education and training
School issues were a key factor in many young runaways' lives and as a consequence, projects did a significant amount of work on these issues, mostly aimed at enabling young people to reintegrate into the education system or (for older young people) to gain access to training or employment. Positive changes were also noted in terms of improved school attendance.

Category 4: Other agencies
For the most part this category relates to projects' success in facilitating young people's access to other appropriate agencies or improving their relationships with existing agencies. In a few cases improvements in contact between different agencies concerned with a particular young person were also noted.

Category 5: Running away
The project staff often identified the fact that the young person had stopped running away as a tangible positive change. This was usually related to young people who had an established pattern of running away. However, it should be borne in mind as discussed earlier that the longer term outcome of the projects' work in this respect would not have been known at the end of contact.

Category 6: Self
Projects identified a number of perceived positive changes in young people's mental outlook, including self-esteem, depression, motivation and suicidal thoughts. This is a problematic area because evidence of such changes is based on impressions rather than firm evidence. On the other hand, issues such as self-esteem are closely related to young people's risk-taking behaviour and so it is important to acknowledge the perception of success in these respects.

Category 7: Other problems and issues
Projects identified some success in tackling other issues and problems which were intrinsically related to young people's running away, such as involvement in drugs, sexual exploitation and offending. Better management of anger and aggression was also cited in some cases.

Category 8: Other people
The influence of other people (peers and older people) is often a key factor in young people running away or staying away from home. In a small number of cases projects cited positive changes attributable to their work in this respect. These included young people ending relationships which were viewed as negative, and also developing new, more positive friendships.

The results of this analysis are shown in Table 13. The four most common categories of changes were family/carer, living situation, school and other agencies. These changes were more common than identifiable changes to running away behaviour. However, as noted above, a reduction in running away may well be a longer-term impact of change in these key areas, and (except in the case of very repetitive running away behaviour) will not usually be directly measurable at the end of the intervention.
We then drew these categories together to develop a measure of the overall impact of the projects’ work in each case. This was achieved by independent analyses of the qualitative data in the ‘end of contact’ forms by different members of the research team and then a process of resolution of differences in assessments.

The measure of change consisted of the following categories:

- **Entirely positive change**: cases where staff identified positive change in relation to all the presenting issues.
- **Substantial change**: cases where there was significant positive change but where one or more issues remained unchanged at the end of intervention.
- **Some positive change**: cases where a small amount of positive change was identified (usually only in one area) but substantial issues remained unresolved.
- **None**: No positive changes identified.
- **Unclear**: Insufficient information to draw any firm conclusions.
- **Not applicable**: Cases where no change was identified but it was also not entirely appropriate to measure this, usually due to intervening factors which prevented work being undertaken – for example, the young person decided to end contact with the project, or moved out of the area.

The outcomes of this analysis are shown in Table 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14: Categorisation of change in each case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entirely positive change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, in project staff’s perspectives, entirely positive change was achieved in 30% of cases and substantial positive change in a further 12% of cases.

---

30

---

This refers to the ‘end of contact sample’ of 239 cases.
The above discussion relates to project staff's perceptions of change. Because the evaluation adopted a comparative approach to the achievement of change, this data is useful in itself as a foundation for analysis of the relative likelihood of achieving positive change with different sub-groups of the runaway population as discussed later in this chapter. However, clearly project workers' perspectives alone cannot be viewed as a definitive statement on the success of the projects in achieving positive change in young people's lives. We therefore set out to triangulate the perspectives of staff with those of 62 young people participating in the case study sample.10

Young people were asked a range of closed and open-ended questions, on questionnaires and in interviews, which focused on their perspectives of change in their lives during the projects' interventions with them. They were also asked to identify the reasons for these changes.

In general, a comparison of young people's and project staff's views, based on an interpretation and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, showed a fairly high degree of consensus. In order to illustrate this and also provide some further information of the kinds of changes achieved by projects we summarise this comparative analysis for some of the main categories of change identified above.

4.2.2 Changes in living situation
In the case study sample there had been a change of living situation during the project's intervention in at least 24 out of the 62 cases:

- 14 of these young people lived with parents at initial contact. Of these one moved from one parent to another, one moved in with friends, five moved into the 'looked after' system, and seven moved into hostels and other accommodation.
- Two young people living with relatives at the initial contact stage moved back in with parents.
- Seven ‘looked after’ young people moved, of which three changed placement, two went to live with family, and two went into semi-independent living.
- One young person was living in a hostel and had moved to another residential unit by the end of the intervention.

In 12 cases the young person felt positive about this change and in 8 cases had mixed feelings. In the remaining four cases one young person felt that this was a negative change, one felt that there was no difference and two young people did not express a view.

Most of these changes were directly attributable to the work of the projects. Young people's perspectives tended to verify the perspectives of project staff on this matter, with all nine cases where workers felt there had been a positive change also being viewed positively by young people:

*I feel stronger and safer. They have been a great support all along. They helped a lot, helped me find accommodation.* [Young person]

4.2.3 Changes in relation to family or carers
Young people were asked to say how they got on with their family at initial contact and at the end of contact. Again, there was a high level of correspondence between workers’ and young people’s perceptions. Of 16 cases in the case study sample where project staff had identified a positive change in family relationships, 13 young people also thought things had got better and three felt things were about the same.

*They have got better because I can chat to my parents more.* [Young person]

*An open dialogue has been achieved between the young person and parents. The family are more together now and more open.* [Project worker]

In addition a further six young people felt family relationships had improved even though project workers had not identified this. This suggests that project staff were not over-optimistic in their assessments of family change.

---

10 We had also hoped to incorporate a comparative analysis of the perspectives of parents and other professionals but the relatively low rate of participation (primarily for ethical reasons as discussed in Chapter 1) means that this is not viable. However, research participants from these groups tended to view the impacts of the projects' work positively and some examples of their views are included in the case studies in Chapter 5.
4.2.4 Changes in relation to education and training

In only 31 cases in the case study sample were young people known to be attending school at the start of the project intervention, although six of the young people in the sample were aged 16 and over and therefore above compulsory school leaving age.

By the end of interventions, only 19 of these 31 young people were still attending school, three had left school, and the remainder were either suspended, excluded or simply not attending. Of the 19 young people still attending, six felt things had improved at school and only one felt that things had got worse.

In addition 12 young people not attending at the time of initial contact had been reintroduced to school by the end of contact. This was often directly attributable to the projects’ interventions. Of these young people, ten felt positive about this:

They have helped me with my schooling. It’s nice to have someone you can talk to who actually listens who doesn’t think ‘she’s just a kid, she doesn’t know anything’. [Young person]

The young person has re-engaged with education - she has recognised the value of it. [Project Worker]

and:

Got over my depression, boosted my self-esteem and got me back to school. They keep me feeling good and help me work out why I feel the way I do sometimes. [Young person]

The young person was reintegrated back into school; she started to mix with peers at school. [Project Worker]

Here too, in most cases the project worker’s claims of positive change were reflected in young people’s views, although the picture was a little more mixed than in the other areas discussed above. Of 18 positive changes in schooling identified by workers, 12 young people also felt things had improved, five felt things were ‘mixed’ or ‘about the same’ and one did not express an opinion.

4.2.5 Changes in relation to ‘self’ and in relation to other problems and issues

We have combined these two categories here because there was substantial overlap in young people’s reporting on changes in these areas in the case study sample.

The 62 young people in the case study sample were asked to self-report on a range of problems and issues which have been identified in previous research as being associated with running away. Young people’s responses, in themselves, are indicative of the wide-ranging issues faced by young runaways. At initial contact, out of 62 young people, at least:

- 33 said they got depressed
- 43 had problems with anger
- 23 had problems with self-harm
- 24 had problems with offending
- 22 had problems with alcohol
- 23 had problems with drugs
- 16 had problems with a boyfriend/girlfriend
- 19 had problems with friends

Only two young people in the case study sample said that they had none of the above problems.

Young people were asked to identify any changes by the end of intervention (open-ended question). Forty young people identified positive change in at least one of the above areas. Young people tended to be much more positive than workers, who only specifically identified positive changes in 17 cases within the case study sample:

(Project) stopped me from running away. I don’t do that any more. They also stopped me from hurting myself. [Young person]
I'm sorting myself out so things are a lot better because [Project] have helped me out. [Young person]

4.2.6 Summarising comments
In this section we have reviewed a detailed analysis of project staff’s perceptions of the achievement of positive change in young people’s lives for the end of contact sample of 239 cases. Staff’s responses reflect a wide spectrum of change, with substantial positive changes being noted in 42% of cases. This analysis provides a useful foundation for further exploration of the contexts and factors associated with positive change in the next section of this chapter. We were also able to seek some verification of project workers’ perspectives through a comparison with the views of young people who participated in case studies. Whilst, inevitably there were some differences in perspectives, this comparison suggests a broad level of agreement between young people and workers about the presence or lack of positive change as a result of the projects’ work in key areas of the young people’s lives, with a tendency for young people to identify a greater degree of positive change than project staff in some areas.

4.3 Factors associated with positive outcomes
A key issue for the evaluation is to try to establish what factors are associated with the likelihood of achieving the positive changes discussed above. This is a complex question which will be explored using the monitoring and case study data over the remainder of this chapter and the next.

It should already be apparent from the preceding discussion that the measurement of change is open to interpretation. We have undertaken some statistical analysis, using the measures developed above, in particular in order to identify characteristics, contexts and other factors associated with positive change from a project worker’s perspective. In this section we provide an account of the main themes emerging from the analysis.

4.3.1 Characteristics and contexts
The characteristics and contexts which emerge from the analysis as being most strongly associated with positive change related directly to current and previous running away history. Positive change was significantly more likely if:

- The young person had not run away before (although this is a slightly tentative finding because of missing data)
- If young people had been ‘thrown out’ (and least likely if they were categorised as having ‘stayed away’)
- The young person was still away at the referral stage rather than had already returned and/or if they had been away for a week or more

Beyond these factors, a number of other patterns were evident during the analysis. These were not strongly significant (this may be to do with sample size) but are indicative of areas for further exploration.

In terms of characteristics, the likelihood of positive change was highest with young people aged 16 and over. There was also some suggestion of higher positive change with young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds but this difference was not statistically significant. There were no differences observed in terms of gender and disability.

There were no strong links between positive change and family structure, although there was a tendency for higher positive change in step-families. There were no links between identified issues within the family (e.g. presence of abuse, parenting problems) and likelihood of positive change.

There was a tendency for the presence of other issues and problems in young people’s lives to be associated with fewer positive changes. Problems at school and risk of sexual exploitation were factors which were significantly associated with fewer positive changes, and there were also consistent (although not statistically significant) trends in relation to problems with offending, self-harm and alcohol use. It should be noted that young people who had problems at school and with offending and who were at risk of sexual exploitation were also more likely to have run away in the past. This network of patterns point to a group of young people who had run away repeatedly, were experiencing...
problems in one or more other areas of their lives, and with whom as a consequence it was more difficult to achieve positive change.

4.3.2 Process issues
There were no clear differences in terms of referral processes but there were some indications that the small group of young people who self-referred or came through informal referral routes had higher positive change than other groups.

There was little evidence of a link between the extent of contact with the young person and the likelihood of positive change, suggesting that short-term interventions could be as effective as longer-term ones, dependent on the context and the complexity of the situation.

Similarly there was no link overall between whether family/carers and other agencies were involved in the work and whether positive change was achieved, but the diversity of contexts in which work took place limit the significance of this finding.

There were, however, highly significant links between the reasons for end of contact and the likelihood of achieving positive change. In cases where the planned work was completed, 80% cases fell into the ‘mostly positive’ or ‘entirely positive’ categories. In the other main categories (young person ended contact, lost contact and change of circumstance) the percentages of positive change were between 23% and 34%. The fact that almost half the cases fell into these three categories points to the importance of factors which hindered completion of the work in understanding why the projects were able to achieve positive change in some cases and not others.

We now turn to an examination of hindering and enabling factors and an exploration of the way in which they influenced the ability of the projects to achieve change in young people’s lives.

4.3.3 Hindering and enabling factors
As discussed in the introduction to the report (section 1.3.2) the concept of hindering and enabling factors is central to the realist approach. It reflects the recognition of the ‘open system’ nature of social interventions. Interventions do not take place in isolation and can be affected by a variety of extraneous factors and events (as well as the above contexts) which may either help or hinder the intervention.

Hindering factors
The ‘end of contact’ form asked project staff to identify factors which they felt had either helped or hindered the work they did. We have undertaken a thematic analysis of the responses to these questions for the ‘end of contact’ sample in the same way as for the outcomes analysis described earlier.

One or more hindering factors was identified in 150 cases (63%). Most of these factors fell into three broad categories relating to the young person (25% of cases), to the young person’s family (18% of cases), and to other agencies (14% of cases)

The hindering factors relating to young people identified by project staff consisted of two main broad categories:
• young people being unwilling or reluctant to engage
• young people’s lifestyle making engagement difficult.

In relation to parents the identified hindering factors tended to focus on parents’ unwillingness to engage, and attempts to block contact between the project and the young person, rather than to factors within the family context.

Finally, the agency-related hindering factors were also of two broad kinds. First, in a number of cases project staff reported that social services had failed to respond (not seeing young person as at risk) or had responded slowly. It was recognised that lack of resources was often a factor in the low priority given to some cases. Second, a lack of, or poor, communication between statutory agencies was identified in a number of cases.

The issue of hindering factors is one about which different groups of participants in the case study sample had quite different perspectives.
The majority of young people did not identify any hindering factors. Amongst those who did, the most common category (eight young people) related to the project. These were primarily issues to do with accessibility and availability. A smaller number of young people also identified factors related to themselves, their family and other agencies.

Parents and carers also tended to focus more on hindering factors related to the young person or the project. A few parents were unhappy that the project had not made more effort to involve them in the work.

Finally, hindering factors identified by external professionals spanned four key areas: the young person, their family, the project, and other agencies in the area. A number of professionals noted the challenges faced by the projects in engaging with young people:

- **Young person's poor self-esteem. Nomadic lifestyle (difficult to locate him).** [Social worker – questionnaire]

Hindering factors identified in relation to the project primarily focused on limited resources and availability. In addition, in several cases concerns were expressed that younger people’s involvement with the projects had introduced them to older young people who had negatively influenced them.

Limited resources leading to poor responses of other agencies (including the agencies within which the respondents were based) were identified in a number of cases:

- **SSD [have] limited resources so end up doing crisis intervention rather than preventative strategies.** [Social worker – questionnaire]

Thus, in general the external professionals’ perspectives on hindering factors were relatively similar to those of project staff, whilst young people and parents/carers tended to emphasise different factors.

**The influence of hindering factors on achievement of change**

We have analysed the extent to which, in the ‘end of contact’ sample, the presence or absence of the three most common categories of hindering factors identified by project staff affected the likelihood of identified positive change. This analysis highlights some important linkages which contribute to our more detailed analysis in the next chapter.

Not surprisingly the presence of hindering factors related to the young person significantly reduced the likelihood of completing the work in a planned way and also the likelihood of achieving positive change. Where these hindering factors were present, 20% of cases ended in a planned way and substantial change was achieved in 25% of cases. Where there were no hindering factors in relation to the young person, 42% of cases ended in a planned way and substantial change was achieved in 54% of cases.

Further exploration of these patterns reveals that the presence of hindering factors related to the young person is also linked to the type of runaway incident. Hindering factors were noted in 35% of cases involving young people ‘staying away’, 24% of cases involving young people ‘running away’; and 13% of cases involving young people being thrown out. This pattern is relevant to an understanding of the issues involved in work with young people who ‘stay away’ as discussed further in section 5.1.2.

There was no statistical evidence of hindering factors in relation to the family affecting the likelihood of positive change. This suggests that, by and large, projects were able to overcome these factors and still achieve change in their direct work with young people.

There was also, overall, no statistical evidence of the presence of agency-related hindering factors affecting likelihood of positive change. However an analysis of the qualitative data suggests that these factors tended to be identified in two contexts – for ‘looked after’ young people and for young people where there were child protection concerns at home. In these cases a slow response or lack of response from other agencies did have a tangible effect on the young person’s situation and on the achievement of change in certain areas. This analysis, in relation to a relatively small data set, tentatively suggests that agency-related hindering factors were specific to particular contexts where the response of other agencies was a relatively important aspect of the project’s work.

**Enabling factors**

Responses by project staff to the question of what factors helped the project’s work were often simply the opposite of some of the key hindering factors (e.g. young person willing to engage, parents open
to the intervention, good response of other agencies) and it would be repetitive to list them here. However there were a significant number of project-related factors which were also identified as ‘enabling’, including:

- Confidentiality and privacy
- Independence from statutory agencies
- Accessibility
- Speed of response
- The approach (young person centred, non-intrusive, flexible)
- Willingness to work with families

By and large, enabling factors identified by young people, parents and carers, and external professionals tended to support project staff’s perspectives:

> Its flexibility. The project worker can go to the family home ... ‘Accessibility’ to an adult who can help. Project worker has a mobile and can be contacted easily. Responds quickly – project worker will go immediately to school if crisis as compared to other agencies e.g. SSD who take two days or so. [Teacher – questionnaire]

Although, as we have seen above, the projects’ models of intervention were not universally appreciated, there was a positive emphasis in most research participants’ comments. The nature of the enabling factors identified provides some important pointers to good practice in working with young runaways. This material relates to practice as a whole and therefore does not lend itself to statistical analysis in relation to achievement of positive change in individual cases. However we return to some of the issues raised in relation to enabling factors in Chapter 6 when we consider general learning from the projects’ practice.

### 4.3.4 Summarising comments

In this section we have examined the characteristics, contexts, process issues, and hindering factors which are associated with the likelihood of positive change being achieved with young runaways. The analysis indicates a strong relationship between the type of absence and extent of previous running away experience. There are also more tentative indications of varying likelihood of achieving positive change with young people in different sub-groups of the sample, such as young people at risk of sexual exploitation. There was also a multi-dimensional relationship between the type of absence, the presence of hindering factors relating to the young person, the way in which contact ended, and the likelihood of achieving positive change.

### 4.4 Summary

In this chapter we have begun to explore the kinds of changes which the projects have been able to identify themselves as achieving with young people, and the range of factors which can positively or negatively influence the achievement of these changes, making use of information provided by project staff.

The projects identified a range of positive changes across a number of broad categories. The main focus of their work appears to have been on the underlying issues (within the young person, and at home and at school) which were contributing to the young person running away. The projects appear to have been able to achieve substantial change in 42% of cases where they carried out ongoing work with young people. This rate is even higher in cases where the planned work was completed or ongoing.

We have been able to compare project staff’s assessments of change with those of young people. For the most part, young people’s views have verified workers’ assessments and suggest that the projects were not over-optimistic in their identification of positive change.

Statistical analysis of the monitoring data indicates a number of characteristics and contextual factors which can affect the likelihood of positive tangible change. The projects appear to have achieved the most substantial change with young people who: had not run away before; had been away from home longer; and had been ‘thrown out’ or ‘run away’ rather than having ‘stayed away without permission’.
An analysis of staff’s responses has identified a number of key factors which were seen as hindering the achievement of change. Most significant amongst these were factors related to young people’s attitudes and lifestyles which were linked to contextual factors such as the type of absence and affected the likelihood of positive change being achieved.

These findings provide some important pointers to the ways in which likelihood of positive change might vary for young people in different situations, and these issues are explored further in the next chapter through a discussion of the projects’ work with seven different sub-groups of young people.
Chapter 5: Working with particular groups of young runaways

The last two chapters have summarised patterns and differences in the projects’ ability to engage with, and achieve positive change with, the diverse group of young people who come under the umbrella term of ‘young runaways’. In this chapter we develop the discussion further by examining the projects’ work with a number of important sub-groups of young runaways.

The discussion in this chapter makes use of data from both the monitoring and case study data sets. Because of the small sample sizes of some sub-groups (and the amounts of missing data for some variables) the statistical findings presented in this chapter should be seen as indicative rather than definitive. Case studies, often based on more than one case, are used to illustrate some of the key issues encountered in working with the different sub-groups. The overall intention is to highlight trends and patterns emerging from the evaluation which may warrant further attention and exploration.

First we look at differences according to the nature and history of young people’s running away. Then we go on to look at work with particular sub-groups of young runaways who were targeted by projects as being most ‘at risk’. There is, of course, overlap between the different sub-groups.

5.1 Nature and history of running away

As discussed in the previous chapter the nature of young people’s absence, and the extent of their previous running away history are the contextual factors most strongly associated with likelihood of projects achieving positive change. So an exploration of the nature of these relationships is fundamental to understanding how, and in what circumstances, the projects were most successful in their work with young people.

5.1.1 Young people running away or staying away for the first time

We focus first on young people who were defined at initial contact as having either ‘run away’ or ‘stayed away’, and had not previously been away. Evidently intervening with first time runaways can play an important preventative role.

Profile

Twenty two percent of initial contacts with young people who had ‘run away’ or ‘stayed away’ were with those running or staying away for the first time. The age profile of these young people was not discernibly different from other young people in contact with the projects but they were somewhat more likely to be male than the repeat runaways in contact with the projects. First-time runaways were also relatively more likely to be living with family and less likely to be ‘looked after’ than repeat runaways. Where information was available these first-time runaways seem to be less likely to be already engaged with other agencies. They also had lower incidence (than repeat runaways in contact with the projects) of a whole range of issues in their lives within the family (e.g. physical abuse), at school (e.g. attendance), and in other areas (e.g. drugs use, offending).

Access and engagement

First-time runaways came from a wide range of referral routes, but there were very few self-referrals, and a slightly higher than average (73%) proportion of police missing person referrals. They were heavily concentrated in the projects undertaking ‘universal referral-based work’.

The rate of ongoing contact with these young people was roughly in line with the average across the whole sample, so there do not appear to be any specific barriers to engagement although the extent of engagement with projects tended to be slightly lower than average – primarily conforming to the short-term crisis intervention model (six contacts or less). The project staff identified hindering factors in many of these cases but the work was much more likely than average to be completed and the contact to end in a planned way.

Interventions

The projects were significantly more likely (64%) to achieve substantial positive change with first-time runaways than with young people in the ‘run away’ and ‘stay away’ categories (39%) who had been away previously, a finding which suggests that this was a sub-group with which the projects had
particular success. There were no strong distinctions within this analysis according to whether young people had been defined as ‘running away’ or ‘staying away’.

Case Study 1 illustrates some of the key factors which may facilitate positive change with young people in this group: a rapid response, a willingness to engage in a fairly even-handed way with both the young person and their family including mediation work, and awareness-raising with young people about the potential risks.

CASE STUDY 1

Lisa

Lisa, aged 13, was referred to the project by police following a missing person report from parents. The project was able to meet Lisa and her mother very quickly after her return home.

Lisa had no previous running away history, no agency involvement and a stable home and school life. She had stayed away for one night with a friend because of boundaries imposed on her at home. They stayed at the house of an older male friend of her friend. The parents were upset and concerned, and seemed initially to be inclined to adopt a heavy-handed approach to the incident – barring the young person from seeing her friends. Thus there was a risk of the situation becoming polarised and of further running away incidents as a result:

There were high emotions: the parents were upset, annoyed and worried. Initially it was a case of ‘you’re never seeing your friends again’, which straight away you could sense was going to lead possibly to more running away behaviour’ [Project worker]

However the parents were willing to engage with the project and particularly welcomed the speedy response and the way the project worked:

[The young person returned at] two o’clock and we were having our first meeting at half past three. It was straight in and we’ll see you and that’s that. It was good ... They talk to you like your human and they see both points of view. They didn’t tell us everything she’d [the young person] said [to the project worker] but they told us the bits we needed to know without breaking her confidence. [Parent]

This brief intervention involved two meetings with the young person and parents following a missing person referral. At each meeting the project workers discussed the incident with the young person separately, and then jointly with the parent. One focus of the project’s intervention was to mediate between the young person and the parents and this approach was successful in encouraging the parents to take a lighter approach with the young person. The second focus was to raise the young person’s awareness of the risks involved in being away from home:

They helped me realise that what we did was really stupid. [Young person]

The intervention seems to have been successful because three months later the young person had not run away again and was happy at home.

However there were some indications that in slightly more complex cases, the effects of this kind of short-term crisis intervention model may not be long-lasting. For example, a case involving eight face-to-face contacts with a first-time runaway with learning difficulties and challenging behaviour, living in a reconstituted family under stress, had a positive short-term effect. Mediation work initially seemed to have produced a positive change in the way the parents enforced boundaries, and the way the young person responded to this:

They’ve come to a real agreement about where and when she can go, and who she’s with, that works well for both of them. [Project worker]

However, the fact that the young person had longer-term support needs, while the project’s emphasis was on a fairly brief intervention, meant that although the young person became calmer while the
engagement lasted she was upset by the end of contact. Three months after the end of involvement her behaviour is reported to have reverted to its former state:

*While she were seeing [the project]… the change in her were unbelievable. She changed from being an angry teenager to being a nice loving teenager and now she’s back to being an angry teenager again.* [Parent]

### 5.1.2 Young people who had run away or stayed away before

As stated in the previous section, the projects were significantly less likely to achieve positive change with young people with a history of running away or staying away than with first-time runaways. Central to this is a distinction between those who were defined by project staff as ‘running away’ and those who were ‘staying away’. This distinction was suggested by project staff as an important one for some of the young people they worked with, who spent time away from home but did not see themselves as ‘running away’. We therefore incorporated this distinction into the monitoring forms for the current evaluation. At the same time, we felt that the exact distinction between ‘running away’ and ‘staying away’ was unclear and were interested to explore how it was conceptualised and whether it was associated with any key patterns in the data.

In practice, the staff seem to have used the ‘staying away’ category to refer to situations incorporating ‘push’ and/or ‘pull’ factors. Some young people were staying away because of problems at home which they were trying to avoid, whilst others were strongly drawn away from the home through wanting to be with other people.

The central focus of this section is to explore the differences (within the group of young people who had been away more than once), between those young people who were defined as having ‘run away’ and those who were defined as having ‘stayed away’. To clarify this, and because as discussed in the introduction to the report the term ‘runaways’ has been used to encapsulate a variety of situations and behaviours, we have enclosed the terms ‘run away’ and ‘stayed away’ in inverted commas throughout this section.

#### Profile

Amongst the initial contact sample there was no difference in the gender split, and no clear difference in the age profiles of young people who had ‘stayed away’ or ‘run away’ before. The former group were, however, much more likely still to be away from home at the time of initial contact and tended to be staying with friends or (in a minority of cases) on the streets. Not all the incidents were necessarily of long duration, however. Some young people were ‘staying away’ regularly for one or two nights at a time. They were significantly more likely to have been away because of ‘pull factors’ – i.e. wanting to be with somebody else. They did not differ substantially from young people who had ‘run away’ in terms of the issues they were facing at home, or in other areas of their lives. However, they were somewhat less likely to be involved with social services at the time of referral.

#### Access and engagement

Young people who ‘stayed away’ were less likely to be referred by police than young people who had ‘run away’, although the majority were still police missing person referrals. They were more likely than young people who had ‘run away’ to be seen at initial contact and as likely to have ongoing engagement with the projects. The average extent of ongoing contact was slightly lower than for young people who were defined as having ‘run away’.

#### Interventions

The most important point of comparison is that the projects were significantly less likely to achieve positive change with young people who had ‘stayed away’ than those who had ‘run away’. Within the ‘end of contact’ sample, no positive changes were achieved with 46% of young people defined (at initial contact) as having ‘stayed away’ repeatedly, compared with 24% who had ‘run away’ repeatedly. Cases involving young people who ‘stayed away’ tended to be more likely to have identified hindering factors in relation to the young person and less likely to end in a planned way.

Analysis of the ‘end of contact’ sample and the case study sample shows that there are differing perspectives on the situations of young people who ‘stay away’. From an adult perspective (parents/carers and professionals) this group are often perceived as being at significant risk whilst away from home:
Young person has recently spent a number of nights away from home without parental consent. She has also been associating with much older males. Therefore concerns remain regarding the risks the young person may be exposed to during these periods. [Female, 12, referred by police and social services]

Young person is mixing with the wrong crowd, into drugs, staying out late. Stolen money from father and has criminal record [Male, 14, referred by father]

However, as in the second case above, this perspective is often not shared by young people themselves. One recurring reason for lack of ongoing engagement with those who ‘stayed away’ was that young people themselves did not feel they needed the project’s interventions.

Linked to this point, a second issue was the significant ‘pull’ that these young people felt towards others that they were spending time with whilst away from home.

A third issue relates to young people’s lifestyles. Once a pattern of ‘staying away’ becomes established young people are often highly mobile and unpredictable. This often made it very difficult for projects to keep in touch with these young people – appointments were often missed and contact could be completely lost. Changes in young people’s circumstances also hindered the continuity of work.

Finally, projects were sometimes confronted with a lack of viable solutions to young people’s situations which made it impossible to achieve change. Some young people who were repeatedly ‘staying away’ were clear that they did not wish to be at home, and the lack of alternative accommodation options for those under the age of 16 meant that they continued to leave home cyclically and stay with other people, often on an itinerant basis:

The law is unfair and being under 16 means that your parents own you and you have to go back; this law is crap [Young person]

Case Study 2 provides an illustrative example incorporating many of the above issues:

---

**CASE STUDY 2**

**Jason**

Jason, aged 15, lived at home with his mum, his stepdad and two younger siblings. Relationships at home were strained and when there were arguments Jason would often go to stay with friends for a couple of days at a time and then would return home. This situation had been going on for a while prior to the project’s involvement. At the time of initial contact, Jason was aggressive and drinking heavily with his friends. He was also regularly missing school and at risk of exclusion. The project worker identified problems in relation to ‘boundaries’ at home and a lack of parental support.

The intervention consisted mainly of one-to-one work with Jason including work on the risks of alcohol misuse, and also some liaison work with his school. Some limited mediation work was also attempted with his parents but this was not successful as his mum refused to cooperate, and declined any further support. Some anger management work was also started though this work did not really get off the ground.

Initially, Jason co-operated in the work and seemed to want to make some positive changes and improve the situation at home and school. However, his friends appeared to exert a bigger pull on Jason than either his parents or the project. As time went on it became increasingly difficult for the project to locate him, and he would often miss appointments. After a couple of months, Jason lost interest in the work and it became impossible for the project to engage with him at all. He became defensive about his behaviour and seemed to prefer to spend time with his mates. His apparent independence from adults made it difficult for the project to get through to him. Shortly after this Jason refused any further contact with the project.

By the end of the intervention, Jason was still spending time with, and drinking heavily with his friends. He was also still at risk of school exclusion. The project referred Jason on to Connexions.
There was insufficient data on successful interventions with young people who had ‘stayed away’ to provide a definitive guide to appropriate models of intervention. However, there were examples of projects working with families in the absence of contact with the young person which appeared to have some positive impact on the situation, particularly where young people were staying away primarily because of problems at home rather than ‘pull’ factors, and of mediation work. There were also examples of creative interventions involving work with young people’s peer groups.

In summary, whilst the exact distinction between ‘running away’ and ‘staying away’ remains to be defined, the above analysis suggests that it is central to understanding the likelihood of projects achieving positive change with repetitive runaways. Young people who ‘stayed away’ from home repeatedly were a particularly difficult group for the projects to achieve change with and for, but some of the risks and issues faced by this group suggest a significant level of need.

5.1.3 Young people who are forced to leave home

The fact that a significant minority of young ‘runaways’ have actually been forced to leave home by parents or carers has long been recognised in the UK (Rees, 1993) and other countries (Brennan et al, 1978) and has been the subject of detailed exploration (e.g. Ringwalt et al, 1998; Rees & Siakeu, 2004).

Profile

The profile of the young people in this category in contact with projects is broadly in line with previous research findings. They were almost all aged 14 and above, with a concentration in the 15 to 16 age group and there was a roughly even gender split. They were more likely than average to be living in a step-family and least likely to be living with both birth parents. They were less likely to have been away before than young people who had ‘run away’ or ‘stayed away’. Finally, they were more likely to be experiencing physical or emotional abuse at home – a point which is consistent with previous research (Rees & Rutherford, 2001).

Access and engagement

Most of these young people either referred themselves to projects (23%) or were referred by other agencies (49%), rather than via police missing person referrals (9%). Most commonly, they were in contact with the ‘direct access’ projects described in Chapter 2 and as a consequence the rate of initial contact with young people who had been forced to leave home was high, with projects having face-to-face contact with 94% of the young people in this category who were referred to them.

Interventions

The projects achieved a high rate (67%) of substantial positive changes with this group and the rate of completion of planned work was also significantly higher than average. For 16- and 17-year-olds the likelihood of achieving substantial positive change was particularly high. This usually consisted of securing safe alternative accommodation for young people, often combined with referrals to other agencies for ongoing support (see Case Study 3).
CASE STUDY 3

Leah

Leah was 17 years old when she referred to the project. She was living at home with her parents and three younger sisters. She had suffered emotional abuse and neglect for some time while living at home. Leah had been thrown out on two occasions in the previous few months by her mother, had low self esteem and was feeling very rejected. Leah had been thrown out again by her mum just prior to the referral to the project and was 'bed hopping' between various friends’ houses.

The intervention mainly consisted of helping Leah to find suitable accommodation and supporting her with housing and benefit applications and interviews. The project also carried out some work to improve Leah’s self esteem. Leah was also referred to a local community project which helped her with budgeting skills. Some limited mediation work was carried out with her family.

By the end of the intervention Leah was living independently in a flat and was feeling much happier. Her self esteem had improved and she had enrolled on a college course. Leah’s relationship with her family had improved slightly by the end of the intervention and she had some limited contact with them.

Although the longer term outcomes of this work are not known it is clear that the projects were often able to play an important short-term crisis intervention role for young people in this age group

However, with under-16-year-olds the case studies suggest that the situation was not always so straightforward. Independent accommodation was not an option, and in some cases projects reported difficulties in gaining a response to young people’s situations from social services, who were perceived as viewing this group as a low priority.

In some cases the projects were able to find a temporary alternative stop-gap (e.g. an estranged parent or an older sibling) or negotiate the young person’s return home, following mediation work with parents/carers. Some parents felt unable to cope with young people’s behaviour and the projects were sometimes able to make some telling interventions to improve the situation. But in other cases the situation remained essentially unresolved and young people were left waiting until they reached 16 in order to find a stable place to live.

One young person aged 14 who had been sexually abused by her father and then thrown out of home was still moving between parents, extended family and temporary carers at the end of the project’s involvement. During this time she had also been thrown out by her grandparents. She had problems with anger, depression and self-harm:

None of them have changed. I think it is just the things that can’t change. It’s just there forever.

In another case a project supported a young person who was under 16 and on the streets (see Case Study 4 below).

Inevitably many young people were experiencing feelings of rejection and this made it difficult for them to disengage from the projects. One young person commented that the bad thing about the project was the lack of contact after the problems were solved. A project worker for another young person felt she had become too reliant on her.

The above discussion is based on a relatively small number of cases, but suggests that working with young people under the age of 16 who had been forced to leave home may be a significant challenge for runaways projects.
CASE STUDY 4

Leon

Leon lived with his mother, stepfather and stepsiblings and he and his mother had a volatile relationship. Leon was first thrown out at age 11. By the time he was 15 he had been thrown out fifteen times. Leon at 15 had been excluded from school for two years and was thrown out two weeks before referral to the project. He was living rough, staying at friends’ and sleeping in cars. He had attempted suicide when a youth worker referred him to the project. Leon was unable to claim benefit because of his age and had therefore gone hungry and was in a poor state of health:

*He knocked on Social Services door and got nowhere; he felt that no-one cared for him, he felt how desperate could he get, and he felt as a black guy he wasn’t getting support.*

The project worker listened to Leon and allowed him to express his anger. The project offered practical support such as the provision of underclothes, and the chance of a shower as well as vouchers and food. The project worker made a verbal child protection referral and tried to mediate with Leon’s mother, who wouldn’t have him back.

Leon said he appreciated a number of things about the project:

*You can go to talk to them – say certain stuff (they) won’t tell anyone.*

*They help you (and gave) clean stuff to wear.*

*(They) helped me with anger, helped me with attitude and helped me with talking to people.*

As a result of the involvement of a social services family intervention team the young person eventually returned home but he did not engage well with his mother. Three months on the young person is back on the streets and there have been no change in the issues causing Leon to be thrown out. Leon says he has ‘stopped violence’.

5.2 Specific sub-groups

As explained in Chapter 2, the funding initiative placed some emphasis on targeting those young runaways who were most ‘at risk’ and a number of the projects incorporated specific target groups within their proposal. Four key groups were: ‘looked after’ young people, young people at risk of sexual exploitation, young runaways from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and younger runaways. Here we consider the evidence coming out of the evaluation regarding some of the issues involved in working with these groups and also include a broader discussion about definitions of risk.

5.2.1 ‘Looked after’ young people

Young runaways in the ‘looked after’ system have been the subject of a considerable amount of research and policy attention. It is known that these young people are much more likely than average to run away repeatedly – a pattern which often starts before they become ‘looked after’ (Wade et al, 1998).

Profile

Within projects covered by this evaluation, young people living in residential or foster care made up 17% of the initial contact sample. The age and gender profiles of these young people were not significantly different to the rest of the sample. However, they were much more likely to be categorised as ‘running away’ and to have been away repeatedly in the past. They also tended to have been away for less time than young people living with family.
Access and engagement

These young people were much more likely than average to be referred via the missing person route, and the remainder were primarily referrals from other professionals (including residential and foster carers).

Overall, ‘looked after’ young people were just as likely to engage and have contact with the projects as young people living with family. However, this overall pattern masks some potentially important differences at project level. A comparison of two projects which targeted this sub-group of runaways suggests that the detailed way in which contact processes with this group are handled may have an impact on the likelihood of engagement.

One project which targeted ‘looked after’ runaways in direct response to referrals from police and residential staff had very little success in engaging with the young people referred. There were two key obstacles to engagement. First, often young people were running away repeatedly and the chaotic nature of their lives made it difficult to meet them. Second, even when it was possible to make initial contact, young people tended to be disinclined to engage. In contrast, a second project had more success in engaging with these young people by initially building up relationships with staff and young people as a background to individual work. This formed a platform from which to develop interventions with young people who were running away from the units. This project had much more success in establishing initial and ongoing contact with young people.

This comparison ties in with previous practice experience and research with this sub-group of runaways (Rees, 2001; Wade, Rees & Smeaton, 2002) and points to the need for creative approaches to engaging with young people who are often mistrustful of adults intervening in their lives.

Interventions

Interventions with this group tended to involve one-to-one work with young people combined with advocacy work to try to resolve the issues that were causing them to run away.

The likelihood of positive change was roughly in line with the average for the ‘end of contact’ sample. Positive changes noted included:

- reduction / cessation of offending
- reduction in substance misuse
- re-engagement with education / training
- positive change of care placement
- positive change in care environment (in same placement)
- improvements in relationships with family
- move out of care
- support in transition to independence
- instigation and positive conclusion of complaints / investigation processes

As a result of these changes, it was noted that in a number of cases young people had stopped running away. Because of reporting procedures it is possible to offer some substantiation for this claim with this group of young people. In one area, police stated that there had been a two-thirds reduction in missing person reports from targeted children’s homes. In the police’s view this had also been linked with a substantial reduction in crime in the locality.

5.2.2 Young people at risk of sexual exploitation

A link between running away and risk of sexual exploitation has been identified in previous UK research (Melrose, Barrett and Brodie, 1999). In the UK, van Meeuwen and Swann (1998) developed a model for Barnardo’s understanding the process by which young people (usually female) are ‘groomed’ and drawn into sexual exploitation (Pearce et al, 2002). Some of the projects in the current evaluation used this model in their work with young people in this group, but it was not universally applied.
Profile

Whilst we use the term ‘at risk’ of sexual exploitation here, there are suggestions in the monitoring and case study data that this risk seems often to already be a reality, for example:

*Young person abused through prostitution - ran away from home, stayed with abusive partner - misusing heroin and crack. [Notes by project staff]*

This group were predominantly (85%) female and tended to be concentrated in the 14- to 15-year-old age range. There were also a large number of other ways in which they differed from the rest of the sample of young people in contact with the projects, being significantly more likely:

- to have ‘run away’ and less likely to have been ‘forced to leave’
- to be living in residential or foster care
- to have been staying at ‘friends’ whilst away from home
- to have been away for a longer period
- to have been away due to ‘wanting to be with somebody else’
- to have run away often in the past
- to have problems with school attendance
- to have problems in a range of other areas (e.g. self-harm, alcohol use, and drugs use)

They were clearly therefore a ‘high risk’ group of young runaways.

Access and engagement

We only have reliable data on risk of sexual exploitation for those young people who had ongoing contact with projects so we are not able to explore issues of access and engagement for this group.

Interventions and change

Projects tended to have quite extended interventions with these young people (they were almost twice as likely to have ten or more face-to-face contacts). The achievement of positive change was much more difficult with this group (32% of cases had a substantial or entirely positive change compared to 49% for the rest of the sample).

A central issue in this work was differing perceptions of the situation by different parties. As suggested by the Barnardo’s model referred to above, the young women often did not perceive themselves to be at risk although others did. In order to engage with young people projects often did not talk directly about sexual exploitation, and focused on building up young people’s trust and raising their self-esteem and awareness.

The challenges involved are illustrated by the following quote from a young woman with whom the project had worked extensively:

*They tried helping me but they don’t make any difference – They keep on at you.*

In some cases, nevertheless, change was achieved. Several young people stopped running away during and following the project’s interventions and there were other tangible positive changes such as reduction or cessation of involvement in drugs, improvements in family relationships, and a change of accommodation.

In another sense, the evidence of lengthy engagements with young people in this target group is a significant achievement and it is likely that successful interventions with these young people will require patient ongoing involvement which can provide the opportunity to intervene and support them when a crisis occurs within their lifestyle.
CASE STUDY 5

Kelly

Kelly, aged 14, was a young carer and had not attended school for some time and had run away repeatedly to be with a group of older males. She is known to have been exchanging sex for drugs. Kelly was away from home at the time she referred herself to the project. She heard about the project through social services who had closed her case, and thought it would be somewhere to go and stay.

The project worker listened to Kelly, was non-judgemental and worked at gaining her trust. Support work was also carried out with Kelly’s mother who was encouraged to report the young person missing when she ran away. The project worker liaised with school and subsequently the young person’s attendance improved. The young person did not initially regard herself as being sexually exploited but work was carried out on harm minimisation and communicating safety issues with regard to selling sex and having inappropriate relationships with older men. The project worker accompanied the young person to a clinic after crisis and drug withdrawals.

Kelly was willing to engage and attended the agency regularly on a drop-in basis. She regarded the project staff as trustworthy and non-judgmental. The project moved at the young person’s pace. However, the young person continued to be dependent on drugs and alcohol and her resistance to other agencies continued to be problematic. Her relationship with her mother remained poor.

Three months on from initial contact the project worker’s view is that there have been reductions in the extent of Kelly’s involvement in selling sex for drugs and in running away. Kelly’s mother is now reporting the young person missing when she runs away. The young person is refusing to go and see the sexual health nurse and it is anticipated that the work with Kelly needs to be long-term.

The young person claims there is no change but states: “The most important thing that has happened is that I’m still alive”.

The value of the project’s interventions, even when little or no tangible positive change had yet been achieved was also emphasised by external professionals in the case study sample:

[Young person] felt listened to. This is still a very powerful experience for her – not to feel judged but listened to. This means she trusts the workers there and uses it as a point of safety and contact when things get difficult. She does have crises and can be chaotic. At a point when we did not know where she was or what she was doing the fact that she would take herself to [Project] when it got too much was very important. [SSD Housing Support Worker]

5.2.3 Younger runaways

Research has estimated that a quarter of young runaways first run away before the age of 11 (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999). These young people are particularly likely to run away repeatedly and as a consequence are more at risk of a wide range of problems in adolescence and beyond (Rees & Smeaton, 2001). In view of this, younger runaways can be seen as one of the higher risk runaway categories, and it is important to focus on the particular issues faced in working with this group. As noted earlier the projects received relatively few referrals from young people under the age of 11 and so we focus here on a slightly broader age group, including 11- and 12-year-olds.

Profile

Most of these younger runaways were male (67%). These younger runaways were slightly more likely to have run away before than the young runaways aged 13 and over in contact with projects and thus they are a distinctly different group from the first-time runaways discussed earlier in this chapter.

Where substantial work was carried out it is evident that some younger runaways were already facing substantial problems in life:
Eldest child with four younger sisters. Problems with step-dad - has expectations of him far beyond his years and capabilities. Continually running away and getting into very unsafe situations. Excluded from school. Bored all day. Suspicions of neglect. Socially excluded. Issues around poverty. [Male, aged 10]

School issues were particularly prominent amongst this group:

Had run away due to problems at school around bullying. Parents trying to get into a different high school to the one she's been given and where the bullies may go. No previous incidences of running or involvement with other agencies. Young person currently in last year at primary school and in process of applying for secondary - requested our help in secondary placement in a different school. [Female, aged 10]

Access and engagement

The large majority (73%) of younger runaways had been referred via a police missing person referral. The main exception was one project that had undertaken publicity and awareness-raising work in schools and as a result had received a number of referrals of young people from these schools.

Compared to the average for the referral sample as a whole, the initial contact in response to referrals of younger runaways was more likely to only involve contact with the family and less likely to involve initial or ongoing contact with the young person. There were therefore some additional barriers to engagement with this particular group, including difficulties in making contact and some evidence of parents feeling the intervention was inappropriate or unnecessary. It was notable that relatively 'hands-off' approaches to police missing person referrals of this age group (e.g. mailing out information and inviting parents or young people to contact the project) did not tend to lead to contact.

CASE STUDY 6

Mark

Mark (10 years old) was first referred after being reported as missing to the police, having spent a night away from home with an older boy.

Mark had lived with an aunt and uncle since a young age (reasons not known). He was not known to social services but had educational welfare involvement due to his behaviour at school and had been excluded on several occasions. He was currently awaiting allocation to a pupil referral unit. He had also been having difficulties in his relationships at home, often getting very angry.

The project carried out extensive work with Mark (more than ten face-to-face contacts) and had numerous contacts with his carers and with other agencies. The project focused primarily on two issues – education and anger management. Work carried out included: mediation with school; securing access to other support services for the young person (individual counselling and group work) and carers (family support); support with the transition into a pupil referral unit.

By the end of the intervention Mark had returned to mainstream schooling and there had been an improvement in his behaviour at home. He had not run away again. The project completed their involvement by referring the young person to another local service which could continue the work and support Mark’s transition into secondary school.

Interventions

Where ongoing engagement was achieved, the monitoring and case study material gathered for this evaluation suggests that runaways projects have the potential to make a telling early intervention with younger runaways which may prevent problems escalating and becoming engrained. The model of working described in Case Study 6, combining individual and group work and extensive contact with carers, worked well. Another project had success with engaging a 10-year-old male through activity-based work, again combined with regular contact with parents. Given the young people’s ages it may be that positive relationships with family members are a particularly important aspect of successful work with this target group and the case study material offers some support for this hypothesis.
5.2.4 Young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds

As discussed in Chapter 3, previous research has found slightly lower running away rates amongst Black and minority ethnic (BME) young people than amongst white young people (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999). It is also notable that running away rates amongst young people of mixed origin are higher than average. Black and minority ethnic young people, in general, run away for similar reasons to white young people, but they may face greater risks whilst away and also are not always able to access helping services that are sensitive to their culture or needs (see also Case Study 4). In addition, as discussed below, for some minority young people the significance and repercussions of the act of running away are very different to those for white young people.

Achievement of positive change tended to be somewhat higher than average for BME young runaways – with substantial or entirely positive change being identified in over 60% of cases – but this difference was not statistically significant (this may be to do with the small sample size and missing data). One particular sub-group with distinctive issues are young women from South Asian backgrounds. The issues facing young women in this group if they run away have been documented in previous literature (see Rees, 2001). In some cases the act of running away can be viewed as bringing shame on the family and this can have significant repercussions for the young person. For this reason, when these young women run away it is often a permanent departure from their home.

Access and engagement

One project in the current study had substantial previous expertise in working with BME young people and developed a successful model of engagement. Since it was believed that these young women would be unlikely to be reported missing if they ran away, alternative means of access were created, including direct publicity and awareness-raising in schools. This yielded a small but significant number of referrals during the period of the evaluation.

Interventions

The work with South Asian young women was usually long-term. The cultural competence of staff and the trust built up were key ingredients in the interventions.

I like working with [Project Worker] because she understands a lot more [culturally] than other workers. She understands about arranged marriages.

These factors, coupled with a lack of other culturally sensitive services to refer on to, led to extensive interventions and some risks of dependency on the part of the young women.

Significant positive changes were identified in case studies of work done with this group of young runaways, including finding suitable long-term accommodation, reductions in self-harming and improvements in emotional well-being.

5.2.5 Conceptualisation of ‘risk’

Further discussion is needed about the conceptualisation of those runaways most ‘at risk’. Whilst a case can be made for including each of the sub-groups discussed above in this group it is not always clear that these young people are those most at risk and there may be other young runaways who are equally in need of targeted and specific interventions.

Around half of the young people in the ‘end of contact’ sample fell into one or more of the above four risk groups (i.e. ‘looked after’ young people, young people at risk of sexual exploitation, younger runaways, and young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds). However the data produced ambiguous messages about whether these young people were more ‘at risk’ than others. They had run away significantly more often in the past, but on the other hand they tended to stay away for shorter periods of time. In general, young people in the ‘at risk’ groups were also significantly more likely to have been reported missing, to have been referred via a police missing person report and already to be involved with other agencies including social services (although this pattern does not apply to South Asian females). In one sense this potentially indicates the level of concern of parents/carers and professionals about these young people, but it can also be viewed as evidence that statutory agencies had already recognised and were attempting to address their needs.

Over two-thirds of young people worked with by the targeted projects were female. This is primarily attributable to the strong emphasis on sexual exploitation as a risk factor. However, the monitoring data set also shows indications of a group of male repetitive runaways who are more heavily involved than females in offending and substance use and could also be viewed as an ‘at risk’ group. Other
minority groups such as lesbian, gay and bisexual young runaways and disabled runaways may also warrant particular attention.

In summary, the issue of risk needs to be thought through in more detail if targeted projects are not to miss out on key sub-groups of young runaways. This requires a clarification of which risks are being considered – e.g. short-term risks whilst away from home, presence of other risk factors such as disengagement from school, or longer-term outcomes due to running away behaviour. If the latter is a factor then longitudinal research on young runaways would be required to provide reliable risk indicators.

5.3 Summary

- This chapter has built on the analysis in the preceding two chapters to explore the contexts in which projects were most likely to engage with, and achieve positive change with young runaways, and to identify some of the variations in models of working which are needed to work effectively with different sub-groups of the runaway population.

- The first part of the chapter looked at different groups of young people categorised according to the nature and history of their running away. In summary, the projects were most able to achieve positive change with two groups of young people through using a short-term crisis intervention model. These were young people who were running away or staying away for the first time; and young people aged 16 and over who had been forced to leave home.

- The projects also had a substantial amount of success in working with young people who were defined as ‘running away’ repeatedly, but notably less success with those who were repeatedly away from home and were defined as ‘staying away’. There were substantial barriers to maintaining ongoing engagement with these young people, even though there were often grounds for concern about their safety and well-being both at home and whilst they were away. Alternative models of engagement may need to be explored in order to work more effectively with young people who repeatedly stay away from home.

- Finally, there are some indications that achieving positive change was more difficult with young people under the age of 16 who had been forced to leave home. The lack of accommodation options and available services for this group of young people (mostly aged 14 or 15) meant that it was sometimes impossible to resolve the issues they faced.

- The second half of the chapter looked at work with four sub-groups of young runaways who might be defined as most ‘at risk’ – ‘looked after’ young people, younger runaways, Black and minority ethnic young people, and young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

- For the first three of these groups there was evidence that projects had been able to achieve substantial amounts of positive change. This had required a context-specific approach using a range of creative ways of making contact with young people and engaging in medium- to long-term work with them.

- For young people at risk of sexual exploitation, achievement of positive change was not generally high, but projects had had notable success in engaging these young people in ongoing work which might in the long-term lead to significant outcomes.

- A brief exploration of the characteristics of the ‘at risk’ groups suggests that there is a need to further explore the concept of risk for young runaways to ensure that targeted work aimed at groups of ‘at risk’ young runaways is inclusive and reaches the diverse range of young people who might fall into this category.
Chapter 6: General feedback on learning from practice

This chapter summarises the reflections gathered from project managers and staff about general learning from the funded initiatives. It also incorporates the responses to a survey of professionals who had contact with the projects. Of necessity it is a brief consideration of key themes relating to a broad span of differing practice models.

6.1 Project set-up and development

This section looks at the operational issues around putting together a project and the more strategic concerns around working with other agencies and promoting a service. The evaluation offered an important opportunity to capture learning about developing projects with young runaways across a range of geographical and service contexts. The feedback from project staff and professionals in other agencies contained some consistent themes which are likely to be of considerable relevance and value to those considering planning to develop runaways projects in the future.

6.1.1 Limited timescale

Comments on the challenges involved in setting up and developing initiatives within the relatively short funding period were a recurrent issue. For those initiatives attached to pre-existing projects, the service already had a local profile and a level of professional ‘capital’ accrued during prior practice:

*What made it work (here) was that a lot of the work had begun and the relationships been forged over the last three or four years. I think if we’d started from scratch we would’ve, well, I just can’t imagine how it would’ve worked.* [Project manager]

But for brand new schemes a pioneering role had to be undertaken – with workers acting as evangelists and educators, attempting to increase awareness of the issue of running away as an initial task and then promoting their service to both potential service users and to other agency professionals:

*Two years is a more realistic timescale in which to make a difference. After a year of solid delivery people are just getting the message.* [Project manager]

6.1.2 Building links with other agencies

Given the cross-agency nature of service provision to this client group, building links with other agencies was a time-consuming but important task. In the responses from professionals there was much praise for the projects’ tenacity in building and maintaining interagency links. However, it was clear from project staff’s accounts that project promotion and the maintenance of interagency relationship was an ongoing task and that this required dedicated resources over and above those available for direct work with young people.

*Project ‘champions’*

One of the most important mechanisms for overcoming difficulties in set-up and development was the presence of ‘champions’ at management level in strategic services – police, social services and education – to help with project promotion. Sometimes this was achieved through involvement of appropriate people in a project steering group:

*Commitment by the police and SSD as part of a multi-agency steering group. The group ensured that the right key people were on board and messages about the project were circulated effectively.* [Social services manager]

When these key players were involved in part funding the initiative, they also had more of an incentive to promote the project.

However, this was another area that required maintenance and resources when there were changes in personnel in the key agencies.

*I think a lot of our systems are too dependent on some people who have a passion about the issue. What if they move to new jobs? We could really be left in the lurch.* [Project manager]
Interagency protocols

Building on the above point, where interagency protocols had been developed this had also proved useful:

The representatives of the initiative ensured that the different multi agency partners were fully consulted on protocols devised so that there would be no questions or ambiguity when protocols were implemented. This was an extremely important exercise that ensured that commitment and enthusiasm of other agencies was gained prior to the initiative starting. [Police officer]

However, some projects reported difficulties in developing and maintaining protocols.

6.1.3 Generating referrals

The issue of generating referrals was the subject of substantial comment, particularly from project staff. This particularly affected new projects. In some cases projects focusing primarily on police missing person reports had experienced significant barriers to receiving referrals through this route. As a consequence, the number of referrals received had been much lower than anticipated at the project planning stage. As discussed in Section 3.1, a relatively small number of referrals were received from young people themselves and this was also a source of disappointment to project staff.

Issues with the police missing person referral route

The prevalence of Misper-type schemes meant that for many projects a key relationship was with the police. Many people reported tensions in this relationship, particularly where the police were the primary (or sole) referrer.

The problem was three-tiered from the projects’ perspective. First, there was inconsistency around who was actually recorded as a Misper and a feeling that parents and police did not always do all that they should:

We want people to make reports and the police to take the reports – we want the reality of children running not this half-hearted picture that certainly in (our area) has been going on for ever. We were very distressed in the first few months when we just weren’t getting reports. [Project worker]

Project staff were concerned about under-reporting and felt that there was potential for increasing police missing person referrals through awareness-raising with parents and foster carers about the risks young people faced when they ran away.

Second, there were delays in police visiting after a reported incident, thus leading to delays in project involvement:

Mispers are a low priority for the police and it depends on an officer being available to do a briefing. It can be two to three weeks before they meet a young person – at which point things may have sorted themselves out. [Project worker]

Third, some projects were dependent on police to ‘promote’ the project to potential users and this did not always happen, despite referral protocols being agreed:

The police debrief officers were supposed to get permission to pass on the information to us – to give out the card and say, ‘Is it alright if we give your details to (project name)?’ and get the permission there and then. It was part of the confidentiality policy that social services were particularly keen on, but I don’t think it actually happened often. [Project worker]

These drawbacks had led some projects to adopt a more flexible referral policy which accommodates a broad range of potential referrers:

We’ve definitely felt the benefit of having a completely open referral policy – before the work developed, when we were restricted to Misper referrals, it really limited access to the project. [Project worker]

Concerns were also expressed about the risks of over-reliance on the police missing person route in terms of inclusive practice. Some workers felt that Black and minority ethnic families and also refugee families might be less likely to report young people as missing, and also that the project’s perceived association with the police might inhibit parents’ willingness to engage with the project.
Promoting the service to young people

Previous learning from practice has indicated that ‘word-of-mouth’ recommendation amongst young people can be an important source of referrals for young runaways projects, but that building up local awareness amongst young people can be a lengthy process.

Some projects had some success in raising their profile amongst local young people by visiting schools and other youth work projects. In one area a rolling programme of group work with young people in residential units was felt to have not only served a worthwhile preventative function, but also to have facilitated involvement with those who did go on to run away – by establishing relationships with residential staff and by being a known ‘face’ for the young people themselves.

The work in children’s homes has far exceeded our expectations of success. It shows the need for consistent targeted intervention over time rather than a brief input … to establish trust with the young people and the staff. [Project worker]

However, overall the level of self referral amongst projects was relatively low and for some staff there was a degree of disappointment that they were unable to improve this. This problem was particularly acute for those projects which targeted more detached young people – those who might not have anywhere safe to stay having lost contact with family and often being beyond the reach of mainstream agencies. They reported difficulties in identifying and making contact (via outreach work) with those who might need the service.

6.1.4 Project ‘fit’ and local impact

Professionals were asked in the postal survey how well the runaways projects fitted into the pre-existing network of local services. Virtually all said that the initiatives fitted in well – and many extended this to stating that projects were often able to smooth an otherwise fractured process of dealing with a vulnerable young person and helping coordinate other agency responses:

There was an obvious need for the project … it filled a bloody great hole. Previously the information about young people who went missing had been passed from us to social services and just got lost in the system. [Police officer]

The comment that the projects filled a gap in the network of service provision was reiterated by a number of external professionals in a range of agencies:

[The project worked] very well - aware of ethos of working in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies. Think most people in [the area] would rate [the project] as an essential resource. [Connexions Personal Adviser]

The project has filled a gap in services. The project aids the work done by other professionals. Education Welfare Officers cannot ensure that students attend school when home/housing is a problem. Some young people have been ‘lost’ between agencies. Runaways can be identified and supported. [The project] fits well with the multi-agency approach to helping young people. [Senior Educational Welfare Officer]

It filled a gap for children putting themselves at great risk. [Family Support Worker]

In terms of the broader impacts of projects beyond the direct work done with young people, a variety were suggested, some relative to particular local issues but others which might equally apply nationally:

• raised the profile of the needs of Asian young women
• changed the perspective of other agencies towards young people who run away from home
• avoided the need for statutory involvement
• helped foster better interagency work
• played a part in crime prevention / reduction

A better relationship has developed with the SSD – the police approach has been more constructive and it has reduced polarisation between police and SSD. [Social work manager]

By reducing the number of young people going missing this has an impact on police time and resources and enables officers to deal with other local issues. [Police officer]
6.2 Learning from the direct work

We turn now to some of the key learning points regarding direct work with individual young people and families which were highlighted in interviews with project staff and the survey of external professionals at the end of the evaluation period. Again, these data sources have provided some valuable material based on direct and recent experience which serves to highlight some of the key issues to be considered both by specialist services and more general agencies in working with young runaways. A number of the themes identified in the material (such as the importance of a rapid response) tend to support aspects of the analysis presented in earlier chapters.

6.2.1 Importance of rapid response

There was a high degree of consensus amongst project workers that a key to success in practice with young runaways was a swift response when a referral was first made and the running away incident was relatively fresh in young people’s minds – perhaps before they had even returned to their usual home. Workers found that young people and their families were highly motivated to engage at this crisis point and to work hard at unravelling entrenched difficulties. However, this motivation might be lost if the initiative was not taken at this particular time.

I recently worked with a 12-year-old who had run away from a children’s home. She had stayed with an older man who gave her drugs and tried to stop her leaving his flat. She was particularly open to talking about minimising risks because she had been exposed to such a frightening situation. [Project worker]

In some situations this explicit desire to ‘strike whilst the iron was hot’ was thwarted by delays in the Misper referral process (as already alluded to above):

The delays in the referral process hindered us … it prevented parents deciding if they wanted support for their young person at that point … if it had happened as planned we would’ve had a much smoother system going and been able to respond within that 48-hour deadline … nine times out of ten I would have to turn up quite coldly on someone’s doorstep and they would be taken aback and say, ‘Why are you here? This was three weeks ago – if we’d have known about you we would’ve made contact then’. That was a response I had from a lot of families. [Project worker]

6.2.2 Early intervention as a key to effective practice

It was strongly felt that early intervention could offer an opportunity to avoid much worse longer term problems – for the young people themselves, their families and society more generally (and this anecdotal evidence has been backed up in research – for example, see Craig & Hodson, 1998).

If the intervention doesn’t happen then, arguably, the young person is at risk of becoming very vulnerable. We all see the stuff on the telly about 15-year-olds who have been missing for months and people who live on the streets – and it all starts at that early stage. [Project Leader]

Many workers highlighted the need for a ‘culture shift’ for all parties (agencies and parents/carers) to change their view of what services were (or could be) about – not focused on crisis management but on early acknowledgement of less serious difficulty and the implementation of prompt diversionary responses. The benefits of steering young people away from criminal pathways were particularly commented upon by a number of police officers:

If we don’t get the resources they become young criminals and if crime isn’t tackled early it spirals out of control – if I can help them now I can save the area hundreds of burglaries. [Police officer]

6.2.3 Pitching and pacing the intervention – young person-centredness

There was much agreement amongst workers that a major element in producing positive outcomes was the way in which they worked. Although there were variations in the terminology employed, all said that it was important to have time for the young people, to build trust, work at the young person’s own pace, listen well and be responsive, flexible and non-judgemental. In effect the workers were proud that they were able to tailor an individualised and young person-led response.

Respondents to the professional survey picked up on this theme as a key to successful work by the projects:
They were much more flexible than Social Services. Workers could meet up with young people at different times and work around the young person’s own patterns. [Social worker]

6.2.4 Working with parents/carer
To some degree there has been a historical tension between being young person-centred and incorporating the views and wishes of parents into work with young runaways (Rees, 2001) but most project staff saw the merit of an inclusive approach:

*We make sure we’re talking to parents because there’s quite a lot of mistrust out there about what you’re doing – ‘What are you doing with my child? … you’ve got to make sure that you’re including families but you’re also there for that young person.* [Project worker]

As the quote above indicates this requires a carefully balanced approach. Comments in the professional survey indicated that other agencies welcomed the fact that project workers were committed to cultivating relationships with parents/carers as well as with young people:

*Helping factors for effective work – Advocacy and support for children and parents which is seen to be impartial.* [Social work manager]

*Whilst this is an impressionistic view only, it seems that families got a lot of support and that young people did not leave home (even if they did not always stop running away).* [Clinical psychologist]

6.2.5 Lack of emergency accommodation for under 16s
An issue that arose frequently in the interviews was the problem of how to cope in situations where young people needed a temporary safe place to stay. Many workers said that this often left them feeling that they were not able to offer a worthwhile ‘holistic’ service because some young people needed emergency accommodation which was not available. There was a consensus that social services were unwilling to offer placements – unless there was a serious child protection issue. This was especially true for ‘older’ young people – those aged 14 and 15 – and not only caused difficult stalemates in casework but could also lead to young people taking greater risks:

*If there isn’t a suitable family or friends for them to stay with then they may stay with unsuitable people … you do the best you can until they get to 16 and you can move them on.* [Project Worker]

6.2.6 Independent status
It would be fair to say that the norm in runaways work up to this point has been for voluntary sector projects to operate in this field – and to advocate for the importance of this in avoiding the stigma associated with statutory interventions (see Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Rees, 2001). This message again came through strongly in these interviews. Many workers were keen to underline the different impact that independent runaway projects could have on the lives of those who had become alienated from statutory provision:

*I got a lot of feedback from young people that my independence really helped. A lot of them may not have had positive experiences of the police in the past or of social services.* [Project worker]

This was especially true for those projects which concentrated on young people who were at risk of sexual exploitation whilst away from home:

*They find it hard to trust adults and I think they find it hard to engage with services, so it is particularly challenging. I think it is incredibly important that there are service provisions such as this scheme that can persevere and work with them in a way that’s much more flexible and creative than mainstream statutory services … they do respond positively when they get a sense that this is different to what they’re used to.* [Project manager]

Again, staff from other agencies recognised the importance of this independence – sometimes even where it caused them some difficulties in their own practice;
They offer one-to-one support to young people who are marginalised. These young people may not want to use a service such as (youth work centre) and outreach work is useful in these cases. [Connexions manager]

I know [project] had a responsibility to keep the young person’s confidentiality – but I respected that and we communicated regularly, both of us knowing that we had the best interests of the young person at heart. [Police officer]

Nevertheless, there were some indications from social services managers that, having seen the benefits of runaways projects, they hoped the work could be brought within the mainstream.

*Needs to be developed to form part of the council’s core business.* [Social services manager]

Interestingly, one project within the evaluation was sited within the youth justice system and staffed by a police officer and a social worker. These workers were happy to operate under a statutory banner and felt that they were able to overcome many of the problems that might have been predicted. In fact they regarded their titles and experience as being useful tools in getting results.

At the core of the successful practice was a flexibility around issues such as confidentiality with neither agency having control over how a case was processed. In addition the workers were very experienced and were able to transcend the negativity which might have otherwise been associated with their professional label:

*One of (my colleague’s) clients asked me to go and visit her. She is in foster care and has a social worker but it was us who she told she’d been raped – And I was able to do the report for her, which was easier than her having to go into a police station and make the report to someone she doesn’t know.* [Project worker]

The project workers were very positive about the work they had done. They felt that the issue of running away had provided a route back into the lives of some young people who had become alienated from mainstream services. Not only did they say that they could use this lever to re-establish a relationship with stigmatised services, but they could also sometimes extend their ‘runaway role’ to advocating for young people who had themselves been the victims of crime.

### 6.2.7 Suggestions from external professionals for potential improvements to project work

Respondents to the professional survey were asked to offer any thoughts on ways of improving the projects’ models of working.

Before detailing these here it is worth noting that they were also asked for weaknesses in the approaches but most respondents were unable to identify any beyond the need for more resources for the projects.

*We haven’t identified any weaknesses so far … without them we’d still be banging our heads against the wall on a lot of cases.* [Police officer]

One area of potential weakness related to inter-agency working. Although some respondents stated a high degree of satisfaction in this respect, others said they found that this could be inconsistent, perhaps suggesting a need for more formal arrangements around communication between project staff and other professionals:

*Closer partnership working between agencies by all (project) workers. Some workers were excellent in this respect, but others were reluctant to share information.* [Police officer]

The suggested improvements often related to injection of extra funding to expand the service available:

*The project needs more funding and more staff. What they’re achieving is very positive but they’re under-resourced … they don’t have the capacity to deal with the demand.* [Police officer]

Other suggested improvements were:

- More publicity / promotion of the project. In particular, the importance of ensuring that professionals in a wide range of agencies were aware of the service.
- More direct access contact points spread across an area. For example, this point was made in relation to a project which was based in a city centre but aimed to provide a service to young people throughout a county.
• An extension of the availability of project workers / services to weekends and evenings, as it was felt that young runaways had a need for support at any time
• The provision of therapeutic work for young people, in particular those with mental health issues
• More work to be done to support parents / carers, provided that this did not detract from the quality and quantity of work undertaken with young people

6.2.8 Learning from innovation
There were a number of projects where innovative approaches to practice were tried out during this programme. We are only able to present brief reflections from three new practice models here. Further information is available in local evaluation reports.

Family support work
As discussed earlier, work with families has been a significant gap in work on the issue of young people running away in the UK. Two projects in the current evaluation developed services additional to their previous work which focused on direct engagement with parents/carers. The approaches were fundamentally different – in terms of referral source, ways of working and core aim – but there were two key elements identified by both projects:
• The importance of working with all adults in the household – primarily to generate a consensus
• The need for real consent and an ability in parents to engage properly
The main benefit of the work was that it allowed for a better understanding of what was a viable and desirable outcome for the young person – whether that be how to mediate an improved situation at home or a quicker understanding of the need to deal with a worse scenario:

Sometimes you realise that a parent has a major issue that they’re not addressing – maybe the whole dynamic of getting the young person back home … there’s nothing we can do – putting the young person back in there, it’s just not going to work … or, if they are back home, instead of going down the ‘mediationy’ type of route you might realise, ‘What I’ve actually got to do with this kid is give them strategies to survive this until they’re 16 and they can get out’ [Project workers]

Whilst the funded initiatives were relatively small scale, some significant successes were noted.

The work done by these projects also highlighted gaps in service provision to families in need in their areas, including a lack of family therapy and a paucity of respite accommodation for young people from social services. Some parents reported assaults by their children:

We’re beginning to identify a gap around parents who are getting violence from their children … if it’s the other way around, of course, there’s support [Project worker]

Out-of-hours work
The ASTRA Project in Gloucester received funding for a small pilot to provide out-of-hours telephone support to young runaways between the hours of 5pm and 10pm. The idea of this pilot was to explore the potential to fill what the project perceived to be a gap in local services in responding to young runaways with urgent needs.

The out-of-hours service received 145 calls over a ten-month period – an average of around three calls per week. Two fifths of the calls came directly from young people but a substantial amount also came from parents or carers and other professionals. The large majority of calls related to young people already known to the project, and most of these were cases where ongoing work was being undertaken with the young person. Calls were made to the service for a variety of reasons. Between a quarter and a third of all calls received could be defined as emergency or crisis situations. As anticipated in the initial conception of the scheme, in these situations an intervention was urgently needed and the project was able to undertake significant work which ensured the young person’s immediate safety. In many of these cases there did seem to be a gap in local service provision, and evidence of this included the fact that some of the referrals were actually received from statutory services. The pilot raised questions about the capacity of other services to meet the needs of older young people in crisis and also about whether young people will always be willing to turn to these services for help.
Project staff felt that the pilot had been worthwhile in that it enabled them to assess the level of need and respond to a small but significant number of young people who were genuinely in need of emergency support. However, delivering the service as an extension of existing daytime services had been a significant strain on the staff team. Project staff and management concluded that this was not the best way to provide an out-of-hours service. Two options for future delivery were a separate local team, or access through a national telephone helplines service.

**Provision of respite care**

Bradford Crisis Care, part of Bradford Social Services Department, gained funding for an initiative to provide 48 hour emergency foster care provision for young people (under 17s) in crisis and in need of somewhere safe to stay - those who have run away or have been forced to leave either home or care. Referrals came via police missing person reports and also from social services. A team of three trained foster carers were available on a rota basis to provide a safe home environment and a place for young people to talk in the evenings. Social workers provided direct support to the young people during the day, including crisis intervention and follow-on work with the young people to either facilitate a return home or to find them alternative accommodation.

The project received 63 referrals in a six-month period, 50 of these were young people living with family, 11 were ‘looked after’ young people (8 in foster care and 3 in children’s homes) and two were in other living situations. Placements were provided in response to 32 of these referrals. In a further 14 cases it was not possible to provide a placement because none was available (including times when the placement was already in use). These statistics over the first six months of the service’s operation suggest a substantial level of need and this was backed up by local professionals who felt that the service had filled a gap in the local safety net. Two learning points suggested by professionals participating in the case studies were the value of the project’s ability to respond rapidly to young people in crisis, and the importance of providing adequate support to the foster carers.

### 6.3 Summary

In this chapter we have reviewed the reflections of project staff and external professionals on the work of the funded projects.

Some significant issues were identified in terms of the setting up and initial development of the projects, including the challenges presented by the short time scale, the resources required to develop working relationships with other agencies, and difficulties in generating referrals and promoting the service.

Despite these teething problems the projects were generally viewed as having fitted well into existing network of local services and to have had a tangible impact on the local situation in addition to the direct work with young people.

A number of key issues for future practice development were identified including the importance of a rapid response and early interventions; the need for a balance between ‘young-person-centredness’ and working effectively with parents and carers; the lack of emergency accommodation for under-16-year-olds; and debates around the extent to which it is important that runaways projects are independent.

The chapter has also summarised very briefly some learning from the funded initiatives which piloted specific services in the shape of family work, out-of-hours emergency support and provision of emergency accommodation.

At a very general level, the feedback from external professionals in particular suggests that during their operation the projects made a significant contribution to the range of local provision available for young people, and that they were particularly valued for filling a perceived gap in the local network of services.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

In this final chapter we summarise and discuss the key issues identified in this evaluation, and draw out some of the practice and policy implications.

In the first section we summarise the key messages from the analysis in Chapters 3 to 5 in relation to generating referrals, making contact with and engaging with young people, and achieving positive change. We also summarise messages from throughout Chapters 2 to 6 regarding models of intervention, the diversity of the initiative and project development.

We conclude this chapter with the identification of three central themes emerging from the evaluation which have broad relevance to current debates and policy developments in relation to children and young people.

7.1 Key points

7.1.1 Generating referrals

The analysis of referrals presented in Chapter 3 highlighted some patterns in the characteristics of young people referred to the projects, in comparison with young runaways as a whole. In particular, young people referred were more likely to be older and female than young runaways in general, and there was an under-representation of young people who had been forced to leave home. These patterns were partly linked to the source of referral and this highlights the importance of decision-making about referral routes to runaways projects and the implications that these decisions have for the inclusivity of services.

The police missing person referral route has become the most common access route for young runaways projects in the UK. The evaluation has shown that this route can be particularly successful in reaching younger runaways and may also be an effective way of contacting and engaging with first-time runaways. However, a significant proportion of young runaways are not reported missing to the police. The evaluation has shown that young people who are forced to leave home are unlikely to be reported. There are also concerns that other sub-groups of young runaways, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are being abused at home, are also less likely to be reported.

Referrals from other agencies were another important source. As discussed in Chapter 6, the success of this route is dependent on effective and ongoing promotion of runaways services to local professionals to ensure that awareness remains high. The evaluation also highlights the fact that young people do not always welcome referrals to new projects by professionals with whom they are already engaged. There is a risk that runaways projects are, by implication, seen as working with the other agencies in a way which makes young people mistrustful of them. This highlights the need to give careful thought to the way in which the referral process between agencies, information-sharing, and the initial contact with young people referred through this route are handled. For this route, as for the police missing person route, the perceived independence of the runaways project is a key issue.

Perhaps surprisingly, the projects received a small but notable proportion of referrals from informal routes such as relatives and friends. The rates of initial and ongoing contact with young people referred in this way were significantly higher than the average. This is potentially a valuable way of making contact with young people, if it is possible to raise general public awareness about the existence of such services.

Finally, the projects achieved a high rate of initial contact, ongoing contact and positive tangible outcomes with young people who referred themselves, although it is to be expected that young people who have the motivation to contact projects will be more likely to stay in touch and follow things through. Self-referrals tended to be older and, often, had crossed the key threshold of 16 years of age and were therefore able to pursue independent living options, thus making the achievement of tangible outcomes easier. However, several projects in the evaluation used awareness-raising in schools to generate a wider range of self-referrals including younger runaways and runaways from minority ethnic backgrounds. These initiatives point to a potential area for further development.

The implication of the above discussion is that projects aiming to be inclusive in their work with young runaways should utilise as wide a variety of routes as possible.
7.1.2 Contact and engagement

The analysis of initial and ongoing contact patterns also presented in Chapter 3 has a number of implications for service provision for young runaways, whether this is done through specialist or generic services.

One key issue is the specific means of accessing young people and the role that parents play in this. The evaluation has highlighted the fact that involving parents/carers in the initial contact may reduce the likelihood of engaging with young people and, in particular, that they may act as ‘gatekeepers’, hindering access to young people. However, this needs to be balanced by a consideration of the importance of engaging with families in order to engage with young people and to achieve positive outcomes. The findings suggest that runaways projects face a difficult balancing act in attempting to contact young people directly whilst avoiding alienating parents and carers.

The evaluation also suggests that a quicker response may be more likely to lead to engagement with young people and, ultimately, this may be dependent on adequate resourcing of services.

Finally, the findings illustrate the fact that the unsettled or even chaotic nature of some young runaways’ lives present significant obstacles to attempts to contact them. This may mean that projects need to make more extended and varied efforts to make and maintain contact with them, again with resource implications.

In summary there are substantial hindering factors to making contact and engaging with young runaways, and projects need to adopt flexible and imaginative responses to these obstacles.

7.1.3 Achieving change

The findings in Chapter 4 and 5 provide evidence of the extent to which projects were able to have a significant impact on the situations of young people with whom they worked. Given the right contexts the projects were able to achieve significant change in key areas of young people’s lives, including their living situation, relationships with family and other carers, links with school, and contact with other helping agencies. Within the sample of cases analysed for this evaluation, the projects achieved substantial positive change in 42% of cases. The evaluation has shown some significant patterns in terms of the likelihood of achieving change according to the young people’s running away history, and the type and nature of their most recent ‘runaway’ incident.

The projects had particular success with first-time runaways. This often required an emphasis on work with parents as well as with young people and was helped by a swift response whilst the issues related to the running away incident were still fresh in people’s minds. This is the one of the scenarios where a very short-term crisis intervention model can yield outcomes and play an important early preventative role.

The factors involved in successful working with repetitive runaways, including those who are ‘looked after’, are entirely different. Trust building with young people is perhaps the fundamental issue in these cases. The work is likely to take on a slower pace and therefore be longer term, often involving ongoing contacts with parents and carers and with other agencies, whilst ensuring that trust and engagement with young people are maintained. In particular, hindering factors to successful ongoing engagement are evident with young people who ‘stay away’ from home repeatedly and this is an area which may require the development of different practice models.

The success of work with those young people who had been forced to leave was linked to young people’s age. With young people aged 16 and above the projects were often able to fulfil a different role in facilitating young people’s access to safe short-term accommodation, and in linking them in with agencies who would be able to work with them in the longer term. For young people in this category who were under 16, however, there are indications that the lack of options and priority given to this group were hindering factors which made achieving change more difficult.

Some of the projects had a notable success in engaging with young people in specific sub-groups of runaways who were deemed to be ‘at risk’. There are two important common themes here. First, the need for creative ways of engaging with these young people was evident. Whilst some referrals across all groups did come through referrals from police and other agencies, contact and engagement with this group often required tailor-made responses to their contexts. Second, interventions with these groups tended to be more lengthy than average. This was due to a combination of factors including the need to slowly develop trust, the complexity of the issues and the lack of alternative services which were able to work with these young people. This suggests that successful work with these ‘at risk’
groups are likely to require more than a short-term crisis intervention model. In addition it raises the issue of the risk of dependency on the project.

7.1.4 Models of working
The projects have generally adopted an individually tailored young person centred approach to working with young people which has been historically the favoured approach to working with young runaways in the UK. This approach has proved to be an effective one in achieving and maintaining engagement and trust with young people who have often had negative previous experiences of adults, but there are also potential pitfalls to this approach in terms of relationships with families and other agencies.

The nature of the relationships between parents / carers and projects working with young runaways has two potentially opposing aspects. On the one hand, in order to engage successfully with young people there is often a need to maintain some distance from parents, particularly where, from the young person’s perspective the root cause of their running away lies within the family. On the other hand, in order to achieve outcomes, the engagement and support of parents in the work is often essential. As the evaluation has shown, parents’ responses to projects can be a key hindering factor to engaging with young people and achieving change. Early runaways projects in the UK often ran into difficulty in this respect, being highly successful in engaging with young people, but alienating parents in the process. The group of projects involved in the current evaluation seem to have done much better in this respect. Models of working have been developed which are inclusive of parents but also maintain a focus on the young person and preserve their confidentiality and trust (see for example Case Study 1 in Chapter 5). The projects have therefore demonstrated the possibility of working in a young-person centred way whilst not alienating parents.

To an extent, similar remarks apply to the dual nature of projects’ relationships with other agencies. In order to achieve results, projects inevitably have to facilitate young people’s access to a range of other services, which requires good working relationships with other agencies. However, young runaways have often had negative experiences of other agencies and the projects need to present themselves as being independent in order to establish good relationships with young people. At times, the projects have also had to take on an advocacy approach with agencies. Again, the projects seem to have achieved a good balance in their approaches in this respect. Fundamental ingredients in their success have been: the initial establishment of positive relationships at a strategic level with other key local agencies at a general level (see below); and initial and ongoing awareness-raising with key groups of staff. The resource implications of becoming and remaining embedded in the local network of services were emphasised by many staff.

7.1.5 Diversity of the initiative
The group of initiatives looked at in this evaluation displayed considerable diversity. There were examples of statutory sector, voluntary sector and partnership initiatives; target groups ranged in age and specificity; referrals were accepted from a variety of formal and informal sources; and a number of different approaches to working with young people and/or their families were piloted. This diversity has offered a rich source of comparative data about the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, which this report has begun to explore.

However, it is important to note some of the emphases and gaps within the programme as a whole which mean that certain issues are easier to explore than others.

First, there was a high concentration of projects whose main referral route was police missing person reports. Young people reported missing are not necessarily representative of young runaways as a whole, and the same point applies to the group of young people covered by this funding initiative.

Second, there was a concentration of projects in urban areas – only one project was entirely rural based and two more had a partly rural catchment area. This continues a trend in young runaways work which means that we still know relatively little about the issues involved in working with young runaways in rural areas.

Third, within the ‘at risk’ categories there was a focus on a limited range of groups of young people – in particular, those at risk of sexual exploitation and those who are ‘looked after’. There may also be other young runaways who are at equal or greater risk.
Fourth, only one project provided accommodation to young runaways, and this has meant that it has not been possible to explore the way in which provision of short-term accommodation might complement other services working with young runaways to form a comprehensive safety net.

Finally, the projects were predominantly based in the voluntary sector, and there are still some issues to explore about the extent to which successful models might be adopted more widely and integrated into mainstream services for children and young people.

7.1.6 Project development

Finally, we consider some key points of general learning from the perspectives of staff and external professionals presented in Chapter 6. It is apparent that the short-term nature of this funding was a problematic factor for many (if not all) of the initiatives. The setting-up of initiatives took up a substantial proportion of total resources and time available and this meant that often the initiatives had only really begun to get going when the funding period ended. There are, perhaps, lessons here for funding similar future initiatives in this or other fields. The short time span also limited exploration of a number of issues, including the potential for increasing referrals from young people and other informal sources over time through local awareness-raising, the likelihood of young people contacting projects again if problems recurred, and the longer-term impact and outcomes of the projects’ work.

The projects seemed to have been successful in establishing good working relationships with social services, police and other key agencies, and the establishment of multi-agency steering groups and inter-agency protocols were important ingredients in this success. On the whole, the initiatives appear to have been well-received by other external agencies within their locality, and to have been viewed, at the end of the funding period, as a valuable addition to the range of local services available to young people.

7.2 Concluding comments

We conclude this report with a brief consideration of three broad themes highlighted by the evaluation which key into current social policy debates in relation to services for children and young people.

7.2.1 The potential for early intervention

This initiative has illustrated the potential for runaways projects to play an important early preventative role with young people who are beginning to experience problems in their lives. Research has shown that young people who run away are much more likely than average to be suffering abuse and maltreatment at home, to be having difficulties in the ‘looked after’ system, to be facing problems at school, to be in trouble with the law, to have substance use problems, and so on. In summary:

*Running away is an important signal that something is seriously wrong in a young person’s life.* [Social Exclusion Unit, 2002:1, emphasis as in original]

The evaluation has shown that young runaways projects, through a prompt short-time crisis intervention with young people and families, can have an impact on the underlying causes of running away which potentially prevents further incidents. This is particularly true for first-time runaways and younger runaways.

Thus, there is a case for services which respond rapidly and effectively to early incidents of running away. The evaluation suggests that this can be partly achieved through referrals by police and other agencies, but that it is also important to encourage referrals from the wider community and from young people themselves, including through the development of strong links with schools. Professionals in other agencies shared the view that services of this kind can play an important role in preventing the escalation of problems at home, disengagement from school, and other problematic behaviour such as offending.

7.2.2 Youth ‘at risk’

Projects within the initiative also demonstrated the ability to engage effectively with what might broadly be termed ‘youth at risk’. These were young runaways at the other end of the spectrum, often older, who were at risk of long-term social exclusion. Through a range of creative approaches the projects had been able to engage with groups such as ‘looked after’ young people, Black and minority ethnic young people and young women at risk of sexual exploitation, who had often lost trust in mainstream
agencies. ‘Success’ with these young people was frequently harder to achieve in the short-term, and interventions tended to be more prolonged with an initial emphasis on trust-building. The evaluation did span a long enough time period to track outcomes for these young people, but the ability of the projects to maintain ongoing contact with marginalised young people clearly offered the opportunity to make a significant contribution to their safety and well-being in the longer term.

The projects were frequently effective in supporting young people aged 16 and over who had been forced to leave home. Whilst this work was again achieved through a range of referral sources, direct access services and self-referral were particularly important routes to engagement with these young people.

The evaluation also highlighted the particular challenges involved in engaging with 14- and 15-year-olds who are becoming disengaged from family, either through repeatedly staying away or through being forced to leave by parents and carers. The projects were often unable to have a significant impact in their work with these young people due to a combination of hindering factors. These included young people’s perceptions and lifestyles but, equally significantly, difficulties in gaining an effective response or sense of priority from other services. The evaluation suggests that this subgroup of young runaways is slipping through the net, and this is an area which requires more practice and policy attention.

7.2.3 Inter-agency working

Finally, the evaluation has confirmed the importance of effective inter-agency working with young runaways. The funded projects made an important contribution to the overall network of provision for young people in need within their locality, often effectively stepping into a gap in the existing framework of support for young people and being valued for this by other agencies.

A recurrent theme in the evaluation has also been the significance of school issues. Many young runaways are facing problems at school and in many cases the projects had substantial contact with schools in attempting to resolve these issues. Schools were also shown to be an important means of contacting young runaways. The link between runaways initiatives and schools is one which warrants further exploration.

There was, by and large, a strong thread of collaborative working between the projects, social services and the police and this was viewed as important by all parties. On the other hand, the independence and flexibility of the projects often seems to have been an important ingredient in their success and it may be that runaways projects need to continue to maintain some distance from mainstream services in order to be most effective. The projects in this initiative offer some excellent examples of how this balancing act can be achieved.
References


Social Exclusion Unit (2001) *Consultation on Young Runaways: Background paper by the Social Exclusion Unit.* London: Cabinet Office


