the future of runaways services
stepping up

background

The Stepping Up report, published in August 2007, builds on existing knowledge about levels of running away. The estimated 100,000 children who run away each year in the UK are, to varying degrees, in need of support and services. Although there is no single profile for a child who runs away, there are common services and approaches that can provide support before, during and after a running away incident. Stepping Up reviews these services and how far the current policy provisions ensure that every child who runs away is adequately safeguarded.

In 2007, a review of services and responses provided by local authorities and police forces was undertaken. The review consisted of three stages: a set of regional consultations that included social services, police and the voluntary sector and ran as seven road shows in cities across England; a national survey of local authorities and police forces; and finally a national conference to test emerging findings. In all, 32 out of 37 police forces participated in one or more stages of the review and 76 out of 150 local authorities were represented in the review.

Survey and consultation findings

• 40% of police forces are not able to access sufficient data to be able to provide information on levels of need
• Many local authorities have nominated ‘runaways’ or ‘missing’ lead officers, although it was often unclear how the role was defined or deployed
• Half of local authorities surveyed had no protocol for managing cases of children missing from home, although nearly 93% had protocols for children missing from care
• The survey showed that nearly twice as many local authorities fail to plan for the needs of runaways as those that do
• The 2005 Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance on missing persons has had a positive impact on local police force responses to missing children
• 60% of consultees felt that Every Child Matters reforms were helpful
• Most consultees felt that Local Safeguarding Children Board’s (LSCB) should lead on the runaway and missing children issue
• Consultees were supportive of reforms that would lead to the increased use of ‘lead professionals’ and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
• Just over 12% of all local authorities have services targeted at runaways
• 20 out of 69 local authorities which responded indicated that they had access to emergency accommodation available for runaways in their area
• 10 out of 27 police forces who responded stated that they had young people staying in police stations overnight due to a lack of alternative emergency accommodation
• All but one consultee felt that current commissioning and funding was failing to meet the need
• Local authorities, police and third sector providers all called for renewed guidance
• There was a strong call from consultees for statutory provisions
Analysis of findings

The survey and consultation findings were analysed and highlighted three sets of issues. The first set relate to the people who will need to take responsibility for change, the second related to the position or place of implementation and the third related to the appropriate procedures.

People: issues raised

Local accountability for runaways needs clearly defining and the pathway for responsibility through LSCB and Targeted Youth Support (TYS) arrangements needs clarifying.

Police forces across the country need to be clear about force-wide and Basic Command Unit (BCU) leadership for managing missing persons and the requirements made upon them contained in existing guidance including ACPO 2005 and Department of Health 2002.

Every child reported missing requires an appropriate and, where possible, independent welfare interview on return, recognising the benefits of the practice as a preventative early intervention for children and young people at risk.

Local data is needed to take account of the under reporting of missing children. Data is best provided in a self reporting format; for example it could be gathered though self reporting surveys that highlight the needs and levels of running away and any instances of risk faced by the children and young people at risk.

The accountability required for a successful renewal of the Government’s 2002 commitments to safeguarding young runaways needs leadership at the highest levels.

Places: issues raised

To achieve safe, locally-accessible services, ranging from refuge to outreach, local authorities need support to identify the best routes through pooled budgets and sub-regional and regional mechanisms to commission services at the appropriate level to meet need.

There is a need for every local authority to detail how young people at risk on the streets can access safe emergency accommodation.

There is a need for a comprehensive review of the full range of accommodation models that are needed regionally, sub-regionally and locally for young people who are at risk and in need of emergency and longer-term accommodation that does not fit within existing provision.

There is a need to provide additional support for local services as they change practices to meet the needs of the most at-risk young people. In particular, support to embed Every Child Matters (ECM) reforms, including the CAF and the use of trusted adults and lead professionals.

Procedures: issues raised

There is a need for a consistent data standard across English police forces, that provides the appropriate levels of intelligence for national infrastructure bodies (Missing People, Police National Missing Persons Bureaux) and for local Children’s Services to be able to assess levels of need for strategic planning purposes.

There is a need to balance the stated need of local delivery managers to place stronger duties on their authorities to provide services for runaways and the problems of using performance management as a driver for change.

There is a need to ensure that national and local strategic planning delivers local provision for every child who runs away so that they can gain immediate access to the services that they require to stay safe.

There is a need for local authorities to understand and deploy services at appropriate levels to meet different tiers of need where young people are at risk. Appropriate support is needed to ensure that services are delivered at every level across local areas to prevent long-term negative outcomes for young people.
Proposals

The report outlines possible solutions. The Children’s Society proposes a comprehensive safeguard for young runaways. The proposal sets out how safe people, safe places and safe procedures could form a national safety net by providing proposals at every level - national, regional and local.

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The following proposals form key elements of the National Safety Net:

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) minister, who holds the safeguarding brief, is given strategic responsibility for ensuring cross-departmental safeguarding responses to runaways
- DCSF to introduce agreed measurement to support the new indicator related to runaway and missing children within the new performance framework linked to the Safeguarding Public Service Agreement
- DCSF to create a statutory duty for local authorities to ensure that every child who is returned from a missing incident receives a ‘return interview’
- Every LSCB appoints a strategic leader for runaway and missing children, which is closely defined by role description
- DCSF undertakes a review of emergency accommodation which addresses a range of issues, including: the need for different models for different groups of young people
- Local authorities to set out access criteria and capacity of emergency accommodation provisions including detailing the management of missing children in need of breathing space for welfare assessments
- DCSF to update and revise missing-from-home and missing-from-care guidance, ensuring that statutory requirements are specified and clarified and its position is harmonised with ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’
- ACPO to issue national police code on data collection and reporting standards required of police forces relating to missing people
- Police forces to ensure that BCU level lead officers are in place and that they embed standards of reporting and monitoring of social services responses to police requests for support

Stepping Up sets out a comprehensive review of services for runaways. It poses a set of challenges and provides a set of possible solutions. The full report is available at www.childrenssociety.org.uk/policy

The Children’s Society is now working with the DCSF to put in place a national safety net for runaways.

1 Still Running II, The Children’s Society 2005
1. The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families makes the case for the implementation of national safeguarding guidance including priority for runaways.
2. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) minister holds the safeguarding brief and is responsible for ensuring that the safeguarding response to runaways is effective.
3. DCSF uses appropriate channels to ensure that runaways and missing children are safeguarded and that their needs are met.
4. DCSF co-ordinates a joined-up approach to preventing youth homelessness and addressing the disparity between DCSF policy and that of Communities and Local Government (CLG).
5. DCSF introduces a new indicator to measure the involvement and missing children within the new performance framework linked to the Safeguarding Public Service Agreement.
6. DCSF advises the national TellUs Survey to provide a measure for the runaway indicator and to provide young people with an opportunity to self-report.
7. DCSF, the English Coalition for Runaway Children (ECRC) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) run a joint campaign to raise the awareness nationally on the importance of reporting a child missing when they have run away.
8. DCSF to create a statutory duty for local authorities to ensure that every child who is returned from a missing incident receives a ‘return interview’ to a standard that ensures a proper assessment of need is made.

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**Safe people**

1. **Secreatry of State leads the safeguarding response to runaways**
2. **Police force strategic leads and government offices co-ordinate**
3. **Local safeguarding children’s board take strategic leadership**

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**Safe place**

14. **DCSF leads national review of safe places**
15. **Refuge and breathing space hubs at centre of safety net**
16. **Services and emergency accommodation act as focus for safe places for at risk young people**
17. **Local strategic plans address needs, services and inter-agency working**

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**Safe procedures**

2. **National guidance, standards and monitoring act as change catalyst**
3. **Force wide missing procedures are monitored and regional commissioning units assist in planning services**
4. **Local safeguarding children’s board’s take strategic leadership**

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**National**

1. **Director of Children’s Services is held accountable for the implementation of the new statutory duty to ensure that all Police requests to undertake a ‘return interview’ are fully complied with.**
2. **Every LSCB ensures that safeguarding practices are in place within their wider and statutory policy and strategy for safeguarding teenagers.**
3. **Every LSCB holds accountability for the planning and implementation of all new national guidance issued from DCSF.**

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**Regional**

9. **ACPO strengthens, clarifies and embeds the strategic ‘nispers’ lead into force level structures**
10. **Government Office Children’s and safeguarding lead advisers linked into supporting local developments on missing and runways.**
11. **Directors of Children’s Services to ensure that schools and education, including connections and missing from education services make links with LSCB strategy for missing and runways.**
12. **Local authorities to set out access criteria and capacity of emergency accommodation providers including detailing the management of missing children in need of breathing space for welfare assessments.**
13. **Every LSCB takes account of the needs of young people at risk on the streets including the development of safe spaces for preventative work.**

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**Local**

19. **ACPO identifies and monitors levels of missing people from at risk young people, including runaways.**
20. **Local commissioning bodies include young people in the development of specifications that set out the provision of the required accessible services, for young people who runaway and go missing.**
21. **Children and Young People’s Plans take account of the needs of young people at risk on the streets including the development of safe spaces for preventative work.**
22. **Every LSCB implements processes for intelligence led needs analysis and scenario planning in order to address the differing needs required for young runaways.**
23. **Every LSCB uses local Common Assessment Framework and trusted multi-agency arrangements to form back for ‘return interviews’.**
24. **Police Forces to ensure that BCU level lead officers are in place and that they embed standards of reporting and monitoring of social services responses to Police requests for support.**
25. **DCSF provides examples of local services engaging with Children’s Trusts and Local Area Agreements processes.**
The Children’s Society is a leading national charity and service provider. Our direct action, delivering solutions and results through a network of projects, supports children who face danger, discrimination and disadvantage in their daily lives. We turn around the lives of tens of thousands of children and their families every year.

Key amongst our areas of operation is the work we do with runaway children at risk on the streets. We provide real solutions for individual cases, while our pioneering research and influential campaigning protects the rights of all children.

Our work is driven by the belief that every child deserves a good childhood and we are committed to creating better childhoods for all.