Review of Runaways Service provided by Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services
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Introduction

This report describes a review of The Runaways Service provided by Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services. This introductory section provides some background to the review including running away and the national context; some description of the services provided by Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services; and a description of the context within which the Runaways Service operates.

Running away and the national context

The term ‘running away’ in the UK is used to describe situations where children and young people under the age of sixteen have chosen to leave home, are staying away from home without parental permission or have been forced to leave home by parents or carers. There is also some distinction, as well as overlap, between the terms ‘running away’ and ‘going missing’ as some children and young people are reported missing who do not necessarily fit the criteria of running away. ‘Going missing’ refers to situations where a child or young person is reported as missing to the police when they are returning late to children’s homes as well as, for example, describing children and young people who are lost.

The issue of children and young people under the age of sixteen running away began to be recognised by agencies in London in the 1980s. This led to The Children’s Society establishing the first refuge for runaways in the UK and then, subsequently, Section 51 of the Children Act 1989 which made legal provisions for such refuges. Throughout the early 1990s, several further refuges were established in England and Wales alongside the development of other practice responses to the needs of children and young people on the streets. The 1990s also saw a number of research reports issues relating to running away amongst under-16s. In 1999 The Children’s Society published the first large-scale UK study of running away (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999) which estimated that one in nine young people run away overnight at least once before the age of sixteen and that there are 129,000 overnight running away incidents each year in the UK.

As a consequence of the interest generated by the above developments, the Social Exclusion Unit highlighted running away as one of its priority areas. An initial report based upon findings from existing research (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001) was followed by a major consultation exercise which, in turn, lead to a second publication recommending policy and practice frameworks to develop national and local strategies to address the needs of young runaways (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Following the publication of this report, the Children and Young People’s Unit (CYPU) announced funding to provide short-term opportunities to pilot a range of innovative responses to running away which resulted in twenty projects working closely with young people and a further seven initiatives which did not involve direct practice.

At the end of 2003, the CYPU ceased to exist and responsibility for programmes relating to running away transferred to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Funding from the Choice Protects grant for each of the years 2004/05 and 2005/06 was made available to support a pilot programme to establish community based refuges that provided services to provide immediate safety for young people who run away from home or care by providing accessible overnight accommodation alongside the provision of direct support for young
runaways and their families to meet their needs and prevent further episodes of running away. Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services were one of five applicants who were successful with their bid and received acceptance of their tender.

In April 2004 Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services began operating emergency accommodation for young runaways at One Orchard Lane as part of the Runaways Service.

The Runaways Service

The Runaways Service, funded by the DfES, began operation in 2004 and is part of existing provision that has been in place for some years, for young people and families in need, provided by Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services. This existing service consisted of an emergency residential placement facility at Orchard Lane, including a team of residential community support workers, an Emergency Duty Team (EDT) of out-of-hours generic social workers, and a team of day-time Community Support workers who can provide support to families for up to, on average, three months. The Runaways Service is therefore an extension of the services already provided In addition to the pre-existing elements of the service, two Connexions personal advisers were funded and brought in to promote the helpline and services available to young people who have run away or are at risk of running away and to carry out workshops in a number of schools in the county.

To facilitate the operation of the Runaways Service, links between the existing EDT and the Community Support Team were strengthened to allow a seamless fast track immediate response to young people in crisis and follow up support if required. This is explored in more detail in a later section of the report.

Thus the Runaways helpline and provision of workshops in schools should not be viewed in isolation as stand alone provision for young runaways but as an integral part of the overall network of services provided by Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services which slots into the existing services provided for all young people and families in need.

The Runaways Service works to meet three aims:

1. Easy access to service
2. Ensuring safety
3. Raising awareness

To ensure these aims are met, the Runaways Service provides the following:

- 24/7 freephone helpline
- links to Community Support Team and specialist services
- experienced and qualified staff
- a timely and flexible response
- message home service
- assessment of risk
- identification of appropriate placement
- provision of ‘survival kit’ where appropriate
- preventative work in schools delivering information and workshops plus creative tools to ensure effective delivery of information to raise awareness of the dangers of running away and where to go for help if a child of young person is considering running away or has run away

The Runaways Service operates for children and young people and their families in County Durham. The area is largely rural with a population, overwhelmingly White European, of approximately 487,000. There are high levels of deprivation in County Durham. Whilst there are
limited services that address youth homelessness, there is no other service provision for young runaways in the area. National research has revealed that approximately 10-11 percent of children and young people under the age of sixteen run away overnight (Rees & Lee, 2005). Based on national patterns, this would equate to approximately 800 runaways each year in County Durham.

The review

In early 2005 The Children's Society's Research Unit was approached by Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services with a view to undertaking a review of the services provided for young runaways in County Durham.

The purpose of the review was to explore the processes and outcomes of the above work in order to identify learning which:

- can be used by Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services to improve its own practice
- can be of wider use in promoting the development of community based emergency accommodation for young runaways, generic services to respond to the needs of young runaways and other preventative measures

Aims of the review

The aims of the review were:

- To gather and analyse a wide range of information and perspectives of both responsive and preventative services to running away in County Durham
- To identify key learning points from the data gathering that are useful to Durham Social Care and Health Family Support Services in further developing this work.

Methods

There were four main elements to the methodology for the review:

1. Monitoring of the work undertaken by the Runaways Service with children and young people.
2. In-depth telephone interviews with key professionals from within Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services and from external agencies that are involved with the Runaways Service.
3. Questionnaire surveys of practitioners from Community Support, EDT and social workers who have worked with children and young people that have stayed overnight in the emergency accommodation at Orchard Lane.
4. Telephone interviews with children and young people who have stayed overnight in the emergency accommodation at Orchard Lane.

Monitoring

At the onset of the review, the Runaways Service had an established monitoring system in place to record aspects of its work. Due to issues relating to confidentiality and data protection, it was not possible for members of the Research Unit to have direct access to the monitoring system. The research team therefore devised a number of questions and the required information was collated by a worker from the Runaways Services and forwarded to the research team for analysis.

In-depth interviews with key professionals

Thirteen in-depth telephone interviews were carried out with representatives from Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Service and representatives from partner agencies such as Connexions, the Police and schools.
These interviews covered issues such as the operation of the service, partnership working, the role of the steering group, barriers to effective delivery and outcomes for children and young people. Representatives from schools in County Durham were consulted about the preventative work undertaken in schools.

In-depth telephone interviews were also conducted with representatives from the voluntary sector and Connexions’ workers seconded to the Runaways Service. These interviews covered many of the issues described above with the addition that the Connexions’ workers were specifically consulted about their role.

**Questionnaire survey**

Two separate questionnaire surveys were designed. The first of these was for professionals working in EDT and Community Support and the second was for social workers who work with children and young people who have stayed overnight in the emergency accommodation at Orchard Lane. As there was only one response from social workers, it was not felt possible to include this element of the review as findings. Sixteen professionals from Community Support and EDT returned questionnaires.

**Telephone interviews with children and young people who have stayed overnight in the emergency accommodation at Orchard Lane**

Sixteen children and young people have stayed overnight in the emergency accommodation at Orchard Lane as part of the programme of support offered by the Runaways Service. All sixteen children and young people were contacted and offered the opportunity to participate in the review using a means that has been successfully used in a number of other research and evaluation projects. Only two young people replied to the research team agreeing to participate in telephone interviews. In an attempt to reach more children and young people, a second invitation to participate was issued and staff from the Runaways Service were very helpful in the attempt to trace present addresses of these children and young people. However no more children and young people were reached and the two young people who agreed to participate in the review did not keep to arrangements and it was not possible to contact them to on further occasions. This, and associated issues, are discussed at a later stage in the report as the lack of views of children and young people who have used the Runaways Service is a serious gap in the review and links to the issues of assessing the impact of emergency accommodation and other service provision on long-term outcomes.

Throughout the remainder of the report, Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Service shall be referred to as DSCH.
Findings of the review

Project statistics

Numbers of people and referrals
Information was provided by the Runaways Service on 232 referrals\(^1\) dating from 5\(^{th}\) July 2004 to 2\(^{nd}\) August 2005 – a thirteen month period. These referrals related to eighty-nine young people. As shown in Table 1, some young people were referred repeatedly during the period. Six young people were referred ten times or more, and these young people accounted for eighty-four referrals, equating to just over a third of all referrals received during the period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of times referred</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three times</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four times</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five times</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six times</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine times</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 times</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 times</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 times</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 times</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 times</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Characteristics of people and referrals
Information was recorded on the monitoring forms about young people’s sex and age and whether they had run away before.

\(^1\) Excludes three anonymous referrals which did not appear to relate to purpose of service
Table 2: Sex of young people referred

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>No. of referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 2 shows, the young people referred to the service were slightly more likely to be female than males, but males were more likely to be referred on more than one occasion.

The age distribution of people and referrals is shown in Table 3. Fifteen-years-old was by far the most common age for referrals, and over two-thirds (68%) of all referrals were in the 14- to 15-year-old age group.

Table 3: Ages of young people referred (at first referral)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>No. of referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years old</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 years old</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 years old</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 years old</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 years old</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 years old</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 years old</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of previous running away experience, fifty-eight of the young people had run away prior to the incident that led to their first referral to the service. Of the remainder, twelve were known not to have run away previously (none in residential care), and the information was not known in the remaining nineteen cases. So the service was primarily working with repeat runaways.

Timing of referrals
Just over half (118) of all referrals were received in the two-hour period between 10pm and midnight, and a further twenty-six between midnight and 3am. Most of the remainder (64) were received out of office hours, between 5pm and 10pm.

There are some suggestions of patterns according to days of the week, with a peak in referrals on Friday and Saturday, and also on Monday.
Table 4: Referrals by day of the week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the week</th>
<th>No. of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>231</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information about referrals
Over a third (38%) of referrals came from residential workers, and a similar proportion (36%) from foster carers (Table 5). Just under 10% of referrals came from parents and other family members, and a further 11% came from social workers and police.

Table 5: Sources of referrals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral source</th>
<th>No. of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential worker</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster carer</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/carer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vast majority (225 out of 232) of referrals came via EDT. Five came through the freephone service, one through the Community Support Team, and one was of unknown origin.

The pattern of referral sources shown in Table 5 is indicative of the fact that the service primarily received referrals rating to ‘looked after’ young people as shown in Table 6. Around two-fifths (41%) of referrals related to young people living in residential care, and an identical proportion related to young people in foster care. Around one in seven (14%) of referrals related to young people living with family. All but one of the young people living with family were only referred once during the period – the exception being referred three times.
Table 6: Where young people had been reported missing / run away from

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where living</th>
<th>No. of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential care</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster care</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>232</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linked to the above, Table 7 shows the reason for referral. The large majority of referrals (83%) related to missing person reports. As previous research has shown, these are not necessarily young people who have ‘run away’ and it is apparent from additional information on the monitoring forms, and the timing of referrals, that many of these referrals related to ‘looked after’ young people who had not returned to their placement at the agreed time.

Table 7: Reason for referral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for referral</th>
<th>No. of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reported missing</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run away</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking of running away</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told to leave</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>232</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Actions taken by the service

The monitoring forms recorded information about work done by the project in response to referrals. In a total of forty-two cases, the project had either done telephone work with the young person (31 referrals) and/or met the young person (18 referrals) and/or visited the young person’s family or carers (nine referrals). The project was more likely to take one of these actions with young people reported missing / running away from family (14 out of 33) than for young people in foster care (15 out of 94) and young people in residential care (nine out of 94).

The outcome of the referral was also recorded on the monitoring forms, and a summary is shown in Table 8. In most cases young people either returned home of their own accord, or there was some police involvement (often leading to the police returning the young person home).
Table 8: Outcome of referral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome of referral</th>
<th>No. of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chose to return</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service notified police</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police returned young person home</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred to other agency</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young person returned home by other agency</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodated in care</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further contact arranged</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved to different placement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>232</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As stated earlier, in 16 cases during the period covered by the monitoring, the referral led to the young person being accommodated at Orchard Lane.

**Operation of the service**

A significant part of the remit of the review was to examine how the Runaways Service operates and to identify factors that contribute to or hinder positive outcomes. This section of the report address a number of operational issues and then moves on to consider the links that DSCH has forged with partner agencies. This has been a crucial element of the pilot as partnership working is crucial to enable the Runaways Service to operate effectively and has been addressed as part of the review by considering the role of the steering group, DSCH’s working relationships with partner agencies and, once again, where appropriate, identifying issues that contributed to effective partnership working or acted as a barrier to achieving this. This section of the report finishes with the identification of outcomes for children and young people and with the suggestions of contributors to the review of ways to improve the Runaways Service.

**The Runaways Service’s fit with overall service provision**

The new elements provided by DSCH as part of the Runaways Service enhance the existing service (a service provided for all young people in need) to include easier access into the service for young runaways who can then benefit from a range of services. As one member of the Community Support Team explained:

> ‘[We can] offer an initial assessment,….. face-to-face contact, a community support worker, an ongoing piece of work, we can offer creative solutions. We can also link in with EDT out-of-hours to ensure that that person’s safe and the situation has settled down’.

This approach is highlighted in the following quote:

> ‘the proactive work we do is not just about kids at risk of running away – it could be kids who are presenting for other reasons as well, so runaways are just part of that for us’.

On the whole, staff within DSCH felt that the Runaways Service fits in well with overall service provision and highlighted the fit with existing services for young people and families:

> ‘This service fits neatly alongside existing services designed to meet the social care needs of the people of County Durham’.
'I feel the service ties in well with that ... already provided out-of-hours. However, I feel it has been [also] very beneficial for those wanting to access support during day time [as they] can access [their] own specific worker'.

'It provides 24/7 cover aimed specifically at young people who run away and fits well into the emergency cover'.

Factors influencing the fit of the Runaways Service into overall service provision
The Runaways Service clearly enhances and utilises the existing service. As one member of staff commented, in reality the service had already existed prior to the establishment of the Runaways Service as young runaways and their carers sought help and support through EDT. DSCH have also been working towards a Preventative Agenda for the past three years and the Runaways Service clearly fits with, supports and furthers the Preventative Agenda. The Runaways' Service therefore expands DSCH’s overall core business of crisis response to enable provision of a holistic service as well as an emergency response.

Factors hindering fit of the Runaways Service into overall service provision
Staff also identified a couple of factors which hindered the Runaways Service from fitting well into overall service provision. The first of these related to the occasional lack of appropriate places to place young people in need of accommodation. This was specifically highlighted in relation to specialist placements for children and young people with learning disabilities and for those with mental health issues. Secondly, there was the recognition that other work commitments, such as those where child protections issues were prevalent, may sometimes gain priority and ‘tie up’ staff from responding immediately. Linked to this is the observation made by staff that because of other pressing priorities, the helpline is not always answered:

‘Work has to be prioritised and if all staff are busy, then the phone may not be answered and we cannot trace numbers to ring people back’.

There are a number of technical issues with the telephone system that renders it impossible to lengthen the time before the answer-machine starts or trace a number if someone does not leave a message. DSCH themselves recognise this as problematic and view the means to address this as ensuring that the member of staff with responsibility for the freephone helpline is given protected time free from other work that prevents them from answering the helpline. Whilst this will not be easy to achieve operationally, DSCH are committed to ensuring that the helpline is given the priority required by changing staffing requirements.

Links between Community Support and EDT
In the past Community Support and EDT had been working more or less independently of each other and there were no direct referral links between the teams, which meant it could take time for a response to be made. However, much stronger and closer links have been forged between these two teams.

‘What we did more recently was link Community Support more directly with EDT within one structure so that now if a young person presents to EDT say at night and we put our support workers in to keep that situation together, we can tell the family that [The] Community Support [Team] will be involved in the morning.’

The two teams are now under one management structure and the Service Manager manages both EDT and the Community Support Team as well as residential workers. This has facilitated consistent communication between the two teams leading to a consistent service. There are also practical links between EDT and the community support team who are in close contact on a daily basis. Furthermore, the EDT staff manage the Runaways helpline out of hours, then hand it over to the Community Support Team during the day:

‘The two services dovetail into one another at the start and end of the working day.’

A seamless service is offered to children and young people because both teams can continue each other’s work when one team is ‘off duty’. There is also continual twenty-four hour support provided which can be accessed through the freephone Runaways Helpline and linked into family support.
Due to The Community Support Team and EDT now being under one structure, DSCH can pass referrals across to each other and are now able to put the Community Support Team as a resource into difficult situations very quickly and are able to focus their responses in a more timely fashion when a crisis arises:

‘We agreed that they (EDT) would let us know about any young people they were working with out-of-hours who were either close to the department or weren’t receiving any ongoing work who presented to the EDT and then we would pick it up the next morning and undertake the initial assessment.’

This was felt to be a more effective method of working because, prior to EDT and the Community Support Team being under one management structure, there was a shortage of child care social workers and a recognition that responses were not quick enough. The placing of the two teams under one management structure was identified as a good way of ensuring children and their families received a service immediately the next day at the time of crisis. One member of EDT highlighted how this often works in practice:

‘Social workers will quite often say to me ‘I’m quite worried about child X. He’s presented two or three times over the last couple of weeks. Is there anything more we can do?’ And I’ll say ‘right I’ll have a look at that’. We don’t just leave these children: we try and engage with them via the community support system or children in need teams if that is appropriate [as] we have got close links with CIN and early assessment’.

Closer links between the two teams have been forged at both the ground and managerial level as managers are also working more closely together. To provide a more preventative and proactive service to young people in need, managers from across Children and Families branch have established ‘Emergency Resource Network Meetings’ where children are identified who are presenting to EDT on a regular basis so that a service can be provided at an early stage before crisis is reached. The monitoring system was also identified as a further means of identifying when young people are presenting regularly to the service and experiencing difficulties, thereby allowing for intervention at an earlier stage.

Emergency residential placement facility at Orchard Lane

Staff at DSCH placed emphasis upon the integrated nature of the emergency accommodation facility at Orchard Lane, stressing that it does not operate in isolation, as previously mentioned, but as part of the wider support offered, via a fast track route. The following day after a child or young person has stayed overnight in the emergency accommodation, the Community Support Team carry out an initial assessment of the young person’s support needs, and if required, provide support to the young person and their family or, where appropriate, refer to other services. In this way the needs of children and young people are met in a speedy and effective manner. Alongside providing a number of outcomes for individual young people, as described below, the emergency accommodation facility reduces the numbers of young people in the looked after system. This is achieved by providing an immediate response and supporting children and young people home more quickly though input from the Community Support Team, thus preventing children and young people from ‘languishing’ in care. Secondly, the provision of an alternative emergency residential facility for young people in need avoids disruption to other young people in the looked after system.

The emergency accommodation, alongside other elements of the Runaways Service, at Orchard Lane is perceived by external professionals as a very useful and important service for young runaways. This recognition not only extends to partner agencies but to representatives from the voluntary sector:

‘I think it is a valuable service in any case for out-of-hours – I think it is a really good service that they offer.’

It was mooted that perhaps the emergency accommodation is easier to access for those children and young people already part of the looked after system than those who have run away from family with no previous contact with Social Services. In one sense, access to any part of the Runaways Service, including the emergency accommodation, is open to all children and young people via the free-phone Runaways Helpline, though experience has revealed that uptake on this resource is very limited. This relates to the stigma for some of being involved with
a social services department and the need for some general work to reduce misperceptions about social services so that people are more accepting of the support they can offer.

**The secondment of staff from Connexions to work on the Runaways Service**

As explained at an earlier stage, two workers have been seconded from Connexions to work on the Runaways Service, primarily conducting the preventative work in schools. From the perspective of managers from DSCH, there have not been any major difficulties in seconding staff from Connexions to the Runaways Service. When the potential for any difficulties arose, having regular meetings and delivering what Durham Social Care and Health and Family Support Services agreed to deliver overcome this. Similarly, this perspective appears to be shared by management of Connexions:

> ‘There have been no problems in terms of our relationship with the Runaways Service, no problems in terms of the management. Anything that has arisen has been of a minor nature and has been dealt with as and when …… so nothing’s been left to lie or fester and there aren’t any problems’.

For the Connexions’ workers seconded to the Runaways Service, some of the process has been clearly defined from the outset, with clear targets and working guidelines from both Connexions and DSCH, and regular supervision, sometimes on a fortnightly basis that has been supportive in nature. However, a number of barriers were also identified, which are recognised as part and parcel of the job when working within a multi-agency framework, that have acted as hindering factors at times. These barriers relate to:

- differences between the two organisations in terms of approach and styles of working
- differences in terms of protocols, gate keeping and confidentiality issues related to problems of information sharing
- a lack of knowledge of each other of the role of the Connexions workers and the work that takes place at Orchard Lane
- differences in understanding of what constitutes a young person centred approach

DSCH accept the need to consider these barriers and give them due consideration to ensure that any other secondment arrangements can limit the impact of the barriers described above. However, it is also recognised that it can often be difficult for a person who has working in a particular culture to understand the working culture of a second organisation and that, whilst neither approach may be ‘wrong’, working in a different manner and with change can be a difficult process for all involved.

Contributors to the review identified a number of positive factors that have arise from seconding staff from Connexions to carry out the preventative work in schools and other educational establishments.

**The provision of direct links into school**

As one staff member stated:

> ‘The obvious benefit is because they are from Connexions they already have excellent links with schools’.

Through having two seconded workers from Connexions as part of the Runaways Service, it has been very easy to forge direct links with Connexions personal advisers in secondary schools in County Durham. Access to and contact with the right people in schools has facilitated targeting secondary schools and providing workshops directly for the right audiences.

**Knowledge and expertise**

The Connexions Advisors are familiar with the culture of schools, possess knowledge of education systems and curricula and hold expertise in tailoring age-appropriate and needs-sensitive presentations and workshops to pupils, including working with children who have special needs and those in the looked after system.

> ‘Young people are familiar with Connexions and their work in schools.’
Young people's familiarity with Connexions and their presence in schools is recognised as is their methods of working with children and young people. This plays as an important factor in breaking barriers to work with children and young people in schools as Connexions workers are not viewed as an external agency coming into schools but as a existing part of school life.

Specific skills, expertise and experience offering different models of working
It is recognised by staff at DSCH that the Connexions Advisors seconded to the Runaways Service possess particular skills, expertise and experiences. This has enabled them to contribute different ideas and methods of working which has benefited the whole staff group at Durham Social Care.

The development of closer links
The secondment of Connexions’ Advisors to the Runaways Service has enabled DSCH to build closer links with Connexions as a service that bridge the gap between schools and DSCH. This relationship is recognised as working two ways:

“It gives us an opportunity to also tap into their organisation and its links and I think that works both ways – they have been able to do that using social care and health – so it’s been a mutually beneficial relationship.’

Connexions Advisers are able to represent and raise the profile of the whole service within the wider community
At a practitioner level, there tends not to be a representative from DSCH at the multi agency meetings that the Connexions advisors attend. Because of the secondment arrangement, DSCH are represented in these meetings which heightens their profile.

Preventative work in schools
From the perspective of schools, the preventative work in schools has been highly successful. This was largely attributed to the abilities of the Connexions Advisers to engage with children and young people through creative means. Teachers highlighted how pupils in school enjoyed the play and workshops, citing the short films about case studies as a particularly successful means of engaging with pupils. Teachers described how the workshops not only raised awareness of the issues linked to running away for young people but also for teachers themselves. There was an emphasis upon the way in which the Connexions Advisors dealt with sensitive issues and addressed pupils’ queries. Teachers, and other professionals, described how the methods employed by the Connexions Advisors ensured they engaged and interacted with pupils which facilitated them digesting and remembering messages in a meaningful manner.

The preventative work undertaken in schools is partly viewed as being very successful because of how many schools and pupils have participated. Over two thirds of all schools in County Durham have hosted workshops and the play which meant that a large number of pupils have received information and are aware of both the potential dangers of running away and where to go for help if they find themselves either thinking about running away or have run away. The preventative work was not only undertaken in mainstream schools but in special schools and Pupil Referral Units ensuring a diverse range of young people has been reached.

The cards that have been handed out to pupils in schools as part of the preventative work, that contain the free-phone Runaways Helpline number, have also developed a currency of their own. These cards provide access to discounts on fast food and this has propelled young people to retain the cards, meaning that they will be to hand if a young person is ever in need and will be able to contact the Runaways Service.

A difficulty that can arise when liaising with a school who has agreed that the preventative work can take place is having to fit with the school’s time schedules and pace. For example, the Connexions Advisors may have to wait for a part of the curriculum that the school deems as appropriate which can be frustrating when working on a time limited project. However, this is now an accepted part of working in partnership with schools and other options are also available:
‘I think we have got over that really and I think that there are sufficient partners out there and young people to work with to say ‘OK, if that group’s not ready for us, we’ve got other avenues’, and I think that is where we have been collectively quite good at finding the other avenues to do the work in’.

A number of schools have not wanted to host the workshops. Some schools simply do not reply to requests to come into school and present the preventative work. Some schools have agreed to host a presentation about the preventative work and whilst many schools accept the offer, other schools do not give their permission for the work to go ahead, despite a number of approaches made by the Connexions Advisors. A professional from a partner agency summed this quite simply:

‘I think the barrier is that some schools just don’t like to…some schools haven’t taken part and the reasons for that will be their own.’

One of the workers employed directly on the Runaways Service felt that any reluctance of a school to host the preventative work may be to do with the culture of certain schools and previous experience of outside agencies coming into schools.

Training

Staff who work as part of both the Community Support Team and the Emergency Duty Team received training with the aim of enabling them to provide an effective service to young runaways and their carers. Whilst there was a general consensus amongst staff that the training they received was effective and beneficial, three staff members identified areas where the training could have been improved. For example, one staff member identified how they only received telephone counselling training in early 2005 when the telephone helpline started in September 2004:

‘(We) only received telephone counselling training earlier this year. Considering service started Sept 04, it] would have been more beneficial to have this training before the service started’.

However, whilst it is acknowledged that it would have been preferable to have offered training to staff before establishing the freephone telephone service, at this point, such training did not previously exist and DSCH worked with Childline to develop a training package to offer to staff. This happened in a very short time-scale as DSCH were notified that their bid to establish the Runaways Service had been successful at a point in time very close to when the pilot began operation.

Suggestions were also made by other staff members to provide further training by supplying a training provider who works in a similar way to DSCH and training that is specific to working with runaways:

‘More training would be helpful as it was ChildLine who did the training and they work very differently than we do’.

‘(We) received telephone counselling course run by ChildLine – (the) course was okay but could have been more specific to runaways’.

Once again, the above point is recognised as valid but in practice this was effected by the short time period between being informed of the success of the bid and operation of the Runaways Service and the lack of training available in this area.

Staff in the Community Support Team and the Emergency Duty Team perceived their own level of understanding of the issues surrounding running away as ranging from moderate to adequate and good to high. One staff member felt that experience gained in a previous post provided adequate knowledge whilst others felt they had attained a good level of understanding through the training they had received in relation to running away. However, one member of staff felt that s/he could benefit from further training in relation to running away and two staff members felt that further knowledge of the availability of local services would be useful:

‘ (I) feel training has given me a good level of understanding on what causes young people to run away/racial issues etc. More information on what other local services are available for young runaways would be beneficial.’
‘I have a good level of understanding on why a young person would run away. (I) would benefit from what local services are available.’

Factors within the Runaways Service contributing to positive outcomes

A number of factors within the Runaways Service itself have been recognised as contributing to positive outcomes. The first set of factors relates to the staff team:

The staff team’s awareness, knowledge and understanding of runaways and other related issues
All staff that work with young runaways have received training and are kept up-to-date with associated issues, government policy and other developments in the field. Many of the staff also have a wealth of experience of working to meet the needs of children and young people who run away.

The staff team’s professionalism, reliability and ability to deliver
External professionals who have worked with DSCH have emphasised a number of characteristics that relate to professionalism, reliability and the ability to deliver. As one external professional stressed:

‘[They are] very very good at getting the job done and making things happen .... I have found them very practical and responsible ....... They are extrem ely reliable and professional.’

A commitment from both senior management and those working at practitioner level
From the outset, there has been a firm commitment from senior management to facilitate the establishment of the Runaways Service and from all staff who have positively embraced the changes involved. The will and ability of all personnel to co-operate and work together to ensure positive outcomes has been an important factor.

A willingness to consult with other experts and listen to other’s views
External professionals have stressed the open and willing manner in which DSCH have sought the views and expertise of others, describing them as being open to ideas, involving others and respecting other’s strengths:

‘They have been open to ideas ... keen to get us involved a lot and worked in a very civilised way ... a very professional way respecting strengths ... qualities and professionalism.’

This has also been highlighted by the consultation that took place with children and young people who have experience of running away:

‘When we first looked at developing the service, we did speak to a number of young people who had presented as running away or at risk of, and we talked to them about had this situation been happening now, what would have been useful for you and, of the services that were there, what worked and what was helpful. We used that, together with our own experience of working in emergency situations with young people, to sort of devise a system we thought might be useful and then went back and said ‘we are looking at doing it like this, do you think that would work?’”

This feedback from young people played an important role in enabling DSCH to monitor what they were doing and to make any necessary changes.

In addition, DSCH also consulted with experts across the UK from outside of the service, such as the Runaways’ Consultant from The Children’s Society, Childline, Aberlour and a wide range of other service providers from the voluntary sector, to ensure they developed and provided a service that was based on need.
Building upon existing services
There have been a number of benefits of building upon existing services such as utilising the expertise of existing qualified staff who have a broad knowledge base and specialist skills.

Promotion of the service
The Runaways Service has been well advertised throughout the county. Other professionals are aware of the service and a significant number of children and young people have been reached through the work that has taken place in schools.

A number of other separate factors have also been identified as facilitating positive outcomes:

Factors relating to DSCH
DSCH has a history of providing support to young people and families. The EDT is well known by families and is viewed as a positive resource for families and young people out-of-hours when experiencing difficulties. The well-established nature of EDT is seen as a positive contributor to facilitating young people and their families contacting the Runaways Service.

Factors relating to the family of a young person
The willingness of families to contact the Runaways Service to prevent family breakdown is identified as a very important factor of being able to provide interventions with young runaways and their families.

Funding
The provision of funding from the DfES has obviously been a significant contributory factor as this funding made it possible to appoint dedicated staff to develop the service.

Factors relating to the wider environment
Staff within DSCH identify the pattern of low numbers of runaways in County Durham as a factor that enables the provision of lengthy support to those children and young people that contact them for support.

Factors that have hindered the work and acted as barriers to effective delivery
A number of factors have been recognised as acting as barriers to effective service delivery:

Factors relating to outside agencies
Whilst staff were keen to stress positive working relationships with the police, they recognised that, from an organisational perspective, there were a number of bureaucratic obstacles to gaining access to information and generally sharing information.

Staff reported that the flow of information from the DfES regarding funding issues was sometimes slow and this affected the start up of the project.

Staff also identified that the limited resources that other agencies faced at times affected their ability to place an intervention. This specifically relates to the provision of accommodation.

Lack of refuge
Some contributors to the review identified that there should also be a range of accommodation forms, including refuge, to ensure the provision of overall services for young runaways. However, those that cited the lack of refuge as a barrier to effective delivery highlighted the importance of establishing what need there was for refuge, and how a refuge could meet need in County Durham, to ensure that the appropriate provision was set up. Representatives from DSCH have not identified, on an operational level, the need for any further provision in the form
of refuge. This perspective is reached from evidence based from running the emergency accommodation and the broader context of running Orchard Lane

**Difficulties in gaining access to young people in the looked after system**

From the perspective of partner agencies working on the Runaways Service, local children’s homes managers had been concerned that emergency residential provision would attract paedophiles and pimps to the area. This concern was based, from the perspective of staff from DSCH, on a misunderstanding of the nature of the provision, regarding it as a bricks and mortar children’s home rather than a facility for short term emergency placements. Staff have had great difficulties getting into children’s homes to promote the service to young people. Managers within the looked after system had argued that there are so many agencies dealing with the young people in their care that they did not want to increase this by having other workers coming into children’s homes. Fortunately staff from the Runaways Service were able to access these young people through the preventative work in educational establishments. This barrier was also noted by an external professional who states the importance of working with looked after children:

> ‘There is, I think, a group that people identify as being particularly at risk of running away and they are young people in care of the local authority and I think there has been some difficulty in gaining access to those young people through some sort of internal mechanisms within social care and health and I don’t really know too much about that but they would have seemed to me to have been a very useful group of young people to have engaged with and there has been some difficulty with that’.

**Lack of access to services when working out-of-hours**

Because the Runaways Service is a 24 hour service, the lack of access to other agencies, appropriately trained professionals and information when working out of hours hinders progressing work with a young person or their families.

**Short-term funding**

Short-term funding was described as a barrier to retaining staff by contributors to the review from a number of agencies as experience has shown that staff will move on when employed to work on a short-term project. The two Connexions workers seconded to the Runaways Service were both working on short-term contracts and moved on to posts that were able to offer long-term contracts, resulting in DSCH losing specific expertise and skills that are difficult to replace.

It was also noted by a manager from a partner agency that longer-term funding may have allowed for more involvement from young people in more aspects of the project which, unfortunately, has not been possible in the allocated time-scale:

> ‘I think, then, that (longer term funding) would have allowed more time to have involved more young people in more aspects of the project. I think when you have a short term one, that is actually quite difficult to do because it takes time to involve young people …. if it were longer term, it would be quite nice to look at how young people could be involved in designing the publicity and thinking about the whole thing and maybe some peer mentoring or young people involved in just designing the project; but I think when you have short term funding, that’s quite a difficult one to do.’

**Factors relating to young people**

Staff cited the reluctance of young people to contact the Runaways Helpline or/and an unwillingness on their part to accept support from Social Service as a fundamental hindering factors. As touched upon earlier in the report, DSCH recognise that any social service department face the age-old obstacle of ‘bad press’ and the need for an effect ‘PR exercise’ to remove some of the stigma of being involved with social services and address the misperceptions help by those who have not had interventions from social services. In addition, the number of anonymous and/or abusive telephone calls made by children and young people to the Runaways Helpline takes up resources and prevents workers from dealing with genuine runaways and their families:
Of the few (young people) referred on the dedicated runaways line, over fifty percent are hoax calls or not applicable.

Factors relating to families
Where there has been no prior involvement from Community Support, there is sometimes a reluctance of families to accept professional involvement from DSCH and this was identified as a barrier to placing interventions. Staff also found that there is less likelihood of a young person returning home if the family has presented numerous times.

A lack of knowledge in the geographical area
It was thought by some that there was insufficient knowledge about running away in County Durham amongst other professionals and service providers and that running away has not been widely acknowledged as a problem. One example of this is a lack of understanding of the difference between an incident of a young person ‘running away’ or ‘staying out late’ from a care placement. Staff commented that the majority of calls made through the main EDT line are referrals from foster carers or residential workers who are reporting that a child or young person has not returned at an appointed time. As one staff member commented:

‘What is the definition of a ‘runaway’? The telephone calls we receive are from young people ‘running away’ from their placement not via the runaway helpline but foster carers or children unit staff ringing the normal EDT telephone line. We then submit a runaway initial contact form. In a lot of cases the young person may return to placement within the hour’.

Under-use of the free-phone Runaways Helpline
It was acknowledged that very few children and young people ring the free-phone Runaways Helpline, despite the publicity and preventative work in schools which highlights the freephone as a resource for children and young people who have run away or are contemplating running away. There is therefore a lack of clarity as to why this is the case and management felt that it would be useful to unpick this issue further.

A misperception amongst other service providers of the role provided by DSCH
It was also noted that sometimes professionals within other universal services ring up the helpline accompanied by a young person to ask for help, hoping for a ‘quick fix’ to the young person’s situation and needs. Often, in such circumstances, in the desire to seek a quick response, there was an underestimation of the importance of gaining a child or young person’s trust in working towards solutions. It was felt that sometimes being the professional that a young person has already placed their trust was a significant stepping stone towards helping the young person and that the professional themselves was in a better position to meet the young person’s needs.

‘I don’t know whether [other professionals] seem to think we have got some quick fix answers. Yes we can give the young person info and yes we can look at if Community Support would be appropriate, but with somebody [the professional] who they have trusted to go to and speak to – it would be better that that person [the professional] tried to discuss and negotiate and work through the issues with the young person initially because they are ringing us to [gain] a crisis response to that situation but at that point in time they are the best person to try and deal with it because the young person has trusted them.’

Partnership working
Managers from DSCH and from other statutory bodies were keen to work closely together and effectively with the Every Child Matters agenda and stressed the importance of collaborative working. The principles of effective partnership working were recognised from the onset of developing the Runaways Service and formalised by establishing the steering group to oversee
the Runaways Service. Indeed, partnership working was perceived as essential for the project to succeed with young people who runaway:

‘it’s not possible to develop and deliver an effective service to this particular group of young people without really good partnership working with all the relevant agencies .. so it’s absolutely essential’.

External professionals and staff from DSCH cited the partnership work that took place between the providers of the Runaways Service and other organisations as excellent. For staff within DSCH, this was a natural means of working to ensure effective delivery of services:

‘We’ve always tried to work closely with other agencies working with children and families so working with Connexions .. to me it’s just a natural extension of what we are doing. I mean the whole management – the whole ‘Every Child Matters' agenda, which is a very important agenda in Children’s services, is about each faction complementing the work done by other groups. So clearly partnership working is absolutely fundamental so I see that as the way we work in children’s services now anyway .. to me partnership working is crucial to give the best possible safety net and net of care around that child’

External professionals also described their positive views of working in partnership with DSCH:

‘In general terms we were really pleased to be involved and it’s just a very positive working relationship.’

A second professional also praised the standard of interagency working:

‘In terms of working with [us], it’s been excellent. We have been really pleased with the communication; we have been really pleased with our level of involvement; we think that the people involved within Social Care and Health have done a very effective job’.

Whilst there is clear praise from a number of external professionals representing partner organisations, one representative from the voluntary sector felt there were suggestions of barriers to, and missed opportunities for, partnership working with the voluntary sector. One voluntary sector professional felt that the target-driven nature of the Runaways Service had hindered collaborative working and also felt that perhaps their agency has been perceived as being ‘too on the edge’ to work with DSCH. There is possibly some misunderstanding of the nature of the targets described by the voluntary sector representative. DSCH set goals for themselves to reach, in terms of the children and young people reached through the preventative work undertaken in schools and other educational establishments. The aim of these ‘targets’ is to guide and monitor their work and ensure the appropriate allocation of time and other resources. Whilst DSCH are willing to allow for the perceptions of others, from their own perspective, setting themselves targets to aim towards was an exercise undertaken in consultation with project staff that enabled them to direct resources effectively and to meet the objectives of the service. In addition, as the Runaways Service is a pilot, targets are one mechanism to assess and define the success of the pilot. The review also shows that as well as reaching high numbers of children and young people in educational establishments, DSCH do spend significant lengths of time working on a one-to-one basis with young people with contradicts the notion of being dominated by the need to target as many children and young people as possible.

Also, to address the other issue raised by the representative from the voluntary sector, it was felt by DSCH that a number of potential partner agencies, including agencies working with the same broad groups of children and young people and using similar methods of access, and themselves were at differing points in both developing and delivering services. As DSCH were working to a very specific timescale, even though opportunities to work together were identified, the overwhelming factor in the decision not to work with some agencies was the pragmatic one of the need to input a service at a specific time rather than being able to wait for other agencies to also be at the stage where they were able to implement a service. Therefore DSCH made the decision to commit to their primary obligations and proceed at a pace that would ensure they kept on track with meeting deadlines. As they did not possess additional resources to support colleagues from the voluntary sector to develop their own service to catch up with the Runaways Service, DSCH proceeded to move the Runaways Service forward without waiting for other service providers to develop their own service. DSCH feel that it is regrettable if there
is a perception that they were not willing to work with agencies from the voluntary sector and will work in the future to redress this perception.

Effective partnership working not only significantly aided development of the Runaways Service but also aided implementation of the service due to the effective links with the Police, Connexions, schools and some voluntary organisations. For example, interagency working with the police led to the identification of trends in running away which benefited both the Police and DSCH in responding to runaways.

The following factors were viewed as facilitating partnership working:

**Effective communication**

One external professional described the ‘total communication between all the agencies’ which yielded in very positive outcomes. This effective communication began when representatives from DSCH began networking with prospective partner agencies prior to service delivery and carried through to working alongside partner agencies, as was the case with Connexions, from whom staff were seconded. The importance of being kept informed was specifically highlighted by external professionals, alongside dealing with any issues as they arise:

> ‘We keep each other informed if there are any particular issues. We can email or telephone so things have been dealt with immediately. We have been very impressed … We feel that issues have been dealt with straight away.’

The excellent communication between agencies played a key role in addressing differences in working practice. Managers from within DSCH and those from external agencies highlighted that, at times, there were initial misunderstandings due to the use of different language and a different focus but these were acknowledged and discussed and open communication was the key to reaching agreements that were satisfactory to all involved and to avoiding problems.

**The importance of involving partner agencies early on**

This has been regarded as crucial to ensure that partner agencies concerns and interests are incorporated from the onset and to gain support and sign-up to the Runaways Service.

**Partner agencies’ views and concerns fully taken on board**

As touched upon in the above point, effective interagency working has been facilitated by the willingness of DSCH to address the views and concerns of partner agencies. This was stressed by one external professional from an organisation with whom DSCH have worked very closely on the Runaways Service. This external professional felt that his organisation’s views and concerns had been fully included and was impressed with the high degree of collaboration:

> ‘I think we have been very…not only involved but I’d say that our concerns and views have really been taken on board.’

Clearly, partnership working has been very productive for a number of those involved, specifically at a managerial level. For staff working on the ground who are not themselves employees of DSCH, there are clearly aspects of partnership working that have been highlighted as examples of good practice that have not fully filtered down to practitioners. For example, the review has identified that whilst managers in the partner organisations were clear about their own role within the Runaways Service and the role of partner agencies, there was some lack of understanding of each other’s role at a practitioner level which resulted in one of the seconded Connexions’ workers voicing an opinion that, at times she felt a stranger whilst working with other staff from DSCH who did not appear to have an understanding of her own role carrying our preventative work in schools. As a response to this, the management at DSCH have acknowledged the need to ensure that all staff are made more fully aware of the work that is carried out in relation to young runaways and to ensure that mechanisms are set in place to achieve this that work operationally.

A second point made by an external professional from the voluntary sector also highlighted how the good practice of partnership working developed by managers did not always filter through team structures to practitioners. This external professional described how, when workers contacted staff at the Runaways Service, they did not always receive a positive response and felt unable to pursue further making links. This professional, however, recognises that it is up to
them as well as staff from the Runaways Service to pursue partnership working at ground level and has hopes that there will be opportunities in the future to do so.

The steering group

The steering group was made up of representatives from the statutory sector agencies. One voluntary sector organisation working on similar issues as the Runaways Service commented that it would have been helpful and productive to have a broader range of representatives on the steering group, including those from the voluntary sector. DSCH accepted this point and were willing to acknowledge that there may be benefits to including a broader range of agencies in the steering group, including those from the voluntary sector. However, DSCH offered the following reasons why this did not happen in relation to the Runaways Service: there is a need to get a balance between working with a range of colleagues and the pragmatics of co-ordinating getting a number of key individuals in a room at the same time to move a project forward. When deciding to include a number of representatives to be part of a steering group, there is some criteria that has to be considered to ensure that the steering group is able to operate effectively. For example, DSCH had to consider where there was a match between the priorities of the Runaways Service and of other potential partner agencies. The priority awarded to the piece of work by any partner agency has to be such that a partner agency were able to commit a representative to attend regular meetings with the ability to commits its organisation to allocating resources and carrying out decisions. The need to establish a steering group that is able to move a piece of work forward in an effective and timely manner was viewed as advantageous. However, DSCH recognise that there is some learning for them in relation to working with a broader range of agencies. There may also be some differences in perceptions of what constitutes a steering group. The steering group of the Runaways Service was a decision-making body closely involved with the operation of the group. For others, a steering group can be a forum that discusses and advises on the guiding principles behind a piece of work without becoming involved in the direct operation of a project. Therefore there may have been a lack of effective communication between different agencies to acknowledge that, to ensure that the Runaways Service moved effectively to meet the requirements of the DfES, the steering group was to play a distinct role in making decision and implementing effective operation. To achieve this, the steering group needed to be composed of a group of representatives from agencies who were able to commit to this as opposed to representatives whose role it was to meet on a few occasions over the duration of the pilot and limit their involvement to offering expertise and guiding principles behind operation of the pilot.

Effective partnership working resulted in a proactive and responsive steering group that was effectively able to fulfil its role. The members of the steering group spoke very positively about both DSCH’s role in establishing the steering group and about what has been achieved via the steering group.

The development of trust between members of the steering group was acknowledged as a key factor in the success of the steering group. This degree of trust was viewed as stemming from DSCH themselves who have shown themselves to be trustworthy to partner organisations.

DSCH have been successful in bringing together a number of individuals from different agencies who possess different skills and expertise. As explained by one professional from a partner agency who is part of the steering group:

‘We all have quite different skills to bring to that project’s management group. We can all tap into different resources and we know different systems and different people - we all have a lot of things to bring and again the whole process is quite speedy really. If things need sorting out there is usually one of us that can sort it out! You can’t always say that about a lot of groups!’

The steering group has been used utilised in a constructive manner to plan and develop the Runaways Service. Problem-solving itself is an ongoing process outside of the steering groups meeting to enable problems to be addressed as they arise, rather than waiting for the steering group to meet to deal with such issues. However, if an opportunity for learning arose from a specific problem, this may be discussed amongst the steering group as learning to be applied at some point further down the line, should it arise. This use of the steering group is identified as a positive factor.
‘I think it has been good in terms of we’ve used it constructively. What we have not done is waited for anything and taken it to the steering group. Anything that needed to be addressed has been addressed straight away and the steering group has been used to plan and develop other things. I think that has been quite good …… If anything had gone wrong, any crisis or anything that needed to be addressed, it wasn’t a case of waiting till the steering group to address it. We would deal with it straight away and we may discuss it at the steering group as an opportunity to learn’.

Within DSCH, staff felt that there was a commitment from all members of the steering group to work flexibly and for the group to work. A factor that clearly facilitated such commitments was the membership of individuals in the steering group who had been involved at the preliminary stages of developing the Runaways Service:

‘I think if you run a project, particularly in local government, over a couple of years, people can come and go and we have been fortunate to have a stable group involved from the start – each of whom has had a real commitment to making the service work which again makes a huge difference.’

Representatives from partner agencies has shown a high degree of flexibility, a willingness to operate outside of traditional boundaries and have given both personal and organisational commitment that filters its way down to other staff involved with the Runaways Service:

‘Individuals from respective organisations have to be really on board from day one with a personal as well as a organisational commitment to making it work and a willingness to be flexible and not operate within traditional boundaries really and be able to give the staff the message that this is about working flexibly and creatively as well and we have been incredibly fortunate that we have had staff who really like to work that way’.

The manner in which the steering group has developed and worked has also identified future possibilities for joint working. Through working together on the Runaways Service, members of the steering group have built working relationships based on trust and are recognising the possibilities for further joint working.

Outcomes of provision of the Runaways Service for children and young people

Staff described the following outcomes for children and young people:

- to make young people aware of the dangers associated with ‘running away’ and better inform potential runaways of the risks involved
- offer advice/guidance
- to provide support to families/young people who need it and enable them to access services/support
- to prevent family breakdown which otherwise may occur
- to ensure young people are safe
- to reassure families that their children are safe even if they do not want to return
- interventions are set in place to facilitate young people returning home
- as a last resort, a young person can be placed in care until locality officer opens and then further decisions are made by the day time social worker.

Whilst most staff were able to identify outcomes of provision of the Runaways Service for children and young people, some felt that these outcomes were in existence prior to the Runaways Service due to EDT having always offered this service.

The impact of being able to provide emergency accommodation.

Staff acknowledged that the longer-term outcomes of providing young runaways with emergency accommodation were not known and that, at present, no mechanisms were set in
place to evaluate the long-term impact of emergency accommodation. However, the following were highlighted as short-term outcomes, and sometimes, immediate, outcomes of emergency accommodation:

- keeps all children and young people safe until they can access more permanent accommodation
- gives young people support
- provides young people with access to day time staff
- allows families 'cooling off periods' to prevent permanent breakdown

Whilst these benefits are of obvious significance, it was acknowledged that emergency accommodation is a last resort for young runaways, to be put into place if no other option is available and does not provide a long-term solution.

Suggestions for improving the Runaways Service

The following three suggestions were identified by management within DSCH to improve the Runaways Service:

1. Recognition of the need for understanding of how partner organisations function and co-working

There was a recognition that even though strong links were forged with the police right from the beginning, there was an awareness that elements of the work with the police often took a slow pace because of the organisational and bureaucratic nature of the police force and that DSCH could have put more work in understanding the bureaucratic procedures and organisational issues of the police, specifically in relation to information-sharing and identifying police practice in other areas in the UK by consulting with the police from areas other than County Durham. It is also recognised that closer links need to be made with the police to focus on young people who are new presentations and also with those who repeatedly go missing.

2. The need to explore a variety of methods to convey messages across to children and young people

Whilst staff working as part of the Runaways Service have utilised a number of creative methods of putting across messages about the dangers of running away and where to go to for support if a young person feels they have no option but to run away, there is also recognition of the need for additional means to ensure that messages are clearly communicated:

    ‘I think we need to further explore using drama and other media and, although we still need to rely on workshops, I think that we need to look at other ways of getting our message of the services across to young people’.

3. Improving the awareness of colleagues on other teams

The need to ensure that more colleagues are aware of the nature of the service was also stressed. Whilst some resources have been put towards in-house publicity, there is an awareness for the need for further resources to further inform and raise the awareness of colleagues in social care and health, particularly those working with children in need, of the work that is undertaken as part of the Runaways Service.
Conclusions and suggestions

In this final section of the report we summarise the key issues identified in the review and make some suggestions relating to areas where DSCH could focus to further develop the Runaways Service.

Summary of key issues

- Analysis of the monitoring data has revealed that 232 children and young people were referred to The Runaways Service in a thirteen month period.
- The majority of these referrals were in relation to children and young people from the looked-after population.
- Sixteen children and young people have stayed overnight in the emergency accommodation.
- Preventative work with children and young people has been undertaken in over two thirds of schools and other educational establishments in County Durham resulting in more pupils reached than the set target of 650 a month.
- The Runaways Service fits well with overall service provision which has been improved by strengthening links between Community Support and EDT to provide a fast track seamless response for young runaways and their families.
- The emergency accommodation at Orchard Lane also provides an immediate response and support to children and young people. Through being an integrated part of a wider service that includes input from Community Support, children and young people are supported to return home thereby preventing entry into the care system.
- There have been a number of benefits derived from the secondment of Connexions Advisors to The Runaways Service to carry out the preventative work in schools.
- This preventative work in schools has been successful in reaching high numbers of children and young people and has utilised a number of creative methods of working with pupils and school staff.
- There are a number of factors relating to staff at DSCH (including awareness, skills and attitudes) that have positively impacted upon delivery of The Runaways Service working in partnership with external agencies.
- Building further on the previous point, DSCH have forged strong links with partner agencies, with an ability to communicate effectively and take on board the views of partner agencies.
- Effective partnership working has facilitated both the development and implementation of The Runaways’ Service.
- The steering group have been both proactive and responsive and has played a key role in operational issues and ensuring effective delivery of the service.
There have been a number of positive short-term outcomes for children and young people and their families as a result of interventions from DSCH – including ensuring safety, providing a breathing space for young people and families, and facilitating young people’s access to other services.

Suggestions for future development

One of the aims of the review was to generate learning that can inform the further development of the service. On the basis of the information gathered, the following suggestions are offered in order to build upon what has already been achieved:

1. The monitoring system developed by DSCH has provided some useful information on the usage of the service and has highlighted some key issues. Given the national significance of this initiative, it is important to build on the work that has already taken place and to enhance the monitoring and evaluation systems to maximise the opportunities of generating future learning both for the benefit of DSCH and for a much wider audience. It would be helpful if these systems included follow-up information-gathering from young people and others to assess the longer-term impact of the project on young people’s lives.

2. Whilst the Runaways Service has worked with significant numbers of young runaways, the majority have been from the looked-after population. Now that the service has been established there is an opportunity to broaden its accessibility to young people in the area who run away from, stay away from or are forced to leave home. The development of closer links with a wider range of agencies, including those from the voluntary sector, would be one means of broadening the referral base. Another potential route is to promote a higher level of self-referral by young people. The cards given out to pupils in schools as part of the preventative work are one potentially effective means of doing this. It is also likely that the service needs a lengthier period of time to develop its reputation in County Durham to ensure that trust is built with the hard-to-reach runaway population. Previous runaways projects have found that word-of-mouth recommendations amongst young people provide an important source of self-referral in the longer term. To aid this process and ensure that service provision matches need, it may be beneficial to conduct a needs analysis in County Durham to establish the type of need and levels of awareness amongst children and young people of the services provided by DSCH.

3. The review has indicated that the service has established a good level of inter-agency working, particularly with other statutory agencies, and has also suggested that there is a potential for this network to be broadened to include non-statutory organisations. As indicated above one of the potential benefits of this would be to broaden the range of referrals being received by the service.

As well as these learning points specifically related to the Runaways Service, the review has also provided some more general insights into the issues faced by statutory agencies engaged with young runaways in County Durham. The monitoring data suggests that a substantial proportion of young people reported missing in the county are looked after children and young people who are late returning to their placements. This is a pattern which is also in evidence in many other areas. High levels of reporting of this kind has significant resource implications for the police and for agencies such as The Runaways Service. It also raises the risk that children and young people from the looked after population who are genuinely at risk may be missed amongst the large numbers of children and young people who are failing to return to placements on time. It would benefit DSCH, and other agencies such as the police, if measures were taken to review reporting practices when a child or young person is returning late to placement and to develop protocols to lessen the burden upon both the police and DSCH to ensure that the focus can be sustained on incidences of running away. These measures could be accompanied by responding in a more holistic and ongoing way with young people who repeatedly go missing rather than individually responding to each individual incident.
In conclusion, the information gathered indicates that DSCH has had success with the setting up and initial development of The Runaways Service. Moreover, the evidence gathered on the work of the service to date has provided some illustrations of the potential of this model to meet the needs of young runaways in a way that is integrated with other local children’s services. The service is still at a relatively early stage in its evolution, but there are indications that with further development, experience and evaluation, it may provide a valuable model of short-term emergency accommodation provision for runaways that could potentially be replicated in other areas.
References


