RUNNING

the RISK

Young people on the streets of Britain today

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The Children's Society
MAKING LIVES WORTH LIVING
RUNNING — THE RISK
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YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE STREETS OF BRITAIN TODAY

A report based on research commissioned by The Children’s Society and undertaken by the Child Care Research and Development Unit, Department of Adult Continuing Education, University of Leeds.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 1 - Introduction .......................................................... 3
  ‘Young runaways’ .................................................................. 3
  Origins of The Children’s Society’s streetwork initiative ........... 4
  Outline of the research .......................................................... 7
  Structure of the report ............................................................ 10

Chapter 2 - Summary of key findings of the research ..................... 13

SECTION ONE: THE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH WHOM THE PROJECTS WORK

Chapter 3 - Description of the young people ............................... 19
  Characteristics ..................................................................... 19
  Life history ......................................................................... 21
  Current situation ............................................................... 28
  Support networks (excluding the streetwork projects) ............... 30
  Behaviour and welfare (apart from running away) .................... 32
  Summary ............................................................................ 33

Chapter 4 - ‘Running away’: young people’s perspectives ................. 35
  First running away incidents ................................................. 35
  Most recent running away incidents ...................................... 38
  Young people’s running away experiences ......................... 40
  Summary ............................................................................ 44

Chapter 5 - ‘Running away’: perspectives of Children’s Society staff and other professionals ............................................. 45
  Factors leading to young people leaving where they live .......... 45
  Factors leading to young people running from substitute care ... 47
  Factors relating to all young people ...................................... 49
  Other issues ....................................................................... 50
  Summary ............................................................................ 51

Chapter 6 - ‘Running away’: synthesis of the data ......................... 53
  Describing the young people with whom the projects work ........ 53
  Sub-groups of young people who run away ......................... 56
  A model of running away ‘pathways’ .................................... 61
  Summary ............................................................................ 68

SECTION TWO: THE WORK OF THE PROJECTS

Chapter 7 - Models of service provision ...................................... 71
  Youth Link, Birmingham ..................................................... 71
  Safe in the City, Manchester ................................................ 72
  Leeds Safe House .................................................................. 74
  The Porth Project, Gwent ..................................................... 76
"YOUNG RUNAWAYS"

The Children's Society's work with children and young people living on the streets of British cities dates back to its earlier origins. When Edward Rose, founder of the Church of England Central Society for Providing Homes for Waifs and Strays in 1867, he was motivated largely by a concern to "rescue the young boundless vagabonds" as he found on the streets of Victorian London. Over hundreds of years, young runaways were still to be found living on the streets of the country's major cities. In response, Edward Rose's organisation, now renamed The Children's Society, sought to work with this vulnerable yet undervalued group of young people in London and other major cities, to explore ways of helping them.

Recent research suggests that the issue of young people running away is an important social problem. In 2000, The Children's Society estimated that there were approximately 36,000 episodes of young people under the age of 18 running away from home or relatives each year (Newman, 1997). Research carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate in 1999 has indicated that in many areas of young people aged 10 to 18 years leave home overnight. (Evans, 1999) The research they suggest that around 12% of these young people go on to run away ten times or more. There are roughly around 3 million young people aged 16 to 18 in the metropolitan counties of England. Even if the above figures were repeated throughout the country, we can estimate that 10,000 of these young people would not return to their homes before their sixteenth birthday.

There is a grey area in the law regarding young people aged 16 and 17 who wish to leave home. Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, for example, notes that young people who are experiencing difficulties or being put at risk of being harmed by the local
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

'YOUNG RUNAWAYS'

The Children's Society's work with children and young people living on the streets of Britain dates back to its earliest origins. When Edward Rudolf started the Church of England Central Society for Providing Homes for Waifs and Strays in 1881, he was motivated largely by a concern to 'rescue' the young, homeless 'vagrants' to be found on the streets of Victorian London. One hundred years later, 'young runaways' were still to be found living on the streets of the country's major cities. In response, Edward Rudolf's organisation, now renamed The Children's Society, renewed its work with this vulnerable group of young people. In the 1990s, its 'streetwork initiative' is, in expenditure terms, its second largest programme of work.

Recent research suggests that the issue of young people running away is an important social problem. In 1988, The Children's Society estimated that there were approximately 98,000 incidents of young people under the age of 18 running away from home or substitute care each year (Newman, 1988). Research carried out by the Society in Leeds in 1993 has indicated that as many as one in seven under-16-year-olds run away overnight (Rees, 1993). The research also suggests that around 2% of these young people go on to run away ten times or more. There are currently around 3.5 million young people aged under 16 in the metropolitan counties of England1. Thus, if the above figures were repeated amongst this group, we can estimate that 10,000 of these young people would run away ten times or more before their sixteenth birthday.

There is a 'grey area' in the law regarding young people aged 16 and 17 who wish to leave home. Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, for example, states that young people who are experiencing difficulties at home can ask to be accommodated by the local

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1 Source: 1991 Census. There are seven metropolitan counties in England: Tyne and Wear, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Greater London, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, and Merseyside.
Introduction and Background

authorities despite parental objections. In Scotland, young people may leave home at 16 with or without parental consent.

The legal position regarding any under-16-year-old who wants to leave home is that they must apply through formal court proceedings under the Children Act 1989, to substitute parental control with that of another acceptable adult who can take parental responsibility for them. Young people under the age of 16 who have run away from home or substitute care are left in a ‘vacuum’ as far as statutory support is concerned: they cannot receive welfare benefits; they should be in full-time education; they are legally unable to work; they are not entitled to a Youth Training place; and they cannot enter into contracts to obtain independent accommodation. They therefore have no legal means of supporting themselves.

As this research will show, young people living on the streets of Britain are highly vulnerable, not only to exploitation and danger but also to losing contact with all existing welfare systems and legal means of self-sustainment. Only by examining and attempting to understand the motivations of young people who run away and their experiences, and by evaluating the systems already in place to offer them support, will we be able to identify the most effective ways both of offering alternative solutions to those who want to run away, and of meeting the needs of those who do.

This research examines and evaluates the work of four of The Children’s Society’s streetwork projects, each of which represent different models of service delivery. The research also explores the situations of the young people they work with, including their backgrounds, the factors that have led them to run away, their own views of their experiences while away from their homes, and their needs and how far these are being met both by the projects and by other support networks. Finally, it offers a model of prevention and early support, together with a series of challenges to all those who have responsibility for children and young people.

ORIGINS OF THE CHILDREN’S SOCIETY’S STREETWORK INITIATIVE

The Children’s Society current streetwork initiative has its origins in research undertaken in 1981 into the needs of young homeless people in London. This research identified a glaring gap in provision for young people under the age of 17. By law, voluntary agencies catering for the single homeless could work only with those aged 16 and above. Young people under this age were expected by the law and social convention to live at home with their parents or other
carers who had, to use the terms of the 1989 Children Act, ‘parental responsibility’ for them. Legally speaking then, they could not be ‘homeless’, but rather ‘absent’ from home or local authority accommodation. If they ran away and were found by the police, they were normally returned to their homes immediately. For most this gave them little chance to address the problems that had caused them to run in the first place; for many, it meant a return to abusive and violent environments. Many ran again, but tried to make sure they kept well clear of anyone who could return them home.

The need for a safe place for young people to go and get help was clear. The Children’s Society responded to this need and in 1985, after four years of extensive planning with other agencies, opened the Central London Teenage Project (CLTP) — the first ‘safe house’, or refuge, for young runaways in Britain. CLTP offered young people accommodation at a confidential address, a chance to discuss their reasons for running away and their needs, counselling, and help with planning their next move.

In addition, the Society undertook research in an attempt to understand why young people were running away, how many were doing so each year, and how best to respond to the problem. This research and the work of CLTP raised clear national implications: it was not nearly sufficient simply to have a London-based ‘safety net’.

A national programme was launched, entitled ‘Young People Under Pressure’. Each of the Society’s six regions was asked to consider establishing a ‘streetwork’ project, responsive to locally perceived needs and developed in co-operation with local and national voluntary and statutory organisations. The final result was five projects opening in the late 1980s and early 1990s: these projects were based in Bournemouth, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, and Gwent.

The role of the Children Act 1989

When CLTP opened, it faced a serious legal problem. Child care legislation had for many years contained penalties for those ‘harbouring’ young people under the age of 16 who had run away from family or care settings. This legislation was necessary to prevent exploitation of young people by those wishing to hide them away. However, CLTP refuge was therefore, at least in theory, in breach of the law.

The Children Bill offered a chance to remedy this situation. The Bill was first presented to Parliament in November 1988 and attempted a comprehensive reform of child care legislation. The Bill provided a golden and, perhaps, unique opportunity for The Chil-
Introduction and Background

dren's Society to influence Government, and to give the official stamp of approval to the refuge initiative. Yet initially the Bill did not include any clause relating to specified organisations working with runaways. Mobilising its links with its supporters, the Society was able to launch a letter-writing campaign, which resulted in pressures on Members of Parliament to respond to the issue of street children in modern Britain. As a result, the issue was raised and debated at Committee stage and an assurance was given by the Minister that the Government would bring forward an amendment at Report stage. The final result was Section 51 of the Children Act 1989, which states that:

51. (1) Where it is proposed to use a voluntary home or registered children's home to provide a refuge for children who appear to be at risk of harm, the Secretary of State may issue a certificate under this section with respect to that home.

(2) Where a local authority or voluntary organisation arrange for a foster parent to provide such a refuge, the Secretary of State may issue a certificate under this section with respect to that foster parent.

(3) Where a certificate is in force with respect to a home, none of the provisions mentioned in subsection (7) shall apply in relation to any person providing refuge for any child in that home.

It is Section 51 that legitimates the existence of the refuge-based projects and ensures that the Society is exempt from the implications of Section 49 of the Children Act and other legislation (Section 71 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, Secion 32 (3) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969, Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984). Under Section 49 of the Children Act, it is illegal to keep a child away from a 'responsible person', an offence punishable by imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or by a fine. Section 51 is of considerable interest to the student of the Children Act in that at one level it seems to be in contradiction to the concept of 'parental responsibility', perhaps the central concept of the Children Act.

Section 51 is not however the end of the story. It also stipulates that all refuges must be certificated by the Department of Health. In brief, this means that they must meet the stringent standards set down in the two relevant sets of regulations (Refuges (Children's Homes and Foster Placements) Regulations 1991, Children's Homes Regulations 1991). The Regulations allow for a young person to stay in refuge for a maximum of 14 consecutive days, and a maximum of 21 days in any three-month period. This certification process has not proved to be easy and we discuss the impact of Section 51 in Chapter 11.
OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH

As we have seen from the above brief history of the streetwork initiative, The Children’s Society has been at the forefront of innovative practice in relation to young people who have run away or have been forced to leave where they live. The Society’s streetwork programme currently consists of five projects:

**Leeds Safe House**

Provides a residential refuge and an advocacy service for young people who have run away or have been forced to leave where they live.

**Porth Project**

Provides a ‘dispersed’ refuge (with approved foster carers) and an advocacy service for young people in South Wales who have run away or have been forced to leave where they live.

**Safe in the City**

Works with young people on the streets in Manchester, provides an advocacy service and occasional ‘dispersed’ refuge.

**Southside**

Provides refuge for young people in Bournemouth, and runs an advice/information centre.

**Youth Link**

Works with young people on the streets in Birmingham, runs a drop-in service, and provides an advocacy service.

The innovative nature of the streetwork programme and the consequent opportunities for learning prompted The Children’s Society to commission the research described in this report. For a number of practical and historical reasons, the research looked at the work of four of the above projects: Leeds Safe House, the Porth Project, Safe in the City, and Youth Link. This enabled an exploration of the main models of service provision: detached street-based work, drop-in centre work, residential refuge, and dispersed refuge. A more detailed description of the services the projects provide is to be found in Chapter 7. It should also be noted that the Porth Project only began service delivery halfway through the research contract and this has meant that the data we have been able to gather relating to this project is less comprehensive.

The research was carried out for the Society over a two-year period (July 1992 to June 1994) by the Child Care Research and Development Unit at the Department of Adult Continuing Education, University of Leeds. The research director was Mike Stein.
Introduction and Background

(University of Leeds), and the research team was completed by Nick Frost (University of Leeds) and Gwyther Rees (on secondment from The Children's Society).

Research aims and methodology

The main aims of the research were:

1) To clarify the various definitions of 'running away' and, where applicable, the obverse 'keeping in touch'.
2) To investigate the processes and systems leading to young people running away including, where relevant, families and local networks/communities, local authority accommodation (e.g. placements/decision-making), homelessness, income, discrimination on any grounds.
3) To explore the needs of young people who are in contact with the Society, as defined by themselves and other key people.
4) To explore the responses of the projects to young people, including:
   - the experiences of project workers in providing a response to young people;
   - outreach work, crisis work;
   - the different methods, settings and philosophies involved;
   - current or proposed changes in the work of the projects and the purpose of these changes.

It was proposed to meet Aim 1 by gathering data in the form of a survey questionnaire from young people using the projects. Aims 2, 3 and 4 were to be met by looking at young people's experience within the projects and after they left the projects, i.e. looking at outcomes. This was to be done by gathering the perceptions of young people, project workers, and other key people.

The research proposal therefore implied the following research methods:

- questionnaires for young people who used the projects;
- interviews with young people who used the projects (with a second follow-up interview where possible);
- interviews with project staff;
- information-gathering from other key people (e.g. social workers).

The final information base gathered through the above methods was:
102 self-completed questionnaires returned by young people;
36 young people interviewed;
49 Children's Society staff interviewed;
28 professionals in other agencies interviewed.

Previous research on running away and street children

In addition to the above information, the research also included a search for UK and international literature on the issues of running away and street children.

The three main previous research studies in the UK have been:

1) Newman, C. Young Runaways: findings from Britain's first safe house. The Children's Society, 1988:
A study of young people at Britain's first refuge for young runaways, plus a nation-wide survey of police missing person statistics.
Key findings:
• incidence of abuse amongst young people who run away;
• over-representation of young people from residential care amongst young people on the streets in London;
• estimated 98,000 missing person incidents (under 18 years old) each year in the UK.

2) Abrahams, C. and Mungall, R. Runaways: Exploding the Myths. NCH — Action for Children, 1992:
A study of police missing person statistics in five areas of England and Scotland.
Key findings:
• estimated 102,000 missing person incidents (under 18 years old) involving 43,000 young people each year in England and Scotland;
• young people generally do not run away to the 'bright lights' but stay in their local area;
• over-representation of young people from residential care amongst young people who are reported missing.

3) Rees, G. Hidden Truths: young people's experiences of running away. The Children's Society, 1993:
A survey of young people in Leeds, plus interviews with young people with recent running away experience.
Key findings:
• estimated 1 in 7 young people in Leeds have run away and stayed away overnight before the age of 16;
• very high incidence of running away amongst young people in residential care, but also a higher incidence of running away from family than had been previously estimated from missing person statistics;
• running away usually starts within the family, even amongst young people who later run away from substitute care.

These studies have therefore all identified significant evidence of young people reported missing, or young people who have run away. All three studies also contained a number of other important findings which are referred to at appropriate places throughout this report.

The international literature research identified 141 articles and books on the issues of running away and street children, most of which were from the USA. Twenty-three of these were obtained, including a comprehensive study by Brennan et al. (1978). A summary of some of the findings of these studies is included in the Appendix.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

A summary of the key findings of the research is found in the next chapter. Following this, the main body of the report is divided into three sections:

Section 1 looks at the young people with whom the streetwork projects work:

Chapter 3 contains a description of the young people’s characteristics, life histories, current situations, support networks, behaviour (apart from running away), and welfare.

Chapter 4 looks at the young people’s experience of running away or being on the streets.

Chapter 5 examines the perspectives of Children’s Society staff and other professionals on the issues of running away and being on the streets.

Chapter 6 concludes Section 1 with a synthesis of the data, a discussion of definitions, and a theoretical model of running away ‘pathways’.

Section 2 looks at the work of four of the streetwork projects:

Chapter 7 describes the projects’ models of service provision and intended outcomes of their work.
Chapter 8 compares the young people in contact with the four projects.

Chapter 9 examines evidence on the extent to which the projects achieve their intended outcomes with young people.

Chapter 10 considers other potential effects of the projects’ work on young people, project staff, and external people and organisations.

Chapter 11 looks at other issues that have arisen in relation to the projects’ work, including accessibility, anti-discriminatory issues and processes of working with young people.

Section 3 looks at implications of the research findings:

Chapter 12 considers implications for working with young people who run away or are on the streets, including an integration of preventative strategies into the theoretical model presented in Chapter 6.

Chapter 13 looks at the broader social policy issues raised by the research findings.

Finally, Chapter 14 contains brief concluding remarks on some of the major themes emerging from this research.
Chapter 1 contains a description of the young people's characters, their histories, current situations, support networks, behaviors (apart from running away), and problems.

Chapter 2 describes the young people's experience of running away or being on the streets.

Chapter 3 summarizes the perspective of Children's Society staff and other professionals on the causes of running away and being on the streets.

Chapter 4 concludes Section 1 with a summary of the theme: are there patterns, of destinations, and a theoretical model of running away pathways?

Section 2 looks at the work of four of the outreach projects.

Chapter 5 describes the practical models of service practices and associated outcomes of their work.
CHAPTER 2

Summary of Key Findings of the Research

SECTION 1: THE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH WHOM THE PROJECTS WORK

The young people have generally had a high level of disruption in their lives [Chapter 3].

- Within the family there was a high incidence of relationship breakdown, conflict and violence.
- Most of the young people had spent periods in substitute care and often had a number of different placements.
- A significant minority of the young people had spent extended continuous periods away from both family and substitute care before the age of 16.
- Amongst the over-16-year-olds, frequent changes of accommodation and periods of homelessness were common.

Most of the young people lacked support networks (apart from the streetwork projects) [Chapter 3].

- There was a high level of detachment from family and (where relevant) social services.
- There was also a high level of detachment from the education system.
- Many young people had a distrust of adults and relied on peers for support.

There were significant levels of substance use, self-harm, depression and criminal offending amongst the young people interviewed [Chapter 3].

- The large majority of the young people had run away before the age of 16 [Chapter 4].
- Most of the young people had first run away from family, usually remaining in their local area, and only staying away for a short time.
- Many of the young people who had run away from family were subsequently placed in substitute care.
- Most of the young people had run away many times and later running away incidents were on the whole more extensive and
Introduction and Background

wide-ranging than first incidents.

- Young people identified a number of positives to being away from where they lived, including relief from pressure and making new friends, but the majority felt that being away had not helped to sort out their problems.
- There were also a number of negative experiences including fear, loneliness, and physical and sexual assaults.
- A majority of the young people had resorted to strategies such as stealing, begging or providing sex for money in order to survive.

Young people’s experiences were matched by the perceptions of professionals who worked with them [Chapter 5] and who identified:

- Abuse as a key factor in running away from family.
- Feelings of not being listened to or cared about and bullying as key factors in running from care.
- Economic stresses on parents and resource constraints on local authorities as important contextual factors in understanding running away.

The data gathered has enabled the identification of a number of major pathways in relation to running away from family and substitute care, in some cases leading to ‘detachment’ from these and other support systems [Chapter 6].

SECTION 2: THE WORK OF THE PROJECTS

The street-based and refuge-based projects all tend to concentrate on working with young people who have already run away a number of times. However, the refuge-based projects often work with young people at an earlier stage of running away experience, while the street-based projects more often work with ‘detached’ young people [Chapter 8].

The projects aim for four broad outcomes with young people and there is evidence of considerable success in at least three of these areas [Chapter 9]:

- The projects are highly successful at meeting young people’s immediate needs. There are some differences in the range of needs met by each of the models.
- The projects have all had significant success in establishing positive relationships with this marginalised group of young people.
Summary of Key Findings of the Research

- There is also significant evidence of projects facilitating change in young people's lives. There are some differences in the kinds of change achieved by the different models.
- The projects aim to work with young people in the short-term and to engage other agencies in meeting young people’s longer-term needs. However, there is considerable evidence that the projects are involved with some young people on a long-term basis.

The research has also highlighted a number of other issues relating to the projects’ work, including unanticipated consequences [Chapter 10] and issues of accessibility, anti-discriminatory practice, and processes of working with young people [Chapter 11].

SECTION 3: IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Drawing on the research data, a model of intervention has been developed. This suggests that future work with young people could develop along broader lines [Chapter 12] to incorporate:
- primary prevention (e.g. education in schools);
- secondary prevention (e.g. mediation between parents and young people);
- tertiary prevention (e.g. street-based outreach work and refuge-based work).

There are a number of areas for consideration by other agencies [Chapter 12] including:
- the need for a co-ordinated response to working with young people who run away;
- the need for a response to the issue of young people running from residential care, and in particular to the issue of bullying;
- educational support for this group of young people.

The research has also highlighted a number of social policy issues [Chapter 13], including:
- young people’s legal position under the age of 16;
- support for young people leaving care;
- the impact of family breakdown on young people.
SECTION I: INTRODUCTION OF THE WINDROS

The purpose of this report is to introduce the windros field and its importance. The windros field is a relatively new and rapidly developing area of study that has the potential to revolutionize our understanding of the natural world. The windros field is a multidisciplinary area that draws on knowledge from fields such as meteorology, geography, and environmental science.

SECTION II: THE WORK OF THE PROJECTS

This section will discuss some of the key projects that are currently underway within the windros field. These projects are aimed at understanding the complex interactions between the wind and the environment, and are critical to developing effective strategies for managing the impacts of wind on human populations and the natural world.

The projects described in this section are focused on a variety of topics, including wind energy, climate change, and weather forecasting. Each project is characterized by a unique set of challenges and opportunities, and is contributing to a broader understanding of the windros field and its potential applications.
In order to obtain a picture of the young people with whom the project works, data was gathered on various aspects of their lives. This data has been gathered from their characteristics, life histories, current situations, networks, and behaviour and welfare. The information was gathered through self-completed questionnaires (142 people) and in-depth interviews (146 people). All of them were conducted through the projects. In several of the different projects the young people were in contact with, a distinction is made only where this is important or a full understanding of the data. A detailed comparison of the different parts of sections with the projects is to be found in...

SECTION 1

THE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH WHOM THE PROJECTS WORK

Exactly half of the young people were aged 14 or 15, and the large majority (61%) were under 16.

Figure 1, Ages of young people in the descriptive sample

* Figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding.
SECTION 1
THE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH WHOM THE PROJECT WORK
CHAPTER 3

Description of the Young People

In order to obtain a picture of the young people who are in contact with the projects, data was gathered on various aspects of their lives. This data has been grouped into five broad areas: characteristics; life history; current situations; networks; and behaviour and welfare. The information was gathered through self-completed questionnaires (102 people) and in-depth interviews (36 people, 32 of whom were contacted through the projects). In terms of the different projects the young people were in contact with, a distinction is made only where this is important to a full understanding of the data. A detailed comparison of the young people in contact with the projects is to be found in Chapter 8.

CHARACTERISTICS

Age

Exactly half the young people in the questionnaire sample were aged 14 or 15, and the large majority (81%) were under 18:

*Figure 3.1 Ages of young people in the questionnaire sample*

1 Figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding.
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

Of the interviewees contacted through the projects, 16 people were under 16 years of age and 16 were over 16.

**Sex**

The questionnaire sample was made up of 59 females and 43 males:

**Figure 3.2 Sex of young people in the questionnaire sample**

In the interview sample 22 were males and 14 were females.

**Origin**

The replies to the question on origin were as follows:

**Figure 3.3 Origin of young people in the questionnaire sample**

Black - Caribbean: 1
Black - Other: 1
Pakistani: 3
Mixed origin: 9
White: 85
Unknown: 3
The questionnaire sample size does not permit definitive statements on this issue. It appears that around one in seven of the young people the projects work with are from ethnic minority communities. However, it is important to set this figure within the context of the composition of local populations. The issue of how accessible each project is to young people from all ethnic groups is discussed in Section Two.

Among the interview sample, where known, 31 were white and one person was of mixed origin. This was not unexpected, given the relatively small number of young people from ethnic minority communities using the projects. It should be borne in mind, however, that the research findings may not be applicable to all groups of young people who run away. There remains a need for more focused research into the issue of running away as it relates to young people from different cultural backgrounds (Patel, 1994).

**LIFE HISTORY**

The interview and questionnaire samples indicate a high level of disruption in most of the young people's lives. Among the questionnaire sample, at least 60% had lived in a family where the birth parents had split up, and around a quarter had lived in a reconstituted family; 70% had lived in substitute care of some form. Of this last group of young people, 84% had lived in a children's home, 57% in foster care, and 17% in a secure unit.

Although the interview data is not from such a representative sample, it gives a more detailed picture of young people's lives. The large majority of young people in this sample had disrupted life histories, characterised by breakdowns in family relationships and periods in substitute care. Most of those contacted through the street-based projects had also spent considerable time 'on the streets' away from both family and substitute care. Of those who were over 16 at the time of interview, very few had a permanent place to live. We deal with each kind of accommodation in turn below.

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2 For several reasons it was not possible to gather information from all of the 36 young people interviewed on all the topics below. In some cases the number of people responding on a specific topic has been given in square brackets after the sub-heading. In all other cases the figures relate to 31 of the young people, about whom reasonably comprehensive information was gathered.
Living with family

Family structure

Of 31 young people interviewed, 23 had lived in families where the two birth parents had split up, and in a majority (14) of these cases a new adult (step-parent) had been introduced to the family. Of the remaining eight young people, two had been taken into care soon after birth and adopted or fostered long-term, and a further two had been taken into care by the age of five.

Quality of family relationships

Two of the young people who were taken into care at an early age could not remember anything about the quality of their family relationships. Only five of the other 29 young people spoke positively about any of the family settings in which they had lived. In two of these cases they referred to living with birth parents (although in both cases the young people had left these families and gone into substitute care before the age of ten); the other three cases were adoptive parents, long-term foster care, and a grandparent.

In the remaining 24 cases there were high levels of conflict within the family environment: 16 of these young people spoke of physical violence towards them from one or more parent/step-parent, or in some cases between them and a parent/step-parent. In nine cases this was the male parent/step-parent only; in four cases the female parent/step-parent only; and in three cases both male and female parent/step-parent. The violent incidents were often repeated and extreme. In some cases young people linked the violence with the parent(s) alcohol use, although there is insufficient data to establish a link.

Poor relationships with parents usually went hand in hand with violence for these 16 young people:

“My mum married my stepdad. I didn’t like him. He battered me a few times and kicked me down the stairs. I still hate him to this day for what he did to me when I was little.”

“They [family] always hit me with a belt and marked my back. They hated me.”

We include here relationships with adoptive or long-term foster parents for the four young people who had lived in these situations for five years or more.
Recently this young person had thrown a knife at his stepfather during one of many violent fights between them, and had also tried to electrocute him.

Eight young people did not mention physical violence by parents but their comments pointed to a range of other difficulties. The level of emotional disharmony is illustrated by the following quotes:

"My favourite part of the family was my dog. That says a lot."

"They didn’t treat me fairly. They wouldn’t let me do things, but let the other kids. I’ve never got on with them since I was five. It felt like I was a lodger."

"It’s very hard to agree with what happened — I was sexually abused [by stepfather] when I was little. It was hard to cope with and still is. I was very upset — mum let me down."

**Substitute care**

**Types and numbers of placements**

Of the 31 young people, 28 had experience of living in substitute care: 26 people had lived in children’s homes; over half (17) had lived in foster care; and five had spent time in a secure unit.

Almost half (13 out of 28) of the young people had gone into care after their thirteenth birthday. Consequently, the lengths of time that most had spent in care were relatively short: 16 people had spent less than three years in substitute care.

It was unlikely that all the young people would be able to remember the exact number of placements (in children’s homes, foster care or secure units) they had had. However, all but one were able to estimate the number. The average was around five placements per person. These figures are similar to general studies of young people in residential care (Stein and Carey, 1985; Biehal et al., 1992).

**The reasons for going into care**

Some of the young people, especially those who had gone into care at a young age, were unsure about the reasons why they had gone into care. Eighteen people were able to give their perceptions of the reasons:
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

- Four people understood the reason to be because they had been abused (either sexually or physically).

- Four people said it was because their parents could not cope. In all four cases this was linked to one of the parents leaving:

  "My mum couldn't cope. Her family rejected her. Her husband left her. She was young. So we came into care."

- Four people said it was due to their parents forcing them to leave home, which meant that they had ended up with nowhere to stay.

- Finally, six of the young people understood it to be because of something they had done:

  "For putting my stepdad in intensive care."

  "I burned down a factory. I got arrested. I thought it was shit."

  "For not going to school. They kept giving me warnings in court but I took no notice, so in the end they took me into care. It was this social worker, she was a bitch. She did everything she could to take me into care."

The experience of living in residential care

Some young people who expressed views about residential care found it "OK". For a few, there was even a sense of relief when they were taken into care, in comparison to their life at home:

"It was great. It's a different scene. You get food. You don't get hit."

However, there were two recurring themes to young people's feelings about residential care. One sub-group of seven young people expressed ambivalent or indifferent feelings about their relationships with staff and young people in residential care, but complained about the rules, and particularly coming-in times:

"It was OK. It was better than being at home. Some staff were dickheads. My key worker and some other staff were all right. The other kids were sorted. They had stupid rules. They kept ringing the police. Bed time was 9.30. They were OK with me."
The other main sub-group, also comprising seven young people, expressed strong negative feelings about residential care and mainly commented about bullying by other young people, usually of a severe nature:

"There was hardly a day went past when you didn't get hit." [and in the next placement] "I got beat up there 'cause I was glue sniffing, I don't mean just bruised. They put me in hospital twice."

In addition, four of the above young people complained of physical mistreatment or verbal abuse by staff:

"The one home was all right until I vandalised it because a member of staff grabbed me by the throat."

"The staff don't do their job properly ... slagging me down, making comments about my weight, like 'You should go on a diet, you're too fat'."

Another issue that came up for several young people who had lived in care and who identified themselves as gay was a feeling that their sexuality had not been understood by care staff, and their consequent feelings of isolation and lack of support. One young man, for example, felt that his growing awareness of his sexuality whilst in a children's home had not been acknowledged or even "allowed as an option" by the people who looked after him:

"They assumed everyone was heterosexual so there was no one I could talk to about it."

These young people had often been bullied and picked on in care and at school and, in one case, by the male staff in a children's home, for being 'different'.

Finally, it is notable that amongst the two main sub-groups of young people above, six of the seven young people who had been bullied were contacted through the refuge-based projects, whilst all of the seven young people who mainly complained about rules and restrictions were contacted through the street-based projects in Manchester and Birmingham.

The experience of living in foster care

Of the 17 young people who had lived in foster care, some described their foster carers as "all right" but there were also
instances of physical mistreatment:

"My foster mother tried to suffocate me in my own bed and tried to drown me in the bath."

whilst some young people felt unwanted:

"I didn't like it. They had two children of their own. They treated me and my brother different. They said we were too much trouble."

Most of the foster placements lasted less than two years and in all but one case young people returned from there to residential care.

_The experience of living in secure accommodation_

The five people who had been in secure accommodation also had varying feelings about it. Two found it "shit" and "bad"; one felt it was "OK". One young person was positive about the experience:

"Good, the best place I've ever been. I had to move on after nine months."

In at least two cases, the young people felt that they had been placed in secure accommodation because adults had perceived them to be at risk due to sexual activity. In two other cases their placement was the result of having committed criminal offences.

_Other places lived before the age of 16_

At least seven (four male and three female) of the 31 young people had spent extended periods away from both family and substitute care before the age of 16. They had left at ages ranging from 11 to 15. These young people had spent continuous periods of between six months and three years away and appeared to have relied primarily on friends as a support network while they were away.

It seems remarkable that young people can be adrift from the usual support networks of family or substitute care for such long periods. This group of young people formed one identifiable subgroup of the young people we interviewed. Some of the main details of their situations are presented in the table below:
Table 3.4  Young people who had spent extended periods away

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age left</th>
<th>Where left</th>
<th>Length of (continuous) time away before 16</th>
<th>Where stayed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Foster care</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Always at friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Residential care</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Hotels (paid), old empty flats, rough on the streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Residential care</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Girlfriend's flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>&quot;Here, there and everywhere&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Friend's and all-night venues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Most nights in town, weekends at stepfather's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>On the streets and with friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Places lived after the age of 16

Sixteen of the 31 young people were over 16 years of age at the time of the interview. Most of these young people had lived in several places since their sixteenth birthday. With one exception they had all left family or substitute care permanently. Six had spent time on the streets, nine had been in a hostel, four had had their own flat, and four had lived with friends. Hostels were generally unpopular, and those who had lived in them complained about the standard of accommodation and, above all, about the rules:

"I wouldn't advise it. It's packed with drugs and crime. I left because I'm not into drugs and I'm certainly not going to break the law."

"It's shit food and you get kicked out from 12.30 to 5.30."

"I don't like hostels much. I can't stand being in a place where the rules are too strict. It really does my head in."

Consequently most of the stays in hostels by the young people interviewed had been short, and some had opted for living on the streets instead.
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

CURRENT SITUATION

The picture amongst the over-16-year-olds is quite different from that amongst the under-16-year-olds, for the legal reasons outlined in the introduction.

People aged under 16

Questionnaire sample:

One of the questions on the questionnaire asked young people to classify their current situation:

- I've run away from where I live
- I've been forced to leave where I live
- I've got somewhere to live
- Other (please describe)

Of the 61 young people under 16 in the questionnaire sample, 48 described themselves as having run away. Of these, 29 had run away from family, 15 from residential care, and four from other places.

A further seven young people described themselves as having been forced to leave where they lived, four from family, two from residential care, and one from foster care.

Most of these young people who had run away or been forced to leave (42 out of 55) were in refuge at the time they completed the questionnaire. Seven of the remainder were staying with friends or relatives and three were sleeping rough. (In three cases, there was no response to this question.)

The other six under-16-year-olds described themselves as having somewhere to live: four were currently staying with friends.

Figure 3.5 The situation of young people under 16 at the time of completing the questionnaire
Interview sample:

In the interview sample, also, the majority of under-16-year-olds (13 out of 16) described themselves either as having run away or as having been ‘kicked out’ by family. Six of these young people were in refuge, six were staying with friends, and one had nowhere to stay. (The remaining three young people had not currently run away.)

People aged 16 and over

Questionnaire sample:

In the questionnaire sample there were 37 young people aged 16 and over. Seven of these people described themselves as having run away, and a further seven as having been forced to leave where they lived. Four of these young people had last lived with family, three in residential care, three in their own place, and four in other places.

The other 23 young people did not classify themselves as having run away or been forced to leave where they lived. Of these, nineteen had somewhere settled to live: at least nine had their own place; at least six were living with family or friends; and two were living in a hostel. The remaining four young people were either living on the streets, or temporarily living with family or friends.

Interview sample:

The over-16s in the interview sample were in a similar variety of situations, including homelessness, staying with friends or relatives, or living in their own accommodation. Few of these young people described themselves as having currently ‘run away’.
None of the over-16s interviewed had a paid job.

SUPPORT NETWORKS (EXCLUDING THE STREETWORK PROJECTS)

Family

Around two-thirds (20) of the young people in the interview sample were currently in contact with a parent. However, in some cases this contact was infrequent, and in others the quality of the regular contact was poor. For example, one young person aged 15 described her current relationship with her family as follows:

"I saw my mother two months ago. She has said she doesn’t want to have anything to do with me any more. She’s trying to get her own back on me. I went to stay with my dad [recently] but he kicked me out for smoking. He’s strict."

In fact, only six of the 31 people had regular and positive contacts with a parent, and a further four had positive contacts with another family member (sibling, aunt/uncle, or grandparent).

Field social workers

Nineteen people out of the 30 who responded on this topic were currently in touch with their social worker, although only nine had regular contact. Interviewees were asked to respond to five statements about their current or last social worker, and the responses from 18 people were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. She/he takes what I say seriously</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. She/he does things behind my back</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. She/he ignores what I tell them</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If I have a problem, I feel I can talk to her/him about it</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. She/he lets me make my own decisions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overwhelmingly negative response to statement 4 highlights the importance of the issue of trust, which came up in a number of young people’s comments:
"He wasn't too bad — used to say things as they were — didn't hide anything. I liked that about him."

"If you tell them something they'll go and repeat it back to your mother."

The above table does not, however, indicate the distribution of individual feelings across the five statements. As a rough guide for the purpose of summarising the data, if a positive answer is scored as +1, a mixed answer as 0, and a negative answer as -1, the distribution of ratings was as follows:

**Figure 3.8 Distribution of young people's responses about social workers**

Thus feelings were polarised, with ten people feeling predominantly negative about their social workers, and eight feeling fairly positive with some reservations. However, these responses do need to be considered within the context of the roles and responsibilities which social workers have, as we discuss in Chapter 9.

**Residential social workers**

A similar scale to that employed for field social workers above was also used for residential care staff. However, with fewer young people responding to these statements, we cannot produce comparisons with the above table. Young people's feelings about residential care staff were mixed. In particular, there were a number of examples of positive feelings about key workers, although this sometimes went hand in hand with feelings of poor relationships with other members of staff (see, for example, the quote on page 25). Again, we need to view this issue within the context of the roles which residential care staff have to fulfil.
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

Education [23 respondents]

Only four of those in the interview sample who responded on this topic were still regularly attending school or another educational establishment. Suspensions and expulsions were common, and amongst the under-16s in the questionnaire sample, some considered they had left school permanently at as young as 13 years of age.

"I did say I would go back, but then the school said it wasn’t worth it ’cause I’d been away for so long." (15-year-old)

Some people linked their detachment from school with going into care:

"It’s changed a lot since I’ve been in homes. I used to be good at school work and attendance. But since I’ve been in homes a lot of things have happened and you don’t care and you feel other people don’t care.”

Amongst the over-16-year-olds, only one person had any GCSE passes.

Other agencies [30 respondents]

Only a minority (11) of the young people had contact with other agencies: day centres (four); solicitors and/or probation officers (four); counsellor (one); health visitor (one); and psychiatric service (one).

Friends

As noted above, a number of the young people interviewed at the street-based projects were currently living with friends, who appeared to be a relatively major network of support.

BEHAVIOUR AND WELFARE (APART FROM RUNNING AWAY)

Self-harm [24 respondents]

Eleven young people (six males and five females) in the interview sample had tried to harm themselves in the previous three months. This involved either slitting their wrists, overdosing, or attempting to hang or strangle themselves:
Description of the Young People

“I tried to strangle myself because I was sick and tired of the bullying [by young people in a children’s home] so I wanted to end it for them.”

Substance use [24 respondents]

Fifteen young people used drugs (predominantly cannabis and amphetamines) and six (including two drug users) used solvents or other substances:

“I still have panic attacks from all the drugs I took — mostly acid, some speed, heroin in spliffs. I used to sell about 30 tabs a day and I’d be taking three a day myself.”

However, only four of the solvent users and two of the drug users felt that their usage was a problem. One of these young people also felt they had a problem with alcohol use.

Criminal offending [24 respondents]

Sixteen people (nine males and seven females) were currently or had recently been in trouble with the police. The most common offences were property offences (burglary, stealing cars, shoplifting), but at least four of the young people (three males and one female) had warrants out for violent offences (grievous bodily harm, wounding someone, etc.). It was quite common for the young people interviewed to be being pursued by other people they had become involved with whilst on the streets. Often this was related to offending:

“There’s a big geezer after me. Last time I saw him he threw me into a shop window. I was selling acid and he didn’t like it.”

Depression [23 respondents]

There was a high incidence of self-reported depression amongst the interview sample: five young people said they had been depressed most of the time during the last three months, and a further ten some of the time. The high level of self-harm reported above is further evidence of many of the young people’s mental states.

SUMMARY

The young people with whom the projects work have usually had highly disrupted lives, characterised by fragmented and often violent family environments, and periods in substitute care.
The majority of under-16-year-olds contributing to the research were living away from their ‘official’ accommodation. Some had been away for lengthy periods stretching to months or years. Amongst the over-16s, frequent changes in accommodation and periods of homelessness were common.

Most people had only limited links with other adults (excluding the streetwork projects), and had either poor or no contact with family and with social services. Friends were a key element of their support networks. Many under-16s had lost contact with the education system, and amongst the over-16s formal education qualifications were rare. None of the over-16s interviewed had a paid job.

Self-harm, depression, substance use, and involvement in criminal offending were all common aspects of the young people’s lives.

Despite the short-term benefits of running away (see Chapter 4) and the relief from the situations that have triggered the decision to leave, the consequences for many are an increasing isolation from all the usual support systems available to young people.
CHAPTER 4
‘Running Away’: Young People’s Perspectives

‘Running away’ is a far from satisfactory term to describe the wide variety of situations described in this report. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 6, but in the meantime we shall continue to use the term as a convenient shorthand to describe any situation where a young person under the age of 16 chooses or is forced to leave their usual accommodation (either family or substitute care) and stays away for at least one night.

The vast majority of young people in both the interview sample and in the questionnaire sample (94% and 88% respectively) had run away at least once before the age of 16. The two methods of data collection enable different aspects of young people’s running away experiences to be explored.

FIRST RUNNING AWAY INCIDENTS

Age and place first run from

A large majority (88%) of young people in the questionnaire sample had first run away from family. Seven per cent had first run from residential care and 5% from foster care. One-quarter (24%) had run away before the age of 11.

Figure 4.1 Where people had first run away from (questionnaire sample)
In the interview sample, 28 young people were able to remember the first time they ran away. Again, the large majority (22) of the young people had first run from birth or adoptive families at ages ranging from six to 15. The others had either first run from residential care (four) or from foster care (two).

Factors leading to young people running away

Considering the family backgrounds of the young people in the interview sample, described in the previous chapter, it is not surprising that violence appeared as a common factor leading up to many first running away incidents from family:

"Because of my stepmum hitting me and she were trying to get my family split up. She kicked one of my brothers out and my other brother were in care since he were 13."

"Because dad [stepfather] hit me and broke my cheekbone and jaw. The school got the social services. My mother asked me to go as dad would have carried on hitting me."

Other factors were arguments or not getting on with parents or stepparents, parents drinking, and differential treatment of siblings.

The numbers of young people who first ran from substitute care are too small for it to be possible to identify common themes, but bullying by young people and poor relationships with staff were both reasons young people gave for deciding to run away. For example:
"They just wouldn't move me [change of residential placement]. The staff didn't do their job proper."

"To get back at the staff."

**Time spent away from family or substitute care**

Most first running away incidents of young people interviewed were of short duration (under three days) and it was common for young people either to sleep rough locally or to go to friends or relatives for help:

"I ran away because mum hit me [at ten years of age]. . . . I slept in a shed. I was away for four days. I was on my own. The police took me back. Mum didn't say anything."

"I stayed at my cousin's for two nights. My cousin rang ChildLine but that was no good. When I went back to my cousin's [after going out] my mum was there looking for me and took me back and she was being really sarcastic. She used to send me up to the bedroom and tell me to stay there all night . . . and she came up, I was lying on my bed and she started hitting me so I just pushed her out of the way and hit her to stop her hitting me. And that's when I got up and left the house. I ran off to my cousin's again and told them what happened . . . Then my sister came and me being stupid I left with her and we spent the night homeless. The next day I came up here [streetwork project] and by the end of the day they had me in a children's home."

The sequence of events illustrated in this last quote is also evident for other young people:

"I'd had enough of my parents. I left home and went round to a friend's. They rang the social services. They contacted the police and I was taken into care. I was upset but it was OK once I got there. I missed my family and I was stupid enough to go back home." (young person aged 14)

At least one-third of the young people had had contact with the police the first time they ran away. Sometimes the police returned the young person home and on other occasions the police initiated the involvement of social services.
Links between first running away incidents and going into care

The last two quotes above illustrate the potential link between starting to run away and the process of being taken into care. This link is confirmed by data from the interviews and questionnaires.

In the interview sample, of the 22 people who had first run from birth or adoptive family, 19 subsequently lived in substitute care. Of these, 14 had permanently left their family and moved into substitute care within about a year of first running away.

In the questionnaire sample, of the young people who had lived in substitute care and had first run from family, two-thirds (65%) had last lived with family at the same age as they first ran away, and a further 13% at only a year older.

MOST RECENT RUNNING AWAY INCIDENTS

Places run from

Around three-fifths (61%) of the questionnaire sample had most recently run from their family, and just over a quarter (27%) from residential care. The remaining 12% had run from various other temporary places of accommodation.

Factors leading to young people running away

Under a quarter of the questionnaire sample had planned to run away, which suggests that most running away happens on the spur of the moment, although there was a high rate of non-response to this interview question.

A list of factors was drawn up from previous research into running away (see Chapter 6), and the questionnaire asked young people to indicate which had happened before they ran away on the most recent occasion. The responses are presented below (some people answered 'Yes' to several factors):
Table 4.3 Factors leading to young people running away

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Residential care</th>
<th>Foster care</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People didn’t listen to you</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somebody was violent towards you</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People didn’t care about you</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somebody was bullying you</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble at school</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somebody drank too much alcohol</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somebody sexually abused you</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somebody asked you to run away</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somebody didn’t like you being gay/lesbian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somebody was racist to you</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of people 81 51 22 4 4

These figures provide further evidence of the high incidence of violence within the family (29 out of 51 people). The other two most common factors in the family were feelings of not being cared about and not being listened to. For young people in residential care, the four most common factors were feeling that people did not listen, or did not care, being bullied, and suffering violence.

Thirteen of the 16 young people aged under 16 in the interview sample had currently run away, ten from residential care and three from family. The reasons given by some young people for running away from residential care reflect young people’s experiences of living in care described in the previous chapter:

"The staff lost control over the kids and there was nothing they could do. They were very short staffed. I was physically bullied all the time. I couldn’t even go to bed without getting my head kicked in."

"I didn’t like the way they treated me — stopping pocket money and threatening to chuck me out."

Others seemed to have developed a pattern of being away from care, and it was more a question of why they should go back there, rather than why they ran away:

"Sometimes I go back if I need a bed or the coppers pick me up."
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

The young people currently running from their family gave similar reasons to those which have already been discussed above, including power struggles with parents, and being forced to leave:

"My mother wrecked my social life then she wrecked my love life and now after 15 years of pure hell I have finally escaped. There are more reasons as to why I left and many people will probably think they are 'normal' and happen to every family but it gets to a point where you just can't take any more shit and you have to get out before you go crazy."

"My dad kicked me out. Well, in a way he kicked me out, in a way I ran away. He says, 'When I get home from work, I'm going to get you in a car and leave you on her [mother's] doorstep and see what she can do'."

Time spent away from family or substitute care

Two-fifths of the young people in the questionnaire sample had spent more than a week away, and over two-thirds had sought help or advice, mainly from friends (28) and the street work projects (27). Amongst the interview sample, seven young people had spent long periods away, as outlined on pages 26 - 27.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S RUNNING AWAY EXPERIENCES

The questionnaire sample provided valuable information about young people's running away experiences, including how often they had run away, where they went, positive and negative aspects, and the survival strategies they used.

Number of times run away

More than a third of the questionnaire sample had run away ten times or more:
Figure 4.4 Number of times young people in the questionnaire sample had run away

Where people had gone

More than two-thirds of the questionnaire sample had gone outside their local area on at least one occasion. People's destinations were diverse, and included neighbouring towns, seaside towns, and large cities such as Birmingham, Manchester and London. It was possible to categorise 73 of the 90 replies as follows:

- people who had never been out of their local area (the town/city they came from);
- people who had been outside their local area but not outside their region (Yorkshire, Lancashire, West Midlands, Gwent for the four projects);
- people who had been outside the region but had not gone to a big city;
- people who had gone to a big city outside their region (Birmingham, Dublin, Leeds, Manchester or London).
Where people slept while away

Almost two-thirds of the questionnaire sample had slept ‘rough’ while away, but as previous research has indicated (e.g. Rees, 1993), this should not be equated with traditional images of sleeping in city centres in shop doorways. Whilst a minority did this, the majority of young people we interviewed were extremely resourceful in finding places to sleep for the night. Examples include derelict buildings, garages and outhouses, stairways to blocks of flats, hospital waiting rooms, railway carriages, parks, cemeteries, and out in the country.

Feelings about running away

Young people were asked a number of questions about their feelings about running away. Their responses are shown below.

Table 4.6 Positive aspects of running away

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did it give you time to think?</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you make friends?</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did it give you relief from pressure?</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were you happier than before?</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you have a good time?</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did it help sort out your problems?</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There appear to have been a number of short-term benefits of running away.

"I didn't have to put up with my mum verbally abusing me and drinking and I didn't have to argue."

In response to an open question about the good things about running away, many young people emphasised the feeling of freedom which it gave them.

"I had freedom, was allowed to do what I felt I wanted to do."

However, fewer than one-third of young people felt that it had helped them to sort out their problems.

"My advice to people is try to sort out your problems because running away just makes them worse."

The negative aspects of running away were considerable and illustrate how frightening the experience can be:

**Table 4.7 Negative aspects of running away**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel hungry/thirsty?</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were you frightened?</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel lonely?</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were you ill?</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were you physically hurt?</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were you sexually assaulted?</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As one young person said:

"It's very scary and no one wants to be near you. You smell and become a liar and you're very lonely."

Many of the young people gave graphic examples of the kinds of risks they face whilst away from family or substitute care:

"Nowhere to sleep, no food, have to shoplift, being cold. You get into a lot of trouble if you're not careful."

"Many times I was approached by men who invited me home with them." (young male)
Survival strategies

Over half (56%) of the questionnaire sample had stolen or shoplifted while they were away, and at least one in seven (15%) had provided sex for money. Amongst the interview sample, the majority of young people had resorted either to stealing, begging, or sex for money to sustain themselves while they were away:

"Committing offences — getting £10 to £30. Theft from a meter, motor vehicle, street robbery. You couldn't stay at one thing too often because the police would catch you. I tried begging but it's embarrassing."

"I had no money, I was upset constantly. I was in bad health and I became a thief and a prostitute."

"The first night I got here I started talking to a few blokes up town. They were on the game. It's the only way I managed to survive — four years constantly every night."

SUMMARY

The findings presented in this chapter are consistent with previous research on running away in the UK. Early running away incidents are predominantly from the family home, are often very brief, and almost all occur before the age of 16. Violence is an important factor in many young people's decisions to start running away.

As a result of running away, attention is often drawn to the family situation and this can lead to the young person being removed from the family and placed in substitute care. Once in care, many young people continue to run away.

Many young people who run away find themselves in risky situations with nowhere safe to spend the night. Thus whilst running away can offer a respite from stressful or abusive home situations, it often leads to a new set of dangers. Lack of money often leads young people to desperate means to survive on the streets.

It is clear that there is a great deal of diversity in running away incidents and there are some suggestions in the above data that early running away incidents tend to be different in character from later ones. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 5
‘Running Away’: Perspectives of Children’s Society Staff and Other Professionals

During the interviews with Children’s Society staff and professionals in other agencies who have contact with the projects, we sought perspectives and knowledge on the issues of young people being away from where they lived. Apart from being valuable in themselves, these perspectives provide a body of information which can be compared and contrasted with the data gathered from young people described in the previous chapter.

FACTORS LEADING TO YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING WHERE THEY LIVE

In all, 47 of the adults interviewed (34 Children’s Society staff and 13 professionals from other agencies) commented on their perceptions of the factors leading to young people leaving where they live, and most made a distinction between young people living with family and young people living in substitute care. There were many similarities in the perceptions of the factors. But there were also some key differences.

Factors leading to young people leaving family

Twenty-one staff and ten professionals from other agencies commented on this specific area. The factors fell into the following categories:

(a) Abuse and neglect (15 staff and six external professionals):

Generally people made a distinction here between three sub-categories: physical; sexual; and emotional/psychological abuse. Emotional abuse, however, spills over into some of the other categories below and was recognised as being the most difficult to define.

(b) Breakdowns in family relationships (13 staff and four external professionals):

Most of the comments in this category related specifically to rela-
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

tionship breakdowns between parents and/or the introduction of a step-parent figure.

"Often marital breakdown ... young people don't feel they belong anywhere — each parent has a new partner." (external professional)

"Competition with siblings and/or step-parents or new partner of parent. I think reconstituted families are a major issue." (project worker)

(c) Lack of support, care or parenting (seven staff and two external professionals):

Included in this category are feelings of not being listened to, development being thwarted, and parents being unable to provide support to their children:

"A chain of children born to adults who, because of their own emotional/physical/spiritual deprivation as children, are unable to provide emotionally for the children in their care." (project worker)

(d) Power struggles — parents not allowing young people to grow up (seven staff and two external professionals):

The two linked themes here were over-strict discipline and a tendency not to recognise the child as developing into a young adult:

"... arguments over boundaries and rules — growth towards adulthood. Young people push boundaries and they get slapped down..." (project worker)

(e) Generally poor family relationships (five staff and two external professionals):

There were non-specific comments on issues such as arguments and lack of communication between parents and children.

(f) Economic factors (two staff and five external professionals):

It is perhaps significant that this category was mentioned more often by external professionals, most of whom were social workers who would have more contact with parents than would project staff. Economic stresses on parents were seen as having a follow-on impact on children, which could lead to young people being thrown out of home.
(g) **Other factors:**

A variety of other factors were mentioned by project staff. Two people mentioned inappropriate levels of responsibility being placed on young people. Other factors mentioned by one person were pressure from siblings, differential treatment of siblings, peer pressure drawing the young person out of the home and alienating them from parents, and running away for fear of a parent finding out something that the young person had done.

**FACTORS LEADING TO YOUNG PEOPLE RUNNING FROM SUBSTITUTE CARE**

Eighteen staff and ten professionals from other agencies made comments on this area. The large majority of comments related to residential care only. The main categories were:

(a) **The care system not meeting young people’s needs (11 staff and seven external professionals):**

The care system was seen by many people as failing to meet some young people’s needs and thus leading them to run away from or leave their placements. Some factors were seen as being linked to the shortage of resources currently available to the care system:

"... children’s homes’ resources are poor, and lack of training means that young people’s needs are not being met." (external professional — social services)

In other cases, the provision of care in a children’s home setting was seen as inherently problematic:

"The care system is by its very nature abusive — the separation of the responsibility of a parent and being in control, changing of shifts, etc. — regardless of the quality of care provided." (external professional — social services)

There were also gaps between specific young people’s needs due to their experiences before coming into care, and the subsequent care provided to them:

"There are certain young people who the department can’t meet the needs of... young people who are so severely traumatised that they can’t survive
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

in a situation like a children's home, there's not enough staff and they get bullied." (external professional — social services)

There are great difficulties in providing care to some young people who end up in the care system, either in residential care or foster care:

"She's had a lot of rejections in the past and now she wants to reject them before they reject her. The damage was done before she came into care, some of her experiences in care haven't helped." (external professional — social services)

(b) Not being listened to (nine staff):

The feeling that young people were not listened to was a common theme amongst staff within the streetwork projects and it is interesting that it was not mentioned by any external professionals. This is perhaps more a matter of a different use of language, however, as there were examples amongst professionals of similar ideas:

"They feel that there is no other solution available to them: no one to talk to about it; no one to mediate." (external professional)

(c) Bullying by young people (six staff and three external professionals):

Both project staff and external professionals reported examples of bullying by other young people.

(d) Mistreatment by residential care staff (five staff):

Again, this was a factor mentioned only by staff within the projects. References were made to young people being picked on or bullied by residential care staff, although some stated that they felt it was only applicable in a minority of cases.

(e) Power issues (four staff and two external professionals):

This was similar to the corresponding category for young people leaving their family. People felt that decisions (e.g. about placements) were often made without consulting young people, and this led to young people 'voting with their feet'. In some cases it was not that power was being used inappropriately, but that it did not correspond to young people's previous experiences:
"Some young people are facing control and discipline for the first time in children's homes." (external professional — social services)

**FACTORS RELATING TO ALL YOUNG PEOPLE**

Some factors leading to 'running away' applied to all young people, whether they had been living with their family or in substitute care.

(a) ‘Pull’ factors (three staff and one external professional):

There were attractions for some young people in spending time away from where they lived and, in particular, going to city centres:

"The street is an exciting place to be." (project worker)

"Young women being attracted to the city centre by money. Whatever they're doing they're being paid for their services." (external professional)

(b) Issues regarding sexual identity (two staff and one external professional):

For some young gay people living with family or in substitute care, their growing awareness of their sexuality is met by a hostile reaction from the people they live with (family, care staff, peers) and from their friends.

(c) General lack of love and care (three staff):

"A lot [of young people on the streets] tell you that they lack love and care and feel abandoned." (project worker)

(d) Detachment from society (six staff):

Some staff responded in broad terms to the questions about the causes of young people leaving where they live. A theme here was that some young people cannot fit into the traditional and accepted patterns of growing up and, as a consequence, become detached from mainstream society:

"I think we’re talking about the way in which society deals with so-called ‘problem behaviour’ of young people. We have legitimised routes to growing up which are very restrictive. Some young people don’t fit into these and often find ‘illegitimate’ routes." (manager)
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

(e) **Other factors:**

One project worker mentioned problems at school as a factor that can lead young people to leave where they live. Another mentioned young men trying to escape from other young men who were pursuing them. Several project workers mentioned factors which are strictly only relevant to over-16-year-olds, e.g. leaving the care system without adequate preparation resulting in homelessness, and young women fleeing violent boyfriends with whom they were living. This overlap between the issues of running away or spending time on the streets, and youth homelessness, points to a problem with definitions which we discuss in detail in Chapter 6.

**OTHER ISSUES**

Two other important issues relating to young people away from where they live were raised by several people.

**Young people involved in prostitution**

This was a significant issue mentioned by a number of people in different cities. Project staff and external professionals were aware of young women and men who were involved in prostitution whilst they were away from where they usually lived:

“It’s been a revelation for me to know how active town is in terms of prostitution. Some young men use it as a means to an end. At the other end of the spectrum there are those who are abused by it and lack the power to get out of it... Most of the youngsters working in the ‘rent scene’ are doing it as a way of making a living.” (project worker)

**Development of patterns of being away**

Some workers commented on the way in which time spent away from family or substitute care develops into a pattern of increasing estrangement and detachment:

“Our experience is that they have had a career of estrangement, becoming increasingly detached from meaningful social networks. Difficulties in the family lead to contact with statutory agencies. They become separated from family relationships. Then in substitute care, their needs are not met. They become detached and end up in the city centre community.” (manager)
The causation is a breakdown of communication and a feeling that no one cares, or at the extreme as a result of abuse. Initially young people might not go very far, but then they move away, pulled onto the street. The new sub-culture gives a thrill ... the street becomes a pull, it replaces the needs the young people cannot get in mainstream society. It becomes a positive.”

(manager)

We return to this theme in the next chapter, where we consider the evidence for the concept of running away ‘pathways’.

**SUMMARY**

The opinions of Children’s Society staff and other professionals who have contact with the projects as to the factors that lead to young people leaving family or substitute care correspond closely to the information gathered from young people presented in the previous chapter.

For young people leaving family, the two most important contributory factors put forward by professionals were abuse and relationship breakdowns, both of which come across strongly in young people’s own accounts of leaving home.

For young people in substitute care, the most common factors suggested by adults were young people’s needs not being met, young people not being listened to, and bullying. Again, this covers the most common factors given by young people.

Three major themes sum up more than two-thirds of the comments made by Children’s Society staff and other professionals. All of them focus specifically on the relationship between young people and their carers:

1. **Poor relationships between carers and young people:**
   - the results of parental relationship breakdown (family)
   - generally poor relationships (family)
   - young people not being listened to (substitute care).

2. **Lack of care and support for young people:**
   - lack of support, care and parenting (family)
   - the care system not meeting young people’s needs (substitute care)
   - general lack of love and care (family and substitute care).
3. **Nature of power relationships between carers and young people:**

This theme covers a range of factors, from over-exertion of discipline by carers from the young person’s point of view, to perceived abuse of the carer’s position of power over the young person in the form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse:

- abuse and neglect (family)
- parents not allowing young people to grow up (family)
- power issues (substitute care)
- mistreatment by staff (substitute care).

From the experience of professionals in contact with young people, therefore, the major explanatory factor for young people leaving family or substitute care is a difficulty in their relationships with their carers, which often fall short of the level of support and care which the young person wants or needs.

The comments of professionals also provide some important contextual material for these relationship difficulties. First, there is the impact of economic factors on both the family (in terms of poverty), and the residential care system (in terms of shortage of resources). Second, there is the recognition that the substitute care system faces a major challenge in caring for young people who have already been damaged by their experiences in the family. We return to both these themes in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6
‘Running Away’: Synthesis of the Data

Terms such as ‘runaways’, ‘absconders’, ‘street children’, ‘young people on the streets’ are commonly used to describe the young people covered by this research project. However, none of these terms offers a fully satisfactory definition. The first two (runaways and absconders) refer to an action that a young person may take, and say nothing about the situations they are in after taking that action. The latter two (street children and young people on the streets), on the other hand, describe a situation or lifestyle with no explanation of how that came about.

This problem of definition has long been recognised in the USA, where a number of studies have attempted to draw up a satisfactory description of ‘young runaways’. The problem is not merely a semantic one, moreover, for without an adequate definition it is difficult to develop effective service provision, or even to discuss the issue.

The Children’s Society’s streetwork projects have resolved this problem in different ways. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8, but for the time being it is important to note that the two refuge-based projects define their target group both in terms of an event that has occurred (e.g. run away, or forced to leave) and in terms of a situation the young people are in (e.g. at risk). The street-based projects, on the other hand, define their target group only in terms of the young person’s situation at the point of contact (e.g. on the street).

It is also necessary to take into account the boundary between running away and homelessness which stems from legal considerations. There is still, to a certain extent, a grey area in the law in relation to 16- and 17-year-olds (see page 3).

DESCRIPTING THE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH WHOM THE PROJECTS WORK

A full definition of the young people covered by this study requires a discussion of contexts and situations before leaving family or substitute care; motivations for and meanings of the act of leaving family
or substitute care; and the subsequent situations in which young people find themselves. The discussion below builds on previous research on young runaways in Leeds (Rees, 1993).

**Contexts and situations before leaving family or substitute care**

There are a number of aspects to this. On an individual level, there is a range of factors which can contribute to a young person under 16 leaving where they live:

(a) *Factors in the family or substitute care environment:*

The evidence presented in Chapters 3 — 5 indicates that many of the young people had severe difficulties in the environment which they left. These can be broadly categorised into physical factors (e.g. violence, sexual abuse, bullying, threats of violence from within or outside the home) which also have an emotional element; and purely emotional factors (e.g. emotional neglect, power struggles, differential treatment of siblings).

(b) *Factors outside the home environment:*

These can include problems at school, pressure from friends, and ‘pull’ factors such as the attraction of alternative lifestyles and the sense of freedom.

(c) *Broader issues:*

Interviews with project staff and other professionals have pointed to a number of broader issues:

- financial pressures on families which heighten tension within the family;
- financial pressures on local authorities which mean that services to young people are under-resourced;
- the legal boundary which can restrict flexibility in routes to independence for young people;
- adults’ attitudes towards young people, including current dilemmas about the control and punishment of young people, and the extent to which they should have the right to be involved in decisions about their lives.
All these factors play a part in defining the context in which young people decide to leave family or substitute care.

**Motivations and meanings of leaving family or substitute care**

The concept of 'motivation' implies that leaving family or substitute care is a rational or 'thought-through' act. However, the fact that only a small number of the young people in the sample planned to run away indicates that this may not always be the case. It seems that most young people nevertheless have some goal in mind when they leave family or substitute care.

The categories of motivations put forward in the Leeds research (Rees, 1993) were: escape; running to something or someone; running away in the hope of changing something; and helping friends. The first two of these categories were the most common in that research, and again appear regularly in the data gathered for this research project. The term 'escape' fits the situations of many young people (particularly those who left violent situations), while the concept of running to something or someone was common amongst young people who had developed alternative networks of support 'on the streets'. This is indicative of the diverse nature of the act of leaving family or substitute care for different young people.

Whichever of the above motivations may be present in particular instances, we must always be aware that the act of leaving family or substitute care can be seen as a positive choice by a young person. It is a way in which they can gain or regain some control of their lives, protect themselves from abuse, and stand up to people who wield more power than they do.

The meaning of the act of leaving family or substitute care also needs to be considered. Whilst most young people appear to leave on the spur of the moment, it is still possible that most weigh up the implications of the act before leaving. The implications for a young person who has already run away many times and has developed survival strategies and support networks are clearly very different from those for a young person who has never run away. Thus the act of leaving will have a diversity of meanings. It is also likely that the meaning will vary according to a young person's culture, ethnicity, socio-economic grouping, gender, sexuality, and the type of accommodation they are leaving. The research also raises an important question as to how young people who cannot run away because of disability, cope with unhappiness and crisis where they live.
Situations whilst away from family or substitute care

The interview and questionnaire data indicate the diversity of situations which young people are in whilst away from family or substitute care. Some young people go immediately to a supportive friend or relative and remain there for the whole time they are away. At the other end of the spectrum, some young people spend extended periods away with no fixed place of residence, relying on street networks and the survival strategies outlined earlier (e.g. theft, begging, sex for money).

SUB-GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO RUN AWAY

The above discussion indicates that there are many categories of running away. In order to bring some order to these categories, we analysed the interview and questionnaire data in an attempt to identify major sub-groupings amongst the young people with whom the projects work. The starting point for this analysis was a study of the descriptive data on life histories of the young people who were interviewed during the research. This study suggested several sub-groups of young people with shared patterns of running away experience. The sub-groups identified were then tested on questionnaire data to explore whether the same differences were present in this sample of young people.

This analysis has enabled us to put forward a model of running away patterns or 'pathways'. However, it is important to acknowledge several limitations to the data collected from young people during the research: First, the data was collected from each young person at only one or two points in time. The patterns we have identified are therefore based on retrospective data rather than on periodic observation. Second, the young people varied in age from 12 to 18 and over. This means that the histories of most of the young people up to 'adulthood' are to varying degrees incomplete. Third, the young people were almost all contacted through the streetwork projects. Other running away patterns may be common amongst the larger population of young runaways.

Bearing these limitations in mind, we present below a summary of the analysis and the model of running away 'pathways' which was developed from it. The model is essentially exploratory and could form a focus for further research.

56
The interview sample

A study of the 31 young people for whom we had gathered detailed life histories through the interviews revealed four distinct sub-groups of young people, three of which represented young people with experience of running away under the age of 16.

**Group A: Young people who had run away fewer than ten times and had not spent long periods away from family or substitute care**

There were six young people in this category (four females and two males). They had run away between two and six times. With one exception, they had started running away from the age of 13 onwards, had first run away from family, and had spent little (less than a year) or no time in substitute care.

Three of these young people were under 16 at the time of interview: two were living with family and one in residential care. Three were over 16 and were homeless, living in a hostel, or in independent accommodation.

**Group B: Young people who had run away ten times or more but had not spent long continuous periods away from family or substitute care before the age of 16**

There were 14 young people in this category (five females and nine males). They had started running away at a wide range of ages from seven to 14 years old, either from family or substitute care. Ten of these young people had spent two years or more in substitute care. These young people had spent regular periods away from home or substitute care, living with friends or other people within their social networks. These periods ranged from a day or two up to six months during any one running away episode.

In terms of current situations at the time of interview, there were three distinct groups amongst these 14 young people:

1. Five young people under 16 who had very recently run away (within the last week) or were currently accommodated in care.

2. Three young people under 16 who had run away or been forced to leave where they lived over a month ago and were currently living with friends. (It is possible that these young people were in the process of becoming detached from support networks).
3. Six young people over 16. Two of these people currently had settled accommodation (family and own flat respectively). The other four were all homeless and two had had no settled accommodation for several years since leaving care close to the age of 16.

**Group C: Young people who had spent continuous periods of six months or more away from family or substitute care before the age of 16**

We identified this sub-group of seven young people in Chapter 3 (pages 26-27). They had all first run from family at ages ranging from six to 15. Four of them had run away ten times or more, but the other three had only run away between two and four times. They had all been in substitute care, but the periods they had spent there were quite short and two of these young people had only been in care after the period they had spent on the streets.

Four of this group were now over 16 and were all living in independent accommodation (own or partner’s flat). Of the under-16-year-olds, two were currently in residential care, and one was living with a girlfriend.

**Group D: Young people who had run away or left home around or after the age of 16**

There were four people in this category. One had run away briefly at the age of 11, but had then not run away again and had left home at the age of 17, subsequently spending more than two years homeless. One had been thrown out by parents two weeks before her sixteenth birthday. The other two young people had never run away or been forced to leave where they lived before the age of 16 but had become homeless after their sixteenth birthday.

Three of these young people currently had accommodation (friends, flat and hostel) and one was still homeless and on the streets.

**Comparison of groups A to C**

The data presented above indicated that groups A to C differ in three important respects:

- The young people in group A had first run away at an average of around 13 and a half years old, compared to an average of around 11 years old for the other two groups. They had generally started running away at an older age.
All but one of group A, and all of group C, had first run away from family, whereas people in group B had started running away from a variety of places, including birth family, residential care and foster care.

Groups A and C had on average spent little time in substitute care (around eight months and one year respectively). Group B, on the other hand, had spent on average more than four years in substitute care.

Questionnaire data

Having identified these sub-groups amongst the interview sample, we were able to explore whether the differences between them, identified in the above comparison, were also found in the larger sample of young people who had completed questionnaires.

These findings are necessarily more tentative, as we do not have such a detailed overview of the young people’s lives. In particular, we could not identify young people from the questionnaire data who had spent continuous periods of more than six months away, as this information was not available. However, we were able to identify people who had spent more than a month away from family or substitute care.

We were able to categorise 86 out of 102 people in the sample. In relation to group A above, there were significant differences within this group between those young people who had first run away three times or fewer, and those who had run away four to nine times. These differences would not have been evident in the interview sample because there were only six people in group A. The differences are large enough to suggest that these are distinct sub-groupings. Thus we now have five sub-groups:

Group 1 Young people who have run away one to three times and have not spent long continuous periods on the streets.

Group 2 Young people who have run away four to nine times and have not spent long continuous periods on the streets.

Group 3 Young people who have run away ten times or more and have not spent long continuous periods on the streets.

Group 4 Young people who have spent a continuous period of at least one month detached from family and substitute care.

Group 5 Young people who have not run away under the age of 16 but have subsequently run away or been homeless.
Age of first running away incident

The average ages of first running away incidents for groups 1 to 4 are shown in Table 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Average Age (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (1 to 3 running away incidents)</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (4 to 9 running away incidents)</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (10 or more running away incidents)</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (experience of detachment)</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These differences were found to be statistically significant\(^1\). Thus, there may be a link between the age of first running away and the number of times a young person had run away (although we do not know how many times these young people would subsequently have run away). This comparison therefore supports the evidence from the interview sample.

Where people had first run away from

This comparison did not yield conclusive information. A higher percentage of young people in group 3 (16%) had not first run from family, compared with the other groups (8% to 11%), but this difference was not statistically significant.

Experience of substitute care

Here the findings are very similar to those for the interview sample and were statistically significant\(^2\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>% who had lived in substitute care</th>
<th>% who had lived in substitute care for more than a year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (1 to 3 running away incidents)</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (4 to 9 running away incidents)</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (10 or more running away incidents)</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (experience of detachment)</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) (Kruskal Wallis Test, \(p = 0.0005\))

\(^2\) For the figures in the first column of Table 6.2, the significance using the chi-square test was \(p = 0.0005\).
Comparing groups 1 to 3, it can be seen that people who had run away more times were more likely to have experience of living in substitute care. It can also be seen that young people with experience of detachment were likely to have had less experience of substitute care than those who had run away ten times or more but had no experience of detachment.

**Conclusions**

The analysis of the interview and questionnaire data enables us to identify some broad sub-groups of young people who differ significantly from one another. In presenting this analysis, we are not suggesting that these groups are fixed and contain different young people. Neither are we suggesting a straightforward causal link between, for example, the number of times a young person had run away and their experience of substitute care. On the contrary, it is possible that the young people in groups 1 to 3 in fact all belong to the same group and have simply been observed at different points along the same running away 'pathway'. The above analysis and the evidence presented elsewhere in the report enables us to draw three tentative conclusions:

- It seems that in many cases there is a link between running away patterns and experience of living in substitute care.

- It seems significant that young people who have spent extended continuous periods away from family and substitute care appear to have not always followed the same pathway: they have not always run away many times, and often have little or no experience of living in substitute care prior to their periods of detachment.

- There is a group of young people (group D and group 5 in the interview and questionnaire samples respectively) who are in contact with the streetwork projects but who have never 'run away'. They may well be part of the city centre 'street culture'.

**A MODEL OF RUNNING AWAY 'PATHWAYS'**

Recent research carried out in Leeds (Rees, 1993) has suggested that 14% of young people had run away overnight before the age of 16, and a further 17% had run away during the day. Amongst those young people who do run away, most (around 70%) do so only once
or twice. Nevertheless, the research suggested that around 4% of young people in urban areas run away more than twice before their sixteenth birthday and around 2% of young people who run away overnight go on to run away as many as ten times or more. As described in the introduction (page 3), we can estimate from these figures that some 10,000 young people from the metropolitan counties of England will run away ten times or more before their sixteenth birthday.

The evidence contained within this report suggests that the young people who have begun to run away repeatedly, with whom the different projects work, are a highly vulnerable group, most having experienced family problems and having lived in substitute care or accommodation at some time in their short lives. The empirical data also leads to a theoretical exploration linking patterns of repeated running away with ‘family’, ‘care’, and ‘detachment from family and care’. But the concept of ‘patterns’ should not suggest a simple linear progression from family to detachment. Far from it, for the findings contained in this report point to the complexity of running away patterns.

Drawing upon our current research as well as other completed research into this area, we note the following:

- Most young people (probably 90% or more) begin running away from the family.

- Most young people (around 70%) only run away once or twice and have never lived in substitute care.

- A significant proportion of young people who run away three times or more subsequently live in substitute care. Some stop running away and remain ‘in care’ or return to the family. Others run away repeatedly from care but remain attached to the ‘care system’. Finally, some become detached from substitute care, often very quickly.

- Some young people become detached from the family without going into substitute care.

These findings lead to the following model of the main running away ‘pathways’ which have been identified by the research:
Figure 6.3 Model of running away pathways

FAMILY

- More than 90% of running away starts here

Pathway 1
- 70% of young people run every once or twice then cease to run away

Pathway 2
- Stability within care

SUBSTITUTE CARE

- Less than 10% of running away starts here

Pathway 5
- Become detached, with no experience of living in care

Pathway 3
- Run away repeatedly (10 times or more) while living in care

Pathway 4
- Become detached, with limited experience of living in care

DETACHMENT

- Detached from family or substitute care for more than six months

Links between running away patterns and young people's experiences of 'family', 'substitute care' and 'detachment'

The family

Most running away begins in the family (nearly 90% of the young people in the questionnaire sample had first run away from the family) and most young people who run from residential care have run away from their families before entering care. The family is therefore central to any theoretical analysis of running away and this includes a recognition of the complexity, diversity and power dimensions of contemporary family relationships.

In terms of family composition, data from the Family Policy Studies Centre show increases in cohabitation, separation and divorce; the growth of lone parents and reconstituted families; increases in female employment and dual-earner families; as well as ethnic and
sexual variations in household forms. Such diversity means that growing numbers of young people find themselves as part of a complex web of social relationships which, depending upon a range of other factors, may be either positive or negative in its consequences. Three-quarters of the interview sample had lived in families where a split had occurred, and in a majority of those cases a step-parent had been introduced.

Significantly, most of the young people researched had, in addition, experienced a misuse of parental power by some combination of physical, sexual and emotional abuse within their families. Violence was a recurring factor leading to many first running away incidents from the family. It was not the only factor, however: ‘not being cared about’ and ‘not being listened to’ were also identified by young runaways as important. We cannot say whether there is more or less violence in families where a split has not occurred; only that the combination of changes and splits in the young people’s families and different forms of abuse and neglect appears to be a powerful incentive for young people to run away.

**Substitute care**

As indicated above and illustrated in figure 6.3, around 70% (Rees, 1993) of the young people who run once or twice from their families cease to run away any more. However, around 30% begin to run away repeatedly and most of these young people will spend some time in substitute care. In the interview sample, 86% of the young people who had first run from their families subsequently lived in care. This included young people with long-term care and repeated running away experience (Pathway 3); short-term care and limited running away experience (Pathway 2); and short-term care experience leading to detachment (Pathway 4).

What do we know about the links between care and running away? Completed research (Milham et al., 1986; Rowe et al., 1989) indicates that young people from residential care are over-represented among young people who run away. In comparison with young people who have never been in care, they are more likely to run away at an earlier age and more often. The Leeds survey (Rees, 1993) found that more than one-third of those runaways who had lived in care had run away ten times or more and 7% had only run away once. Of those young people who had never lived in care, however, none had run away as many as ten times and 43% had only run away once. The survey also revealed that young people running from residential care are more likely to run away with someone else,
travel further afield, stay away longer and be picked up by the police than young people running away from their families.

Abrahams and Mungall's study indicates wide variations of running away incidents between residential care units of similar sizes, purposes, young people and locations. Earlier UK studies have identified the key role of residential staff in influencing runaway behaviour, including the impact of different levels of control and the significance of positive responses to runaways who return in preventing repeat episodes (Akland, 1981; Milham et al., 1975; Berry, 1975). All the major UK studies highlight the significance of the 14 to 16 age group: "running away is overwhelmingly a problem of middle and late adolescence" (Abrahams and Mungall, page 10, 1992). Rees suggests the need for further research to explore the links between running away episodes and the age of entry to care, length of time in care and the number of different homes a young person had lived in whilst in care.

Our present study identified four common factors leading to young people running away from residential care: feeling that carers did not listen; feeling that carers did not care; being bullied; and suffering violence in care. Other research has added to this picture. Abrahams and Mungall suggest that young people from residential care were often 'running back' to family, friends or previous care placements. They also suggest that various features of 'group living' and the organisation of residential care itself may influence running away behaviour, including: bullying and victimisation; the desire for more individual staff attention; enhancing peer group status; organised 'escapes'; inappropriate placements particularly in cases of young people with severe behavioural difficulties, young offenders and those needing psychiatric treatment; and, finally, the use of distant residential placements. Both Newman (1989) and Rees echo many of these reasons but place more emphasis upon young people's powerlessness and lack of involvement in the care system. At its worst, the whole process of entry to care, the care experience and leaving care can be seen by the young person as outside their control.

Stein (1993) has further developed this theme by suggesting that residential care, under certain conditions, can be a form of 'institutional abuse'. He comments:

"Judged by outcomes this institutional abuse is the chronic failure of much residential child care, (as well as other forms of substitute care) despite the commitment and caring of most of its largely untrained and poorly paid work force, to be a compensatory parent particularly to those young people estranged from their own families who need preparation
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

and support in their transition to adulthood. A growing body of research, powerfully amplified by the voices of young people themselves, shows how substitute care generally fails to compensate and assist them — developmentally, emotionally, educationally — so that by the time they leave care their life chances are very poor indeed."

This is not in any way to suggest, simplistically, that care is the cause of the young people's problems, which may be deeply rooted within past family difficulties including damaging and abusive relationships, or that the young people would have been better off if left or returned home. Nor is it to fall into the trap of juxtaposing the 'bad' residential care option with the 'good' fostering option: foster home breakdown rates and unsuccessful outcomes for this age group are similar to residential care, and many young people's substitute care experiences include both foster and residential care (Rowe et al., 1989). In addition, there are, of course, good examples of residential care as well as foster care. Neither is it to ignore the impact of major changes in social legislation and the under-resourcing of public services. Instead, what is being suggested — and supported by our existing knowledge — is that the care system, including residential child care, generally fails to compensate and assist many of these young people. This failure goes far beyond provision in the actual care environment and includes funding policies, training, support and management of carers.

However, simply using the problematic outcomes of residential care experiences as a basis for identifying the phenomenon of 'institutional abuse' is not very helpful in terms of generating a response. We need a working definition.

'Institutional abuse' can be defined as the policies, procedures and practices which create or contribute towards problems of instability, dependency, stigma, identity and under-achievement: the major problem areas highlighted by recent research studies. Against a background of diverse needs, it is difficult to suggest how these problems should be prioritised. But the failure of our system of substitute care to offer many young people stability — that very stability which was often judged to be missing in their own families and backgrounds — raises fundamental questions about the rationale of the system itself.

We know from a number of studies that most young people in long-term care experience multiple placements. Yet such a passionate description as 'multiple placements' cannot capture the emotional impact upon young people of changing carers, friends, neighbourhoods and schools, on several occasions, with little constancy in their lives. Neither, despite the resilience of young people, can it
capture the emotional energy and strength required by these young people to meet changing expectations derived from new relationships and different social situations. Moreover, these are young people whose own developmental stages have often been impaired or damaged by their pre-care experiences. A rare convergence of sociological, psychological and psychiatric perspectives would conceive being in care, under these conditions, as an assault on personal identity.

Providing stability for young people is therefore prioritised as a prerequisite for addressing the related areas of dependency, stigma, identity and under-achievement. But this is not in any way to downgrade the significance of each of these other dimensions as forms of institutional abuse. They are too important. Dependency and stigma include, for example: policies, procedures and practices from a ‘bulk-buying’ economy; the denial of personal privacy; and the lack of involvement and participation by young people in decision-making.

Similarly, identity problems may result from a failure to assist young people in gaining essential knowledge and understanding of their cultural, ethnic and family roots. Under-achievement may be connected to a range of institutional care policies and practices, including lack of privacy, low career expectations and poor school links.

A recognition of institutional abuse identifies quality of care as being central to both providing a context for and responding to running away.

**Detachment from family and care**

Just under a quarter of the young people in the interview sample had spent more than six months continuously away from their families and substitute care before the age of 16. All these young people started running away from their family, and all had spent short periods in care (although not necessarily before the long period that they spent detached). Their ‘living’ places included all-night venues, friends, empty flats, sleeping rough on the streets and “here, there and everywhere”.

Most of these young people had lost contact with education, social services and all other formal agencies, apart from the streetwork projects. Self-harm, depression, substance use and involvement in offending were part of their lives. Having left at ages ranging from as young as 11 to 15 years, they were living outside, or marginal to, key societal institutions — their families (or substitute care) and education — the institutions which play such an important role in preparing young people in their transitions to adulthood.
The Young People With Whom The Projects Work

SUMMARY

Detailed analysis of the experience of running away has led us to identify five pathways — with serious (and, for some, apparently irreversible) outcomes. We have also suggested links between patterns of running away and young people's experiences of 'family', 'care' and 'detachment from family and care'. This means we may now be able to find more sensitive and appropriate policy responses. We look at this issue in Chapter 12, after we have explored the current responses of The Children's Society's streetwork projects.