



Registered Charity No. 1020419

Missing News

Welcome to the thirteenth issue of *Missing News*, bringing you the latest developments in policy, practice and research from across the missing sector, and other linked sectors.

Since our last edition, the government has [agreed to introduce a law on guardianship](#) which will allow relatives of a missing person to look after their finances and property in their absence. **Join our campaign to get the government to prioritise Guardianship legislation in the Parliamentary timetable** by [writing to your MP today](#). Other significant news for this edition includes the launch of [Say Something](#), a joint campaign to tackle child sexual exploitation from NWG Network and Missing People. Also the publication of two new research reports [Community Mental Health Teams and the response to missing patients](#) and [Running the Risks: the links between gang-involvement and young people going missing](#).

The newsletter is divided into five sections. Simply click on one of the sections below to be taken to the latest updates in that area or scroll down to browse all news and developments. Please contact Jenny Dickson (Information and Evaluation Officer) at jenny.dickson@missingpeople.org.uk if you have any feedback about this newsletter or would like to share the work of your organisation or project in the next edition.

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Policy and parliamentary work

[Guardianship legislation](#)

At the end of March 2015, the Ministry of Justice responded to the public consultation on guardianship by agreeing to introduce a law which would allow the relatives of a missing person to manage their property, legal and financial affairs whilst they are absent. The

consultation generated overwhelmingly positive responses and support for the new law which, when introduced, will prevent families from having to stand by and watch the life they hope their loved one will return to fall apart, at the same time as they are going through the emotional trauma of having a missing loved one.

In June, Missing People launched [our campaign](#) to ensure this new law is prioritised in the Parliamentary timetable to make Guardianship a reality for families like Vicki's who have been waiting for years. Vicki told us how she felt when her husband first went missing:

"When my husband first went missing there was the huge impact of suddenly going from being a couple and having two wages to suddenly overnight becoming a single mum who could only work part time, with a mortgage and bills to pay. There was this traumatic thing going on that my husband was missing, and that in itself was traumatic enough, but there was still the everyday living to do as well. A law to help protect missing people's finances and help their families with the financial problems they face is urgently needed, so that other people don't have to go through the same experience as me."

Help us by emailing your MP to ask them to raise this matter with the Minister. Visit our campaign page **to take action now**, [by clicking here](#).

Child sexual exploitation

In June, Ofsted's Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw [voiced concerns](#) about ineffective processes for sharing information on children who go missing from care. He cited findings from recent 'single' inspection reports which show that half of the local authorities are either failing to carry out return interviews, or do not ensure they are independent or good quality. He emphasised that the capacity of local agencies to take preventative action and disrupt sexual exploitation is undermined by poor information collection and sharing. You can read more about the benefits of independent return interviews for children who have been missing in our information sheet [Return Interviews](#).

The Office of the Children's Commissioner also highlighted problems in information sharing in their report [published](#) in February which assessed the extent to which the recommendations made in its [inquiry into childhood sexual exploitation in gangs and groups](#) have been implemented. The report suggests that progress in strategic planning by Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) (92% have produced a strategy) has not yet led to significant progress in front-line services, where co-operation and information sharing between agencies can still be problematic.

Barnardo's, NSPCC and Community Care have each recently released information indicating a rise in service demand for, and reports of, child sexual exploitation. The [Barnardo's data](#) showed an almost 50% increase in the number of children the charity

supported who had experienced, or were at risk of, sexual exploitation in the 12 months to April 2014 (rising from 2,118 in 2013/14 to 3,175 in 2014/15).

Similarly, an investigation by [Community Care](#) (based on freedom of information requests to local authorities in England) demonstrated a 30% increase in CSE referrals to social workers in the last year. More than four in five referrals (83%) concerned girls prompting experts to warn that agencies are struggling to identify male victims. The same investigation also identified inconsistent recording of referrals relating to CSE.

The [NSPCC findings](#), based on responses from police forces in England and Wales to freedom of information requests, show that the number of recorded sexual offences against children rose to 31,238 in 2013/14 – more than a third higher than the previous financial year (22,654 reported offences). The majority of victims were aged between 12 and 16 but more than a third were younger than 11.

Number of looked after children missing from care is rising

In June, London assembly member Caroline Pidgeon released a report [London's Children: Missing from Care](#). The findings, based on freedom of information requests, show that in 11 London Boroughs the number of children missing from care in for more than 24 hours doubled from 231 in 2013, to 504 in 2014 (there was directly comparable information for both years available across 11 London Boroughs).

A rise in the number of children going missing from foster care in England was also identified in [data published by Ofsted in January](#) which showed that between April 2013 and March 2014 there were 13,305 *instances* of children in foster care going missing – a rise of 36% on the previous financial year. This equates to 4,245 *children* going missing from foster care in 2013/14 – an increase of over 900 children on the previous year.^[1] In over half of the incidents (54%), children were missing for less than a day. The most common reason the children gave for going missing was to have contact with family or friends, although in a quarter of incidents the reason for going missing was unknown, suggesting a lack of routine recording of this vital information. Over 500 of the missing incidents recorded the child as being at risk of sexual exploitation.

Paul Adams, a foster care development consultant for the British Association of Adoption and Fostering, responded to the Ofsted data by emphasising the importance of informing children of [the risks they face](#) when missing from care. This is in line with [new guidance for Children's Homes from the Department for Education](#) in March which states that specific procedures must be in place to prevent children going missing and children's homes must take action if they do go missing. In particular, the guidance states that where there is a risk that child may run away or go missing, staff should do their best to help them understand the risks and dangers involved and make them aware how to seek help if they

do run away. Missing People provides a 24/7 [helpline 116 000](#) which provides advice and support to children and adults who have run away, or are thinking about doing so, to explore their options and stay safe.

The DfE guidance also stresses the requirement for the responsible authority to ensure the child has an independent return home interview when they come back. However, the Ofsted [annual report into the state of social care provision for children and young people](#) found it 'deeply disturbing' that many children's homes do not provide interviews to young people returning from having run away from their care home, pointing out that young people in care are disproportionately at risk of becoming victims of abuse (both sexual and non-sexual) whilst away.

Placement stability and missing from care

Findings published in June from a [survey of foster carers](#) undertaken by the Fostering Network shows that children looked after in foster care are moved too often, including two in five who were already living with at least their third foster family since coming into care. The 2013 Ofsted report [Missing Children](#), found that 'effective care planning,' and therefore maintaining placement stability, is key to reducing incidence of missing amongst children in care. In March, the Public Accounts Committee published a [report](#) on children in care which criticised the Department for Education for a reluctance to lead improvements in the quality of care and stability of placements for looked after children and warned that, until this changes, outcomes for children in care will not improve.

Absenteeism from schools

The Welsh Government [published statistics](#) in March on the characteristics of persistent absentees from primary and secondary schools in Wales. It shows that persistent and overall absence rates are highest among children entitled to free school meals or with special educational needs. Statistics [published](#) in March by the Department for Education showed that the same is true in England. [Statutory guidance on keeping children safe in education](#) highlights the links between being missing from an education setting as an indicator of abuse or neglect and signposts the [statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#) for more information about this specific issue.

Modern slavery and human trafficking

Legislation in the [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) enacted in March sets out the provision of advocates for child victims of modern slavery, establishes the first independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner in the UK and strengthens tools available to enforce the law and punish perpetrators. The Home Office [estimates](#) that there were between 10,000 and 13,000 potential victims of modern slavery in the UK in 2013. Up to 60 per cent of

trafficked children in local authority care go missing, many of whom are never found again and are highly likely to be returning to exploitation. The links between child sexual exploitation and missing are summarised in our [Missing and Crime](#) information sheet. You can also read more about this issue in our information sheet [Trafficked children and missing](#).

Safe places to stay when in crisis

The Joint Committee on Human Rights published a [report](#) in February highlighting that the government was failing to provide enough refuge places for female victims of violence and recommends more guidance is provided to local authorities, who have jurisdiction over providing such places. The links between victimisation and missing are discussed more fully in our [Missing and Crime](#) information sheet.

In February, the Home Affairs Committee [published a report](#) on what can be done to improve the use of police and mental healthcare resources to prevent police cells being used as a place of safety. The report cites going missing as one of the common reasons why a person with mental health problems might come into contact with the police and references Missing People's information sheet [Missing and Mental Health](#).

In December, following a review of sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act, the Department of Health and Home Office [announced](#) plans for legislation to ban the use of police cells as a 'place of safety' for children experiencing mental health crisis. They also suggested that police cells ought not to be used for adults, apart from in 'exceptional circumstances'. Some charities, including YoungMinds, have stressed that in order for the policy to work, sufficient funds must be made available to increase the number of safe appropriate beds that local areas can access easily and quickly.

[1] The number of *instances* of children missing from foster care is higher than the number of *children* who went missing that year because some children will have gone missing more than once within the reference period.

Practice

Launch of Say Something Campaign to tackle CSE

NWG Network[1] and Missing People [launched the "Say Something" campaign](#) in June to tackle child sexual exploitation. The [campaign](#), developed with young people and funded by the Department for Education, aims to safeguard vulnerable children and young people

by empowering them to identify early indicators of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Say Something also offers a [free 24 hour anonymous phone and SMS helpline 116 000](#), enabling young people to disclose information and seek support.

Other child sexual exploitation practice news

Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre at Cardiff University has published a [briefing on child sexual exploitation](#) (CSE) which examines problems and solutions from the perspectives of young people and professionals. The report expresses concern at low awareness levels of CSE, including amongst professions responsible for identifying and referring victims to support. Amongst other things, the briefing recommends that CSE be tackled against a background of other issues such as addiction and mental health in response to young people themselves noting how harmful relationships are sometimes chosen as a way to avoid other problems.

The London Assembly's Police and Crime Committee has published a [report on tackling childhood sexual exploitation \(CSE\) in London](#). The report emphasises the need for effective monitoring, information sharing and reporting strategies. It also recommends that each Local Safeguarding Children's Board establish a forum to engage with young victims of child sexual exploitation. It emphasises the particular risk those who have gone missing are at of becoming victims of CSE.

The PSHE Association has published [guidance on teaching about sexual consent](#) for pupils in key stages 3 and 4. The guidance outlines key concepts and provides legal definitions as well as including lesson plans on specific topics such as sharing sexual images, the right to withdraw consent, and victim blaming.

Young peoples' views of good care

National Voices and the Think Local Act Personal partnership (TLAP) have published [a report setting out young peoples' views on what good co-ordinated care involves](#). The report, 'My Life, My Support, My Choice', emphasises the complex nature of the situations some young people are in and recommends that their opinions be at the centre of decision-making processes about their care, allowing their care-plan to be sensitive to the particular needs of their situation.

New websites for young people

Public Health England has launched a [health and well-being website for young people](#). The website, developed by young people, aims to help build emotional resilience in 11-16 year olds by equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to make informed decisions and help with the pressures of growing up. The site covers a range of key health

and well-being issues that affect young people such as personal confidence, exam stress, sexual consent, and puberty.

The charity Victim Support has launched [a website for their youth programme](#), You & Co, to help young victims and witnesses of crime cope with the impact this can have on their lives. The website provides support and advice for coping with a range of crimes, including bullying, gang violence, and sexual exploitation and directs young people to one-to-one support, if needed. It includes an interactive courtroom to show young people what being a court witness involves and other information resources.

[1] The NWG Network charity is a UK network of professionals working with children and young people who are at risk of, or have experienced, sexual exploitation.

Research

New research report from Missing People and Catch 22's Dawes Unit: [Running the Risks: The links between gang-involvement and young people going missing](#)

Today we are proud to launch a ground-breaking new research report, in partnership with Catch 22's Dawes Unit, exploring the links between gang-involvement and young people going missing. The report reveals how gangs are setting children up in flats for weeks at a time to sell drugs in provincial areas. It calls for gang involved young people who go missing from home or care to be treated as victims rather than criminals. The children are left in unsafe environments and in some cases have their phones taken away from them so they are completely isolated and have no contact with friends, family or professionals who might help them. There is also evidence that some of the most vulnerable children in the country in children's homes, pupil referral units and schools, who don't have a criminal record, are being targeted by gangs to set up these so-called "county lines" as they are less likely to attract police attention.

Drawing on extensive research and in-depth interviews with young people and practitioners, the report finds that these young people who go missing are more vulnerable to gang involvement and sexual exploitation, for reasons including debt and involvement in 'drugs lines'.

Jo Youle, Chief Executive, said: *"When a young person returns from being missing it is not the end of the story. It's an opportunity for learning and understanding. It is a time for care and support. Every missing incident gives us an opportunity to reach out to a young person, to find out what's going on, and to offer them the help and support they desperately need. Missing People is there for missing children and adults 24 hours a day,*

365 days of the year, by phone, text and email.

“Reports such as this enable us to better understand the reasons why people go missing and mean that we can provide a better service in the future. I hope that all of us will heed the recommendations in this important report. We must avoid judgements being made between children who some believe are ‘genuinely’ exploited and those who people think make a ‘choice’. I call on us all to commit to working together, and working better, to safeguard vulnerable children and young people.”

New research report from Missing People: [Community Mental Health Teams and the response to missing patients](#)

In May, Missing People published a research report exploring what happens when a patient who is receiving community-based mental health services goes missing and how Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) respond when they return. The report, based on freedom of information requests to CMHTs, makes a number of recommendations including that all CMHTs should create and hold a distinct policy for responding to community-based patients going missing, and that they should pre-plan a route back into services for any patient who is discharged whilst missing. The research also recommends that all returned missing adults should be offered a return interview. For further information on the links between mental health and missing, you can also look at our [information sheet](#) on the issue and read [Gabe’s story](#), a case study of a missing adult experiencing mental health problems, part of our [recent research](#) exploring the issues that arise when a person who has gone missing is found and reconnected.

Second International Conference on [Missing Children and Adults](#)

This world-leading conference took place in Brussels in early July, attracting delegates from around the world to discuss issues relating to missing children and adults. Many of the presentations from the conference are available [online here](#).

[Seriously Awkward: How vulnerable 16-17 year olds are falling through the cracks](#)

In July, the Children’s Society published a report about the specific challenges 16 and 17 year olds face when they “fall between the cracks” of adult and children’s services, protections and support. The report highlights inconsistencies in the law for this age group which leaves many unprotected in key risk areas such as abuse and neglect. It also finds that services can struggle to provide age appropriate support to meet the needs of older teenagers. In addition, public and professional attitudes to 16 and 17 year olds can compound the problem, deeming the young people as ‘troublesome’ rather than ‘in need.’ The report calls for additional support and protection for 16 and 17 year olds who do not have a trusted and reliable adult to guide them, or whose needs are greater than

their families can manage alone. You can read more about the issues specific to 16 and 17 year olds who go missing in our [information sheet](#).

Human trafficking and modern slavery

The Human Trafficking Foundation [published a report](#) in July which looks at what happens to survivors of modern slavery after they leave safe houses in London. The report was based on research with survivors and professionals, as well as analysis of freedom of information requests to London local authorities. It found that although survivors had escaped from traffickers and been placed in a short-term safe environment, on leaving safe houses the majority lose any further engagement with statutory services, putting them at high risk of being drawn back into exploitative or abusive situations. Most professionals believe that on leaving safe houses, survivors are at risk of further harm and re-trafficking because of their high vulnerability. The Foundation calls for consistent and coherent 'move-on' and 'post safe house' support across the UK.

Annual review of ChildLine

NSPCC has published [Under Pressure](#), their annual review of ChildLine 2013/14. The service offered 290,979 counselling sessions in 2013/14, roughly similar to the year before. The report shows that four of the ten most cited reasons for calling were related to mental health: prolonged diagnosable mental health problems, self-harm, suicidal feelings, and low self-esteem and unhappiness. School and education problems appeared in the top ten concerns for the first time with a 200% increase in those ringing about exam stress. In total, 68 per cent of the counselling sessions took place online via one-to-one chat or email.

Mental health and young people

Young Minds [published findings from a survey](#) of parents in February which examined the problems parents face when dealing with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The key issues included access to support - one in four parents had to wait over 12 months to receive treatment for their children and over 80% said their child had to get to crisis point before getting any support. Almost three in four parents felt CAMHS did not have adequate resource to meet the needs of children and young people with mental health problems. Young Minds and NHS England are [soon to release a Parents Say Toolkit](#), which will enable CAMHS to embed parent and carer participation in their service.

Child abduction

The charity Parents & Abducted Children Together (PACT) has [published child-abduction figures for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland](#) that indicate a rise of 13% in the number

of child abductions from 2012/13 to 2013/14. Rates vary significantly across the country. Both the increase in numbers and the significant comparative differences might be indicators of changing recording techniques. The report authors also note that, because the rate of child abduction is quite low (900), a large percentile change can be the result of just a few extra cases.

Child sexual exploitation

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) [published a report in December](#) which looked at child sexual exploitation among children and young people involved in family court proceedings. The research analyses a sample of previous Serious Case Review submissions involving CSE and notifications from operational staff of other children known to CAFCASS who were victims of CSE. The findings show that child victims of sexual exploitation tend to be targeted because of their history of vulnerability, including being in care. Furthermore, some victims may believe that they are in consensual relationships, often describing their abusers as partners. Common vulnerabilities from the cases of CSE studied in the report were highly unstable backgrounds, a parental incapacity to provide protection and being exposed to substance abuse or violence in the family.

[Joint research](#) by the Universities of Bristol and Central Lancashire led by the NSPCC has found that 40% of English schoolgirls have experienced sexual coercion in their relationships. Sometimes this pressure was considered normal by the partners. The authors have called for improvements in sex education. The research is part of Europe-wide research into intimate teenage relationships by the [STIRitUP partnership](#).

LGBT Homelessness

The Albert Kennedy Trust has [published a report on LGBT Homelessness](#). The report shows that young people who identify as LGBT are at a significantly higher risk of homelessness than their non-LGBT peers, which the report suggests is in part due to their increased exposure to familial rejection and sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. In addition, they can be exposed to LGBT phobic bullying. Once homeless, these young people are more likely to be exposed to targeted violence and sexual exploitation and engage in risky sexual behaviour than their non-LGBT peers. The report notes that the situation is exacerbated because LGBT young people are also less likely to seek help than non-LGBT homeless young people. The report recommends that the government legislate so that service providers are sensitive to sexual-identity-specific needs and that highlights a need for more research on the needs of LGBT homeless and their geographical locations.

Consultations and inquiries

A joint consultation has opened from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HMI Constabulary and HMI Probation on [joint targeted area inspections](#). The consultation seeks view on the proposals for the delivery of joint targeted area inspections under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. Consultation closes on **11 August 2015**.

Dates for the diary

- **Saturday 12 to Sunday 13 September:** Take part in the [Thames Path Challenge](#) for Missing People.
- **13 October to 24 November:** Home for Christmas exhibition at St Martins-in-the-Field.
- **Monday 7 December:** Missing People Annual Carol Service, St Martin-in-the-Fields. London.

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Missing People
Roebuck House
284 Upper Richmond Road
London, London SW14 7JE
United Kingdom

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