

Read about the Parliamentary debate on Guardianship legislation, the links between missing and gang exploitation and the rise in the number of children and young people missing from foster care.

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**missing
people**

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Missing News

Welcome to the fifteenth issue of *Missing News*, produced by Missing People's Policy and Research Team (policyandresearch@missingpeople.org.uk), bringing you the latest developments in policy, practice and research from across the missing and related sectors.

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NEWS FROM MISSING PEOPLE

The latest stage of our **Guardianship campaign** has galvanised support amongst MPs, [with a debate](#), secured by MP Julian Sturdy (York Outer), in Parliament on 23 March 2016. This is in addition to 37 MPs signing the [Early Day Motion](#), significant press coverage, including [this article](#), and the issue being [raised on the floor](#) of the House of Commons by Kevin Hollinrake MP. We're continuing to work with MPs and campaign

supporters to ensure the Government prioritises this law without delay.

Missing People, in conjunction with politicians, held events in Cardiff and Westminster to promote [Child Rescue Alert](#) – an alert system activated when a child has gone missing and police believe their life is in imminent danger. Over 25 politicians attended both events leading to significant press coverage for the campaign. Alongside [other activity](#) the campaign led to over 40,000 people signing up for alerts.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE: MISSING AND RUNNING AWAY

In December, Ofsted published [annual statistics on foster care for 2014/15](#). The report shows that 5,055 children and young people were recorded as missing from their foster placement in 2014/15 - an increase of 19% on the previous year. Children and young people are also going missing from foster placements more often – the number of times that children were recorded as missing increased by 29% to 17,175.

Railway Children has produced [new resources for teachers and youth professionals](#) designed to help young people understand the risks of running away and identify safer alternatives and people who may help them. The resources, which cover Key Stages 2-4, are free to download and include teachers notes, lesson plans, lesson resources, PowerPoint presentations, and audio tracks.

In February, Railway Children also published a [report which suggests Nightstop emergency accommodation could help 14 and 15 year olds](#). Nightstop is an initiative, coordinated by the charity Depaul UK, and supports young people in crisis by providing them with a bed for the night in the homes of approved volunteer hosts. The service is currently limited to those aged 16 and over but the report suggests that, with support and agreed protocols for local authorities and the police, it could be extended to include 14-15 year olds. [Missing People's manifesto](#) calls on the government to ensure that every missing child or young person who is unable to return home safely can access suitable emergency accommodation to keep them safe. Provision of flexible refuges and other non-statutory accommodation models such as Nightstop could help to support runaway children, especially when they are reluctant to engage with statutory services.

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE)

Barnardo's published a report ['It's not on the radar'](#) in March. The report examines the hidden diversity of children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation in England, in particular looking at how perceptions of sexual exploitation can affect the identification and response to CSE. The findings are based on round-table discussions which focused on boys and young men; lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people; disability; ethnicity and faith. The report asserts that whilst identity alone may not result in vulnerability to CSE, all aspects of a child's identity must be considered when identifying and raising awareness of CSE.

The Home Office and Department for Education [consultation](#) on proposed changes to the statutory definition of CSE closed on the 11 March. The aim of the consultation was to provide clarity on the definition of CSE as a form of child sexual abuse and ensure that all professions are using the same definition when working together in creating risk assessments, targeting disruption, and investigating offending. You can read Missing People's [consultation response](#) here. Results and the government's response are due to be published in spring 2016.

In January, the Scottish government [launched a new campaign](#) to help raise awareness of, and prevent, child sexual exploitation. The campaign includes a new website [CSEtheSIGNS](#) and a [television advertisement](#) which provide information for parents and young people about the risks of CSE and action they can take to reduce the chances of it happening. The campaign references results from a survey of parents in Scotland which found that whilst 93% of parents had heard of CSE, 29% only know a little about it. Furthermore, 36% of parents believe that child sexual exploitation is something that will not affect their family.

[Research carried out by the NSPCC](#) shows that 96% of professionals working with children after abuse consider the support available to be 'inadequate'. Half also said that many children and young people are struggling to access vital help from NHS mental health services because of tight eligibility criteria and three out of four said it is harder to access therapeutic services now than five years ago. The [NSPCC](#) is calling for increased funding for support services, clear government guidelines on when a child should receive support, and more research into the scale of the problem and good practice.

The [Blast Project](#), a service working with boys and young men who are experiencing, or at risk of CSE, has developed new resources aimed at primary school children. The resources include a short film, workbook, and professional guidance.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND MODERN SLAVERY

In December, the government put on hold plans to make independent advocates for unaccompanied children a statutory requirement. The [decision follows a trial run of the service](#) in 23 local services which showed that whilst the involvement of an advocate was seen as positive by children and professionals in terms of aiding decision-making and ensuring children were listened to and valued, it had no effect on the number of children who went missing: 15 children with an independent advocate were missing at the end of the trial run, compared to 12 without one. The government has since consulted about alternative models and will update Parliament on next steps in March 2016. More information on the link between missing and trafficked children can be found in our [information sheet](#), produced jointly with ECPAT UK.

In February, the Home Office published [national asylum statistics](#) which show that there has been a 56% increase in the number of asylum-seeking applications from unaccompanied children in 2015 to 3,043 (up from 1,945 in 2014).

GANGS

In January, the Home Office published a new [cross-government approach to ending gang violence and exploitation](#) which sets out six priorities for 2015/16 and beyond. One priority - particularly relevant to the link between gangs and missing - is 'protecting vulnerable locations and places where young people can be targeted'. Evidence suggests that children are transported by gangs, from places like pupil referral units and residential care homes, in order to commit criminal activities. They are then returned to the setting in time to avoid the young person being reported missing, or raising suspicion. The report refers to a review undertaken by DfE in relation to missing children which will inform and shape future practice and policy. You can read more about the relationship between missing and gang-involvement in our research report, carried out in partnership with the Catch 22 Dawes Unit: [Running the Risks: the links between gang-involvement and young people going missing](#).

On Thursday 3rd March Chuka Umunna, MP for Streatham, introduced a [Commons Debate on Gangs and Serious Youth Violence](#). Ann Coffey, MP for Stockport, took the opportunity to emphasise the links between gang-involvement and children and young people being coerced into selling drugs, sometimes far from home. This phenomenon, known as 'County Lines', is a key factor in gang-involved young people going missing. Ann Coffey MP highlighted our research report '[Running the Risks](#)' and called for the police to use data about missing episodes to inform early intervention and disrupt gang activity.

In February, the Mayor of London Boris Johnson announced a [new London-wide initiative to help children and young people exit gangs](#). The London Gang Exit programme will be led by Safer London along with delivery partners Only Connect and Redthread. It will provide support to 300 young people aged 16-24 who are involved, or are at risk of becoming involved, with gangs. Support will focus on mental health problems, substance misuse support, employment, and housing.

The Home Office published a report in January on the [changing perceptions of gangs over the past two years](#). The study was based on research with practitioners in the 33 areas covered by the Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme. Major changes identified include: gangs spending less time on the streets and conducting criminal activities more covertly; increasing involvement of gangs with organised crime groups; and an increase in sexual violence and exploitation.

In November the Early Intervention Foundation published research into [Preventing Gang and Youth Violence: Spotting Signals of Risk and Supporting Children and Young People](#). Running away or going missing was identified as a risk indicator of gang-involvement across all age groups from 7 to 25.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE: SOCIAL CARE

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Children has launched [an inquiry into local authority run children's social care in England](#). The inquiry will explore how services are responding to reduced funding but increased demand. It will also look at how to improve the delivery of support and outcomes for children. Meetings for the inquiry will be held in April and July and the inquiry's findings are due to be published by the beginning of 2017. Missing People's [response](#) calls for resources to be prioritised for return home interviews (RHI) and follow-up support for young people in care who have run away. [Evidence from Ofsted](#) shows that interventions from the Worcestershire RHI service contributed to a 30% reduction missing children incidents over the previous year. Furthermore, [a report about the value of return home interviews](#) compiled by Railway Children, illustrates that every £1 spend on independent return home interviews and follow up support, achieves a social value of £5 with positive outcomes for young people such as improved family relationships, better education prospects and greater confidence and self-esteem.

The Scottish government has [commissioned a review](#) of the child protection system in Scotland. The review will focus on Child Protection Committees, Initial Case Reviews, Significant Case Reviews, and the Child Protection Register. The review aims to assess existing legislation to see whether steps taken when children have experienced or are at risk from harm are strong enough. Recommendations will be published by the end of

2016.

In January, the Department for Education published a [policy paper](#) outlining the government's reform programme for children's social care services in England for the next five years. The paper outlines the broad vision for the programme which is structured around three main areas: people and leadership, practice and systems, and governance and accountability. A full children's social care strategy is due to be published in the coming months.

BULLYING

The Anti-Bullying Alliance published [new resources](#) in February to help tackle bullying of disabled young people that identify as LGBT+. This follows research in 2012 showing that homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying is more common amongst young people with disabilities or special educational needs.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

In March, the Home Office published a [strategy](#) detailing actions the government plans to take towards ending violence against women and girls, working around the pillars set out in 2010 of prevention, provision of services, partnership working and pursuing perpetrators.

HOMELESSNESS

In January, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Crisis published their annual report [examining the impact of economic and policy developments on homelessness in England](#). The findings, based on a survey of local authorities, highlight that councils find it difficult to help single homeless people – particularly those aged under 35. The majority of councils back a change in the law to expand homelessness prevention. The links between homelessness and missing are explored further in our [information sheet Missing and Homelessness](#), produced jointly with Homeless Link.

MENTAL HEALTH

The Department for Education has opened a [consultation on the most effective support methods to help improve the mental health of children and young people](#). The consultation focuses on peer support – how to help young people safely give each other appropriate advice and support. The consultation closes on the 24th March.

The Department for Education has established a [fund for developing mental health peer support networks](#). The money will go towards online advice and workshops that aim to develop mental health support networks, as well as new online resources for parents and young people. An advisory group will be established to gather evidence from young people and schools that are already running successful peer support networks.

In March, the Association of School and College Leaders and the National children's Bureau published [results of a survey of school leaders looking at the prevalence of mental health issues amongst the children](#) they work with and the availability of support. Two in three said they had experienced challenges obtaining mental health care local services for their students and 80% would like to see Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) expanded in their area. An increase in the prevalence of self-harm and suicidal thoughts amongst students was reported by 79% and over half (55%) felt there has been a large increase in anxiety or stress.

DEMENTIA

In March, the Department of Health published the implementation plan for the Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia 2020. The plan sets out specific commitments to address dementia issues across four themes: risk reduction, healthcare, awareness and social action. You can read more about the links between missing and dementia in this presentation: [The Impact of Living with Missing Incidents: How the experience and fear of missing incidents affect people with dementia and those who care for them](#).

DATES FOR THE DIARY

18-23 June 2016 [Missing People Cycle Challenge](#)

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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Roebuck House
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