

Evaluation of Barnardo's Safer Choices Missing Service

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Foreword

Research shows that children and young people who go missing from home are at a considerably higher risk of being harmed. This can take many forms, including physical harm and sexual abuse or exploitation. It is our collective responsibility to identify those children and young people to both protect and safeguard them from further risk of harm. In April 2013, in recognition of such vulnerabilities, a tri-partnership initiative between Police Scotland, Renfrewshire Council and Barnardo's was established with the purpose of better identifying, protecting and directly supporting children who had gone missing from their home. The overarching aim was to reduce the number of missing person episodes and to prevent breakdown within home or the place of care environment as well as reduce the risk of children and young people becoming subject to sexual exploitation and other crime-related issues. From the outset, the partnership approach sought to better understand why our children and young people go missing and ensure timely and direct interventions were put in place.

It has been acknowledged that troubled children and young people may be reluctant to engage with different statutory agencies. Their reluctance to share what is happening to them is a real barrier to their protection. Barnardo's involvement and expertise in this field has helped to build relationships with children and young people to enable them to develop trust and feel that they can share information about where they have gone missing, what happened while they were away and what support they need.

The service has continued to evolve and a strategic approach to investigation has been developed around the CARE Model (Concern, Analysis, Risk and Enquiry) to ensure we have defined processes in place when criminality has been identified which both supports vulnerable children and young people but also ensures that perpetrators are brought to justice. Following publication of the Care Inspectorate Report entitled 'Services for Children and Young People in Renfrewshire' in December 2015, the Safer Choices - Missing Service was identified as good practice and inspectors recognised that this service is ensuring that children and young people who are identified as being at risk or vulnerable to sexual exploitation are well protected and being kept safe.

I believe that the partnership approach taken to date has helped to protect and support some vulnerable children and young people in Scotland and I am very pleased to announce that following the success of this initiative in the Renfrewshire Council area, the Safer Choices - Missing Service model has now also been extended into the Inverclyde Council area.

My hope is that we can continue to protect as many children and young people as possible from being exposed to the risks and harm they face when they go missing.

Chief Superintendent Jim Downie
Divisional Commander
Police Scotland

Executive Summary

Background

It is estimated that around 9,000 children and young people go missing for a period of either overnight or longer in Scotland each year, meaning that 9,000 vulnerable young people are exposed to risks that could change their lives forever. These risks include child sexual exploitation (CSE), staying in unsafe places, victimisation, criminalisation, substance misuse, and disengagement from their support networks.

In 2012 Renfrewshire Council, Police Scotland and Barnardo's Scotland formed a unique tri-partnership in response to shared and increasing concerns regarding a particular group of vulnerable young women who were going missing. This led to the development of the Barnardo's Safer Choices Missing Service ('Safer Choices'). Safer Choices works with young people within the Renfrewshire area, who have gone missing from children's houses, independent units or from their parental homes. Police Scotland can refer young people upon their return from a missing episode to Safer Choices, whose staff then undertake a return home interview (RHI). This interview involves a needs and risk assessment, as well as the completion of a Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF). Depending on the needs of the young person, the RHI can lead to more in-depth one-to-one work. In addition, Safer Choices staff aim to use their expertise to raise awareness of CSE and to provide advice to professionals working with the young people within Renfrewshire. From the outset it was evident that forging equal relationships between the relevant agencies would be a key element in the success of the service, but that the knowledge, experience and the child centred and individualised approach brought by Barnardo's Safer Choices also would bring additional capacity and expertise to the agencies already involved.

While keeping young people safe and reducing risk is the core priority for the service, each of the three agencies involved bring a slightly different emphasis to the additional priorities for the service. Dealing with missing episodes and offending, particularly in relation to young people in care, is a resource intensive activity for Police Scotland, and addressing missing episodes through Safer Choices was therefore anticipated to have the added benefit of freeing up resource. Police Scotland also wished to develop a more detailed intelligence picture around missing episodes and the potential for CSE and other forms of risk taking behaviour in order to inform operations. Barnardo's Scotland and Renfrewshire Council were not only concerned with the risks looked after young people were taking by running away from placements but also the 'unmet need' experienced by young people going missing from their own homes.

The overall aims of the service are therefore to help better address missing episodes in order to reduce CSE, identify vulnerabilities at an early stage, and to develop a better understanding of young people who go missing. The service also aims to help identify victims, perpetrators, problem locations and to share information with relevant partners in order to increase knowledge, understanding and intelligence in this area.

Since the service began in 2013 there have been significant national developments around both CSE and Missing Persons in Scotland as well as across the UK. In 2014 the Jay report on the extent of CSE in Rotherham highlighted going missing as an important factor in young people's exploitation. At the same time, the Scottish Government published 'Scotland's

National Action Plan to Tackle CSE. Further work has also been carried out by the Scottish Government, who have been consulting on a draft national Missing Strategy. This Strategy is based on a broad consultation, however, it includes aspects already contained within this service model, such as identifying CSE risks and the utilisation of return home interviews. Police Scotland have also rolled out Missing Person Coordinators across all 14 divisions in Scotland, in order to improve and coordinate their responses to Missing Persons, of which young people make up 64%.

The evaluation

The tri-partnership commissioned independent researchers from the Centre for Youth & Criminal Justice (CYCJ) in 2015 to help document the knowledge and information gathered by the service since its inception, as well as to examine the effectiveness of the service in relation to short-term outcomes for young people. A multi-method approach was used in order to develop a comprehensive picture of the service including: consultation with young people who have received a service and with the professionals who use the service (namely Police Scotland, Renfrewshire social workers; Renfrewshire residential staff and Safer Choices staff). In addition a small focus group comprised of key individuals involved in setting up and overseeing the partnership was held to gather a more detailed background and picture of the service. The Safer Choice's database was also interrogated and examined in order to build up a profile of missing young people and episodes in the area, in conjunction with social work records and police records of charges accrued by the young people referred.

The research covers the first two years of the service, from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2015.

Key findings

Profile of the service

- Safer Choices received 589 referrals in respect of 111 young people in the first two years of the service. Two-thirds of recorded missing episodes in the sample resulted in a further referral to Safer Choices. This is likely to be an underestimate of the need in the area as many young people will not be reported missing, especially those who are missing from home. However, the level of multiple referrals is potentially indicative of the complexity, challenges and behaviours in the lives of young people that professionals need to respond to.
- Out of these 589 referrals, 183 (around one-third) resulted in a RHI. Frequent reasons for not undertaking a RHI included the rolling up of multiple referrals, young people not meeting the service criteria, moving out of the area, logistical issues in arranging RHIs at children's houses or refusal of the young person to participate. RHIs took place on average 13 days following referral, perhaps reflecting some of these challenges.
- A total of 20 young people received individual support from Safer Choices within the time period. The length of this input varied according to individual need, and averaged approximately five months.

Perceptions of the Service

- Professional respondents described the Safer Choices Missing Service as:
 - Independent
 - Voluntary
 - Child friendly and better placed to engage
 - Flexible
 - Informed

- A recurring theme from professionals was that of the strength of the partnership, which was portrayed as equal, transparent and effective with clear lines of accountability and good communication between agencies. However, there was also a recognition from professionals that Barnardo's Safer Choices could bring a level of flexibility and persistence in engaging the young people that other statutory agencies could not. Other benefits identified included the specialist skills Safer Choices workers could bring, such as knowledge, experience and risk assessment tools, particularly with regard to CSE.

- Following implementation of the service, professionals described an increased openness in communication among different agencies and improved interagency working and information-sharing in general. However, there was a mixed picture in terms of specific intelligence gathering, as some of the police respondents felt this intended aspect of the service had not been realised. Directly counter to this was the perception from the Police Scotland representative on the partnership group that the intelligence picture had improved considerably since the service commenced and had resulted in a number of significant investigations, interventions and disruption activities. Other agencies noted that the primary focus of the RHI was not intelligence gathering per se, but rather the support needs of the child. Although intelligence may be a useful by-product of that RHI it was noted that there were other vehicles for the service to contribute to intelligence gathering, such as at the Vulnerable Young Persons Group. These divergences may reflect different perspectives and experiences, for example between front line and senior staff, as well as the slightly different set of priorities that each partner agency brings to the service.

- Young people described their Safer Choices worker as:
 - Trustworthy
 - Easy to talk to
 - Understanding

- Young people interviewed tended to be positive about the relationship they had with their Safer Choices worker and stated that they felt more comfortable in talking to them and were able to share the realities of the risks they had taken while they were missing. However, it was evident that this relationship took time to develop, as young people who go missing could be described as being in a 'balancing act', trying to keep themselves and their friends safe whilst also protecting their privacy from those they perceive as being in authority. This tension may have led to some young people being unwilling to engage with the service, and certainly meant that some young people held back from sharing information initially.

The profile of the missing young people

- Analysis of the Safer Choices database did not reveal any obviously unique characteristics of young people who go missing. Roughly equal numbers of males and females were reported missing, with 55% of young people referred being female. Historically, studies have suggested that males were less likely to go missing but it appears that nowadays males and females are equally at risk, perhaps as stereotypes about what constitutes vulnerability in males and females are dispelled. However, boys tended to be referred to Safer Choices more quickly than girls which may indicate increased concern about their behaviour.
- The peak age for referral was age 15 (41% of all referrals), with referrals steadily increasing until that age, and then dropping off afterwards. This may simply reflect the makeup of the client group and the fact that historically many young people have left care at the age of 16, rather than reflecting need in the 16 and 17 year old population. There was no significant difference between males and females in the age of first referral.
- Similarly, professional respondents could not identify a specific 'type' of young person who would go missing but they did recognise that young people who were already vulnerable and/or had a history of trauma or attachment issues were at particular risk of going missing.

The pattern of missing

- Approximately two-thirds of young people went missing at night (between 5pm and 7am) with the remainder going missing during the daytime. Again, this finding echoes that of the 2014 Jay report, which found young people can go missing and be at risk during the day as much as at night.
- Based on the first missing episode only, those missing during the day were significantly more likely to be female (71%) than male (29%). This may be due to the increased awareness across the local authority regarding risks affecting both girls and boys and going missing or indeed may be related to the time of day they tend to go missing, with professionals quicker to refer to those missing overnight. It has not been possible to explore this from the data available.
- The median length of each missing episode was around nine hours, and ranged between a few minutes and 10 days. Based on all missing episodes where data was available, there were no significant differences between gender, time of going missing and placement type in relation to the length of missing episodes.
- While the responses from professionals indicated that every young person and every missing episode was different, two of the clear trigger points were the unsettlement and disruption of becoming accommodated, and a missing episode in response to emotional upset such as an argument with family, friends or other residents. Weekends were also identified as a time when missing episodes were more likely to occur, although for many young people their episodes were not restricted to weekends. The use of social media was also implicated in a number of missing episodes.
- The discussion of the vignettes with young people revealed their view that once a pattern of missing behaviour had been established it was difficult to persuade young

people otherwise, suggesting that prevention and early intervention are crucial to ensuring young people's safety.

Risk of CSE

- Ninety five SERAF assessments were carried out across 60 of the 111 individuals who were involved with the service. Almost half (44, or 46%) of these risk assessments recorded a high or significant risk of CSE, a further 26 (27%) measured a moderate/medium risk and 25 (27%) measured low/no concerns with regard to CSE. Alcohol misuse, breakdown in family relationships, staying out overnight and self-esteem issues were the most common risk factors affecting young people.
- More females than males were assessed to be high risk using the SERAF tool but this difference was not significant. Similarly risk was not found to be related to placement type, this reflects findings in the 'Jay Report' from 2014 highlighting that it is not only 'looked-after' or accommodated young people who are at risk of CSE, but those living at home who would not necessarily come to the attention of services.

Other risks faced while missing

- Professionals mainly identified the risks faced while missing as being 'risks to self' such as exploitation (sexual or otherwise), victimisation and the physical, social and emotional effects of substance use (in particular the use of New Psychoactive Substances or 'legal highs'). There were a small number of instances where there were also concerns about risk to others, for example, from young people lashing out when feeling vulnerable.
- Young people mainly identified physical risks to self through sleeping rough, substance misuse or victimisation.

Outcomes

- There was an increase in the number of missing episodes in the six months post referral compared to the six months pre-referral. Although the long-term aim of the service remains to reduce missing episodes, it is possible that the work undertaken to increase awareness of the risks faced while missing among agencies, parents and carers has led to an increase in reporting. Anecdotally there had been concern that young people living at home were often not reported missing at all, and while it has not been possible to verify this with parents and carers, this increase may (at least in the short term) reflect a positive change in response, rather than an underlying change in risky behaviour.
- Measuring offending is another indicator of the risks that young people face while missing. There was a small and non-significant increase in the number of offences recorded pre and post referral to the service, although the gravity of these offences reduced. The reasons behind this change are unclear, and may reflect the fact that a young person is often referred to the service at a crisis point in their lives, or an increased focus on the young person by a range of agencies.

- Safer Choices monitor outcomes for young people using a framework linked to Scottish Government health and wellbeing indicators for children and young people (SHANARRI). Use of this measure indicated reductions in associations with risky peers and adults, consumption of controlled substances, and overall levels of risk and harm.
- Following engagement with Safer Choices workers the majority of the young people who were consulted were able to identify behaviour and choices that had put them at risk in the past, and felt they could give advice to other young people who were missing.

Wider development, strategy and impact

- Safer Choices undertook missing and CSE awareness raising training with 31 staff from five children's houses prior to the service commencing. Barnardo's evaluation of this training found that, across the local authority, there was an increase in confidence in relation to understanding CSE.
- An average of 92% of respondents felt more confident in describing key issues in relation to CSE, 77% of respondents felt more confident in identifying some of the potential indicators of CSE and 68% felt more confident in their ability to meet safeguarding responsibilities to young people at risk of CSE.

Recommendations for the partnership

Strategy, development and awareness-raising

- The awareness-raising and strategic / developmental work has clearly been one of the most successful elements of the Safer Choices partnership. All partners should therefore continue to roll out the CSE briefings to professional staff across Renfrewshire to ensure knowledge and training becomes embedded in practice, with a particular emphasis on front line staff including police officers.
- Following publication of the National Police Scotland pilot, Renfrewshire will revise policies and protocols in relation to risk assessment and missing episodes based on best practice identified following the outcome of this pilot.

Engagement and buy-in

- Safer Choices' position as a third sector agency specialising in working with children and young people meant that it was viewed as child-centred and, as a result of being free of statutory duties, best placed to engage with the young people. Despite this, and despite high levels of persistence and flexibility by Safer Choices, the rate of engagement caused some delay in undertaking RHIs and direct work. While this may simply reflect the complex nature of the client group, and it is assumed that statutory agencies would have equal or even increased difficulties in engaging these young people, more exploration of this is needed to maximise engagement. In particular, the length of time to engage young females in a RHI should be better understood.
- Social Work and Residential staff were often unclear about the 1-1 work, and Safer Choices should look at ways to communicate the content of that work (without of course

compromising the young person's privacy), which might help increase knowledge and understanding of the work from all partners. It may mean that other agencies are then better able to support young people and encourage them to engage with the service.

- Safer Choices staff should maintain their current flexibility and be able to respond on an individual basis to young people regarding their needs
- The work that Safer Choices has commenced to develop preventative and multiple approaches within children's houses, for example by ensuring that they are well known by the young people even if a missing incident has not occurred, should also continue to be supported by the partnership.
- The partnership should consider consulting with young people further to identify and promote the responses and supports they would like upon their return from those missing episodes.

Communication and learning exchange

- There were mixed views about whether the aim of increasing intelligence and missing, CSE, perpetrators and problem areas had been fully realised. The partnership should seek to clarify the exact purpose of the RHIs and work together to ensure that these aims are understood and achieved by all involved.
- Police Scotland should continue to ensure that information is consistently shared in particular with regards to concern reports in relation to those children and young people living at home.
- All agencies continue to explore opportunities to promote and maintain good working relationships and engage in learning exchange opportunities.

Monitoring and outcomes

- It has been difficult to fully assess the effectiveness of the partnership from a retrospective evaluation, as data from which to benchmark has been patchy and inconsistent. Going forward, all partners should consider the outcomes they wish to monitor and ensure that data-sharing and information management systems are in place to support this work.
- It may be beneficial to explore some of the findings in more detail, as although differences were not always significant, they may indicate a pattern of behaviour that is not fully understood or reflected in the data that was available. For example, this might include: gender differences, or differences in missing episodes that occur during the day or at night.

Recommendations for wider practice

Residential practice

- The entry in to residential care was seen as a key trigger point for a missing episode. While this will always be a difficult time for young people, coming often at a point of crisis, social work and residential staff should consider if and how this transition could be better managed.
- Many respondents talked about young people staying away due to fearing the repercussions of being under the influence of alcohol or other substances. It may be

beneficial to consider what the current policy across the children's houses is and whether this supports young people to return. Young people may be able to assist in amending this policy where necessary.

Support for young people

- Many young people alluded to the need for some form of family support or mediation in order to help young people return home. Ensuring that staff are aware of the provision of support in the area, and are able to identify needs and access this support when required may also prove helpful.

Wider learning and implementation

- There is nothing to suggest that Renfrewshire is unusual in any respect, the concerns identified by professionals working with young people and the risks faced by young people who run away are likely to be similar across the country. It is important that other local authorities look to how they respond to this group of young people, drawing on the learning from the Safer Choices model as well as the wider work that is ongoing to address CSE and protect children in the Renfrewshire area. Sharing good practice and learning from projects like this can only help in the long term.

Introduction

Each year it is estimated that around 9,000 children and young people go missing¹ in Scotland (Wade, 2002). While a young person is missing from home or care they can be particularly vulnerable and face a number of risks or be forced to take actions that are necessary for survival. Furthermore young people who go missing from home or care are often an already vulnerable population, with backgrounds characterised by disruption and disadvantage. However, many instances of young people running away are not reported to the Police (Smeaton, 2013) and there is limited provision of specialist services for children in Scotland (Lerpiniere et al., 2013), meaning that many young people do not get the support that they need. When it is known that a young person is missing, the point when a young person returns home is often viewed as a crucial time in engaging the young person in services, as is the nature of the response that they receive (Mitchell et al., 2014).

The Barnardo's Safer Choices Missing Service (herein 'Safer Choices') commenced in December 2012 with the aim of addressing missing episodes and the risks associated with being away from home. The Service is a partnership between Police Scotland, Barnardo's Scotland and Renfrewshire Local Authority. While the main focus is young people absconding from one of the five children's houses in the Local Authority area, the Service also works with young people absconding from home or from independent units in the area. The Police refer young people to the project upon their return from absconding and Safer Choices then undertake the return home interview, which incorporates an assessment of the young person's needs and risks, as well as advice to professionals and direct one-to-one intervention where required.

Given the increased concern about child sexual exploitation in the wake of the inquiries in to the wide-scale abuse and exploitation of young people in Rotherham and other areas, and the clear links that the Rotherham inquiry drew between child sexual exploitation and going missing (Jay, 2014) there are a number of policy and practice developments underway in Scotland. These include work by the Scottish Government to develop a Missing Strategy and action taken by Police Scotland to roll out Missing Persons Coordinators across Scotland to coordinate the response to young people who have been reported missing. Barnardo's have therefore commissioned the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice, not only to evaluate the impact of the Barnardo's Safer Choices Missing service, but also to use the evidence generated from this research to inform the policy and practice developments in this area. The main aims of the research are therefore:

- To explore the research literature in relation to young people who go missing
- To profile the patterns, needs and risks of young people who go missing from care or home in Renfrewshire
- To evaluate the impact and stakeholder perceptions of Safer Choices in Renfrewshire
- To identify the learning for practice across a range of different agencies

¹ Broadly defined in most studies as being missing overnight or longer

Literature Review

Prevalence of going missing

It is estimated that each year around 77,000 young people in the UK go missing from home or care at least once by the age of 16 (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). A survey of more than 11,000 young people by the Children's Society found that one-in-nine young people had gone missing overnight by the age of 16 (Rees & Lee, 2005), a figure that had not changed since an earlier version of the study undertaken six years earlier (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999). Applying this rate to young people in Scotland, Wade (2002) estimates that this translates into approximately 11,000-12,000 missing incidents in Scotland each year, involving 9,000 young people. The latest national UK survey (Rees, 2011) indicates that there has only been a minimal reduction in the prevalence of those going missing, by about one percentage point.

Characteristics of young people who go missing

Most studies suggest that young females are statistically more likely to go missing than young males; with some suggesting that being female is a specific risk factor (Lin, 2012; Rees & Lee, 2005; Wade, 2002). However, other studies suggest that males and females in care are equally likely to run away (Biehal & Wade, 2000), and that although lower numbers of young men run away they do so at a younger age than females (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Rees & Lee, 2005). There are also some debates about whether this reflects a genuine difference between males and females, or whether there is to some extent a gendered response to young people who go missing (Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007), with perceptions of risk and vulnerability in young women leading to increased levels of concern and reporting when a young female goes missing (Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007). Certainly a recent report by Barnardo's (2014) identified that young males are missing for longer periods before being reported.

The risk of going missing increases with age (Lin, 2012). National surveys and other studies indicate that the average age of going missing is around 14 or 15 (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Mitchell, Malloch, & Burgess, 2014; Rees & Lee, 2005), although this may be an artefact of the methodology of these surveys, as they tend to only consider the under 16 age group (Rees & Lee, 2005). As outlined above, males tend to run away slightly earlier than females, with Rees and Lee (2005) reporting a slightly higher proportion of males who had gone missing before the age of 11.

Having a history of going missing is significantly associated with risk of future missing episodes, and could increase the likelihood of this happening again by up to 92% (Lin, 2012). Furthermore, it is not the case that young people become more 'streetwise' with increased experience of going missing, rather the research suggests that those who have been reported missing more than three times are at particularly high risk, not least because this indicates that there are unresolved and on-going issues in the young person's life (Shalev, 2011).

Most young people are only missing for a relatively short space of time (Biehal & Wade, 2000). A study of 346 young people who went missing in four local authority areas in

England over a two-year period found that most (93%) returned in one day or less, and only six young people stayed away for longer than one week (Hayden & Goodship, 2013). The same study found that young people in care, or with multiple missing episodes, were more likely to go missing overnight. In Oxford, a study of 51 missing young people found that 58% returned of their own accord and that 30% were returned by the Police (Shalev, 2011). Studies have also found that the majority of young people who go missing are not reported to the Police (Mitchell et al., 2014; Smeaton, 2013), with a UK survey noting that around 68% of under 16s were not reported to the Police while missing (Rees & Lee, 2005). Around 10,000 young people living in residential or foster placements go missing in the UK each year (APPG, 2012; Taylor et al., 2014), meaning that young people who are in care are overrepresented among this population (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Malloch & Burgess, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2014). It is estimated that going missing among young people in care occurs at around three times the rate of the general population (APPG, 2012; Rees & Lee, 2005; Shalev, 2011). However, this may, in part, reflect a variation in reporting rates between young people missing from home or care (Malloch & Burgess, 2011), although this alone is unlikely to account for the full extent of the difference. Young people who run away have frequently been found to have backgrounds characterised by disruption, disadvantage, and neglect, as well as physical and sexual abuse (McCarthy & Thompson, 2010; Rees & Lee, 2005; Smeaton, 2013), which may increase the likelihood of being in care. Other factors, such as placement instability, can also increase the likelihood of missing episodes among young people in care (Lin, 2012).

Reasons for going missing

Studies have explored the many different reasons that young people give for going missing, and these can broadly be categorised as either 'push' factors (issues that make a young person feel that running away is necessary for their safety or well-being) or 'pull' factors (where a young person goes missing to participate in relationships or activities without permission). There may also be times where both factors operate, for example a young person who is unhappy at home also running away to spend time at parties that they would not otherwise be permitted to attend. However, Kempf-Leonard and Johansson (2007) note that young people are far more likely to run 'from' something, rather than 'to' something. Common push factors include: family conflict (Mitchell et al., 2014; Rees & Lee, 2005; Smeaton, 2013; Wade, 2002); other family pressures such as bereavement (Smeaton, 2013), caring responsibilities (Mitchell et al., 2014) or parental substance misuse (Malloch & Burgess, 2011); as well as abuse and neglect (Malloch & Burgess, 2011; Rees & Lee, 2005). Lerpiniere et al. (2013) note that 80% of perpetrators of sexual offences against young people are known to the child, and if this perpetrator is resident in, or frequents the home then this could precipitate a missing episode (Smeaton, 2013). Other push factors include problems at school (Malloch & Burgess, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2014; Rees & Lee, 2005; Wade, 2002), or needing time and space to deal with personal problems (Mitchell et al., 2014; Rees & Lee, 2005).

Pull factors tend to revolve around rebelling against boundaries, such as staying out late with friends, or going to parties or participating in activities that would normally be prohibited to the young person (Mitchell et al., 2014). However, it is important to note that the reasons for running away can change over time, and what commences due to unhappiness in the living environment could evolve to become an established pattern of behaviour (Biehal & Wade,

2000) where a young person continues to go missing to spend time with people who they have met, or to maintain involvement in activities to which they have been exposed. However, there is also a complicated relationship between push, pull and risk factors. Sometimes the risks that young people face while away (see section 3.1.4) can also be experienced as 'pull' factors, such as spending time with perpetrators who are grooming the young person, attending parties or seeking the thrill of offending (Hayden & Goodship, 2013).

The links between a background of neglect and abuse, running away and being taken in to care may explain, in part, the high rate of missing episodes witnessed in the looked after and accommodated population, as young people who are in care are already potentially more vulnerable to running away. However, there are also unique aspects of the care environment that might intensify both push and pull factors and contribute to the decision to run away. Distress at the separation from family, including parents and siblings, increases the likelihood of running away (Taylor et al., 2014), particularly if young people are placed far from home (APPG, 2012). Biehal & Wade (2000) found that more than half (53%) of young people missing from care had left to be with friends and family. These young people were more likely to go alone, and to stay away longer than those who ran for other reasons, but were less likely to have offended or faced serious risks while away. However, other studies suggest that the risks of a young person returning 'home' to a family from whom they have been removed may be underestimated by some agencies such as the Police (Hayden & Goodship, 2013).

Push factors pertinent to residential care included escaping from the restrictions and boundaries of being in care (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Lin, 2012; Taylor et al., 2014); a response to negative peer cultures and bullying (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Lin, 2012; Taylor et al., 2014) and feeling pressured to participate in group incidents of running away (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Taylor et al., 2014). The unit environment, linked to the unit regime and culture can also play a part, with one study finding that different residential units displayed substantial variation in missing rates (from 25% to 71%) (Biehal & Wade, 2000).

The risks faced when missing

Going missing can leave a young person vulnerable to considerable risks, with Wade (2002) estimating that one in six young runaways in Scotland are hurt or harmed while they are away, and the risks increase the longer that a young person remains missing (Lin, 2012). The reasons for going missing highlighted that young people often leave home or care to escape from traumatic experiences, but the risks faced while missing often only serve to re-traumatise the young person. To compound the situation, the act of leaving, or being forced to leave, can also be experienced as traumatic (McCarthy & Thompson, 2010). Understanding the risks faced while missing is therefore crucial in supporting a young person and increasing their resilience to any subsequent trauma. Each of the main risks faced by young people while they are missing is now explored in turn.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Following developments across the UK, particularly in Rotherham, Rochdale and Oxford, questions around the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation (CSE) in the UK have been raised. One of the key links that had been made is the strong yet complex relationship between going missing and CSE (Biehal & Wade, 1999; Jay, 2014; Lin, 2012; Malloch & Burgess, 2011) and it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the average age of being a victim of CSE is 14 or 15 (Lerpiniere et al., 2013), and that the average age of going missing is also 14 or 15 (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2014; Rees & Lee, 2005).

While there are no accurate figures for CSE in Scotland (Brodie & Pearce, 2012; Lerpiniere et al., 2013), certain groups are known to be more vulnerable, such as young people who are in care (Brodie & Pearce, 2012). As going missing is highly significant in increasing the risk of CSE (Brodie & Pearce, 2012) the increased rate of going missing among young people in care is likely to be a factor in the increased vulnerability of this group to CSE. However, the relationship between being in care, going missing and CSE is frequently more complex than this, as young people in care are already vulnerable to CSE through reduced resilience arising from difficulties faced in their childhood backgrounds, such as abuse and neglect (Lerpiniere et al., 2013). Furthermore, residential units can be targeted by perpetrators specifically because these risks increase the likelihood of access to victims or provide opportunities such as peer-on-peer introductions (Jay, 2014). Thus young people in care face a 'triple whammy' of risks when it comes to CSE.

However, as the inquiry into the exploitation of young people in Rotherham highlighted, many of the victims of CSE were not looked after and accommodated (Jay, 2014) and thus despite this overrepresentation among young people in care it should not be assumed that CSE is limited to the looked after population. In addition, the majority of young people who go missing do not experience CSE (Smeaton, 2013), and so while CSE is a very real risk and should always be considered a possibility when a young person goes missing, other risks that a young person might face while missing should also receive attention.

Staying in unsafe locations

The vast majority of young people who go missing stay with family or friends (Shalev, 2011), but the Still Running II survey, carried out across England revealed 16% of young people who had run away admitted to sleeping rough, although this had fallen from around one-in-four in 1999 (Rees & Lee, 2005). Young males were more likely to sleep rough (23%) than females (11%). However, avoiding sleeping rough does not necessarily mean that the young person is staying in a safe location, and indeed between one-in-five and one-in-four report not having a safe place to stay while missing (Mitchell et al., 2014; Rees & Lee, 2005; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002), for example sleeping rough or staying with someone that they had only recently met (Rees & Lee, 2005). Furthermore, if a young person has been removed from the family home it is likely that this is because it is not a safe place for them to spend an extended amount of time (Hayden & Goodship, 2013).

Victimisation (physical / sexual)

Young people who go missing are at an increased risk of becoming a victim of crime (Biehal & Wade, 1999; Hayden & Goodship, 2013) in particular, physical or sexual assault (Biehal & Wade, 1999; Shalev, 2011), with one-in-six young people missing in Scotland reported to be harmed while they were away (Wade, 2002). Sleeping rough, or staying in an unsafe

location, further increases the risk of victimisation (Crawford, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2011; Shalev, 2011).

Offending / criminalisation

While young people are at increased risk of becoming a victim of crime during a missing episode, they are also more likely to become involved in committing crime (Biehal & Wade, 1999; Lin, 2012; Malloch & Burgess, 2011), most often as a result of crimes necessary for survival, such as stealing food and money (Crawford et al., 2011; Hayden & Goodship, 2013; Kempf-Leonard & Johansson, 2007); drug dealing (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002) or association with antisocial peer groups (Crawford et al., 2011). Survival strategies were more likely to be employed the longer that a young person was missing for or by those who were living on the streets (Shalev, 2011). A study of young people living on the streets in the Midwestern US (Crawford et al., 2011) found that almost all (97%) had engaged in some form of violence within three years, although the study did not distinguish between reactive violence (in response to a threat or assault) and proactive violence.

The relationship between offending and going missing was complex, with young people with convictions more likely to run away (Shalev, 2011) and others leaving home or care to maintain their involvement in crime (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Shalev, 2011). However, a study by Devon and Cornwall Police (cited in Shalev, 2011) found that 40% of young people who went missing started their involvement in offending during a missing episode, indicating that addressing missing episodes may also play a part in preventing offending. In addition, and this is especially pertinent for young people in care, increased contact with the police can serve to increase the likelihood of offending behaviours and criminalisation (Hayden & Goodship, 2013), for example police call-outs in response to behavioural incidents, missing episodes or police contact when returning a young person home from a situation that they do not want to leave, or one to which they do not wish to return.

Substance misuse

Young people who go missing are at increased risk of substance misuse (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Johnson, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2005; Lin, 2012). A US study (Johnson et al., 2005) of 428 young people aged 16-19 who had run away and were homeless found that more than 60% met the criteria for a substance abuse disorder. While it is always difficult to ascribe causation, in looking at the age of onset of substance misuse the authors found that most young people developed their substance problems at the time of, or after, their first missing episode, suggesting that they had not left home because of their substance use. Substance misuse, especially among those sleeping rough frequently occurred with other issues such as mental health issues (Johnson et al., 2005), poor health, victimisation and crime (Shalev, 2011).

Disengagement / detachment

The longer that a young person remains missing, or where short but frequent missing episodes occur, the greater the risk for long-term disengagement and detachment from home, school or other support networks (Biehal & Wade, 1999, 2000; Lin, 2012). This not only leaves the young person vulnerable to prolonged risks, but can also result in poorer outcomes that can affect a young person's opportunities across the rest of the lifespan, such

as reduced resilience (McCarthy & Thompson, 2010) and exclusion from school or low academic achievement (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Smeaton, 2013).

The Scottish perspective

A Scottish Government Ministerial Working Group consisting of experts in the field produced a plan in 2014 to highlight, examine and reduce the risk of CSE in young people within 'Scotland's National Action Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation'. This action plan was published in November 2014 at the same time as the Brock report on child protection (*Safeguarding Scotland's vulnerable children from child abuse: A review of the Scottish system, Children in Scotland*) and subsequently updated in October 2015. A refreshed National Action Plan for CSE was published in March 2016.

Research, knowledge and practice gaps

It is clear that the number of young people going missing has remained relatively stable over the past decade or so, despite a range of policy and practice developments in the intervening years. These include the funding of 27 pilot projects to work with young runaways by the cross-government Children and Young People's Unit including England and Wales; and an action plan to highlight awareness of young runaways in 2011 (Smeaton, 2013). Furthermore, it is apparent that young people who go missing are a particularly vulnerable group, and that going missing can expose these young people to further risks and traumas with potential implications for future resilience and physical and mental health. What is also evident is that many instances of young people running away are not reported to the Police (Shalev, 2011; Smeaton, 2013), especially those who are living at home (Brock, 2014), and that there is limited provision of specialist services for children in Scotland (Lerpiniere et al., 2013). These response failures mean that young people do not get the support that they need, and are at risk of further missing episodes, victimisation and trauma.

Furthermore, the research literature that does exist tends to focus on young people who go missing overnight or longer; young people who go missing from care and the risks that young people face while sleeping rough. This may represent a sensible approach to minimising risk, given that young people in care are an especially vulnerable group and the risk of harm increases if a young person is living on the streets (Crawford et al., 2011; Shalev, 2011) and the longer a young person is missing (Hayden & Goodship, 2013; Shalev, 2011). However, these scenarios do not reflect the circumstances of many of those young people who go missing. While young people in care are overrepresented (Biehal & Wade, 2000), they comprise only a small proportion of the total number of young people who go missing (Rees & Lee, 2005; Shalev, 2011). Likewise, most young people return to their place of residence within a day or less (Hayden & Goodship, 2013; Rees & Lee, 2005), and the majority do not end up sleeping rough (although this does not mean that they are necessarily in a safe location) (Shalev, 2011). Lastly, the relationship between going missing and CSE is not limited to those young people who are missing overnight. There is also an emerging concern about young people who are only missing for short periods during the day (and simply viewed as 'absent' from school for example), but are being exploited by adults within this time (Godar, 2013), yet this is viewed in some areas as the least riskiest missing pattern with a less urgent response generated (Hayden & Goodship, 2013).

It is crucial that we begin to develop a more comprehensive understanding of all young people who go missing: from who they are, to why they go missing, the patterns and trends of missing episodes, the risks that they face while away from home or care, and lastly what constitutes best practice in meeting young people's needs and reducing their risks. The evaluation of Barnardo's Safer Choices Missing Service presents the opportunity to begin to address some of these gaps in the literature, as the service works with all young people who are reported missing in the Local Authority area and referred to the service, regardless of their home or missing circumstances. The timing of the evaluation is also fortuitous as it mirrors the work being carried out by the Scottish Government and the development of a national Missing Strategy for Scotland. This Strategy will be based on a broad consultation, however, it includes aspects already contained within this pilot such as identifying CSE risks and the utilisation of return home interviews.

Methodology

Participants

Anonymised data from the Safer Choices service database, supplemented by placement data from social work and offending data from police was received in respect of all 111 individuals who had been referred to Safer Choices between April 2013 and March 2015.

Interview participants were drawn from two main groups: young people who had been the recipient of a return home interview or involved with the one-to-one service, and professionals (police, social work, residential staff and Safer Choices workers). The intention had been to consult with a small sample of parents or carers; however, it had not been possible to identify any individuals in this target group who were willing to participate.

A total of eight young people participated in the consultation, made up of two females and six males, between the ages of 13 and 18 years who were interviewed face-to-face. Twenty-one professionals participated in a telephone interview, with five each from police, social work and residential care, and six from Safer Choices. In addition, a small focus group was held with four key staff from police, Barnardo's Scotland and social work to chart the history and development of the service from inception to date.

Ethics

The research was given ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee and the Barnardo's Research and Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the consultation and, in the case of under 16s, from those acting in loco parentis. Participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the research and all data were stored securely. Interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participant and conducted in private. Transcripts were stored securely and anonymously, and the recording destroyed upon transcription.

In order to discuss sensitive issues without causing distress to young and vulnerable participants, the consultation mostly took the form of a series of vignettes designed to elicit information about the push and pull factors for going missing, as well as the risks faced while missing, without asking young people directly about their own personal experiences.

Information about ChildLine and the Samaritans was provided at each interview and young people were returned to a trusted Safer Choices or residential worker immediately following the interview.

Retrospective consent was not obtainable from young people on the Safer Choices database. However, this information was fully anonymised prior to sharing with the research team, and the data was processed in accordance with ethical standards covered under Schedule 3 of the 1998 Data Protection Act, which does not require the explicit consent of the individual where there are no additional consequences for the data subject but does permit the use of such data where its use is in the interest of the wider population.

Procedure

Information on missing episodes, basic demographics and service input was gathered from the Safer Choices database in respect of all young people referred to the service. This data was supplemented by anonymised information about placements from social work, and offending patterns pre and post referral from the police. Individuals were allocated a code by Safer Choices in order that the different datasets could be matched; however, the key to the code was retained by Safer Choices and not shared with the research team.

Professionals to be consulted were identified via their respective agencies and were selected due to their level of involvement with the service, or with young people who had received a service. Young people to be consulted were identified by Safer Choices. While purposive samples such as these increase the potential for bias in the sample, it also meant that participants were able to contribute meaningfully to the research. In addition, the sensitive and challenging nature of the topic may have put some young people off participating, especially those who were particularly vulnerable.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and analysed within-group (young people or professional) using NVivo (version 10). Interview transcripts were analysed on a case-by-case basis and were first coded separately by the members of the research team. After the first coding cycle the team then met to cross-reference the emerging codes in order to reach a consensus about the coding structure and a cross-case analysis was then undertaken to identify emergent themes across the sample.

A data analysis plan was developed and agreed with the research team. All quantitative data was analysed using SPSS (version 21). Data was provided from the Safer Choices project database, social work records and police records of offending. The young people in the sample were identified by unique identifier and this was shared across the various agencies. Data were combined to form two databases for analysis purposes, one containing a record of all referrals and one with demographic details on each individual young person referred.

Findings

Profile of the service

History and development

The Safer Choices service forms part of a wider Renfrewshire response to addressing Child Sexual Exploitation which, as far back as 2006, emphasised inter-agency planning and work to identify and support young people at risk. By 2010 protocols were in place to address child trafficking, supported by an extensive multi-agency training programme. The impetus for this specific service arose from concerns within both social work and the police about a group of young women and increasing concerns with regard to their vulnerability, and a desire to strengthen Renfrewshire's response to CSE in light of the findings and conclusions from enquiries at the time into CSE in Rotherham and Rochdale. Thus, as part of the Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee's commitment to safeguarding young people at risk of exploitation, a tri-partnership was formed between Renfrewshire Council, Police Scotland and Barnardo's Scotland in December 2012 to deliver a support service for young people who go missing from care and who may be at risk of sexual exploitation (Renfrewshire Community Planning Partnership, 2014). Following a period of staff training and awareness-raising across the three agencies, the service formally launched in March 2013. The service is accountable to the Vulnerable Young Persons Strategic Group, which oversees the strategic and operational planning in relation to CSE in the area, and is an integral part of vulnerable young person's planning and procedures in the area.

Data was recorded by Safer Choices both before and after training had been carried out with 31 staff across five children's houses. The result of the training was an average of 92% improved confidence in describing key issues in relation to sexual exploitation of young people, 77% increased their confidence in identifying some of the potential indicators of sexual exploitation, 62% improved confidence in understanding that sexual exploitation is not a choice young people make, 68% improved confidence in awareness of the vulnerability factors which affect young people at risk of exploitation, 70% improved confidence in being comfortable they could respond appropriately to young people who may be affected by sexual exploitation, 55% improved confidence in their awareness of the reasons why young people affected by sexual exploitation may not disclose abuse, 82% improved confidence in being able to discuss effectively issues of sexual exploitation with 'at risk' young people and 68% improved confidence in being comfortable they could respond (appropriate to their role) in meeting safeguarding responsibilities to young people at risk of being sexually exploited.

Although the service is targeted at missing young people, this underlying purpose of addressing CSE was evident from the small focus group, with almost all participants including it in their description of the service. However, from the start, different agencies had a slightly different emphasis on the priorities for the service, with the police noted as being additionally concerned about reducing missing episodes and offending, as dealing with these matters was a particularly resource intensive activity for them.

There was a requirement for Police Scotland to provide a more detailed intelligence picture around missing episodes and the potential for CSE and other forms of risk taking behaviour. In order to operationalise the service, Police Scotland expanded the remit of two existing

police officers to encompass the service based within the Concern Management Hub at Renfrew Police Office. These officers provided the key mechanism for generating referrals to the service. The Barnardo's Safer Choices Missing service committed to undertaking a Return Home Interview (RHI) to establish the 'push factors' and 'pull factors' for each young person, and to assess the risk of harm and the likelihood of any future episodes of missing from care. In particular, Barnardo's Safer Choices staff brought expertise in assessing the risk of young person's involvement in (CSE) and utilised their Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF) to undertake this. Information arising from the assessment and information gathering from each of the three agencies was shared using the secure email service set up for this purpose.

The service still broadly operates in this fashion, although there have been some changes to police systems rather than processes. The biggest development was that it was evident from the start that there was unmet need in a 'hidden' group of young people, namely those young people going missing from home. These young people were often not reported missing to the police, but were only being identified when they were involved in missing episodes with young people from children's houses. The service was duly expanded to incorporate this group but due to the volume of need, this focus has been revised again. At present the main priority remains young people from Renfrewshire who are missing from care, however other individuals (e.g. individuals from outside of the area who are missing from independent care providers, or young people living at home) can be worked with depending on the level of presenting risk and service capacity.

Additionally, Safer Choices has a 'sister' service that operates a street team in Glasgow city centre, which is one of the key areas that young people from Renfrewshire as well as other areas regularly "runaway" to. They are therefore able to engage with young people whilst they are actually missing as well as provide soft intelligence to partner agencies about the risks that young people frequenting these areas may be exposed to.

The main aims and objectives of the service today are: addressing missing episodes to reduce CSE; identifying vulnerabilities at the earliest stage; developing a better understanding of young people who go missing; and the identification of victims, perpetrators and problem locations and sharing that information with relevant partners. In addition, a long-term aim remains to reduce missing episodes, although it has become apparent that achieving the aforementioned aims and objectives can lead to a short-to-medium term increase in reported missing episodes, as awareness and appropriate concern rises among agencies and parents/carers.

These aims and objectives are achieved through the provision of direct intervention such as the RHIs, one-to-one work with young people and support for parents and carers, as well as more strategic inputs such as awareness-raising; training; information-sharing and participating in multi-agency meetings and early intervention and prevention with young people in schools.

The focus group identified key achievements, milestones and opportunities in meeting these goals and a recurring theme was that of the strength of the partnership, which was portrayed as an equal, transparent and effective partnership with clear lines of accountability and good communication between agencies. This meant that each agency's viewpoints and experiences were valued and that any problems that did arise were resolved quickly and easily. Similarly the projects' involvement and participation in the vulnerable young person's

(VYP) operational group, care planning meetings and regular visits to children's houses were highlighted as extremely important in embedding the service within Renfrewshire.

However, in order to implement the service and to meet aims and objectives, some barriers needed to be overcome. These were varied and included challenges in engaging young people in the service. This may have been due to a number of reasons, such as: by the time agencies became aware of the behaviour it was already habitual; young people viewed themselves as adults and did not understand the level of concern about their behaviour; or, that young people were simply missing at the time of the RHI. The focus group participants also noted that CSE itself can be a barrier to engaging young people, as grooming by perpetrators means that young people are unlikely to recognise that they are being sexually exploited but rather believe that they are in a relationship. However, despite these challenges, it was recognised by focus group participants that Safer Choices could still provide a more flexible and supportive RHI service that other agencies, such as the Police and Social Work were not best placed to provide for a range of reasons including capacity, responsibilities and perceptions by young people.

Other barriers related to the systems that young people are within, for example, school or residential placements can increase association with other vulnerable peers. In addition, entry into care could precipitate a period of going missing while the young person becomes familiar with the processes, rules and requirements of residential care. At times Safer Choices felt that communication was not as good as it could be with children's houses, as scheduling clashes between RHIs, activities and visits meant that some young people were not available for a RHI. Recent moves to increase the visibility and awareness of Safer Choices staff in children's houses with the aim of building up relationships with residential staff and young people should begin to resolve some of these issues.

Differing agency perspectives and the application of professional judgement, while adding to a broader picture about the young person, also had the potential to result in inconsistencies in assessing a young person's level of risk. However, the focus group felt that the open communication between partners, and the level of CSE training that had been provided in the area, has minimised disagreements. Police Scotland are currently piloting a new risk assessment process across three local authorities and it is anticipated that following the successful completion of this, the practice will be adopted across Renfrewshire.

Process barriers including time delays between missing episodes and the sharing of concern reports with Safer Choices were also noted. It was felt that although occasionally there had been delays in receiving notification, these were due to human error rather than any systemic or cultural problems. The Police also described the implementation of a new information system, the interim *Vulnerable Persons' Database*, (*iVPD*) that had taken time to bed in and had resulted in some temporary delays. It was also highlighted that the necessary redaction of information that was required in some reports could hold up the process of referral.

Key to the Safer Choices service was the use of individual support packages and child-centred responses, acknowledging that every child who goes missing is different and is in need of different levels of support - the best projects tailor packages of support to each individual and in conjunction with them. The importance of direct work with young people which is genuinely young person centred is critical. The most effective services make time to listen to the young person's own assessment of their situation and discuss with them the

range of issues in their life. This gives services a better understanding of the circumstances leading to the young person running away and enables them to work with the young person in devising a realistic, applicable solution. Safer Choices have completed some internal evaluations with the young people and from this identified situations where some young people have been able to recognise through 1:1 structured work that they are in “an unequal and potentially harmful” relationship and have taken the decision to cease any further contact, whilst other young people are using this time to explore reflectively issues that are contributing to their behaviours. Young people need to have choices about who is best to advise and support them; if they have run away from their care home, for example, social workers are often seen as ‘the enemy’.

The focus group considered what they would like to achieve over the next two years of service provision and a key goal was to move towards ‘disruption’ of activities, such as using the information gathered to target particularly at risk locations such as party flats, school year groups or neighbourhoods and to empower communities to prevent CSE. There were a number of barriers that could prevent the service moving in the direction that it wanted to go, mostly related to financial and funding issues. Despite this, focus group participants felt that without the service there would be less information gleaned from the RHIs, more work generated for statutory agencies such as police and social work, and less capacity for therapeutic intervention. That there was now higher level interest in missing young people and CSE from government and inspectorates was therefore viewed as a positive opportunity that could mitigate for some of these barriers, and help the service continue to develop and meet its aims and objectives.

Process

Between April 2013 and March 2015 a total of 589 referrals were made to Safer Choices in respect of 111 young people. In year one 53% (n=314) were made, while 47% (n=275) were made in year two. The number of referrals made per young person varied from one to 44 and the majority of the young people who were referred to the project had been referred more than once.

Of the 589 referrals made to the Safer Choices in the time period, 183 (31%) resulted in a RHI being carried out by the team. The decision not to progress some referrals any further was due to a variety of reasons, for example in many cases there were multiple referrals made over a short period of time for a single young person and these were grouped together in one interview; some of the referrals did not fit the project criteria in that they involved young people outwith the local authority or outwith the age range; in some cases the young person had moved to another local authority prior to a return interview being arranged. A number of referrals were also not in relation to a missing episode but reflected wider concerns about the young person, particularly in relation to CSE. There were also several occasions where the young people did not want to work with Safer Choices and refused to meet with them despite numerous attempts at engagement, and on some occasions was impacted by scheduling clashes or miscommunication in the children’s house where information regarding a scheduled meeting was not passed on.

In many of the referrals there was data missing in respect of one of the key process dates (either the episode start or end date, the referral date, or the RHI date). For the episodes where data was available, the length of time between the end of the missing episode until the young person was referred to Safer Choices ranged from referrals made on the same

day to one referral being made 99 days later, however, this long period of time was extremely unusual with the mean length of time recorded as six days to referral. More than half of all episodes were referred to Safer Choices within three days or less. The case that involved a 99 day delay refers to a young person who was immediately accommodated in secure care for the duration of the 99 days before being formally referred.

The male young people tended to be referred to the service slightly quicker than female young people, with young men being referred a mean length of 5.24 days after returning from the missing period and young women being referred a mean length of 6.61 days. It is not clear why this is the case, but may reflect differences in the levels of concern about males and females (with males more likely to be missing at night as outlined below). The difference was not statistically significant.

On average there were 13 days (mean=13.24 days) between the date of referral to the service and when the RHI was carried out, however, this ranged from 89 days later (this case was somewhat of an anomaly and will likely relate to the young person's circumstances) to occasions where the interview was completed on the same day or even prior to the formal referral being received (when the service was already working with the young person). However, three-quarters of all RHIs took a week or more to be carried out although it should be noted that in at least one-quarter of these cases multiple attempts had been made to undertake the RHI before the date of completion, with a 'no show' by the young person the most common reason for the delay. At times Safer Choices staff had to persist three or four times in order to meet the young person.

Return interviews were carried out with males on average after 9.3 days and with the females after 15.8 days, an independent samples t-test in this case showed this difference to be significant, producing a result of $t=-3.199$ ($p<0.001$). Again the reasons for this difference are unclear, and from the data available it is not entirely certain if this relates to greater challenges in engaging young women, or differences in use of secure placements etc. This should be explored further.

Of the 111 young people referred to the project, 20 went on to receive a 1-1 service from Safer Choices. The length of this involvement varied from case to case, in two cases the database reflects that the input from Safer Choices lasted only a day and in another the young person started receiving a 1-1 service in January 2014 and that input continues to date, however, the average length of 1-1 input from the project is 160 days. Both genders were equally involved in the 1-1 service with ten young men and ten young women receiving it. As the service receives referrals for slightly more young women than young men (see below) this is perhaps a slightly higher number of males receiving 1-1 work than might be expected.

Profile of the young people

The majority of missing episode referrals (54%) made were in regard to females, and indeed females made up the greatest number of young people referred to the service with 55% of the young people in the sample being female, 44% being male and in one case this information was not supplied. 95% of the young people were described as 'white British', the remainder were described as white but of a different background and there was one Asian

young person referred. With regards to sexuality the vast majority of young people declined to answer this question.

The average age of the sample at referral was 15 years old (mean=14.96 years) with referrals steadily increasing until age 15, and falling away after. Two of the young people in the project reported that they had a physical impairment, 11 reported a learning disability, two reported having an autistic spectrum condition, four described a behavioural condition and three reported having mental ill health, although using self-report means that this is likely to be an underestimate of need.

At the point of their first referral to the project the most common placement type (34%) was a local authority unit (e.g. children's house). Around one-quarter (26%) were living at home, 18% were placed in a residential school, 14% were in a private unit, 6% were in either a closed support or secure unit and 2% were in foster care at the time. More than two-thirds (68%) of the 'home referrals' were in relation to young women while males made up 59% of the referrals from other sources such as children's houses.

Risks of CSE

In total 95 SERAF risk assessments were completed with 60 young people, 54% of the young people Safer Choices worked with. Forty four of these risk assessments recorded a high or significant risk of CSE, a further 26 measured a moderate/medium risk and 25 measured low/no concerns with regard to CSE. It is noted that multiple SERAFs are completed when there has been a change of circumstances for the young person, such as a change of placement. In 11 cases the young person also received 1-1 input from the project, one of these young people who received a 1-1 service had been assessed as mild risk by the SERAF, four at moderate risk and six of them were assessed as being at significant risk.

More females than males were assessed to be high risk but this difference was not significant. Similar numbers of low risk and high risk young people were found across the various living placements.

The most common risk factors measured across this group as a whole included:

- Alcohol misuse 34/60 (57%)
- Periods of going missing overnight 29/60 (48%)
- Breakdown in family relationships 23/60 (38%)
- Self-esteem issues 20/60 (33%)
- Drug misuse 17/60 (28%)
- Staying out late 17/60 (28%)
- Family history of drug misuse 14/60 (23%)
- Isolation 12/60 (20%)
- Self-harming 12/60 (20%)
- Expressions of despair 11/60 (18%)
- Peers involved in sexual exploitation in the last six months 11/60 (18%)
- School exclusion 10/60 (17%)
- Family history of abuse 10/60 (17%)
- Family history of mental health issues 7/60 (12%)

Other risks

For 107 young people there was a record of the number of offences they had committed between six months prior to their first referral and six months post referral. The number of offences recorded ranged from none in 22% of cases to 53 offences in the case of one young person. The mean number of offences was 6.95 offences over this period. The young males in the sample had committed more offences on average than the young women (7.26 offences to 6.75) but this difference was not significant. There was a greater mean number of offences committed by the young people referred missing by children's houses/other locations than those referred as missing from home (8.50 compared with 5.76 offences) but again this difference was not statistically significant.

The pattern of missing episodes

There were 589 missing episodes by a total of 111 young people in the six months following their referral to Safer Choices. There did not appear to be a large difference between males and females in the number of missing episodes in that six months (5.5 and 5.2 respectively). Data on missing episodes prior to referral to Safer Choices was patchy and is not included in the analysis here.

Similarly, due to gaps in the data the lengths of all of these episodes can't be examined, however on examination of the 477 episodes where start and end time were documented, the average missing episode lasted for approximately 19 hours. This average was greatly affected by a large amount of variance in time spent missing, ranging between a few minutes and for longer than 10 days, and when looking at the median length of time (which is less affected by these extremes) the median missing episode lasted for nine hours and 15 minutes. Although males were missing for slightly longer than females (19 hours compared to 14 hours), this difference was not statistically significant.

Where this data was recorded, with regards to the episode related to their *initial* referral to Safer Choices, more than two thirds (66.7%) of the young people had gone missing at night (after 5pm), with the remainder leaving during the day. The table below shows that when the time of day of the initial missing episode is examined, 71% of those individuals missing during the day were female, and 29% were male. A Chi square test showed this pattern to be significant ($\chi^2=4.933$, $p<0.05$). When incidents of going missing at night were examined it was slightly more likely to involve young males but the difference was not significant.

Table 1: Time of day of *initial* missing episode by gender

| Gender | Missing during day time | Missing at night | Total |
|--------------|-------------------------|------------------|----------|
| Female | 17 (71%) | 33 (45%) | 50 (51%) |
| Male | 7 (29%) | 41 (55%) | 48 (49%) |
| Total | 24 (100%) | 74 (100%) | 98 |

However, when all 483 missing episodes (not just the initial episode) were examined by gender there were no significant differences found in relation to gender and time of day going missing. The majority of missing episodes (68%) commenced after 5pm.

Similarly, when all 472 missing episodes where the placement type and length of episode was known were analysed, it appeared that young people went missing for a longer period of time from out of home placements (just under 18 hours) than from home (just under 14 hours). However, this difference was not statistically significant, and may also be affected by factors such as earlier or better recording of missing episodes in residential care rather than by parents and carers at home.

Outcomes

It has been very difficult to accurately assess outcomes from the service, as data available on missing episodes and offending behaviour prior to referral was patchy and inconsistent, and was not fully complete for the six months post referral either. This means that there was not always an accurate baseline from which to measure change. For example, although Safer Choices were usually aware if a young person had a history of missing episodes prior to first referral, only 68 cases recorded a specific number of 'missing episodes' both in the six months prior to their referral to Safer Choices and also in the six months following that referral. Based on the analysis of just these cases, there was a highly significant increase in the number of missing episodes after their initial referral, with a mean of just under three episodes in the previous six months and of just under seven episodes in the next six months. A paired-samples t-test gave a result of $t = -4.699$ ($p < 0.001$). This increase was not entirely unexpected and anecdotally has been attributed to a range of factors including: improved reporting, an increase in the use of concern reports, or indeed an increase in missing episodes in some young people due to changes in circumstances, for instance rebelling against rules (e.g. curfew times), within a children's house or the referral coming at a time of crisis in the young person's life

In examining data on offence charges in the six months prior to the first referral to the service and charges in the six months after referral, it was found that although there was a very slight increase in the number of offences recorded post-referral (a mean of 3.65 offences post-referral compared to a mean of 3.29 offences in the six months before) this increase was not found to be significant when a paired-samples t-test was carried out. When the gravity² of the most serious offence committed by each young person was compared pre and post referral there was a decrease. The mean gravity score of the most serious offences recorded pre referral was 2.50 and the equivalent mean post referral was 2.38, however, this reduction in severity was not found to be significant when a paired-samples t-test was used. Also it is worth noting that this non-statistically significant reduction was seen equally in both of the genders and among those young people referred from children's houses, there was no reduction in offence severity recorded among those young people who had been referred from home.

Twenty five young people had more than one SERAF completed during their time with the service, for 17 young people two were completed, for four young people three assessments

² Using the ACPO youth offender case disposal gravity factor matrix as a guide.

were completed, for three young people four assessments were recorded and in one case five of these risk assessments were carried out. For the majority of the young people who had a record of multiple SERAF assessments their level of risk had either stayed the same or increased over time. In the cases of five young people their level of risk had reduced, in three cases this was from moderate risk to low risk and in two cases from significant risk to moderate risk. This changes in the SERAF score might not necessarily reflect changed risk, but may be as a result of new information coming to light following the Safer Choices 1:1 intervention.

In order to increase understanding of outcomes in relation to the service Barnardo's also shared the results from their Safer Choices Outcome Monitoring Framework. This framework is collected by Barnardo's as part of routine service monitoring and is designed to identify whether or not interventions achieve positive outcomes for the young people and their families. The framework is used by both professionals and service users to complete risk assessments and identify areas for change at the start of work. These are monitored and updated throughout the duration of the intervention whilst levels of risk continue to be assessed. The following areas are evaluated:

- Assessing levels of Risk (Safety and Health)
- Improved School attendance
- Reduction in repeat Missing from Education
- Reduction in repeat Missing from Care incidents
- Reduction in repeat Missing from Home incidents
- Reduction in alcohol and/or drug consumption

These outcomes are matched to the SHANARRI well-being indicators – safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included. The analysis and graph below was produced by Barnardo's and highlights reduced association with risky peers, reduction in level of risk or harm and a reduced or safer consumption of controlled substances.

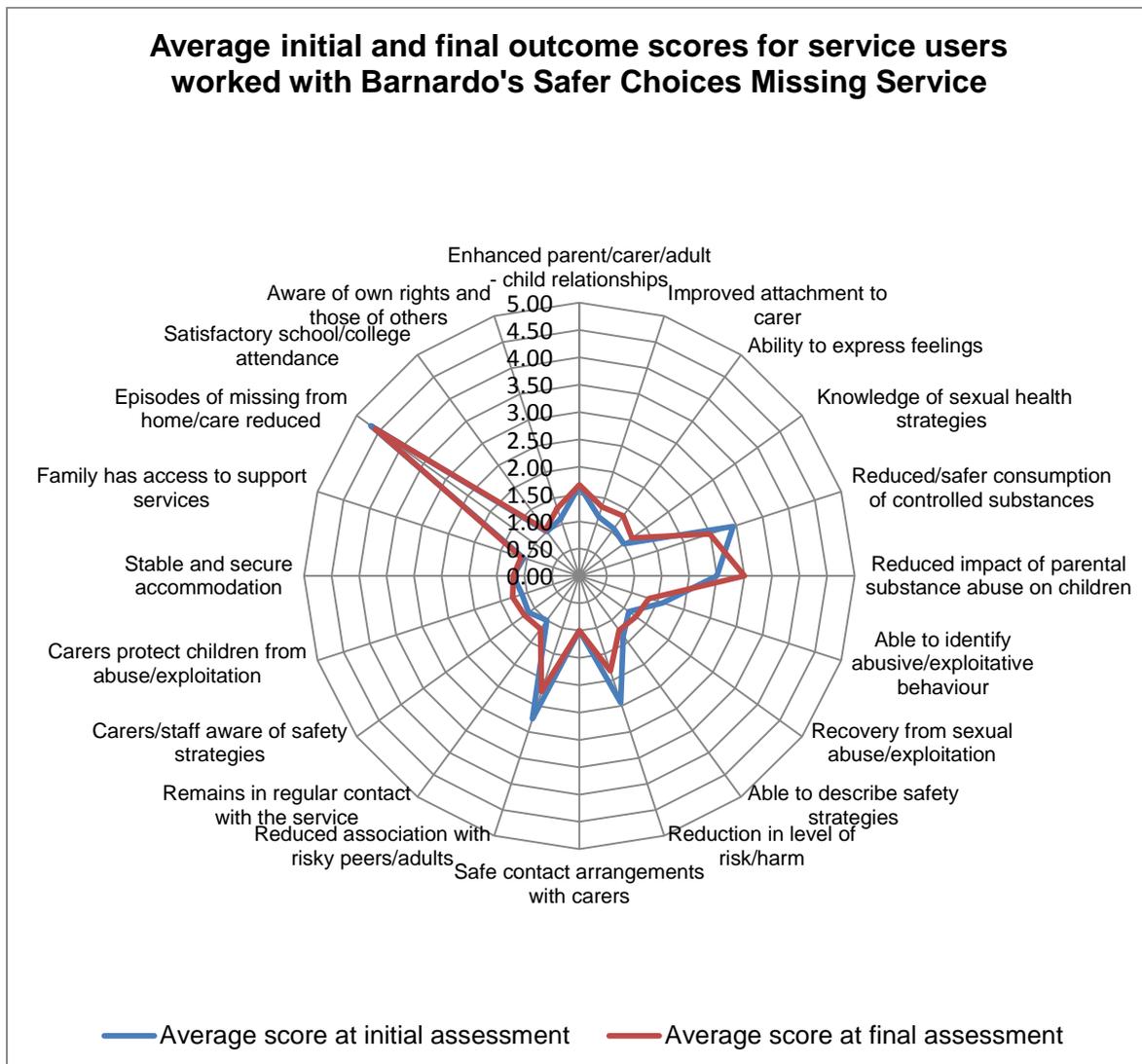


Figure 1: Average outcome scores for young people working with Safer Choices. Data collected and analysed by Barnardo's Safer Choices.

Young people's perspectives

Eight young people who had received a RHI, and the majority of whom had received a 1-1 service from Safer Choices, were interviewed face to face in interviews that lasted on average around 40 minutes. The start of each interview included questions and discussion around six individual vignettes describing young people in fictional situations, designed to enable young people to explore and discuss missing episodes without disclosing any personal details. These vignettes can be seen in the Appendix. Despite this research design, several of the young people were open about their experiences and where appropriate this additional information has been included.

Why young people go missing

While reflecting on the vignettes they were given the young people tended to respond with an emotional explanation for why young people ran away. Several respondents suggested that young people could feel insecure and nervous when they are placed in care and stressed or anxious when they are under pressures at home. The point of entry into care was seen as a time that was particularly fraught with anxiety, high emotion and miscommunication about the decisions behind the move.

“She’s finding it weird that she’s moved into a residential...maybe she just doesn’t know how to accept it...if they’d spoke to her about everything that’s happened and why she’s there...”

Words such as ‘pressure’, ‘stress’ and ‘having no freedom’ were frequently used when describing why a young person would run away from home in general, but there were particular issues with being in care and group living situations, in that the young person might ‘not feel part of’ the unit or ‘not understand’ why they had been placed there, or that they missed contact with their siblings or experienced frustration with others in the environment:

“Just getting annoyed by people in here [...] sometimes it’s the workers, sometimes the other people” (Male respondent)

Adverse and traumatic experiences in childhood, such as witnessing violence and family conflict were also picked up on as a reason for young people going missing, and also how it might affect young people when they are missing (such as being quick to respond to situations with violence).

“Like it’s not exactly the parents fault but if parents arguing and that..... and he’s actually seen that, it stays in his brain” (Male respondent)

One of the vignettes included the topic of social media and a young person talking to a ‘friend’ online prior to going missing; in each case the young person interviewed described the risks that young person was taking, in general they appeared very aware that the internet can be used to entice young people and that it was dangerous to trust or meet people they only knew online.

“What could have prevented [young person described in the vignette] from going missing?” “Block his internet. His mum and dad checking up on him. Even if they’re busy at work they still have five minutes to check on what their wains doing.” (Male respondent)

“... because its someone online and you don’t know if it’s actually them and then when you go and meet them and it’s not them they might just put you in a car and drive away with you.” (Male respondent)

In terms of their own personal experiences of going missing, the young people described wanting to be with friends, this was often combined with the use of alcohol or drugs (and legal highs in particular).

“I was going to Glasgow everyday, stealing out of shops to get legal highs...” (Male respondent)

The risks of going missing

Using the vignettes young people were mostly able to clearly articulate a range of risks that might be faced in the different scenarios. These tended to fall in to the category of physical risks related to sleeping rough or taking substances; as well as the potential for being harmed or exploited by others.

“He might pass out, he might collapse and die. Someone might spike him with something and he’ll die.” (Male Respondent)

“Sleeping outside. For obvious health reasons and lying there sleeping and anything could happen.” (Male Respondent)

However, some of the scenarios drew a more mixed response, with situations involving rough sleeping or strangers more clearly identified as dangerous, and more nuanced situations involving friends and parties less clear. Most still could identify a range of risks in each situation even if they did not believe that the person was truly in danger.

“Someone being a good pal for letting him crash. I don’t really see anything wrong with that.” (Male respondent).

“Yes [she’s in danger], but she’d probably be in danger if she left as well because she’d been drinking. (Female respondent)

Some young people shared a little about their own experiences of going missing, and the risks frequently related to harm, or potential harm to themselves through misuse of substances.

“Some of the risks they were talking about like passing out and stuff, I’ve passed out before. It’s scary how it can happen to me” (Male respondent).

Prevention and Intervention

The question ‘what would have stopped this young person going missing?’ again brought a variety of responses. In general the young respondents felt that having contact with family members, friends and more freedom would stop the young people in the vignette examples from going missing, these answers reflecting the reasons given for why young people might run away in the first place. Another suggestion was to ensure that young people had access to opportunities and things to do, to distract them from the stress, pressure or boredom that they experienced. Young people also felt that there could be a better understanding of the pressures that some young people faced.

“His mum [could have done the chores] whilst he’s doing his exams because it’s stressing him out. I done that as well when I was staying with my mum. I was doing my exams and I was doing everything. I was like ‘no’ I’m going out....” (Male respondent).

In general the role of the family was a repeated topic among the young people, whether that was parents spending time with young people to ensure they were safe on the internet to ensuring young people are able to visit with family members, particularly siblings, when they had been placed in residential care.

[Question] What could have prevented Josie/Jack from running away?

[Answer] Contact

[Question] Does that mean as much contact as he wants or just knowing that there’s some at all?

[Answer] Just knowing that there’s some at all (Male respondent)

However, some of the young people appeared to suggest that once someone has gone missing one time they will continue to repeat this pattern, for example: ‘...if he goes missing once he’s still going to go missing’ and ‘if he’s 13 then it’s too late now, it’s too late’. And a further young person responded to the question: ‘Why do you think Connor doesn’t need any support?’ with the answer: ‘Cause any support wouldn’t change him at aged 17’. These comments appear to highlight the importance that should be placed on early intervention and indeed prevention.

In terms of what would make young people return home after they had been missing for a period of time the responses were fairly polarised. In some cases there was suggestion of just calling their parent(s) to come and get them, particularly if it appeared the missing episode was out of character. Other young people suggested that a young person would not want to come back if they had been drinking, perhaps thinking they would get into more trouble for drinking than they would for running away, others identified that in the main they would tend to come back on their own when they felt like it.

“He might realise how boring it is and not do it again because it’s quite boring when you run away.” (Male respondent)

“He’ll probably just come back in a day or two anyway; he probably just needs a wee break.” (Male respondent)

In relation to support required in order to return home, or to prevent the young person from going missing again, the most frequent responses were in relation to housing and homeless support; support for drinking and use of other substances, and also in relation to family support and mediation.

Sharing their own experiences of the service

Around half of the young people were positive when asked about their relationship with their keyworker from Safer Choices. They were described as easy to talk to and several of the young people who took part felt they could be trusted with more information than they might have told the police or their family or other people in their lives. However, this was not

always the case, particularly at their start of their involvement with the service and it was clear that it took time to build trust and relationships.

“... I didn't quite know how far I could go without her saying oh no I need to go and speak to someone else about that. But basic things were fine, if she asked if I was doing drugs I'd say no and she'd say I'm not going to tell anyone but I'd think yes but you probably will” (Female respondent)

However, later in the interview this same respondent said in response to the question ‘What did you like about the support you got?’

“Probably that I would say more to her than I would to anyone else because if I went downstairs and started telling the staff they would straight away say oh we'll need to tell your social worker about that but with her it would only be if it was something really serious that she would pass it on”.(Female respondent)

Young people clearly have a complicated balancing act going on between what to disclose and what not to disclose and this can be particularly hard when it involves other people like their friends. There is a tension between having freedom, being safe and the desire to avoid getting into trouble or have their peers get into trouble. In this respect, many young people preferred having someone to talk to who was not from a statutory agency and although several young people described the police as being kind and asking questions about their safety, most struggled to be open with them, as one young person described:

“That's what I didn't like it was the same police officers that kept picking me up I was like no, get lost”. (Male respondent)

Whereas a female respondent described her interaction with the Safer Choices worker:

“The kind of main focus was that I was going missing. They were asking what I was doing when I was away, was I drinking, taking drugs. That came into it as well. It was definitely more to do with the missing thing but she did ask what I was doing, who I was with, did I get in trouble, did the police see me stuff like that. It wasn't just you went missing why did you go missing; she was more interested in what I'd been doing while I was away” (Female respondent)

However, many still felt that they had to hold information back and could not be completely honest. Some young people felt that the involvement of yet another worker in their lives was intrusive, and others did not seem to have registered the role of the service and what it could have offered them amongst all of these services.

“I had a Barnardo's worker, a drug and alcohol worker, a social worker. I was surrounded with all the staff. I was just like 'no, I'm not meeting anyone” (Female respondent)

Despite these early perceptions, the majority of respondents were no longer involved with the service and so this perhaps enabled them to reflect on what they had learned in a way that current service users may not.

“... I didn’t think he was going to help me out but I gave him a chance and it did [...] when I first met him I was like oh here we go here’s someone else trying to control my life and then you get to know someone so it’s good” (Male respondent)

Most of the respondents had spent some time working 1-1 with a Safer Choices worker during which time they discussed the risks they are taking when they go missing. For some young people these were risks they hadn’t ever considered and for others they may have been risks that other people had told them about, but they had refused to acknowledge at the time. For some of the respondents the distance created by their having moved on from that period in their lives appeared to make it easier for them to accept these potential risks and reflect that they had perhaps been lucky not to have been seriously hurt. This knowledge had affected some of the young people in this study and some respondents stated it had changed their behaviour.

“I definitely think that I think more before I do something whereas before it would be after I would think I shouldn’t really have done that [...] I never thought that stuff actually happens, I thought it was just stuff that you hear about but obviously it does” (Male respondent)

“ [Now] I’d just take myself away from the situation but I wouldn’t want to run from it cause it just makes it worse and I learned that, it makes it worse when you run away from it” (Female respondent)

Young people frequently described the information and advice received from their Safer Choices worker as helpful. However, while most recognised that this information was useful some found it harder to take on board the advice.

“I’d never ever thought about it [the risks]. Then I read some of the stories and watched some of the actors and realised it does happen to people. (Male respondent)

“He gave me lots of good advice I just never took it...I’m my own person” (Male respondent)

However, the Safer Choices worker may have had more of an influence on some of the young people who were less likely to listen to their family or the police. At times they were seen as more knowledgeable or credible because of their professional and personal experiences.

“Good advice but I already knew about it but he worded it different” (Male respondent)

“...because it was somebody different, it was somebody outside the family so I listened a bit more, because when the Polis were just shouting at me I just thought nah I don’t want to talk to youse but with [Safer Choices worker] was more understanding of how it was and how I felt” (Male respondent)

Young people also mentioned a practical element to the service, focusing on harm reduction and practical strategies while missing was also useful.

“She was saying stuff like obviously we don’t want you to go missing but if you are can you make sure you’ve got money, your phone, your charger...stuff like that. Before that I probably wouldn’t have thought of anything like that, I would go with no phone, no money...”

Six of the young people stated they no longer went missing; this change in behaviour was explained mainly as stemming from changes in themselves or their circumstances: growing out of it, now having permission to be with friends or having stopped their use of legal highs. A small number of young people did reflect on the influence of Safer Choices on their behaviour too. Two young people stated they did occasionally still go missing, however, both state it was less frequent and that they were more likely to tell people where they would be.

“If I didn’t have [worker] I think I would, I would still be running away” (Female respondent)

Professional perspectives

The young people who go missing

When asked to describe the young people in their experience who go missing there was no clear ‘type’ of young person affected in terms of demographic; professionals could give examples that related to both genders and all ages. However, what did emerge were descriptions of young people with trauma issues or problems with attachment. This was something very much linked with young people in care who struggle to form healthy relationships and display low self-esteem.

Professionals went on to describe that where young people have experienced chaotic childhoods with neglectful parenting, particularly where there have not been strong boundaries, they can feel further isolated by being placed in care and it can be seen as very restricting and a form of ‘punishment’ that young people wish to escape from. This is often expressed by their urge to leave when they choose and spend time with peers, friends and family who they often feel understand and like them more than those people who are paid to be with them. Young people often bond or ally strongly with other young people who have experienced similarly troubled backgrounds; these relationships have the potential to be positive and affirming but also have the potential to be destructive to each party.

Social media was identified as playing quite a large role in the lives on the young people with strong emotional feelings being created around individuals who young people speak to only briefly online. Similar strong bonds can be created where young people are putting themselves at risk sexually online in a way it was felt they may not have been able to in the past. Making these connections is very easy for young people through the use of computers and mobile phones, significantly Smart Phone technology with access to numerous social media apps through wireless connection or 3G/4G. This can lead to them running away to meet individuals who are essentially strangers to them, putting themselves in many different types of risky situations.

As a result the identified 'pull factors' for these young people included spending time with friends or acquaintances and taking part in activities that would be forbidden, such as alcohol and drug use and sometimes the offending behaviour that goes with these activities including theft to access them and the resulting public order offences. Residential respondents particularly identified that for some young people the weekend holds a special significance in that it is considered 'party time' and young people are drawn with their peers to the city centre or 'party flats' for the excitement and the 'buzz'. In some cases the young people avoid returning afterwards because they fear being punished for being drunk or high or late resulting in a longer missing episode.

Pushing against new or unwelcome boundaries put in place by a children's home is a key factor for these young people. Other 'push factors' identified by the professional respondents included being unsettled in a children's home, or having multiple changes of placement, leading to further instability and potential resentments. For some young people leaving can be a way of coping with changes in their living situation, changes within the unit or at home; particularly at times when the unit is noisy or uncomfortable to be in, young people might want to just walk away from it. It was reiterated that it is very easy for one individual to disrupt a whole unit, causing frustration and avoidance in some young people and providing temptation and 'something to join in with' in others.

Being removed from mainstream school was also identified by a social worker as having an impact on young people. This can have multiple effects such as removing previous boundaries and daily structures, also the young people might then come into contact with other young people who are also struggling and have been removed from mainstream.

From the responses both push and pull factors were equally strong drivers of behaviour in the opinion of the professional respondents and some situations provide both push and pull for the young people simultaneously. For instance, where there is exploitation they can be both drawn to it and also feel a desire to hide it from the adults in their life who could protect them.

Missing episodes

Key triggers and patterns

In terms of what can trigger episodes of going missing, again the issue of being accommodated and the disruption this can cause both in practical and emotional terms was identified, as were further emotional upsets such as arguments with friends, peers, partner or their family. Young people can often struggle to express these feelings of being let down. Where they feel that the children's house is not allowing them time with family or friends, for instance if time with family has been denied for whatever reason, this can cause young people to feel abandoned or left out or punished for something that is outwith their control.

Respondents were asked if they could identify any patterns to the young people who go missing, the majority of respondents could not identify a particular age range or gender who were more likely to go missing, in their experience, however, when it came to when young people tended to go missing the majority of professional respondents highlighted Friday nights and the weekend as the periods of time they were likely to head off out and often not

come back for hours or days. This is not by any means the only time young people go missing, several respondents took pains to describe other young people who did not fit this mould but this certainly appeared to be the most predictable time for young people to take off. This time of the week also appeared strongly linked with pull factors such as being with peers, drinking, use of drugs or New Psychoactive Substances (NPS or 'legal highs') and in many cases heading towards Glasgow city centre and known popular hangouts for young people such as the Four Corners (a location within Glasgow city centre at the intersection of four roads, where young people often congregate). Anxieties about not wanting to return to the placement while under the influence of drugs or alcohol could also affect the length of missing episodes with young people choosing to remain away longer to avoid further consequences.

Risks while missing

There are multiple risks that young people face while they are missing, which can broadly be split into two groups: risks to self and risks to others. The risks to self that young people could face that were identified by the respondents included being vulnerable to sexual exploitation. There is a real concern expressed by respondents that some of these young people are very easy prey for those who might want to target them. Staff in children's houses are aware that some of the young people don't identify these types of risks and don't ask questions about why someone would seek them out or why they would be given money or drugs or alcohol. There was a comment made that 'young people learn how to act tough' and this means they will do what they feel they have to, to get by, they are very adaptable.

"... it depends what the peer group and the levels of that group accepts as normal will define how far a young person can go" (Safer Choices worker)

Substance use was highlighted by many respondents as a real issue for young people's risk taking and missing episodes, in particular legal highs were identified as a problem. Several respondents made the connection between substance misuse and emotions in the young people, identifying that some young people are actively trying to block out or forget what is going on in their lives. Use of substances like these however means young people come into contact with dealers, have to come up with the means to pay for them and then are even further at risk while they are under the influence, when their decision making is even further compromised. Other non-exploitative victimisation is also an issue in the lives of these young people in the forms of violence, such as peer-on-peer fighting or taking risks with regard to sexual activity. These issues can be exacerbated by substance misuse which lowers inhibitions even further and can result in young people 'going along with' acts they might not have otherwise done.

"... sometimes they might find themselves under pressure because they've agreed to do something and then changed their mind but feel unable to get out of the situation..." (Safer Choices worker)

Other forms of exploitation can be a risk factor for the young people, particularly with regards to offending when other individuals will appear to do favours for and support young people with accommodation, food, substances etc. but will in time demand some form of recompense, this repayment can take the form of expecting young people to carry out criminal acts such as shoplifting and carrying drugs.

Getting involved with offending can be considered both a risk to themselves and also a risk to others and this offending behaviour can take the form of offending for financial gain such as housebreaking or shoplifting. Also when young people are misusing substances their behaviour can become very out of control and violent resulting in the potential for serious harm to others.

*“... just even the places they’re associating and hanging about. There’s obviously a criminal element but there’s also any number of opportunistic people that are about and they can get very quickly drawn into something like that”
(Residential worker)*

Many of the respondents expressed real anxieties and concern about the young people in their care, in terms of being ‘corporate parents’ residential staff in particular described anxious nights trying to track young people down and times they have tried to intervene and protect young people from potentially risky situations and individuals.

“... all you want them to do is come home safe, so you’re always thinking outside the box, what if, what if, can I do any more to see if I could get her home, do you know what I mean?” (Residential worker)

*“I just worried that somebody had taken her or that she’d met someone older or she ended up on her way to London. You know you hear these stories and you just can’t help but feel sorry as you would do with your own children ...”
(Residential worker)*

When staff identify risks that young people in their care are vulnerable to they will try to divert young people from that and some strategies for doing that were described by respondents. This can involve going to collect young people at night, ensuring a young person has a cheap, inexpensive phone that would not be sold but that staff could contact the young person on, structuring group activities on a Friday or Saturday night and checking social media to find out what plans young people are making.

The Barnardo’s Safer Choices Missing Service

Descriptions by professional respondents used to describe Safer Choices were overwhelmingly that it was independent, voluntary, child friendly and were therefore in a position to engage young people better. Other benefits identified included the specialist skills Barnardo’s workers bring, additional knowledge and assessment tools particularly with regard to identifying CSE. It was felt that Safer Choices itself would help increase capacity in other agencies and they would have more ability to be flexible and persistent with young people in ways that other agencies cannot.

The police respondents particularly highlighted the rapport that the workers would have and the chance to probe more deeply than they might be able to into the risks young people might face alongside the chance to guide or signpost young people with particular needs and vulnerabilities.

“They have the time and the skills and the relationship so they can get more information than we can as Police Officers” (Police respondent)

Also identified and regarded positively was the training, guidance and education that Barnardo’s Missing workers had carried out in other agencies in the early months of the project.

“I think their knowledge as well, they’ve been able to link us into agencies in Glasgow that we didn’t know existed” (Social work respondent)

In principle the service itself was seen very positively with many of the residential and social work respondents describing positive interactions with the service, however not all of them were aware of the 1-1 service that was offered. In contrast there was good awareness of the Safer Choices project’s involvement with the Return Home Interviews. The initial service design was to respond to referrals from young people accommodated in children’s houses, flexibility and responsiveness within the service enabled the inclusion of young people going missing from home. There was some concern that despite positive working relationships with most of the staff, there were a few issues, for example a couple of occasions where appointments had not been confirmed in the appointment book at children’s houses.

The service model

The independent non-statutory nature of Safer Choices was highlighted by the professional respondents as directly linked to increased opportunity to gain more information from the young people; something that some residential staff, social workers and police admit can be difficult for them.

“I think it’s just to make sure young people ... if they do find themselves in a situation or if they’ve had an experience and they feel they’ve nobody to talk to then Barnardo’s is there to help them, they’re this independent force for good, I think everybody knows about Barnardo’s and what they do for children. My hope would be that young people will view them as allies not enemies, as social workers and maybe residential staff and police are quite often viewed sometimes by young people ...” (Residential respondent)

“... young people don’t want to speak to social work, and the police are maybe the people that have arrested them the week before and the next week they are trying to have a chat with them, so it’s a bit of a conflict.” (Social work respondent)

The ability to come back again and again with young people even when the initial response was negative was seen as a positive aspect of the project. Residential workers described multiple attempts on the part of Safer Choices workers trying to engage with the young person, and if that failed trying with a different worker; this persistence in trying to engage with a young person is simply not something that the police are able to do. The flexibility of the service also enables the worker to try these different approaches and where it is required provide further guidance or support, 1-1 work or even as described by one respondent, spend some time with a parent if it is required.

This ability to bring further specialist knowledge enhances what is currently provided by residential workers, the police and social workers, particularly within risk and need assessment for instance identifying when young people are at risk of or experiencing CSE, but also other knowledge such as identifying known risky locations that young people might be visiting and individuals whose names crop up time and again. This broad knowledge base enables them to pick up on details and issues that might be missed by others.

“So the police role is more about making sure they are returned home whereas your work is maybe getting that time to get to know them and stop it happening again” (Safer Choices worker)

The project gives the Safer Choices worker more leeway and time to spend with young people who would not perhaps be considered an appropriate case for the police or social work. For instance, where no crime has been committed or no formal social work intervention is required, but where the young person and/or their family simply need some support. The acknowledged heavy workloads of both social work and the police are mentioned as issues when it comes to forming a relationship with the young people and particularly with regards to the police, having an officer’s time freed up in this way was acknowledged as beneficial for them.

Effectiveness, impact and outcomes

Impact

From the interviews the benefits identified were, for example greater risk awareness in staff, particularly residential staff and particularly with regards to CSE and learning more about some of the dangers that can be found online. Also an increased staff awareness of the sorts of questions they could be asking young people when they return, that could help residential staff identify the sorts of risks young people are taking.

“... the feeling is that’s one of the more successful aspects of the service, it’s generally through partnerships with those different agencies within the Renfrewshire area, statutory and voluntary services. People have an awareness of our service; they have an awareness of the behaviours around missing young people and an increased awareness around sexual exploitation” (Safer Choices respondent)

These working relationships between agencies are also vital, particularly with regards to sharing intelligence and information regarding both sexual exploitation and the more general risks faced by young people who are missing from home.

“I think they’re great, I think everybody in Paisley really sings their praises because they are such a much needed service. [...] they do fantastic work with them” (Social work respondent)

The Safer Choices staff were able to provide support to the young people, their families and also fellow professionals who felt they could contact them for help at any time. Families in particular were also reassured that they were doing the right thing by reporting young people missing at the earliest possible time.

“For parents it gives an opportunity for somebody to signpost them to interventions to give them guidance again on things to look out for, computers, messages, Facebook sites, all that type of stuff” (Police respondent)

The type of information that workers could access through the young people has the potential to be very useful for police enabling them to identify locations or individuals of interest to them, e.g. legal high shops (selling NPS), adults of concern and other peers of concern. There has also been increased openness and information sharing between all agencies, something that as one respondent pointed out, given the current climate, might have occurred anyway but this has certainly helped pull people together. The police respondents also highlighted the value of the training that had been given from Safer Choices to the residential workers regarding the types of questions to ask and the kind of information to collect which they felt enabled staff to better recognise the signs of concern.

The project was felt to have raised awareness among young people of the risks, particularly when young people feel they have been at fault for the situations in which they have found themselves. However, it is acknowledged that despite positive responses from some of the young people this does not always equate to behaviour change.

“I do believe it will have an impact on young people being able to stay safe but I can’t categorically state that because we don’t know ...” (Social work respondent)

It was felt by some professional respondents that even if there was no measurable reduction in the number of episodes of young people going missing they might in fact be taking more steps towards being safe when they are out and making better choices. Residential staff, in particular, when asked about the impact of the service felt that although changes in numbers of missing episodes might not be seen immediately, the intervention would be having an effect on the young people and their safety in the longer term.

“... sometimes it is hard to measure the meeting between Barnardo’s and the child, my thinking is if, see if it makes one child think twice about getting into a car or going to an address they don’t know, speaking to a person they don’t know” (Police respondent)

Intelligence and information sharing

A key issue for the police was in increasing the level and quality of intelligence from the missing episodes, something they struggled to achieve themselves with the young people. There was a mixed picture in terms of intelligence gathering. Whilst there were clear improvements in awareness and education among agencies, the perception among several police respondents was that the intelligence gathering aspect of the service could be improved. Countering this, however, is the clear view from a strategic police level that the intelligence picture had improved considerably allowing extensive analytical work to take place to identify key locations or ‘hot spots’ where young people congregate, the sharing of

this information across all agencies and identification of key individuals who were at particular risk of CSE.

Other agencies noted that the primary focus of the RHI was not intelligence gathering per se, but rather the support needs of the child. Although intelligence may be a useful by-product of that RHI it was noted that there were other vehicles for the service to contribute to intelligence gathering, such as at the Vulnerable Young Persons Group. These divergences may reflect different perspectives and experiences, for example between front line and senior staff, as well as the slightly different set of priorities that each partner agency brings to the service. In addition, it was felt that key briefings by police officers to residential staff have improved the flow of information and intelligence allowing links to be made between individuals and locations which were not previously known. This has enabled a bespoke approach to gathering further information in order to develop a rich intelligence picture and appropriate interventions.

Factors influencing effectiveness

Engaging young people is an issue for the Safer Choices workers, as it is for other professionals such as the police, although perhaps to a lesser extent. Some young people will refuse to talk initially and, in some cases, at all with the worker, some young people would talk initially but then retreat again. Respondents felt that sometimes young people were simply snowed under with different workers or that without having a prior relationship young people would be less likely to open up as they would be considered just another stranger in their lives. This was something identified by the project and in recent months more priority has been put on building relationships and engaging with young people and staff from children's houses, even at times when they are not working with a specific child. There were early issues engaging young people to meet with Safer Choices workers so it was suggested that more work might need to be done to ensure that all staff were fully aware and supportive of Safer Choices working with the young people by ensuring that appointments were put in the diary and young people supported to keep these.

"... the nature of what they're looking at with the young person, you've got to spend a lot of time building up a relationship and stuff like that, two young people particularly who have kind of rejected work with Safer Choices are really really traumatised young people who struggle to build up relationships with a worker"
(Social work respondent)

Another factor that could influence the effectiveness of the service is the timing of the intervention; where behaviours are persistent there is a great deal of resistance to any attempt to change it. Overall it was felt that the earlier the referral was made and the worker involved then the better. Often young people think they are in full control of their choices and can look after themselves and sometimes don't even acknowledge that they are missing as they consider themselves with their friends and just having a good time. Recognising their own vulnerabilities, the risks and potential exploitation in various situations is not straight forward for some of these young people.

Changes and Improvements

It was felt to be vital for front line police to recognise signs of trauma among young people on the street, however, it was reported that although training was well attended it tended to be by those who are specialist officers and therefore already fairly knowledgeable and well-informed. Understandably operational priorities will need to take priority; however, as the training is of benefit to a wide range of practitioners the next challenge is to ensure that this training is rolled out across the force. It might be worth considering different methods of reaching those officers in order to overcome this issue, perhaps making use of online learning or information sheets/pamphlets to ensure every front line officer has knowledge of what to look for in vulnerable young people who are missing.

Professionals working together across agencies for shared outcomes rely on support from keyworkers to encourage young people to engage with Safer Choices workers, to remind them of appointments and ensure meetings are put in the diary. It was acknowledged that residential workers in particular have a unique relationship with young people and positive encouragement from them could help with the lack of engagement from some young people.

It was suggested by residential respondents that the RHIs might be more effective if there was a short delay after the young person had returned/been returned home. With both police and social work involvement at the point of return, a period of breathing space might lead to greater engagement. Beyond this, however, it was felt that Safer Choices workers were flexible and willing to try various methods to gain engagement on the part of the young person and to tailor the approach to individuals.

Concern was raised by one respondent regarding young people not in formal mainstream education and it was felt this might link in with periods of going missing, with young people either at increased risk due to not being engaged in positive activities, or by missing with other vulnerable young people who were at risk. This is something worth examining in greater detail in the future.

Clarity regarding the use of the 'traffic light system', the protocol the police use to record the level of severity/concern for the young person, could be improved in some cases. Some very positive relationships were reported between children's houses and the police which ensured good communication and decision-making while others reported struggling to convince the police to accept a severity level they felt was warranted. Clearly risk assessments are dynamic and various factors will impact on risk level and the vulnerability of that young person. Differing agency perspectives and the application of professional judgement, while adding to a broader picture about the young person, also had the potential to result in inconsistencies in assessing a young person's level of risk. However, the focus group felt that the open communication between partners, and the level of CSE training that had been provided in the area has minimised disagreements. Police Scotland are currently piloting a new risk assessment process across three local authorities and it is anticipated that following the successful completion of this, the practice will be adopted across Renfrewshire.

Discussion and Concluding Observations

The strength of the partnership

Bringing three services together in this way to work in a true tri-partnership is not a straightforward task, but from the start it was felt that the relationships and equality between these agencies, and the open sharing of information and intelligence between them, would be vital to the success of this service. It appears that this has been achieved, with all participants speaking highly of the commitment and achievements of the partnership. The strength of the partnership means that even when issues do occur they can be quickly resolved and the service continues to develop and evolve in response to feedback. The commitment from all partners to the partnership and in addressing CSE, particularly in an ever challenging financial climate should be noted.

Expertise and child-centred practice

Despite the partnership being the foundation of the approach, there were clearly added benefits that the involvement of Barnardo's Safer Choices brought to the partnership. The organisational values and experience of Safer Choices ensures that the RHI itself is important on two fronts: firstly, as an information gathering assessment tool, and secondly, as an opportunity for the young person to talk about the circumstances of the missing episode from their own perspective. Key here is the child-centred individualised approach utilised by Safer Choices. Respondents described the service as independent, voluntary, child-friendly, non-statutory and therefore able to engage young people better. These young people would be deemed 'hard to reach' and it was felt by respondents that an independent but highly qualified individual such as a Safer Choices worker might be the best way to involve the young person. The flexibility that Safer Choices brings to working with the young people was also identified as something likely to increase engagement. The expertise of workers in the organisation also allowed for a range of credible 1-1 work to be undertaken. However, while many of the residential and social work respondents were positive about their interactions with the service, some of them were not aware of the 1-1 service that was offered, meaning not all were able to fully comment on it.

The parallel work carried out by the Safer Choices 'street team' in Glasgow city centre was also identified by some professional respondents as providing an extra dimension to the knowledge and tools that the Safer Choices workers have. It supports what Safer Choices does in terms of young runaways and it also provides other types of 'soft intelligence' to other partner agencies. Similarly the project's involvement and participation in the vulnerable young person's (VYP) operational group, care planning meetings and regular visits to children's houses enables a more rounded view of the young person, their strengths and vulnerabilities and risks. This level of contextual knowledge can only help their work with young people, particularly in relation to 1-1 support.

Influence and Learning

Beyond the RHIs and 1-1 input with young people, the service also enables different aspects of integration and cross-agency strategic development, including: the facilitation of training,

across both the local authority and Police Scotland; participation in child protection and vulnerability meetings as well as consultancy support offered.

It appears that, in this respect, Safer Choices has had a large influence in the Renfrewshire area, raising awareness of missing episodes, CSE and increasing practitioners' confidence through training, support and advice. Professional respondents were quick to highlight the learning they had achieved through their involvement with Safer Choices, specifically identifying what they had learned about CSE, something that concerns residential workers and social workers particularly. Training provided by Safer Choices to the workers at children's houses was evaluated by Safer Choices and this evaluation identified a large post-training increase in confidence from workers in their abilities to recognise and approach the topic of CSE with the young people they support.

Engagement

As outlined previously it was felt by both professional and young participants that the police were not best placed to provide the required level of support or guidance and did not have the relationships necessary for the engagement and disclosure required in the RHIs. Professional respondents felt very strongly that the approach, knowledge and expertise of Safer Choices meant that the organisation could maximise engagement with young people. Many of the positive remarks made by young people in this study related to the ease they felt in talking to someone else, with half of the respondents feeling very positive about the Safer Choices worker. These strong relationships between the workers and young people have been created because staff from Safer Choices have been able to use a range of advanced and interpersonal counselling skills to develop empathy for the young people. This constitutes the first building block in developing trust with many of the young people and forms the basis of successful interventions.

Despite this, the lower than anticipated ratio of RHIs to missing episodes was, in part, due to challenges and delays in engaging young people. Even when young people did meet with Safer Choices, a number of young people in the sample struggled to fully engage and open up, at least initially, with the Safer Choices worker. There was concern that some of these young people were overwhelmed with adult workers trying to speak to them and an additional person was too much for them. In terms of helping young people open up with their concerns and share potential risks they may have taken it was queried by social work respondents whether a previous relationship with the young person would help. However, young people often described a mistrust of statutory agencies, and felt that their information would be shared in a way that would be detrimental to them.

However, professionals and young people alike commented on the persistence of Safer Choices, with respondents stating they felt that the workers were doing all they could to be flexible. It is difficult, therefore to identify exactly what else might help increase engagement. In addition, without any point of comparison, it is difficult to assess whether this level of engagement is indeed higher than would be observed with another agency (for example, the Police), or whether the complexity of the missing population simply increases levels of disengagement. The longer length of time taken to undertake RHIs with females is also a point of note, and this finding should be explored further.

Impact

It has been very difficult to assess the impact of the service, due to limitations with the data and the lack of the comparison group. As a result it is not possible to conclude whether Safer Choices is having a long-term impact on outcomes for young people in relation to missing episodes. In the short-term there appears to have been an increase in reports of young people going missing in the pilot area. However, this increase has coincided with awareness-raising and training given to statutory agencies and parents, so this change will likely reflect increased awareness and understanding of the risks and increased opportunities to share information, and potentially demonstrates to what extent the service is being used by referrers and becoming embedded in the local authority. In addition, many of the young people have complex needs and risks that cannot be resolved quickly. Many will require a great deal of long-term, specialised interventions, something that young people should be better placed to access through their involvement with Safe Choices.

Similarly it has been difficult to measure some of the less tangible changes in behaviour. Although many of the young people continued to go missing from both home and children's houses this study could not measure if and in what way young people changed their behaviour and avoided potential risks while they were missing. However, professional respondents did feel that this was happening over time. Similarly, the young people interviewed as part of the evaluation expressed a greater awareness of the risks and were able to reflect on risky situations they had found themselves in. Some of this appeared due to the source of the information; with some young people asserting they would not have listened to the same information had it come from family or the police.

Of the eight young people who were interviewed, three quarters now stated they did not run away any more and the remaining two disclosed that they still might but would take more care and be more aware of the risks.

Risks

There has in the past been an assumption that young women are more likely to run away and more likely to be at risk, however, the evidence from literature appears to show that young men and young women are equally likely to put themselves at risk in this way and equally likely to face similar risks when they are away. Previous studies have suggested that young women are reported missing more quickly than young men but in this study the reverse appears to be true, with males receiving an intervention more quickly. It is important therefore that practitioners do not make judgements about risk based on gender. Similarly a substantial minority of young people went missing during the day, and it is important that these situations are considered as potentially risky as a young person missing overnight.

Some of the young people, when referring to situations outlined in the vignettes, took a somewhat fatalistic approach to the young people who were going missing, suggesting that once someone had gone missing on one occasion, particularly when this was linked to a stressful home situation, they would continue to run away and once away they would not seek help from their family. This highlights the importance of preventing missing episodes in the first place, and identifying those most at risk of running away. When professionals were

asked to describe the young people in their experience who go missing there was no clear 'type' of young person affected in terms of demographics. However, what did emerge were descriptions of young people with trauma issues or problems with attachment, this was something very much linked with young people in care who struggle to form healthy relationships and display low self-esteem. It was felt that these young people are particularly vulnerable to being drawn into risky situations, with the entry in to care a particular trigger point.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the partnership

Strategy, development and awareness-raising

- The awareness-raising and strategic / developmental work has clearly been one of the most successful elements of the Safer Choices partnership. All partners should therefore continue to roll out the CSE briefings to professional staff across Renfrewshire to ensure knowledge and training becomes embedded in practice, with a particular emphasis on front line staff including police officers.
- Following publication of the National Police Scotland pilot, Renfrewshire will revise policies and protocols in relation to risk assessment and missing episodes based on best practice identified following the outcome of this pilot.

Engagement and buy-in

- Safer Choices' position as a third sector agency specialising in working with children and young people meant that it was viewed as child-centred and, as a result of being free of statutory duties, as best placed to engage with the young people. Despite this, and despite high levels of persistence and flexibility by Safer Choices, the rate of engagement caused some delay in undertaking RHIs and direct work. While this may simply reflect the complex nature of the client group, and it is assumed that statutory agencies would have equal or even increased difficulties in engaging these young people, more exploration of this is needed to maximise engagement. In particular the length of time to engage young females in a RHI should be better understood.
- Social Work and Residential staff were often unclear about the 1-1 work, and Safer Choices should look at ways to communicate the content of that work (without of course compromising the young person's privacy), which might help increase knowledge and understanding of the work from all partners. It may mean that other agencies are then better able to support young people and encourage them to engage with the service.
- Safer Choices staff should maintain their current flexibility and be able to respond on an individual basis to young people regarding their needs
- The work that Safer Choices has commenced to develop preventative and multiple approaches within children's houses, for example by ensuring that they are well known by the young people even if a missing incident has not occurred, should also continue to be supported by the partnership.

- The partnership should consider consulting with young people to identify and promote the responses and supports they would like upon their return from those missing episodes.

Communication and learning exchange

- There were mixed views about whether the aim of increasing intelligence and missing, CSE, perpetrators and problem areas had been fully realised. The partnership should seek to clarify the exact purpose of the RHIs and work together to ensure that these aims are understood and achieved.
- Police Scotland should continue to ensure that information is consistently shared in particular with regards to concern reports in relation to those children and young people living at home.
- All agencies continue to explore opportunities to promote and maintain good working relationships and engage in learning exchange opportunities.

Monitoring and outcomes

- It has been difficult to fully assess the effectiveness of the partnership from a retrospective evaluation, as data from which to benchmark has been patchy and inconsistent. Going forward, all partners should consider the outcomes they wish to monitor and ensure that data-sharing and information management systems are in place to support this work.
- It may be beneficial to explore some of the findings in more detail, as although differences were not always significant, they may indicate a pattern of behaviour that is not fully understood or reflected in the data that was available. For example, this might include: gender differences, or differences in missing episodes that occur during the day or at night.

Recommendations for wider practice

Residential practice

- The entry in to residential care was seen as a key trigger point for a missing episode. While this will always be a difficult time for young people, coming often at a point of crisis, social work and residential staff should consider if and how this transition could be better managed.
- Many respondents talked about young people staying away due to fearing the repercussions of being under the influence of alcohol or other substances. It may be beneficial to consider what the current policy is across the children's houses and whether this supports young people to return. Young people may be able to assist in amending this policy where necessary.

Support for young people

- Many young people alluded to the need for some form of family support or mediation in order to help young people return home. Ensuring that there is sufficient provision of these types of services in the areas may also prove helpful.

Wider learning and implementation

- There is nothing to suggest that Renfrewshire is unusual in any respect, the concerns identified by professionals working with young people and the risks faced by young people who run away are likely to be similar across the country. It is important that other local authorities look to how they respond to this group of young people, drawing on the learning from the Safer Choices model. Sharing good practice and learning from projects like this can only help in the long term.

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Appendix

T1 V1.

Josie is 14 and until recently had been living with her mum and stepdad and two younger brothers. Her mum has mental health problems and there had been lots of arguments. Josie also had to spend a lot of time looking after her younger brothers. Due to the situation at home Josie was moved to a children's residential unit a couple of weeks ago, and it is not clear how long she will be there. Her brothers are now living with a foster carer. On Tuesday night Josie doesn't return to the unit.

T1 V1.

Jack is 14 and until recently had been living with his mum and stepdad and two younger brothers. His mum has mental health problems and there had been lots of arguments. Jack also had to spend a lot of time looking after his younger brothers. Due to the situation at home Jack was moved to a children's residential unit a couple of weeks ago, and it is not clear how long he will be there. His brothers are now living with a foster carer. On Tuesday night Jack doesn't return to the unit.

T1 V2.

Leanne is 15 and lives with her mum and two younger brothers. She is always having to look after the younger ones and do housework as well as studying for her exams. She'd rather be hanging around with her friends at the park instead. Her friends all hang out in a big group with some other people that Leanne doesn't know and they all seem to have boyfriends or girlfriends. One day her mum comes home from work and finds that Leanne is not there. She still hasn't turned up by 11pm and Leanne's mum calls the police.

T1 V2.

Luke is 15 and lives with his mum and two younger brothers. He is always having to look after the younger ones and do housework as well as studying for his exams. He'd rather be hanging around with his friends at the park instead. His friends all hang out in a big group with some other people that Luke doesn't know and they all seem to have boyfriends or girlfriends. One day his mum comes home from work and finds that Luke is not there. He still hasn't turned up by 11pm and Luke's mum calls the police.

T1 V3.

Jasmine is 13. She is doing quite well at school and gets on well with her sisters. Recently she has been spending a lot of time on her iPad in her bedroom and her parents are often busy at work so don't have much time to check on her. Jasmine has been making new friends online and enjoys spending hours chatting, messaging and sharing pictures. One day Jasmine's parents come home from work and she is not there. They call all of her school friends but no-one knows where she is. She still hasn't come back by midnight and her parents call the police.

T1 V3.

Jamil is 13. He is doing quite well at school and gets on well with his sisters. Recently he has been spending a lot of time on his iPad in his bedroom and his parents are often busy at work so don't have much time to check on him. Jamil has been making new friends online and enjoys spending hours chatting, messaging and sharing pictures. One day Jamil's parents come home from work and he is not there. They call all of his school friends but no-one knows where he is. He still hasn't come back by midnight and his parents call the police.

T2 V1.

Afifa is 17. There are lots of arguments between her and her family. These often become violent and she has sometimes seen her Dad hitting her Mum. Last week he had threatened to hit Afifa. As a result she has been spending a lot of time out of the house even though she worries about her mum. Afifa has recently been spending more time with a group of people who hang out at the shops. They are a bit older but seem to look out for her. One night after a particularly nasty argument Afifa has had enough and goes out to meet her new friends. One of the guys, John, has his own place and offers to put Afifa up for a while. Afifa doesn't know John that well but he seems nice and so she agrees to stay with him while she thinks about what to do.

T2 V1.

Amir is 17. There are lots of arguments between him and his family. These often become violent and he has sometimes seen his Dad hitting his Mum. Last week he had threatened to hit Amir. As a result Amir has been spending a lot of time out of the house even though he worries about his mum. Amir has recently been spending more time with a group of people who hang out at the shops. They are a bit older but seem to look out for him. One night after a particularly nasty argument Amir has had enough and goes out to meet his new friends. One of the guys, John, has his own place and offers to put Amir up for a while. Amir doesn't know John that well but he seems nice and so he agrees to stay with him while he thinks about what to do.

T2 V2.

Claire is 16. She has been in and out of care for most of her life after she was abused by a family friend when she was six. Her mum struggled with addiction for many years and couldn't look after her very well. Claire started drinking and smoking cannabis a lot, and getting in to trouble at school. She was expelled from school about six months ago. Her drinking has got worse since then and she has been in a bit of trouble with the police. Claire had been recently staying with her Aunt Margaret but they have been arguing a lot, especially since the police have been coming to the door. After Claire stole money from her aunt's purse, Aunt Margaret decided that it was the last straw and kicked Claire out. Claire had nowhere to go, she has no money and spent last night sleeping in the bus station.

T2 V2.

Connor is 16. He has been in and out of care for most of his life after he was abused by a family friend when he was six. His mum struggled with addiction for many years and couldn't look after him very well. Connor started drinking and smoking cannabis a lot, and getting in to trouble at school. He was expelled from school about six months ago. His drinking has got worse since then and he has been in a bit of trouble with the police. Connor had been recently staying with his Aunt Margaret but they have been arguing a lot, especially since the police have been coming to the door. After Connor stole money from his aunt's purse, Aunt Margaret decided that it was the last straw and kicked Connor out. Connor had nowhere to go, he has no money and spent last night sleeping in the bus station.

T2 V3.

Jenna is 15 and lives at home with her mum, dad and two younger sisters. She has just finished her exams. Things are OK at home, but she is a bit bored and isn't too sure what she wants to do next. Some of her friends have started hanging out with a group of people who are quite a bit older and live in the next town. These people often have parties and Jenna's friends say that there is often free alcohol at them. Jenna hasn't been to any of the parties before but one night she goes along. The party is OK but Jenna isn't too sure about some of the people there. Jenna ends up really drunk, and the person whose house it is says she can stay there. It's late and a long way home and Jenna doesn't have any money to get home, so she decides to stay out.

T2 V3.

Jordan is 15 and lives at home with his mum, dad and two younger sisters. He has just finished his exams. Things are OK at home, but he is a bit bored and isn't too sure what he wants to do next. Some of his friends have started hanging out with a group of people who are quite a bit older and live in the next town. These people often have parties and Jordan's friends say that there is often free alcohol at them. Jordan hasn't been to any of the parties before but one night he goes along. The party is OK but Jordan isn't too sure about some of the people there. Jordan ends up really drunk, and the person whose house it is says he can stay there. It's late and a long way home and Jordan doesn't have any money to get home, so he decides to stay out.