

AMBITIOUS PLYMOUTH SCRUTINY PANEL

Integrated Youth Services
Missing Young People's Team



1. Introduction:

Research evidence indicates that children who go missing from home or Local Authority Care represent a particularly vulnerable group requiring special attention in terms of their potential for maltreatment and significant harm, including sexual abuse and exploitation. Early identification, assessment of risk and provision of support is therefore essential.

Plymouth City Councils Missing Young People's Team, renamed as MIST (Missing, Intervention and Support Team) is part of a multi-agency response to minimise the risk of children and young people going missing and to protect them from harm or exploitation.

MIST consists of four FTE Professional Youth Workers, a Full Time Qualified Social Worker and is managed by a Service Manager (Qualified Social Worker) from within the Youth Services. The Police are currently recruiting an officer to align themselves closely to the team.

The Team is informed by the following:

- *Plymouth City Councils Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures*
- *Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and Working Together March 2013*
- *Statutory Guidance on children who Run Away and go missing from Home or Care 2011*
- *South West Peninsula Child Sexual Exploitation Standard Operating Protocol*

2. What the team is responsible for:

The Team has a shared responsibility for action to reduce the incidence of children in Plymouth going missing from home and from care.

3. The team's aims & objectives:

MIST aims to deliver, in partnership with other services, a brief intervention service to children to reduce the likelihood of further running away and missing episodes as well as a reduction in risk taking behaviour and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

Through awareness campaigns in schools and with information, encourage parents and carers:

- To better understand the reasons why children run away and the risks they are exposed to when missing
- To be alert to any likelihood that this may happen
- To take reasonable steps to keep their children safe and know their whereabouts
- To take prompt action to locate them if they have any concerns
- To report them missing to the police as soon as possible if they are unable to locate them and remain concerned for them.

Provide information, personal, health and social education within Plymouth schools to reduce the incidence of children who run away and the harm to them arising from it (for example Child Sexual Exploitation).

4. Who it works with:

The team works closely with Devon and Cornwall Police, who provide most of the referrals, using the I21a process, to the team. In addition, there is a partnership and very close working relationship with Children's Social Care, looking at young people who go missing from their care placement. The team also works closely with the wider Youth Service, (Community teams and YOT) as well as the voluntary sector such as Barnardos and NSPCC. Finally, schools are a key to any support and early intervention that young people and their carers may require. The team are planning to run two Educational Programmes on Child Sexual Exploitation, at Stoke Dameral Community College and ACE, starting in the new academic year.

The target group for support from the Team are young people aged 10 – 17 years, who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts are unknown.

5. How it works:

MIST receives notifications from the police of all children reported missing from home in Plymouth.

On receipt of information, the team checks with social care to see if the child is known. Where this is found to be the case, the team liaise with the responsible case worker to ascertain whether or not services are required. The team will work with children's social care and other teams where children are already known and receiving support. It is primarily an early intervention team responding to needs identified by a missing person report.

A Return Interview will be carried out by practitioners from the Team who will make contact with the child and/or parent(s) within a maximum 48 hours, but ideally within 24 hours, where:

- The child is aged under 13 years
- The safe and well interview or other information about a child indicates that they are vulnerable
- a child has gone missing for a second or subsequent time.

Information is reflected in the Return Interview form and CSE Risk Assessment.

6. Key processes:

The interview and actions that follow from it should:

- Identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the Safe and Well check (his/her medical condition should be discussed and any need for medical attention assessed);
- Understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away;
- Try to prevent it happening again

Where an allegation of physical or sexual abuse is made or becomes evident, child protection procedures must be implemented and contact made immediately with the Police Child Protection Unit.

The interview could lead to a pre-CAF initial assessment subject to agreement with the child and family. Depending on the issues and presentation of need, this may lead to a full CAF assessment and an offer of service for up to 3 months or signposting to other more appropriate teams.

Where a service is offered, this will be in order to:

- Increase the child's awareness of the dangers of running away and the issues young missing persons face
- Build up a trusting relationship with him or her leading to opportunities to identify the issues that made them run away from home or care
- To help the child to seek safer solutions to deal with their issues other than running away
- Enable him or her to feel safe to ask questions if they don't understand something or want to find answers to their questions.

7. Key performance data and outcomes:

The Team aims to make contact with the child/young person and/or parents within a maximum of 48 hrs and undertake a return interview and risk assessment.

Based upon the outcome of this meeting the team can then offer a brief focussed intervention and/ or appropriate signposting in order to:

- Increase the child's awareness of the dangers of running away and the issues young missing persons face
- Build up a trusting relationship with him or her leading to opportunities to identify the issues that made them run away from home or care
- To help the child to seek safer solutions to deal with their issues other than running away
- Enable him or her to feel safe to ask questions if they don't understand something or want to find answers to their questions.

April to June 2013:

The team began taking referrals in April and in the first quarter there have been **122 referrals, 42** which have been on **LAC young people**. This equates to approximately a third of the work coming into the team.

8. Current Developments

At the beginning of June the Team were requested to undertake interviews with officers from Devon and Cornwall Police, looking at the possibility of 'Looked After Children' being at risk of and/or being exposed to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). To date, as part of Phase I, the team has engaged with 13 young people and this work is on-going.

In addition, two schools have agreed for the Team to deliver the programme 'Be-Wise to Sexual Exploitation' to year 9 in September 2013.

We are also exploring with a National Missing Persons Service a 24 hour service for advice to parents and young people who have concerns and wish to talk with someone about the issue of running away or going missing. We are securing an 0800 number and are planning to produce leaflets and information with in social media about support we can offer to Plymouth young people and their parents/carers.

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