1 in 9 – The Scottish Coalition for Young Runaways

A SCOPING STUDY OF SERVICES FOR YOUNG RUNAWAYS

FINAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

1   This study was undertaken to examine responses to young people in Scotland who run away from home or substitute care. The study, commissioned by 1 in 9, The Scottish Coalition for Young Runaways, originated from concerns about the experiences of young people who run away or are forced to leave where they live and aimed to find out more about the responses currently in place to address the needs of these young people.

2   Research carried out in England and Wales for the Children's Society (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Rees and Lee, 2005) indicated that approximately 11% of young people had run away overnight before the age of 16. This represented one in nine of the youth population (Rees and Lee, 2005: 7). The Aberlour Child Care Trust commissioned a similar study to assess the situation in Scotland. This study (Wade, 2001), based on information gathered from young people and agencies, also concluded that by the age of 16, at least one in nine (11%) of children and young people will have run away overnight on one or more occasion. Approximately 9000 children and young people run away each year in Scotland (Wade, 2001).

3   Studies conducted across the United Kingdom have highlighted:

- There appears to be little difference in the rates of running away between urban and rural areas;
- Running away is commonly due to arguments and conflict at home, experiences of emotional or physical abuse, or to seek respite from parental problems (i.e. alcohol or drug dependency, mental health issues);
- Running away is also closely associated with problems at school;
- Although the rate of running away is slightly higher in poorer families, the link between poverty and running away seems to be indirect;
- The majority of young runaways have run from their family home;
- A high proportion of young runaways are from stepfamily backgrounds;
- Young people in substitute care are over-represented among runaways but research indicates that many of these young people have a history of running away and the quality of care may not be directly linked;
- One in six young people sleep rough while away;
- One in twelve young people report being hurt or harmed while away;
- Very few young people seek help from agencies while away;
- The majority of young people who run away from home had not been reported to the police as missing while away.

(Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Wade, 2001; Rees and Rutherford, 2001; Rees and Smeaton, 2001; Rees and Lee, 2005; Owen and Graham, 2004; Smeaton and Rees, 2004; Smeaton, 2005; Macaskill, 2006).

4   In England and Wales, the Social Exclusion Unit was given the remit of responding to the findings of the Safe on the Streets Research Team study and published a report in 2002, *Young Runaways,* (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002) which outlined key recommendations for the delivery of services to support young

runaways. This report recognised that not all young people who needed support were receiving it and a monitoring and evaluation group was formed to help implement the recommendations of the report and to monitor progress. A recent consultation by the Children's Society examined the extent to which the proposed measures had been put in place and is expected to produce a final report later in 2007.

5   Both the Social Exclusion Unit (2001) and studies carried out in Scotland (Wade, 2001; Owen and Graham, 2004) have reiterated the difficulties in obtaining official statistics on young runaways and have drawn attention to variations in recording practice between agencies and an overall lack of data collection at both local and national levels. The absence of accurate information on the nature and extent of incidents of running away is likely to have implications for policy development.

Background to the Study

6   In Scotland, the Scottish Executive established a Working Group to consider the findings from Wade (2001), among other issues, and to make recommendations accordingly. A Guidance Pack on Vulnerable Children and Young People (Scottish Executive, 2003) was developed by a multi-agency Working Group. The introduction to the pack noted that some young people were at risk from *"damaging behaviour and negative outcomes such as self-harm, substance misuse, sexual exploitation through prostitution and running away"*. The importance of preventative work was highlighted, with the key to successful prevention being *"early identification and sound assessment"* which, the Guidance noted, should underpin all interventions. The pack contained three documents (Vulnerable Children and Young People: Legislative Framework (Scottish Executive, 2003a); Young Runaways (2003b); Sexual Exploitation through Prostitution (2003c).

7   The Guidance Pack (Scottish Executive, 2003) described the arrangements that Area Child Protection Committees were expected to make, to organise and co-ordinate services in their local areas for vulnerable children and young people, specifically young runaways and young people considered to be at risk of sexual exploitation. The Guidance noted that legislation already existed to provide refuge for young runaways but did not appear to be utilised.

8   The Scottish Executive (2003b: 6) noted:
"…concern that the needs of children and young people for refuge are not being adequately met. An assessment of how local agencies are meeting the needs of young people for refuge in their area and levels of demand should be conducted as a matter of priority by the Scottish Executive. Additional work is also required on models of good practice in the provision of refuge. Following this work additional guidance should be provided on the provision of refuge support for children and young people in Scotland".

9   In recognition of these concerns, and because agencies were concerned that action was not taking place consistently across Scotland, a coalition of voluntary and statutory agencies came together to address the plight of young runaways in Scotland with a view to influencing both policy and practice. 1 in 9, The Scottish Coalition for

Young Runaways, co-ordinated by the Aberlour Child Care Trust, includes representatives from: the Association of Directors of Social Work; ChildLine Scotland; Barnardo's; Who Cares? Scotland; Streetwork (Edinburgh); the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland; Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders Child Protection Office and the Scottish Children's Reporters' Administration.

10   One of the initial objectives of the Coalition was to identify current responses and activity among local authorities and Child Protection Committees (CPC) in addressing the needs of young runaways. In particular, it was considered important to identify the action taken by local authorities and partners to put in place protocols as recommended by the Guidance, and to examine the translation of these protocols into practice.   This study was commissioned to identify how CPCs and local authorities respond to young runaways and considers the extent to which the Guidance has been implemented across Scotland. This scoping study maps the existence of services and arrangements; it does not attempt to evaluate them.

Definition

The Scottish Executive (2003b:1) defined a young runaway as:

"a child or young person under the age of 18 who spends one night or more away from the family home or substitute care without permission or who has been forced to leave by their parents or carers".

11   This scoping study defines a young runaway as any child or young person under the age of 16 who spends at least one night away from the family home without the permission of their parent or carer[1], and under the age of 18 who runs from substitute care.   This definition is shared outside Scotland (for example, Social Exclusion Unit, 2001)[2].

12   The report sets out:
- The aims and objectives of the study
- Policy context
- Definitions used and statistics collected by local authorities
- The implementation and operation of inter-agency protocols
- Existing services for young runaways
- Models of practice – some examples of current responses are outlined in more detail focusing on: responses to young people who run from residential care; provision in local authorities where no specialist services are in place for young runaways; Aberdeen's Young Runaways Project; Aberlour ROC service and refuge provision
- Monitoring and service developments
- Some concluding points.

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[1] 16-17 year olds who run away can legally live independently and can access accommodation and some financial benefits.

[2] The Scottish Executive also note that "the welfare of the child or young person must be the primary consideration and in some cases therefore concerns may be raised about the safety of the child or young person after a shorter absence" (2003b:1).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

13   The aim of the study is to examine the provision of services to young runaways by local authorities and Area Child Protection Committees. 1 in 9, The Scottish Coalition for Young Runaways identified the objectives of the study as being to:

- explore the level of awareness of young runaways among local authorities and to review the extent to which they have identified young runaways in their Children's Services Plans;
- establish how many local authorities have (a) adopted protocols for responding to runaways in line with the Executive Guidance and (b) to identify how commissioners, managers and providers are utilising these protocols;
- consider the extent to which protocols, where they exist, meet their objectives and in particular, address the needs of the young people;
- identify what action has been taken to provide services for young runaways;
- explore any existing plans to identify gaps and develop services.

14   While this study will focus specifically on the Scottish context, links have been established between 1 in 9, The Scottish Coalition for Young Runaways and the Children's Society, who have recently conducted a national survey of services for children who run away and go missing in England and Wales (not in Scotland). It is expected that there will be future opportunities for dialogue and information sharing on the existence and development of services across the UK.

Research Methods

15   In order to meet the aims and objectives of the study, the following methods were used:

- A documentary review of each local authority Integrated Children's Services Plans (32 in total);
- Existing studies, both general (examining the incidence of running away and experiences of young runaways) and specific (evaluations of specialist provision), were reviewed;
- The study was introduced at the quarterly Child Protection Chairs Committee meeting;
- Each Chair and Lead Officer of Child Protection Committees (CPC) were asked to complete a questionnaire[3] outlining local authority responses to young runaways, or to nominate a representative to do so;
- A representative from each area was asked to provide protocols, where available, and any relevant statistical data;
- Monitoring data was collected from police, local authorities and voluntary services wherever possible to ascertain the numbers of young runaways identified by agencies;
- A detailed examination of protocols adopted by local authorities and any guidelines issued by them to staff at local level was carried out in order to

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[3] This questionnaire was originally developed by the Children's Society.

identify the form such protocols have taken, where they exist, and to consider their practical application;

- Attendance at the Scottish Out of Hours Social Work Services Group to discuss the study;
- Case studies outlining young people's experiences were provided by The Young Runaways Project in Aberdeen and the Aberlour Running - Other Choices (ROC) Project in Glasgow;
- Statistical data was obtained from ChildLine Scotland and the Aberlour ROC refuge.

Information provided

16   Twenty-eight completed questionnaires were returned from CPCs, 25 were from local authority representatives and three questionnaires were completed by police representatives who had been identified by CPC Chairs or Lead Officers as the appropriate contacts. In the majority of cases, an individual respondent completed the questionnaires; in a small number of areas information was collated by a number of agencies (usually social work services and the police). The available information was limited, and the researchers were contacted on a number of occasions by respondents to advise us that they were unable to give us much information, or to explain gaps in the information provided. Although seven questionnaires were not returned, in most of these cases the research team contacted a representative from the local authority area and information was obtained by other means. Only one CPC did not respond to our request for information. Annex One provides a summary of the information provided. While responses are presented in Annex One by area, throughout the body of the report we have anonymised comments provided by individuals.

17   The data collection was a complex process and our request for information was regularly passed on within organisations and to other relevant agencies as individuals did their best to provide a complete picture of service provision. Specifically, the research team was regularly informed that this process raised the issue of young runaways and in doing so, highlighted areas for development, as well as examples of good practice.

Professional interviews

18   Interviews (formal and informal) were carried out with a range of professionals across the country to gather more information or clarify that provided; explore awareness and knowledge of the issues; use of agreed protocols; and/or views about existing or future services. This included interviews with representatives from the police (6), social workers and social work managers (10), residential and secure accommodation managers and workers (5), workers in voluntary organisations (6).

Interviews with young people

19   Interviews were carried out with young people who had run away in order to discuss their experiences of service provision and to explore their views about the kind of provision that would meet their needs. Although 10 agencies were contacted in order to access young people, those who took part in the study were contacted through Stirling Council, Aberlour Child Care Trust's Crannog Project in Stranraer and NCH CAPS Fostering Project.

20   Six young people were interviewed including five young women and one young man. The young people ranged in age from 14 to 16 years. Additionally, one young woman submitted a letter in preference to interview. All the young people had social work involvement in their lives, and five had been or were currently 'accommodated by the local authority' although all had initially run from home. Three of the young people lived in a rural area and four were from towns and cities within the central belt; one of the young people was in secure accommodation at the time of the interview. The interviews are supported by separate case studies (Annex Three and Four).

POLICY CONTEXT

21   A range of policies and services have been developed to respond to 'children in need', most recently *Getting It Right For Every Child* (Scottish Executive, 2007) which sets out a vision for every child and young person in Scotland. While an array of policies exist to ensure services protect and support children and young people, specific legislation and guidance exists for young people who run away. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 specifically included the provision of short-term refuges for children at risk of harm. Section 38 (1) specified that where a local authority perceived a child to be at risk of harm, they could provide a safe place *at the child's request.*

22   The Act made provision for three forms of refuge, limiting the period for which refuge could be provided to seven days, or in exceptional circumstances, to a maximum period of 14 days. This can consist of:
- A residential establishment controlled or managed by the local authority, if that establishment is designated by the local authority as a suitable place of refuge;
- The household of a foster carer or other approved carer;
- Use of a registered residential establishment for the purposes of providing refuge for children and young people.

23   The Scottish Executive (2003b) noted that different forms of provision are required to meet the needs of young runaways and indicated that a range of services and service providers are required including:
- Telephone helplines;
- Outreach teams;
- Family mediation and counselling services;
- Centre-based provision;
- Universal services delivered via health and education.

24   The Scottish Executive extended support to ChildLine and Parentline, including an additional £500,000 over two years to allow ChildLine Scotland to open a new call centre to increase the number of children they were able to help by up to 60% (Scottish Executive, 2003b). In December 2006, funding to ChildLine was expanded further (£308k in 07/08, and an additional £228k annually thereafter, subject to evaluation) to expand the capacity of the Glasgow and Aberdeen centres and to support the setting up of a third centre in Edinburgh. The Aberlour ROC project and Refuge received £600,000 from the Scottish Executive, which alongside funding from a number of other agencies, enabled the Aberlour Child Care Trust to establish the ROC refuge as a fixed-term pilot project to assess the effectiveness of a residential refuge for children and young people who have run away or been forced to leave home[4].

25   Other areas for development were identified by the SE including:
- Planning and development of services for young runaways to be taken forward within the wider children's services planning process;

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[4] An independent evaluation was conducted which reported in 2006 (Malloch, 2006).

- Development of local protocols to support young runaways and to identify and agree the roles of different agencies;
- Progress reports on protocol development, monitoring and evaluation to be considered as part of the child protection reform programme.

DEFINITIONS AND STATISTICS

26   The Scottish Executive (2001) *For Scotland's Children: An Action Plan*, highlighted the importance of better integrated children's services. Integrated Children's Services Plans (Plans) set out the operation and implementation of Children's Services by each local authority. Their objective is to illustrate continued and sustained progress towards achieving improved outcomes for children and young people. The 32 local authority Plans were examined to identify what, if any, services were in place or planned for young runaways.

27   Of the 32 local authority Plans examined for the purpose of this study, only eight referred specifically to 'young runaways', with five doing so in the context of 'children in need'. Three of the Plans provided more details of services:

28   **Aberdeen** *(For Aberdeen's Children: Integrated Children's Services Plan 2005-2008)* refers to the work undertaken by the Young Runaways Service noting that in a 15 month period to September 2004 over 1,000 missing person reports were dealt with by this service. It is noted that The Young Runaways Project is working with a group of young people to:
- Explore the reasons for young people running away;
- Help them understand the risks of doing so;
- Support young people to develop alternative coping strategies;
- Reduce the level of police intervention.

29   **East Renfrewshire** (*Children's Services Plan 2005-2008*) sets out a list of priorities agreed by the Child Protection Committee for 2005-2008 including a review of all statutory child protection policies and procedures, and states: *"Policies around working with pregnant drug and alcohol users, domestic abuse, young people running away and children exploited through prostitution are currently being developed"*.

30   **Glasgow City** (*Integrated Children's Services Plan 2005-2008)* notes that young runaways are included in overarching strategic objectives for 2005 – 2008 aimed at ensuring improvements for children, young people, their families/carers whose access to mainstream services can be difficult; where they need additional supports; or where these services do not best meet their needs. Running away is also detailed as one social consequence of living with domestic abuse and the report outlines the provision of a dedicated refuge for young runaways.

31   Generally, local authorities do refer to the most vulnerable children and young people as defined in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 as "children in need". Other terms used included: vulnerable children; children in need of additional support; intensive support; complex needs; children who have social needs; homeless; in need of protection; at risk of abuse; affected by violence in the home; poverty/rural deprivation.; disadvantaged; vulnerable families; looked after children; referrals to youth justice; Children's Hearing system; child protection. While these terms could often include young runaways, the limited attention given to this group of young people could lead to their specific needs being overlooked in the current or future development of services.

Definitions

32.   One of the difficulties of collating data on young runaways has been the range of terms used to describe these young people.   The term defined by the Scottish Executive: *"a child or young person under the age of 18 who spends one night or more away from the family home or substitute care without permission or who has been forced to leave by their parents or carers"* was not universally recognised by respondents.   Different agencies used different terms and categories which may, but do not always, include young runaways.

33.   The police refer to 'missing persons' but not all young people who run away are reported as missing. Young people who are reported as missing from residential care may also be viewed as 'absconders' and may be expected to return, or may have failed to return at the agreed time.   Respondents in statutory services generally referred to 'missing persons' or young people missing from residential care.   Few were aware of incidences of running from home, unless the young person presented as a 'child in need'. One respondent commented:

"A particular difficulty in addressing this issue is the definition of runaways –whether someone is running "to" or "from" some one or something with or without the intention of returning to their place of residence. Different interpretations of these definitions have an impact on how incidences are recorded or not".

Data Collection

34.   Respondents were asked to indicate what figures were collated in their local authority on incidences of running away. The available information was very limited and different agencies, where statistics were collected, held different figures often based on different definitions.

- Police forces will routinely collate data on missing person reports. However the reports are not always categorised by age or circumstance (i.e. missing from home or being looked after) and may be broken down differently by area.
- Seventeen local authority respondents reported that they did not routinely collect this data, seven did so for looked after and/or accommodated young people and only one area routinely collected figures for young people reported as missing both from home and local authority accommodation.
- One local authority respondent referred to police missing persons data alone.
- Few authorities collated data from their children's units, instead data was often held by individual units.

35   A number of respondents indicated that they had fully expected to be able to access figures on young runaways within their local authority, however, when they tried to do so, found that this information was not available. This was often due to the definitions used by different services:

"I did try to get the information you asked for and spoke to social work, police, health and education colleagues, but found it impossible to get accurate figures on the scale of the problem - if any - in this area. Part of the difficulty was that there were

different ' thresholds' for identifying a young person as a ' runaway' and a different response dependant on the age of the child/young person".

"We had a full discussion about this at the CPC and basically this information is not collated in our agencies. Social work are aware of looked after children who run away. I think agencies had difficulty in defining when to classify a young person as a runaway. Sorry to give so little info but it indicates the need for guidance".

36   While respondents referred to available figures on young people who had run from residential units, there was less awareness of numbers of young people running from home.

"If parents contact our duty team then we always advise that they contact the police usually after they have done some initial checking. Of course not all parents contact either ourselves or the police and we would not therefore be aware of those young people".

37   Respondents suggested that the police would collate figures on young people reported missing, although it was acknowledged that a range of factors could determine whether or not a child would be reported missing including: age, circumstances, and the likelihood of staying out without permission. It was regularly suggested that children who ran from home may be considered to be a child 'in need' but unless a young person came to the attention of the police or other services they were unlikely to defined in this way. Young runaways who were not considered to be 'vulnerable' were often returned home without being recorded in any official capacity as a 'runaway'. However, without a detailed assessment it was not clear what procedures were put in place to identify whether or not a young person was 'vulnerable'.

Statistics

38   Given the differences in definitions used and data collected, it is not surprising that where figures were available they were limited and variable in content. Respondents indicated that the figures they did have did not always relate to actual incidences of running away:

"...the police receive about 20-30 calls of missing young people every weekend and most have not returned home because they are at parties etc but they are dealt with as missing persons and the relevant forms filled in".

39   One respondent advised that data was not currently collated in their area however specific incidents would be recorded and logged and could be used to develop data.

"All "Unauthorised Absences" from our Residential Units are logged. However this will also include periods of unauthorised absence which last for a short period of hours, not just overnight or longer periods".

"When children go missing from foster placements this is logged by the Foster Carer, the carer's Support Worker and the child's Social Worker. However these incidents are not collated".

"Scottish Children's Reporters Administration do log each incident reported by the Police or other agencies. However these are reported statistically as "beyond parental control" (Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Sect 52 (2) (a)). There is no differentiation between young runaways and young people who may have been reported as "beyond parental control" for other reasons".

"Statistics for young people who run away are not isolated from other statistical information for young people who have a range of other, related problems, such as school attendance difficulties or substance misuse".

40   Where statistical data was provided in a categorised way, it still serves to illustrate the difficulties inherent in identifying actual numbers of young runaways. Data collated in the Strathclyde Police area, for example, provided statistics on missing persons but were not routinely categorised by age and circumstance. Although the researchers were advised that figures are collected at divisional level for young people reported missing from children's units we were unable to obtain this data, which is not currently collated centrally. Statistics were provided by Highland, Glasgow City and Midlothian relating to recorded reports of young people missing (or 'absconding') from residential care.

41   Figures provided by Grampian Police show a statistical breakdown of young people reported missing from local authority accommodation and from home.   In Aberdeen available figures show that in 2006:

> - 688 accommodated young people were reported missing (relating to **179** actual young people),
> - 295 young people were reported missing from home (relating to **218** actual young people).

Grampian Police (2007)

42   This breakdown illustrates that although there are more reports of accommodated young people reported missing, on an individual basis more young people were reported missing from home. From the discussion above, it is evident that accommodated young people are over-represented in official statistics, while young people who runaway from home are likely to be under-reported and much less likely to come to the attention of statutory services.

43   The data available across the country gives a very partial picture of the numbers of young people who run away in Scotland (also noted by the Social Exclusion Unit, 2001 for England and Wales) and illustrates the lack of consistency in recording incidents of running away – or indeed the use of any shared term by which to monitor these incidents.

44   Data provided by the voluntary sector appears to indicate that a significant number of young people who run away do not come to the attention of the statutory services,   For example, between 1st April 2006 and 31st March 2007 around 665

young people talked to volunteer counsellors at ChildLine Scotland about running away[5]. The calls came both from children and young people who had already run away, and from those who were thinking about running away.

- Most of the callers were aged between 11 and 16, however small numbers of younger children (aged between 5 and 10) also spoke about running away.
- Over twice as many girls as boys talked about running away and the vast majority of callers spoke about running away from home.
- Around 5% of the callers talked about running away from care.

ChildLine Scotland 2007

45   According to a representative of ChildLine Scotland, children and young people who call ChildLine Scotland about running away very rarely talk about this problem in isolation. Almost 95% of callers last year who talked about running away as their main problem also spoke about other, related problems. In many cases young people talked about multiple, interlinking problems that they were struggling to deal with. These include:

- mental health problems;
- self harm and suicide;
- school problems;
- bullying;
- problems with living in care;
- pregnancy.

My mum and dad have kicked me out because I told them I was pregnant and now I have nowhere to go. I just want someone to talk to.

I ran away from home today – my dad's been hitting me. He comes home off his head and hits me for nothing. My mum left a few years ago. I never see her anymore.

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46   According to ChildLine Scotland, the main problems young people talked about in association with running away in 2006-7 were family relationship problems and abuse. Family relationship problems were overwhelmingly the most common issue affecting young people when they talked about running away, with almost 80% of callers talking about severe family problems, including on-going arguing and fighting, family breakdown, parents divorcing or separating and bereavement. Abuse was also a common problem for young people running away, with just under a third of young callers talking about physical abuse, mainly at the hands of their parents or carers. Smaller numbers of callers also talked about sexual abuse and emotional abuse.

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[5] These figures are likely to represent an underestimate of the numbers of children and young people calling ChildLine Scotland about running away.

> *Barnardo's Street Team has recorded a changing trend in the presentations of children/young people they meet on the street. Of seventy young people (under 18) who were in contact with the service, 17 young people lived at home, 36 in residential units/ schools, 13 were homeless, 1 had their own tenancy and 3 were in secure care. In the past the majority of young people were from residential schools and they often spoke of "having run away" due to high levels of unhappiness, bullying, unsavoury/unfair treatment from staff and other young people in units. Barnardo's now see an increase in the number of young people from SWS children's units who speak of "running away" or coming into town because they wanted to catch up with their pals at the "Four Corners", of Argyle Street and Jamaica Street. These young people tend to return to the units the next day if not picked up by the Police or SWS Standby services and returned to the unit during the night. Of concern is the speed at which some of these young people become involved in risk behaviours such as involvement in sexual exploitation and addiction in particular.*

Provided by Glasgow City Council, 2007[6]

47   Figures from the Aberlour ROC refuge which provides refuge places for up to three young people at any one time illustrated that between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007:

- 61 young people were given refuge (15 boys and 46 girls)
- the majority of young people (77%) were aged 14 or 15
- while most of the young people were from Glasgow and South Lanarkshire, others were from Renfrew, North Lanarkshire, East Renfrewshire, Argyll and Bute, North Ayrshire and Highland
- 6 of these young people had run from substitute care (5 reported missing)
- 48 had run from the family home (17 reported missing)
- 5 had run from the home of a relative[7]

Provided by ROC, 2007

48   Key points:
- There is no agreed definition of 'runaway' across local authority areas
- The Scottish Executive definition is not used routinely or frequently by all agencies
- Different data is collected by different agencies but is not centrally collated and is not comprehensive
- Statutory agencies appear to have a partial picture of the number of young people who would constitute 'young runaways' as defined by the Scottish Executive
- Young people who are looked after and accommodated are over-represented in official statistics
- Young people who run from home are under-represented and rarely come to the attention of statutory services

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[6] See also: Dillane et al, 2005.

[7] One young people had run from 'other' accommodation while information was missing for one young person.

- A significant proportion of young people who runaway from home are not reported missing to the police or other statutory services
- Other than the research published by the Aberlour Child Care Trust (Wade, 2001) based on self-reports by young people in school, we have no accurate national picture of the extent of running away in Scotland.

INTER-AGENCY PROTOCOLS

49   In order to improve the way that agencies responded to young runaways, the Scottish Executive (2003b) set out *Guidance For Professionals Working With Young Runaways* aimed at all agencies and professionals that may work with children and young people. The Guidance stated that local protocols should be developed for responding to young runaways. The protocols should be linked to broader services for children in need, with multi-agency involvement and it was noted that Child Protection Chairs should have a key role in their development and monitoring.

50.   The Scottish Executive distinguished between the needs of young people running from home and young people who are looked after and accommodated in the Guidance, noting:

"There are two groups of children and young people who need to be considered in the preparation of a protocol: children and young people living at home and children and young people being looked after away from home, and while there will be a degree of overlap different approaches may be required to address the needs of those two groups of children and young people. It will be important to consider whether the protocol meets the needs of both of these groups of children and young people" *(Scottish Executive, 2003b: 12)*

51   In terms of protocol content, the Guidance set out a number of requirements which covered the development of local protocols and indicated that protocol content should address issues of prevention, immediate safety and support. The requirements of protocols are provided in Annex Two.

52   According to the Guidance, local protocols 'must':

- Recognise that children and young people who run away will need somewhere safe to stay;
- Recognise that not all parents will inform the police or other statutory agencies that their child has run away and other professionals should be aware of the need to pick up changes in the child's behaviour which may indicate that he/she is at risk;
- Include guidance on actions once a child or young person is located;
- Include guidance on the needs of young runaway's normally resident outwith the local authority area.

53   For children being looked after away from home, they must also:

- Outline the responsibilities of individual agencies and clarify the responsibilities of different agencies in attempting to locate the child or young person and return them to their home or care placement;
- Clarify the format and type of information to be provided by local authorities to the police.

54   Respondents were asked if their local authority had a protocol/s in place and to indicate whether this applied to young people who were accommodated and/or young people who ran from home.

55   *Looked after and accommodated young people protocol*
- Twenty four respondents reported having a protocol in place for children who are looked after or accommodated (although they sometimes referred to procedures or policies that existed rather than to inter-agency or joint protocols);
- One respondent referred specifically to police operational procedures;
- Three respondents said their local area did not have a protocol in place;
- Two respondents indicated their area was in the process of developing a protocol;
- No information was available for one CPC;
- One respondent did not know if they had a protocol in place.

56   *Young people running from home protocol*
- Four responents reported having a protocol for children running away from home;
- Four respondents reported that this was being developed;
- The other respondents did not have a protocol in place or it was not known if they had one;
- One respondent indicated that their protocol on young people experiencing sexual exploitation covered the issue of young runaways and this was referred to by two other respondents in discussion. However it is important to note that these groups of young people (young runaways and young people at risk of sexual exploitation) are considered separately in the Guidance (Scottish Executive, 2003).

57   Copies of inter-agency protocols were received covering four police areas:

- Children and Young People Missing From Local Authority Care Joint Protocol
  (Lothian and Borders Police, City of Edinburgh Children and Families Department, West Lothian Community and Support Services, Midlothian Social Work Division, East Lothian Department of Education and Children's Services, Scottish Borders Social Work Services)

- Missing children, absconders and children otherwise absent from Local Authority Care Joint Protocol
  (Tayside Police and Angus Council Social Work and Health and Education Service)

- Young Runaways Reporting Protocol (Policy and Procedure)
  (Grampian Police[8] and Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Social Work Services)

- Children and Young People Missing from Local Authority Care
  (Strathclyde Police)
  This is currently being piloted in two areas.

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[8] Grampian Police also provided a copy of their Standard Operating Procedures for Young Persons Missing from Residential Establishments and Foster Care Placements.

58   Police Standard Operating Procedures were referred to by respondents across the country and are likely to be in place in all police authorities. However these procedures do not operate as inter-agency protocols. Nevertheless, they do set out police practice as one respondent noted:

"The Missing Persons Policy operated by Fife Constabulary instructs that all children under the age of 16 years, who are reported as missing persons, receive a 'return' interview by the Reporting Officer when they return home. The purpose is to 1. Confirm the safety and wellbeing of the child, 2. Ascertain why the child went missing, 3. Ascertain where the child has been during the period missing, 4. Identify who, if anybody, the child has been associating with. Referral to other agencies may take place if considered appropriate to inform any other measures that may require to be considered in terms of the child's safety and well being. Habitual missing persons under the age of 16 years are the subjects of report to the Reporter to the Children's Hearing".

59   All the police-led protocols provided for the scoping study refer to young people who are looked after and accommodated. The protocols differ somewhat in the way that young people are categorised in terms of risk. Grampian and Strathclyde Police use a traffic lights system, designating levels of risk as green, amber or red. Lothian and Borders use High/medium/Low risk categorisation while Tayside refers to 'Absence without authority/Missing/Absconders' as categories.   One respondent advised that Stirling and Clackmannanshire (in conjunction with Central Scotland Police) also have a traffic-light system of response in place, although it is understood that this is a procedural practice rather than established inter-agency protocol[9]. The protocols were examined in terms of the following:

Table 1

	PROTOCOLS[10]			
	Grampian	Tayside	Lothian and Borders	Strathclyde
Recognition of underlying causes of young person running away	yes	yes	yes	no
Guidance on information sharing	yes	no	no	yes
Assessment of risk and categorisation of response	yes	yes	yes	yes
Agency procedures at point of Notification	yes	yes	yes	yes
Procedures for agencies on return of young person	yes	yes	yes	yes
Stress the importance of welcoming a child or young person	yes	yes	no	no
Follow up action and assessment of future risk	yes	yes	yes	yes
Referral to other services	yes	no	yes	Yes

60   In line with Scottish Executive Guidance (2003) the Grampian and Tayside protocols clearly emphasise the need to ensure that a child or young person feels safe

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[9] /Interagency protocols developed by ROC were not specifically referred to by respondents although currently in existence.

[10] The above groups summarise key areas identified in the Guidance (Scottish Executive, 2003).

at the place they are being returned to and indicate that a young person will be seen by an independent person, e.g. from Who Cares? Scotland or a Children's Rights Officer. The others (Strathclyde and Lothian and Borders) indicate that the young person will be offered the opportunity to meet with someone, although Strathclyde Police hope that in the future return interviews will be conducted by the Family Protection Unit as a matter of course.

61   The majority of joint protocols target young people who go missing from local authority accommodation, and respondents indicated that these were generally considered effective in reducing the number of young people reported to the police:

"The traffic lights project is a protocol between Strathclyde Police and Social Work Services in East Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde in relation to absconders from care establishments. The protocol was produced to help staff in residential units and the police make decisions about how to respond when a child goes missing from their placement. It outlines three categories of risk (red, amber and green) and the expected responses of staff in each case including follow up action when the child is found or returns. Since the pilot project was introduced there has been a drop in the number of reported absconders by approximately 64%".

62   While reductions in the number of young people reported missing to the police was perceived as an important benefit of the protocols, it was not clear how young people's experiences were affected when the introduction of categories in this way was not supported by other resources.

63   Preliminary results of an evaluation which is currently being undertaken by Strathclyde Police indicate that as a result of the introduction of a protocol, much more dialogue appears to be taking place between police officers, and social workers and children's unit staff, although it was noted that there is an ongoing need for training on relevant issues in all areas where protocols have been implemented.

64   Several respondents provided copies of detailed procedures produced by local authority Child Protection Committees setting out guidelines and procedures in place in local areas to respond to vulnerable children and young people. While these procedures often specifically identified young people at risk of sexual exploitation, respondents indicated that they would generally also be implemented for young runaways. Although there may be some overlap between these groups of young people, the extent to which a protocol for young people at risk of sexual exploitation will also address the needs of young runaways is questionable. Nevertheless, the procedures were developed due to growing concern with children at risk for whom usual child protection procedures were not considered appropriate. They included the following:

65   *Protecting Children Protocols: Safeguarding young people at risk of sexual exploitation (May 2006) Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee*
This document is one of a set of protocols each offering guidance in relation to work with specific groups of young people or with families with particular difficulties. It is an interagency document and was drawn up by representatives from social work services, education, health, police and voluntary agencies. The document includes:
- the legislative framework;

- definitions and indicators of involvement in sexual exploitation;
- preventative strategies and use of a strategy meeting to identify concerns about an individual young person;
- procedures required if a young person is 'looked after or accommodated'.

66   *Inter Agency Notification Procedures: Vulnerable Children and Young People (December 2000) Glasgow Child Protection Committee*
This document identifies the need for guidance for agencies responding to young people considered to be involved in high risk behaviour and vulnerable to sexual exploitation. It sets out procedures to provide practical support for young people, improve inter agency communication and service co-ordination. The procedures **must** be used for 'looked after' young people and **may** be used for young people over 16 years who are not looked after.
The document outlines:
- principles for inter agency working;
- the need for risk assessment and case discussions/ meetings to undertake this;
- what case discussions should address, including action planning and who should attend;
- indicators of sexual exploitation and how young people may become involved;
- procedures which should be followed for young people missing from residential and foster care.

67   More broadly, the Argyll and Bute Protocol focuses on the needs of children and young people deemed vulnerable[11]:

Vulnerable Missing Children and Young People Protocol (June 2006)
Argyll and Bute Child Protection Committee
This protocol is one of a series of inter-agency documents produced by the partnership agencies of social work services, education, health and Strathclyde L Division. It sets out to outline the process for joint working in information sharing, formalising good practice and ensuring better outcomes to support and protect vulnerable children and young people in the area. It outlines:
- the guiding principles of information sharing across agencies;
- the reporting process when a young person goes missing from home or when 'looked after' or on the Child Protection register and includes 16-18 year olds who are living in unsettled accommodation;
- agency responses if young people are in residential care;
- useful resources are listed, specifically Barnardo's Street Team and Running - Other Choices.

68   These documents illustrate some of the wider areas of service provision which may include young runaways. It is possible that similar documents exist in other local authorities and indeed, a number of respondents suggested that they currently had inter-agency responses in place to address the needs of young people at risk of sexual exploitation, but did not include them as part of their response to young runaways – largely due to the different ways that definitions were utilised. One respondent commented: *"The protocol on young people experiencing sexual exploitation covers*

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[11] A separate protocol has been developed by Argyll and Bute Child Protection Committee to address the needs of children and young people considered to be at risk of sexual exploitation.

the issue of young runaways. Development of integrated assessment framework will enable a multi-agency approach to be taken to all vulnerable young people".

69   Other respondents indicated that they were currently developing protocols and guidance with other agencies (i.e. the police, education).   North Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, East Renfrewshire and North Lanarkshire Child Protection Committees are currently working together to develop Vulnerable Children and Young People Good Practice Guidance.   This is currently in draft form and will address the recommendations of the Vulnerable Children and Young People legislation, to clarify roles and responsibilities across agencies and assist in the process of ensuring the safe return of all young people who run away.

70   Operational protocols also exist for young people who go missing from education and from health care services.   Additionally where specialist runaway services exist, there is considerable evidence of joint work with other agencies, notably the police but also health and education services to develop operational procedures and develop protocols (e.g. Aberlour ROC Refuge).

71   The implementation and operation of protocols highlights the importance of inter agency working with children and young people involved in running away and other high-risk activity or behaviours – co-ordinated as part of the multi-disciplinary child protection system. However the interchange of protocols which target young people at risk of sexual exploitation with young people who have runaway may suggest some confusion of the presenting and underlying issues.

72.   Recognition of the importance of joint work and contributions that different agencies can make was highlighted in *Protecting Children, A Shared Responsibility* (1998) Scottish Office.   For this to be effective however, requires the appropriate allocation of resources. As one respondent indicated:

"The Protocol has identified joint, indeed greater responsibility for Social Work departments, with those Missing Persons who are classed as Unauthorised Absence or Low Risk. These responsibilities and their implications have not been realised, nor have any additional resources been made available to allow delivery of these requirements".

73   Another respondent commented: *"Young people can remain at Police Offices for extended periods due to social work resourcing issues"*. This can be problematic outwith 'office hours' where it can be difficult to access services. This was noted by one respondent who commented on the importance of emergency duty social workers; and by Standby Service managers. The role of social work out of hour's services or emergency duty teams is important in responding to young people who have runaway and in the implementation of protocols. However this can raise a number of issues:
- Young people are less likely to be recorded as missing during the day so this may fall to out of hours teams;
- Statutory involvement can be an issue for young people so social work may not be the best agency to respond to young people who have run away in all cases (voluntary service may be more appropriate, where this exists, and the use of independent interviews can be crucial);

- Out of hours services often can't meet the requirements set out in protocols (e.g. speaking with a young person) or they can be unrealistic (e.g. looking for young people);
- The absence of a national protocol can create difficulties;
- Out of hours services need to be included in strategic developments;
- Flexibility in local areas is required;
- Formal follow-up needs to be part of the process;
- Lack of resources available for day services means that services are generally stretched.

74   More generally, other issues raised with the implementation and operation of protocols related to:
- the importance of joint training to underpin these protocols and support their implementation in practice;
- Agency responsibilities need to be clear, as one respondent commented: "*Police think it is a social work responsibility, social work think it is a police responsibility*";
- While protocols are developed at strategic level, their implementation can 'fall down' at grass-roots level.

75   For operational protocols to work well requires that they are continually monitored and that each agency has a lead person identified to ensure their effectiveness. Where protocols were in place, local authorities did tend to have a named individual (or post holder) who had responsibility for the implementation and oversight of the operation of protocols.

"I have responsibility for the implementation of our protocol on working with vulnerable missing young people and our protocol on young people at risk of sexual exploitation, any concerns would be raised with the Chief Officer's Group and Child Protection Committee".

76   Five of the local authority respondents reported having a lead officer or named manager with strategic responsibility for young people who runaway; this included local authority Lead Officers; Development Managers: Child Protection; Head of Planning and Policy: Children's Services. Thirteen respondents indicated that a senior manager had designated responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of missing from care protocols or procedures. All police respondents indicated a lead officer was in place to oversee joint working and adherence to existing protocols.

Table 2
Strategic provision

	Yes, in place	Yes, being developed	No	Not sure/no information
A designated senior manager with responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of missing from care protocols / procedures	13	3	12	4
A report about patterns of absence amongst looked after young people	4	7	12	9
An action plan with targets for minimising missing from care incidents	3	6	13	10
Assessments of risk for young people who are identified as at risk of running away from local authority accommodation	20	6	0	6
Initial assessments of risk for young people who run away from home	9	4	11	8
Involvement of local agencies concerned with the welfare of looked after children in the process of agreeing risk assessment formats	11	7	5	9

77   Twenty respondents indicated that risk assessments were routinely carried out for looked after and accommodated young people identified as being at risk of running away, six respondents indicated that these assessments are currently being developed. Only nine local authorities routinely carry out initial assessments of risk for young people who run away from home, with four developing them. Clearly if young people are returned home, unless defined as 'vulnerable', then it is crucial that appropriate assessment procedures are in place to obtain full information on the young person's circumstances and concerns.

78   Key points:
- Protocols were more likely to be in place for children and young people who were looked after and accommodated
- Few protocols were developed for children running from home and none explicitly for this group of young people
- Where protocols existed, they had generally, although not always, been established through joint working
- Joint training was considered crucial to the operation of protocols, particularly in the opinion of police respondents
- There was concern that limited resources and lack of training impacted on the extent to which social work services were taking responsibility for enacting protocols
- Improved communication between agencies was considered to have resulted from the implementation of protocols in some areas
- While a young persons access to an independent worker and referrals to other services was included in protocols this was not uniform and actual practice could vary depending on circumstances
- Initial aims of the protocols were not always realised due to pressure on resources

- While protocols effectively reduced the number of young people being referred to the police from children's units, work had to be ongoing to avoid increasing number of priority reports rising over time
- It was not clear how a reduction in the number of young people reported missing to the police would necessarily improve services to young people unless additional supports were put in place.

79   Statutory services are often expected to respond to complex situations and are required to do so within the limits of their organisational remit and resources. To consider the wider issues, young people provided their experiences of running away.

Young People's experiences of running away

80   All the young people interviewed in this scoping study indicated that they had started running away between the ages of 12 and 14, with the exception of the only male interviewed who started to run from the age of six years old. Three of the young people reported they had run away on four occasions or less; however, the other three young people estimated that they had run away very frequently, from 16 times to as many as 300 times, in the case of one interviewee. The length of time young people were missing at any one time varied from just a few hours while six years old to two to three weeks, in the case of two young people.

'I've run away from everywhere I've lived. I couldn't even count how many times – definitely over 50, sometimes it was every day, it was my hobby. I loved the adrenalin that built up from being chased, by the police or whoever'.
                                                                                   Young person aged 16.

81   The young people had all run away from home and some had also run from residential and foster care. Two of the young people had run away alone and two had run with other young people, either from home or from residential care; the other two young people had sometimes run alone and sometimes with others, tending to run alone if going from home but with others if running from residential care.

82   Two of the young people reported that they had run away on the spur of the moment, after an argument or confrontation and two of them said they had planned and awaited the opportunity to run away, in one case when everyone in the house was in bed. The two other young people reported that it varied, according to the circumstances. All the young people, with the exception of one, went away without telling anyone, even siblings or friends; one young person reported telling her mother that she was going to leave.

83   The reasons young people gave for running away were primarily concerned with family relationships for example, stress and pressure from parents or confrontations with them. One young person reported running away because of her mother's alcohol problem. One young person cited the fact that she did not like the staff in her residential placement, while another gave a list of reasons:

'Getting bored, wanted out, or wanted to see my pals, my family or wanted a drink, drugs, sometimes got addicted to running away , can't sit in - had to get out of the house'.   Young person aged 15.

84   The young person who sent a letter rather than being interviewed described the reasons why she ran away and the pattern of consequences that followed:

'I only ran away for attention and nothing more, I felt that when I ran away people cared because they would always find me, and for a short time after this things would go back to normal, and when they got bad again I would just do the same, so it was a vicious circle'.   Young person's written response, age unknown.

85   Young people appeared to have taken very little with them when they ran away. One young person took food and drink from the fridge, one took a phone, cigarettes and a tent and another took some clothes; otherwise it was typically small items such as make-up or a phone and charger or, in the case of one young person, nothing at all.

The experience of running away

86   Almost all the young people reported that they did not feel worried before they left about what might happen to them once they had run away, although one said that she did sometimes think about the consequences. Another young person described her feelings prior to running as follows:

'I wasn't really worried about anything – you don't have time to think, the adrenalin kicked in and I just went. At the time I didn't think about the risks, I was desperate – I even jumped out of windows to get away'.
                              Young person aged 16.

87   Although two of the young people stated that they did not feel unsafe at any time while they were missing, the others cited instances when they were frightened or felt unsafe, especially at night. Most also described times when they were hungry, cold or missed members of their family. Most were able to recognise, in retrospect, ways in which they had potentially been in danger or at risk. One young woman appeared to have an alcohol dependency issue and usually sought out opportunities to misuse alcohol and by doing so, was at some considerable risk:

'Once or twice it did feel scary – I woke up in a house, didn't know how I'd got there, I had blanked out'.   Young person aged 15.

88   Three of the young people said that they had no idea where they would go when they ran away; the others said they went to friends, one stayed in her tent and the other tended to stay locally:
'I didn't plan on going far. Most of the time I stayed locally, just dandered about in the village. I went to the local Old Folks home, once I drove a tractor about, once I went to a stranger's door and they took me in and then phoned the police to come and get me. And one time I got to Skye in my step-dad's car – that was the furthest'.
                              Young person aged 16.

89   Research findings highlight the risks facing these young people on the streets:

- Running away is commonly due to arguments and conflict at home, experiences of emotional or physical abuse, or to seek respite from parental problems (i.e. alcohol or drug dependency, mental health issues) (Rees and Lee, 2005; Malloch, 2006).
- Rees and Lee (2005) illustrate that one in six young runaways sleep rough, and one in 12 young runaways are hurt or harmed while running away.
- Wade (2001) estimates that one in six young runaways in Scotland reported having either been physically or sexually assaulted whilst away from home.
- There is evidence of 'risky survival strategies' in the case of one in ten young runaways (Rees and Lee, 2005).
- Research on the experiences of young runaways has identified that offending behaviour is generally a survival strategy (shoplifting, theft, prostitution) or a coping mechanism (use of drugs, alcohol) (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Wade, 2001; Biehal and Wade, 2002; Owen and Graham, 2004; Rees and Lee, 2005; Smeaton, 2005). This can often result in long-term difficulties including addiction and adult homelessness.

90   These statistics do little to highlight the extent of harm experienced by young people who run away or the ongoing damage and distress that underpins their running away and subsequent risks. As Rees and Lee (2005: 22) note, *it can be estimated that more than a fifth of young people who run away overnight might be regarded as at tangible risk whilst they are away from home*.

SERVICES FOR YOUNG RUNAWAYS

91   The Scottish Executive Guidance (2003) set out a number of areas where services were needed to respond to young runaways, specifically: preventing running away; providing immediate safety for a young person who has run away; and the provision of support. Respondents were asked to outline the services available in their area for young runaways. Clearly, respondents interpreted the questions in different ways and in some cases may not have acknowledged services that were not specifically for young runaways.

Emergency accommodation

92   Respondents were asked if emergency accommodation was provided for young runaways. Thirteen respondents stated that there were no dedicated places available for this group of young people, while eleven respondents replied that accommodation could be accessed as necessary (eight respondents did not know or did not provide information).

   Examples of available accommodation included the following:
   - Children's Unit with 5 places and 2 linked flats;
   - emergency flat with 2 spaces;
   - foster care placements;
   - NCH project, foster carers or a family, where appropriate;
   - self-contained bed-sit within a children's unit which was used as crisis/emergency care;
   - scatter flats and bungalow accommodation;
   - referral to homeless services;
   - Aberlour ROC refuge.

93   None of the respondents referred to using this accommodation under Section 38 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. The Aberlour ROC refuge is the only dedicated refuge in Scotland and provides three of the 10 refuge places available in the UK and was used and/or referred to by a number of respondents.

"We use our residential children's units to offer time out in times of crisis. Outwith this authority we use Aberlour Refuge (Running Other Choices) to support young runaways…ROC project offers confidential help, support, accommodation, advocacy, information and outreach support work with families".

94   This was seen by some respondents as an important resource that could be replicated elsewhere.
"There is no provision of short-term supported accommodation, for those young runaways that are regular missing persons. Such a facility should provide a vehicle for expression, where the young persons' reasons for running away could possibly be addressed".

95   One respondent noted that although there was no emergency accommodation specific to runaways in their local area, where a child under 16 presented themselves

at a hostel, housing or other services, inter-agency child protection policy would require automatic referral to social work services for assessment as a 'child in need'. *"Depending upon the outcomes of such an assessment the child will either be given support to facilitate a return to the family home or will become accommodated".*

"We are a very small authority and would have problems designating any of our resources for this specifically. We have foster placements we could use if available and a residential establishment that has a history of taking emergency placements".

"There are no specific resources dedicated to young runaways in (this area). Where there are concerns regarding a young person, placement away from home either with relatives, carers, local young person's unit or in very extreme circumstances, secure accommodation would be considered".

Table 3
Other services

Current services and initiatives

	Yes	No	Not known
Preventative work in schools	9	14	10
Other preventative work[12]	10	12	11
Accessible written information	7	14	11
Local telephone helpline	2	29	1
Parenting work	12	10	10
Return home interviews	12	9	11
Specialist runaways project	3	19	10
Other	2	13	0

96   Respondents also referred to other services. One respondent provided copies of a parenting handbook produced jointly by a number of agencies**.** Other services referred to included community support teams which offered individual packages of support to vulnerable young people in partnership with school guidance staff and school based social workers.

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[12] Other preventative work included: community support teams offering individual packages of support to vulnerable young people in partnership with school guidance staff and school based social workers; and integrated community schools for early intervention.

"Joint Support Team in schools provide early identification of and early intervention for children and young people 'in need' or 'at risk'. School social workers, school counsellors offer individual support to young people in school".

97   One respondent indicated that more preventative resources could be made available through educational support:

"Within the scope of education, there could be an increase in the exposure of the Runaway Helpline run by the NMPH. As part of this, a package available to schools similar to the "Running Away – a cry for help" issued by the NMPH used in England and Wales. Though adapted for Scotland and approved by Scottish Education Authorities".

98   Services available in the voluntary sector were referred to by five respondents who indicated that they were aware or, and had made use of: Aberlour ROC; the Young Runaways Service; and Streetwork (Runaways Action Project) – all of which provide specialist services for young runaways or young people who are thinking of running away.   NCH and Barnardo's Street Team were also referred to as services which local authorities could work with.

Young people's experiences of services

99   Young people were asked whether there were any ways in which services could have prevented them from running away. Most young people said there was nothing anybody could have done, and one young person explained this in more detail:

'No-one could have done anything to stop me; they all tried, family, social workers and I did sit and listen, but I wouldn't accept help, I had a problem accepting help. I tried to speak to people and say how I felt but the social workers didn't really do anything. No-one really understood – my social worker didn't have to go back to the problems I had. I was so angry I took it out on myself, I self-harmed and I even scared myself then. I didn't want to hurt others, like my mum, so I hurt myself'.
<div align="right">Young person aged 16.</div>

100   However, young people did have suggestions for preventative services. Having someone to talk to, who could help and listen was a common theme for young people:

'You need somewhere where young people can go to talk to other young people about what it feels like to want to run and what they should do instead. When I was 13 or 14, if someone had come along and not talked down to me, maybe someone my own age or a bit older, who had the experience and could put themselves in my shoes, it might've made a difference. Maybe even a Runaway Helpline where you could talk to another young person on the phone and arrange to meet them to talk later'.
<div align="right">Young person aged 16.</div>

'Don't just lock them up, give more support and understand why they have run away. Understand how we came to be there. It could be drugs, drink, domestic violence and just being bored. Every situation is different'.
<div align="right">Young person aged 15.</div>

101   Most of the young people had become involved with services while missing from where they lived, generally at the point where they were 'found'. One young person had had no contact with services and one had only limited contact with the police when they gave her a lift back to her home. Two young people interviewed considered that the police had very negative views towards them, perceiving that the police viewed them as wasting their time and worrying their families; however, one young person commented that the police officers she had contact with varied – some were *'arrogant'* but some were *'nice'*. Young people's experience of social work services was variable; two of the young people said they would not approach social workers for help as *'they were fed-up with me'*. However, one young person described the Emergency duty Team social workers as *'good to talk to; they do quite a good job'*. Other services which young people commented positively about included Barnardo's Street Team, Includem and the Running Other Choices- Refuge.

Young people's views of services needed and advice to other young people

102   In addition to suggestions about preventative services, young people had some ideas about what services would be helpful for those who were already 'on the run'. The form of help most mentioned was a safe place to go and stay; in addition, an understanding person to talk to; and a telephone helpline were also suggested.

103   When asked what advice they would give a young person who was thinking of running away, all the young people without exception said they would tell them not to run away but to try to find alternatives.

'Be wise, don't go, stay at home and keep safe. It makes it worse if you run. Respect your parents and talk things out'.
Young person aged 16.

'I would say to them – sit down and think it through first, don't just take off. I was lucky as I put myself in bad situations and over four years, when I think about it, it wasn't a good situation. I ended up with 15 foster carers, 4 homes and it wasn't good being shifted about so much. And don't go alone – once the adrenalin calms it's not a nice feeling to be alone. I get panic attacks now just thinking about it'.
Young person aged 16.

104   Similarly, Wade (2001) identified a number of factors which young people considered might have prevented them running away, or might have helped them once they had run away. They include:

- Increased publicity for local services that might be available to help young people;
- Opportunities for advice, counselling and family mediation prior to, or at the point of, running away;
- School based preventive services;
- Respite accommodation to prevent young people being exposed to danger on the streets. Young people felt this kind of refuge provision should be small, homely and well supported;

- Increased and improved emergency accommodation options for those aged 16/17 and lacking a stable home base.

MODELS OF PRACTICE

105 While local services differ significantly due to geographical necessity and organisational practice, different models of responses to young people can be identified (see also Rees, 2001; Rees et al, 2005). The following discussion is not intended to evaluate different approaches, but merely illustrates some of the different ways of responding to young people that currently exist and highlights some of the issues that practitioners and managers identified as a result.

1. Residential Units

106   From the information provided for this scoping study it would appear that a large proportion of the young people who feature in police missing persons reports are accommodated (see also Biehal and Wade, 2000 and 2002). While proportionately, these young people account for a small number of the young people who run away, they do run more frequently. As noted previously, young people may also be reported missing should they stay out after an agreed time and may not technically be considered missing (or to have runaway).

107   Statistical data on the total number of young people who go missing from residential care was impossible to obtain. Two police respondents were able to provide breakdowns of data for their area, however other respondents were not. One police respondent tried to provide this information for the study by contacting divisional areas (figures for missing persons from residential accommodation was not collated centrally) but was not able to obtain categorised data. Local authorities were asked to provide this data but it was not generally available from a central point. While individual units were likely to keep figures, it was not usually collated across the authority. Who Cares? Scotland indicated that they did not have figures for numbers of young people running away and emphasised the problems with definitions that exist (i.e. absconders, failure to return, missing). However they noted that they are setting up a new recording system and database and it is feasible that they could start recording incidents of running away for the young people they work with.

108   Workers identified some of the difficulties in categorising young people reported missing from residential units as 'missing persons' As one residential manager commented, the reasons why young people go missing from residential care can vary:
"I would say that we have very few young people who actually run away as such i.e. that they go for long periods of time or we have no idea where they are. Most of the young people in the unit who go missing go away for an overnight – mainly to a pal's house or to family. We usually know where they've gone and they know that we know. It's partly a problem about us not being able to give permission for young people to stay with a friend without us doing Police Checks on them".

109   In relation to young people who have runaway however, residential workers commented that young people may have various reasons for running away, for example: struggling with having boundaries set in foster or residential care when they are not used to this at home; or being bullied. When young people run away from the units, workers recognised that they could be at considerable risk, mainly as a result of

drink and drug misuse, sexual abuse and potential exploitation (see Crawley et al, 2004; Dillane et al, 2005). One respondent gave the example of girls/young women who regularly run from the local children's unit; "*they tend not to go alone and are usually found drunk at the home of other young people – often bed and breakfast or Homeless Accommodation. They tend to have money for alcohol or the young people they stay with do, but they're usually hungry when they come back*".

110   Another worker commented: "*They eventually get cold, wet and hungry, may be abandoned by older young people they have run with and may be frightened to come back*".

111   As discussed previously, protocols are in place to respond to young people who go missing from residential children's homes. Respondents commented that these procedures provide guidance for contacting the police, keeping in touch with families, identifying places the young person may have gone to and responding accordingly.

112   It was also suggested that while there are a number of services on offer for young people, it can often be difficult getting them to engage with services. Residential social worker respondents commented that it is important to educate young people about the risks they are taking, but to do so in a way that they will take heed.

113   Once a young person has returned or been taken back to a unit, the Scottish Executive Guidance (2003) emphasises the importance for a young person to have the opportunity to discuss the reasons for running away with an independent professional, the risks of this situation occurring again and what action needs to be taken to reduce the risk. The Guidance indicates that support should be made available to assist the young person with ongoing issues, as appropriate.

114   Residential workers acknowledged that responses to the young person on their return to the unit were very important. Workers commented that young people need to be fed and clean, then to have discussions about why they ran away and how worried people have been. Young people need to be actively welcomed back. This was seen as part of relationship building and illustrating that workers were available and accessible for young people. It was noted that Who Cares? Scotland workers try to be available and some local authorities are better than others for linking them in with a young person in these circumstances.

115   Access to an independent person is identified in the Guidance as being important for young people in residential units. One respondent suggested that this was carried out effectively in their local area:

"*Return home interviews are undertaken for young people who are looked after and accommodated. They are undertaken by social work, the police and 'Who Cares' worker and are thought to fully meet the need for this group of young people*".

116 One worker commented that each young person has their own reasons for running away so a detailed assessment is required to try to work with them on these issues while accommodated and in the transition period when they are back in the community, highlighting the need for follow-up services to provide ongoing support,

such as housing, education and personal skills development. It was suggested that young people need to have choices about who is best able to advise and support them; social workers are often seen as 'the enemy'. Mentoring, befriending and peer support were viewed by respondents as potentially more likely to be effective.

2. General Provision

117 In areas where there is no specialist provision, respondents indicated that available services would be employed 'as necessary'. In these areas, respondents tended to refer to young people missing from residential care rather than from home when they discussed runaways, and several respondents referred the researchers to the police, who were frequently seen as the agency with responsibility for young people who run away from home, for information. As illustrated previously, this is the situation for a significant majority of local authority areas.

118 One respondent acknowledged that when a young person runs away:
"There aren't really any specific services that come into play; it's a bit of a void. There are procedural things such as the EDT and Police being contacted and then a wait until the young person comes back. There's no direct action as such or any services that can be put in place. It's quite often part of a pattern of behaviour and they usually come back or are found. The Police get fed up with those who run away regularly because it takes up a lot of their time".

119 Young people who ran from home could also cause concern for statutory services, with the result that they could be defined on the perceived basis of risk:

"There is no accommodation specifically designated for runaways. Generally runaways presenting to services would be returned home unless there was evidence of child protection concerns indicating that home is unsafe. In that case, steps would be taken to identify temporary placement – starting with family/friends, then if that is not possible, looking at other resources e.g. foster carer or residential unit".

"As noted, the issue of absconding tends to go along with other factors in the lives of some of the vulnerable children and young people we work with, and would be addressed as part of wider risk assessments and care plans for vulnerable children. Generally, intervention aimed at improving the safety and security of young people in their home setting will tend to reduce the likelihood of them absconding. In extreme cases, absconders placing themselves and/or others at risk are considered with reference to criteria for secure accommodation".

120 One local authority gave the example of a joint voluntary/local authority funded service which provided a specialist residential unit which could work extensively with two young people, especially those who have had multiple placements and history of absconding. While it was not secure accommodation it was considered to provide intensive support building on strong relationships between workers and young people and on detailed risk assessment. Currently this resource was reported to be working effectively with a young man who was considered to be a regular 'absconder'.

121 Only nine local authorities reported having initial assessments in place for young people who run from home. These young people were not likely to be seen by statutory services unless reported missing or presenting themselves to social work services. They were more likely to contact voluntary services, where they existed. Respondents, when asked to outline what they considered would help improve responses to young people suggested the following:

- phone helpline, while recognising that in some cases young people's lives are chaotic and they might not use one;
- family mediation that could have a worker in place to help talk through any particular issues or reasons for a young person being unhappy;
- someone who could be there when the young person is returned home.

122 The ability to link young people into relevant services was seen as important by a number of respondents. Different forms of preventative work were likely to be in place such as Family Support Services and groupwork within alternative education bases. It was noted that workers would address running away with young people if identified as an issue.

"Due to geographical location and very small numbers, no formal services are in operation, however if an occurrence happens then all appropriate supports would be available"

123 A representative from ChildLine Scotland outlined the difficulties they can face when a young person who has run away calls for help. They will try to involve the Emergency Duty Team (EDT), where it is appropriate, across all local authority areas. In ChildLine Scotland's experience, according to a respondent, a young person over 12 who has run away will not be seen as a priority for the EDT, depending on contextual circumstance. *"This is clearly not policy, as it stands in contrast to the Children's Scotland Act, the Child Protection Framework for Standards and the Children's Charter - which states that children must 'get the help when they need it'. It is presumably a resource issue"*.

124 Subsequently, ChildLine Scotland will explore whether the young person has somewhere safe they can go to spend the night, with a social work visit arranged for the next day. They will also explore alternatives that might be appropriate for the young person, for example shelters and street teams, if these are available in the local authority area. In some cases, the young person might agree to go home after discussing the issues they are experiencing with the ChildLine counsellor.

125 However, a ChildLine respondent outlined the potential problems of a pattern developing where a young person loses faith in the idea of even seeking support. *"For example, a young person runs away and is encouraged to go home with a social work visit arranged for the next day. They do so, everything is fine, and either they don't turn up for their meeting with social work or they do and tell social work that everything is fine. A week later, the situation breaks down again and the young person runs away again. If they are repeatedly advised to go home when they seek support there is a danger that they will assume there is nothing out there to support them – and stop seeking help"*.

126   It was noted that resources are crucial in order for young people to feel listened to and for support to be available for young people at the point of seeking help. One respondent suggested that this means *"more shelters similar to the ROC project or other alternatives. It also means outreach capacity to support young people in rural areas who otherwise are expected to travel to cities alone"*.

3. Young Runaways Service

127   The Young Runaways Service is a joint initiative aimed at *'increasing the safety and reducing the number of, young people accommodated in residential units, residential school and foster care in Aberdeen who run away'*. The service was set up following concerns by Grampian Police about the risks facing young people who run away from residential units, residential school and foster care, leading them to commission a study carried out by Barnardo's into the extent of this problem. The Barnardo's study found that during 1999, Grampian Police dealt with 897 reports of missing people under the age of 18. Furthermore, two-thirds of the reports related to 89 young people who had run from residential units, with each report averaging five hours of police time (Barnardo's information).

128   Consequently, a multi-agency group was established (including the police, social work department and Barnardo's along with other agencies) to set up a city wide protocol which would operate for young runaways from local authority accommodation. A dedicated service was also established to provide a resource to which young people could be referred.

129   This joint work has highlighted the importance of the issues facing young runaways across the city, although at present the service is only used by young people who have run from local authority accommodation – and crucially, have been reported missing to the police. Respondents highlighted some of the issues that have arisen throughout this process.

Operating the protocol

130   The protocol (which operates on a traffic light basis – green, amber and red) is always used when a young person goes missing from local authority accommodation but does not automatically require workers to alert the police in the first instance. One respondent commented: *"The protocol was generally deemed a success in the period following the inception of the protocol. The number of missing person reports decreased significantly. This allowed finite resources to be targeted at those young people who were most at risk"*. While this worked very well to start with, respondents indicated that it lost some of its impact as residential social workers tended to increasingly go for the 'red light' due to concerns that they would be responsible if risk was underestimated. To address this, the Young Runaways Service, in partnership with the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care, conducted training days to make new staff aware of operational practice. Case studies were used to do this (see Annex Three). This helped develop a broader understanding of the roles of different agencies. As one worker noted: *"One of the benefits of the training is that it seems to foster mutual understanding of professional roles"*

131 This could be beneficial in a number of ways, as another worker noted there are sometimes differences in opinion about the criteria being used, for example how vulnerable a particular young person is. However with negotiation agencies could usually work together on an individual basis.

132 Workers commented that the protocol worked well in a number of ways:
- In practical terms, when a young person goes missing it enables workers to assess the situation and do what they could to get the young person back without necessarily going straight to the police;
- The young people like the fact that workers care enough to go looking for them and it promotes better relationships with young people and their families, if they are contacted before going to the police;
- It removes the time lapse that could exist when workers had to contact the police in the first instance;
- Workers can evidence that they have done a risk assessment and record what steps they took to retrieve the young person;
- The police aren't bombarded with alerts about missing young people. The police then seem to have a faster response time because they know it's a serious running away issue. It makes for better relationships with the police as an agency;
- It works well as a means of fostering good partnership working between agencies involved with young people. There's a lot of knowledge sharing e.g. where young people hang out, who with and which places are not safe;
- If a young person goes missing from care the Emergency Duty Team implement a protocol and will let the social worker know the next day; the incident will be recorded even if no action taken.

Inter-agency working

133 As a result of the joint work involved in developing and operating the service, inter-agency working was seen to be generally good and improving, although it was acknowledged that this could often come down to personalities and how confident individuals felt about their own role. Communication and keeping channels open between agencies was seen to be a priority, in the past this had sometimes been seen as a challenge for the service. Joint work with the police, Young Runaways Service and residential units could also be used to focus on a 'spate' of incidents of running away where these occurred. There was a clearer understanding of different agencies roles and responsibilities and more realistic expectations of what partner agency staff could achieve.

Developing Services

134 The Young Runaways Service is extending their provision to include young people who run away from home and a joint protocol is being developed to implement this. Currently the Service is setting up a drop-in facility aimed at young people running from home and as a preventive measure to decrease their likelihood of becoming accommodated.

135   These developments are currently being drafted and developed, however one respondent noted that Response Police Officers will be asked, upon returning a missing young person, to give brief details of the service and to fill out a consent form with the young person stipulating whether they would agree to contact from the service. *"While this system is in the process of being designed in such a way that we can respond at some level to every incidence of a young person being reported missing, we are aware that young people are not always reported as such. For this reason we hope to set up a dedicated phone line and also a limited drop in specifically for those who are not reported, or are thinking about running, and feel they need help"*.

136   Respondents indicated that a quiet calm place or refuge would be an important addition to the service if available, as it was noted that children's units can be noisy and busy places. However a respondent pointed out that there are staff shortages in residential accommodation and it may be difficult to staff a refuge given the unpredictability of numbers using the service at any time.

4. ROC Provision: Support, Refuge and Outreach

137   There is currently only one refuge in Scotland, provided by Aberlour Child Care Trust and established through partnership working between the voluntary sector, local authorities, Strathclyde Police and the Scottish Executive. The service is funded by the Scottish Executive, Greater Glasgow Health Board, The Railway Children Trust, Aberlour Childcare Trust and the Big Lottery and is available to young people who have run away from the family home or local authority care. The refuge can house up to three young people at any one time and young people are supported to help them plan and work out the next steps.

138   The refuge works in conjunction with the ROC Outreach Project which offers children and young people, who run away or are at risk of running away, a confidential and independent service. The type of service offered by ROC Outreach staff depends on the young person's situation and can include: advocacy, mediation, individual support, information, counselling, links with other services, and assistance with finding safe, temporary accommodation if required. Work is carried out with young people in the short or long-term depending on identified need.

139   The Aberlour ROC Refuge was developed to accommodate a maximum of three young people at any one time and to serve the local authority areas of Glasgow, and its surrounding areas (for example East Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire.) Young people can stay in or access refuge accommodation 24 hours per day, seven days per week through the operation of an on-call system.   A 24 hour helpline ensures that young people can make contact with the refuge whenever support is required. The evidence to date indicates that this is an important service for vulnerable young people.

140   The stated aims of the ROC Refuge are to:

- Provide safe and confidential accommodation to young runaways therefore minimising/eliminating risk of harm from (i) the location they ran from or (ii) the place they would have run to.
- Link young runaways into a support service which can help them to address the reasons for their running away.

141   Figures from the ROC refuge illustrated that between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007:
- 61 young people were given refuge (15 boys and 46 girls)
- the majority of young people (77%) were aged 14 or 15
- while most of the young people were from Glasgow and South Lanarkshire, others were from Renfrew, North Lanarkshire, East Renfrewshire, Argyll and Bute, North Ayrshire and Highland
- 6 of these young people had run from substitute care (5 reported missing)
- 48 had run from the family home (17 reported missing)
- 5 had run from the home of a relative.

142   Ongoing assessment while in the refuge identified more extensive problems that young people were experiencing, (such as substance misuse, self-harm, eating disorders, physical and/or emotional abuse), which may not have been known to other agencies.   Given the needs of the young people admitted to the refuge, service provision needs to be flexible and responsive.   Refuge staff continue to informally assess young people during their stay in the refuge, support them, advocate on their behalf and mediate with family members and/or other agencies.

143 The refuge provides an important opportunity to offer young people an alternative to being on the streets and to reduce the risks they face when running away.   In an evaluation of the refuge (Malloch, 2006) young people themselves viewed the refuge very positively and most of the young people interviewed stated that being in the refuge had made things better for them, at least in the short-term but often in the longer.

144 The refuge appears to have been successful in achieving the following objectives:
- Keeping young people safe;
- Engaging effectively with young people;
- Providing more detailed assessment of young people and their situations e.g. eating disorder, child protection concerns;
- Developing positive relationships with young people;
- Supporting young people to make decisions;
- Providing young people with information about other options available to them.

145   The service can respond to a range of issues facing young people (see Annex Four, for case-studies outlining the experiences of three young people who accessed this service) and is considered to be an important resource by the local authority respondents who indicated that young people from their area had been accommodated:

"ROC Project has successfully supported a very vulnerable young runaway, offered liaison work with the area social work team and the young persons' family. This young person had mental health concerns and would have been very easily exploited if the support had not been made available to keep her safe".

"ROC Service is very child–centred –provides positive advocacy support to young people, has over time developed effective communication links with local social workers / other CHCP staff. Very committed to inter-agency working and developing joint protocols".

146 The combination of outreach work, refuge accommodation and ongoing aftercare provision for young people who wish to make use of these resources is important in delivering a comprehensive and linked up service for young people. While the costs of such a service are significant, ROC managers have consistently set out to design and deliver a high quality, effective refuge service while, at the same time, keeping costs to a minimum. The innovative system of staffing the refuge has kept costs relatively low. This costing includes post-refuge outreach work for up to three months with young people who use this resource and compares favourably with other UK refuges.

147 As the scoping study has shown, the refuge is used by young people from a range of local authorities and it may be useful to consider the viability of a cross local-authority resource in other areas.

MONITORING AND SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

148 In order to maintain an overview of current services, respondents indicated a number of mechanisms and forums that were in place to monitor existing services and to identify the need for changes or the development of new services. A number of methods were identified generally consisting of inter-agency meetings involving community support teams, youth justice co-ordinators, social work, education and other agencies as considered relevant in the local area. These meetings were held to:

- Monitor the circumstances of young runaways;
- Consider missing person issues (from residential units) and the risk assessments that were in place;
- Review police reports (including young runaways who have come to the attention of the police) and make a joint decision on the action required;
- Overview protocol for children and young people who go missing from local authority care;
- Monitor the implementation and application of protocols on an inter-agency basis.

149 Respondents also identified the establishment of multi-agency sub-groups to undertake this monitoring and referred to sub-groups formed to examine issues around vulnerable children and young people, and in one area, on missing children and families.

 "The CPC has a missing children and families sub-group which looks at a variety of issues in relation to children who are missing or whose whereabouts are not known".

"A sub –group of the Vulnerable Young Person's CPC Sub group is to be established, chaired by the Principal Officer Care Management, Performance and Practice Support. This will bring together all key agencies working with vulnerable young people on the street including runaways to develop a more coherent coordinated response to meeting needs / addressing concerns etc".

150 Respondents outlined their plans to ensure the welfare of young runaways and reduce the incidence of running away. Where numbers of young runaways were perceived to be small, often in more rural areas, respondents indicated that individual support packages would be implemented to ensure the safety and well being of young people running away from their local areas.

151 In areas which were developing improved responses to young runaways (developing operational protocols for example) respondents indicated that written information was being produced to signpost services and collaboration with other agencies (such as education) was underway to raise awareness of running away as an issue. A number of local authority respondents indicated that they were in the process of developing policies and procedures for vulnerable young people, which would include young runaways, while others noted that they were developing joint work in this area, generally around the needs of young people who are looked after and accommodated.

152 Local authorities who made use of services in the voluntary sector gave examples of ways in which joint work was leading to improved responses to young

runaways, notably with Barnardo's and Aberlour ROC. One respondent commented: *"We are currently reviewing with Aberlour our use of ROC to identify trends and patterns to see whether we can better develop our response"*. Several local authorities indicated that they had commissioned training aimed at improving awareness of the issues facing young people and the need for informed responses.

153 One respondent noted that:
"CPC are currently devising Vulnerable Children Good Practice Guidance and a protocol for staff (the vulnerable children sub-group includes social services, education, police, health, SCRA, housing). Also need to look at more consistent preventative strategy – have had training delivered 4-6 times per year by Barnardo's Street Team, Glasgow".

154 Respondents were asked to comment on any factors they could identify which had helped them to develop and provide appropriate responses to young runaways. Examples given included the following:
- Concern from the police about the number of young people going missing from care led to the development of a service for these young people;
- High level of commitment from workers;
- Effective joint work/multi agency forums;
- Good relationships between social work services and the local Police;
- Responding to Scottish Executive guidance;
- The presence of Aberlour ROC and a shared agency wish to develop more effective preventative services for young people;
- Developing awareness of risk.

155 When asked what factors, if any, had created challenges in the development of services, a number of issues were identified:
- Six respondents referred to lack of resources;
- Rurality;
- Lack of suitable accommodation locally;
- Lack of awareness of this issue;
- Perceived small numbers of young people who ran away;
- Need for cross-authority co-operation;
- Complexity of systems in place to report missing children and young people;
- Disparity between police forces in response to this issue – need for unity;
- Need for refuge – not social work run – to give young people space.

CONCLUDING POINTS

156   Throughout the scoping study it was apparent that differential responses operate between children and young people who run away from home and those who run from substitute care, the latter being more likely to run away repeatedly. Various strategies are currently in place to improve the experiences of young people who are looked after and accommodated and it would appear that there is a widespread acknowledgement that responses should be in place for this group of young people should they run away from care placements. There is less agreement on the need for practices and procedures aimed at young people who run from home.

157   Although there is clearly confusion and lack of clarity over definition and availability of statistical data to assess the incidence of actual running away, the data collection process for this study has itself gone some way to highlighting some of the complex issues facing statutory agencies. One respondent who struggled to provide information for the study commented: *"it has highlighted for me the need to strengthen and develop this area of work"*. Two others indicated that they would ensure that the needs of young runaways will be incorporated into future Children's Services Plans.

158   However another respondent also pointed out:

"The lack of a strong response to the scoping survey indicates the need to do further work on young runaways. It may well be that I have not spoken to the right individuals or that they have not recognised what they do as being described as young runaways".

159   Their appeared to be some confusion among respondents about this issue in general, and about current procedures and practices. Some existing practices as well as potential developments were ambiguous. The importance of a workable system was emphasised by one respondent:

"There should be a single contact system for all children and young people who go missing i.e. children and young people who run away from home/care, children who are missing from the child protection register, children missing from education, children (under 5) and families whose whereabouts are unknown, missing asylum seeking children and young people etc. Currently there is a range of 'missing children' systems in place few of which link to one another. Currently the opportunity for a child or young person to 'disappear' or fall through the net exists".

160   While the complexity of various strategic tools was critiqued by another respondent who indicated:

"In terms of the child protection agenda we do have some concerns about the numbers of protocols which exist dealing with missing children ... missing from education, health etc. Whilst these latter protocols generally concern missing families it can be confusing to practitioners to have so many separate protocols and it might be more helpful to have one protocol which covers all missing children".

161 The scoping study has identified continued confusion about the use of definitions and appropriate responses, with the recommendations contained in the Scottish Executive Guidance (2003) not widely implemented. Current practice, as reported in this study, raises a number of key issues.

Definitions and data collection
- Lack of accurate information to identify the scale of this problem
- Lack of awareness of the what the real problems facing young people and service providers are as a result of this
- Different issues facing young people running from home and from care
- Runaways from home receive a poor service yet there is apparent compliance with guidance because attention is focused on young people missing from care
- Young people who run away are often situated within wider groups (i.e. children in need) and not defined specifically as runaways
- Statistics and services are often 'hidden' within other categories

Joint work and operational protocols and practices
- There are a range of responses in place but lack of clarity over definitions and levels of risk can lead to confusion in responding to young people
- The importance of effective joint work supported by adequate resources and ongoing training is highlighted
- When young people who are looked after and accommodated runaway there is more likelihood of a co-ordinated inter-agency response including information sharing
- Lack of assessment for young people who run from home would suggest their needs may not be identified
- Systems which reduce the number of young people reported to the police as missing may not improve the situation for young people unless additional services are put in place

Service provision
- The availability of refuge provision or suitable emergency accommodation is important in keeping young people safe and providing an environment where young people's needs can be identified and assessed
- National Missing Persons Helpline would be useful for police, especially in cases where young runaways are not reported to the police
- Some resources, e.g. refuge and helpline would not be sustainable on a single local authority basis and would require cross-boundary co-operation

Overall considerations
- Need for strategic approach – rather than simply another strategy
- If data about frequency of running away is not collected there is a danger that resources will be diverted into areas that are 'measured' and have 'targets'

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	Collation of statistics	Protocol – Looked After and Accomm	Protocol – children running from home	Strategic lead - Social work
Aberdeen City	Yes	Yes	Being developed	Yes
Aberdeenshire	No	Yes	Being developed	Not known
Angus	No	Yes	No	No info
Argyll and Bute	Logged (Acc)	Yes	Yes	No info
City of Edinburgh	Yes (Acc)	Yes	No	No
Clackmannanshire	No	Yes	No	No
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dumfries and Galloway	No	No	No	No
Dundee City	Yes LAAC	No	No	No
East Ayrshire	Yes (Acc)	Yes	No	No
East Dunbartonshire	No info	No info	No info	No info
East Lothian	No	Yes	No	No info
East Renfrewshire	No	No	No	No
Falkirk	No	Yes	No	No info
Fife	Not known	Police procedures	No	No
Glasgow City	Logged	Yes	Yes	Yes
Highland	No	Yes	No	No
Inverclyde	Missing persons (police)	Yes	No	No
Midlothian	Yes	Yes	No	Not known
Moray	No	Yes	No	Yes
North Ayrshire	Not known	Yes	Being developed	No
North Lanarkshire	Not known	Yes	Not known	Not known
Orkney Islands	No	Yes	No	Not known
Perth and Kinross	No	Being developed	No	No
Renfrewshire	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Scottish Borders	No	Yes	No	No
Shetland Islands	No	Being developed	No	No info
South Ayrshire	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known
South Lanarkshire	No	Yes	Being developed	No
Stirling	No	Yes	No	No
West Dunbartonshire	Not known	Yes	No	No
West Lothian	No	Yes	No	No

	Preventative services	Emergency accommodation	Follow-up services[13]	Services being developed
Aberdeen City	No	Yes- Children's Unit	Yes- Runaways Project	Yes
Aberdeenshire	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known
Angus	Yes	Yes- Young people's unit & foster care	Yes	Not specified
Argyll and Bute	Yes	Yes- ROC Refuge	Yes	Not specified
City of Edinburgh	Yes	Yes- residential unit & foster care	Yes Streetwork	Not specified
Clackmannanshire	Yes	No information	No information	Not specified
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Yes- local helpline	Yes- NCH accommodation & foster care	Yes	Not specified
Dumfries and Galloway	No information	No	No	Not specified
Dundee City	Not known	No	Yes	Yes
East Ayrshire	Yes	No	Yes	Not specified
East Dunbartonshire	No information	No information	No info	No info
East Lothian	No information	No information	No info	No info
East Renfrewshire	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Falkirk	No information	No information	No information	Not specified
Fife	No information	No information	Yes	Not known
Glasgow City	Yes	Yes – ROC Refuge	Yes – Barnardos' Street team	Yes
Highland	Yes	Yes – housing services flat and resid accomm	No	Not specified
Inverclyde	No	Yes – residential unit and foster care	Yes	Not specified
Midlothian	Yes	No	Yes – Street work	Not specified
Moray	Yes	Yes – self-contained bedsit in crisis unit	yes	Not specified
North Ayrshire	Yes	No	Yes	Not specified
North Lanarkshire	No	Yes – scatter flats, accommodation	No	Yes
Orkney islands	Yes	No	Yes	Individual basis
Perth and Kinross	Yes	No	Yes	Not specified
Renfrewshire	Yes	No	No	Not specified
Scottish Borders	No	No	No	Not specified
Shetland Islands	No information	No information	No information	Not specified
South Ayrshire	Not known	No	Not known	Not specified
South Lanarkshire	Yes	Yes – ROC refuge	Yes - ROC	Yes
Stirling	Yes	No information	No information	Not specified
West Dunbartonshire	Yes	No	Yes	Not specified
West Lothian	Yes	No	No information	Not specified

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[13] Follow up services could include return home interviews, outreach or other non-specified services

ANNEX TWO

The Guidance stated that protocols must:
- Recognise that children and young people who run away are often experiencing serious problems in their lives;
- Consider how to signpost children and young people to information on local services available to help them;
- Include guidance on the sharing of information between agencies;
- Confirm that when discussing issues with children and young people the practitioner must be clear about how information will be dealt with and any limits to confidentiality.

For children being looked after away from home, they must also:
- Stress that all children and young people in residential care should be provided with advice on sexual health, drug misuse and other matters relating to their personal safety and welfare;
- Emphasise the need to assess the risks of running for each child being looked after away from home;
- Encourage children and young people's residential units, in partnership with the police, to consider what protective action should be taken to ensure that vulnerable children in their care are not targeted by adults (or other children and young people) in their community who might wish to exploit them or involve them in high-risk or criminal activities;
- Include information on when a child or young person in substitute care who has gone missing should be defined as having run away;
- Include guidance on when the police should be notified about the child or young person's absence;
- Confirm who else should be informed about a child or young person's absence.

In terms of safety, local protocols 'must':
- Recognise that children and young people who run away will need somewhere safe to stay;
- Recognise that not all parents will inform the police or other statutory agencies that their child has run away and other professionals will need to be aware of the need to pick up changes in the child's behaviour which may indicate that he/she is at risk;
- Include guidance on actions once a child or young person is located;
- Include guidance on the needs of young runaways normally resident outwith the local authority area.

For children being looked after away from home, they must also:
- Outline the responsibilities of individual agencies and clarify the responsibilities of different agencies in attempting to locate the child or young person and return them to their home or care placement;
- Clarify the format and type of information to be provided by local authorities to the police.

In supporting the child or young person, protocols must:

- Confirm that every child or young person who runs away should have the opportunity of discussing with a professional the reasons for their running away, the risks of it occurring again and what action needs to be undertaken to reduce risk.
- Recognise that the interview with the child or young person may identify child protection issues or a need for information on sources of support or advice;
- Recognise that children and young people who run away are often experiencing serious problems in their lives;
- Recognise the need to consider whether any support is required for the child or young person or the wider family;
- Remind professionals of the need to be aware of signs that the child or young person may have been involved in high-risk activity or abuse during their absence;
- Emphasise the importance of information both in identifying children or young people at risk and in building up a profile to help determine the priority rating for an individual child or young person in substitute care should they abscond again.
- Recognise that for some children and young people running away will be a transition to independent living;
- Stress the importance of welcoming a child or young person who returns to a residential establishment having previously run away.

Young Runaways Service (Aberdeen): Case Study

The following case study is an approximation and amalgam of actual events. While the story has been changed enough to render it fictional it is nevertheless a realistic depiction of a Young Person's experience in terms of developing a pattern of 'staying away' from home/residential care. Names and details have been changed in order to preserve confidentiality.

Jane began being reported missing when she was 15. To begin with she was going missing overnight and returning sometime the next day. School attendance dropped markedly and Jane's parents had begun to suggest that Jane's behaviour at home was becoming intolerable. Jane cites 'big arguments' with her parents as a reason for staying away, as well as wanting to hang out with her friends.

Jane's pattern of running escalated quickly. She began going missing for up to 5 days at a time and stopped attending school. It would sometimes take her parents 2 – 3 days to report her missing. Jane would eventually return home or would be returned by the Police. When away Jane would usually stay with friends, though her associations were often not long standing and were becoming increasingly transient. Jane's spells at home gradually became shorter and shorter. Life at home became strained and a big argument eventually led to an impasse whereby Jane's parents no longer wanted her at home and Jane didn't wish to return home.

Jane had contact with social work and two voluntary services during this time. Jane engaged reasonably well with services for the first few weeks until her pattern of running escalated. It became increasingly difficult to get hold of Jane while she was missing though she would occasionally answer her phone to let someone know she was OK. During times when she was at home she would attend sessions but consistent work with either service proved difficult due to the chaotic nature of her life.

The final time Jane went missing from home she was traced to a flat where she was living with a 23 year old woman (Sandra). Sandra had no previous connection to Jane other than the fact that she lived nearby a relative of Jane's and that the two had become friends. Sandra was known to Social Work. Given the likelihood that any return home would breakdown within days it was agreed between social work, Jane, her parents, and Sandra that Jane could remain there on a temporary basis until such a time as a suitable alternative could be arranged.

During this time Jane engaged with voluntary services on an ad hoc basis. The chaotic nature of her lifestyle was clear. Jane was essentially turning night in to day living, at 15, without any appropriate adult supervision other than brief and fleeting contact with services. During this time she made use of

the local G.U.M. Clinic for emergency contraception. Details of her associations were now largely unclear.

Part 2

The second part of Jane's case study is situated in residential care and has been used in joint training on the Missing Persons Protocol for Young People in Residential Care which is in place in the area. It is designed to illicit discussion around level of risk and grading of the young people in question in relation to the traffic light system at the core of the protocol. The discussion questions from the training have been included as well as possible responses from Children's Unit Staff which correlate to the guidance offered within the protocol (For further information on the protocol see Pg.32 of this document).

Approximately one month later Jane was placed in a children's unit as an emergency. She has a large network of friends in the Aberdeen City area. She has been known to abuse cannabis and has self harmed in the past. Since her admission she has gone missing on a daily basis. She has been found in the company of a 20 year old male and it is suspected that she is involved in a sexual relationship with him. At 1020 hours this morning she ran out of the fire exit door with another resident, Sharon.

Sharon is 13 and has been at the unit for two months. She was placed there as she is out with parental control. She also has a large network of friends. She frequently shoplifts and it is suspected that she deals and uses speed. She is very small for her age.

Both girls have mobile phones with them but are not responding to calls.

It is now 1130.

What is the category of risk for each of the young people and how have you decided on this? What should you do now?

While historically the temptation may have been for Unit Staff to err on the side of caution and report the girls on Red (the highest risk category) it would probably be the case that considering the time of day they would both be graded Green. If too many young people are reported red without proper adherence to the protocol then too much strain is placed on finite Police resources. Ultimately this could lead to those young people at genuine high and immediate risk being put at greater risk as the resources which should be actively attempting to trace them have been deployed elsewhere.

A Green Grading does not necessitate the involvement of the Police. Instead it allows unit staff the opportunity to make their own enquiries; phone call to parents to inform them that Jane and Sharon are missing and to enquire if they had heard from the girls; phoning round other known family members, friends, associates. If there was enough staff on duty then staff may go out

and look for missing young people if they had an idea where they might be. A risk assessment to ensure staff safety would have to be done prior to this. Staff would keep a log of actions.

You receive information from staff at another Children's unit who advise you that whilst Jane was missing yesterday she had been in the company of one of their residents who had since informed them that they had gone to the flat of a male in his 20's who had given them alcohol, shown them a pornographic video and then had sex with Jane. It is now 1600 hours.

What is the category of risk and how have you decided on this? What should you do now?

With this new information staff would contact the Police. At this point staff and the Duty Sergeant would have discussion regarding the grading of the two girls. An up to date risk assessment would have been faxed to the sergeant. The Sergeant would make the final decision regarding the grading.

The nature of the new information could mean that the girls would be graded red. The Police would interview the young man who had provided the information to gather as much detail as possible. An address check would be done to ascertain whether the girls were with the male in question. In this case it was confirmed that Jane and Sharon were not with this man. As this man would now be taken in for questioning about the alleged events of the previous evening then the element of risk which saw the girls graded red would no longer be in the equation. The girls would likely drop back down to amber. An amber grading effectively means that responsibility for actively making enquiries sits with social work staff.

There has been no contact with either missing person. It is now 2330 hours. Both girls have previously failed to return overnight but have come back the following morning.

Have you informed the Police? What action did you take before contacting the Police? What grade did you report Jane as? Explain your reasons for this.
What grade did you report Sharon as? Explain your reasons for this.

Who else did you inform and when.

At this point staff may make another phone call to the Police in order to reassess the grading of both girls. A number of factors would need to be weighed up. Jane is 15 and regularly goes missing. She usually returns unharmed the next morning. Last night however it is alleged that she may have been sexually exploited by a man in his 20's. Though she is not with this man it is possible that she could get herself in a similar situation.

Sharon is only 13 years old. The fact that she was with Jane may normally reduce risk slightly but there is no guarantee that they are still together. Also the possible events of last night would suggest that this factor may be negligible in term of reducing risk.

Unit staff may well at this point be arguing strongly for the girls to be graded red. The duty Sergeant may agree or he may not. A negotiation often takes place at this stage. It may be agreed that the girls remain amber for another hour before being upgraded. While the protocol provides guidance there is no definitive right or wrong answer to be gleaned. In effect the grading decision is a judgement call made by the duty sergeant and based on the information at hand.

Both Jane and Sharon were traced by Police and returned to the unit unharmed.

ANNEX FOUR

The ROC Refuge: Case Studies

Case Study 1

A was referred to ROC Outreach by the ROC Refuge where he had spent several days. He had refused to go home because of the level of anger and confrontation there. There was no physical violence.

He is a 16 year old boy, and we met at the point of his return home from Refuge to his parents. His relationship with his mother in particular was very poor and his parents were not sure that they would be able to cope with his return home. In fact they said that they felt like running away themselves as they were also having problems with their two young daughters. They own their own comfortable home and both parents are employed. It transpired that A had been adopted as an older child, and that his previous background had been traumatic and neglectful. He settled very well, however although he went easily to strangers and seemed to trust too quickly everyone who gave him attention. He describes his first birthday with his adoptive parents as the happiest day of his life.

Unfortunately, following a row with his adoptive parents, he had run away - back to his birth family. He was quickly returned home. It seemed that because of all the emotions involved this had been handled badly, and following that incident the young person maintained contact with his birth family, all of whom had complex social problems. These relationships were not healthy as his birth family had treated him very badly when he was little, and he was not emotionally equipped to be able to deal with the backlash at home. His adoptive parents were too hurt to be able to support him adequately through this time.

There were clear attachment problems, and over the following year the young person struggled with his identity, and when stressed would run to one particular member of his birth family. He was very vulnerable when running and eventually became involved in drinking and violence. The young person had attended the local secondary school, but he began truanting during this time because of his feelings of alienation. He was therefore attending college at the time of referral, but having made some friends there, his cheek and talking during lectures soon resulted in his being excluded.

His goals (which he identified during conversation without prompting), were to improve his relationship with his adoptive parents; to develop the skills needed to better judge whom to trust; to maintain a distance from people who exert a bad influence; and to further his education. ROC helped this through various exercises, both with the young person and jointly with his mum, to learn to understand each other better and for both of them to respond appropriately and positively to each others attempts at reconciliation.

He was accompanied to a meeting at college having been coached in the best way of putting his case across. He spoke well and seldom needed advocacy. In 1:1 sessions, he often spoke of his inability to judge whom to trust. He could easily identify times

when he had made good choices and times when he made poor choices and that would lead into deeper discussion which helped him to gain insight into his behaviour.
Social work services were accessed and the case allocated.
He won a repeat place at college for the following year.
His relationship with his parents has improved greatly by his judgement and theirs.
It is several months since he last ran away.
Other goals have been identified and work is ongoing.

Case Study 2

B is a 16 year old boy with a learning disability who was referred by his school.

Living in a chaotic family in poor conditions, he had refused to go home from school one day, stayed until extra curricular activities were over but eventually did return home, however, the next day he appeared at school dirty and unkempt. He was given breakfast and a shower at school and was referred to ROC and to social work services. ROC treated this as priority and the young person was seen at school where he disclosed abuse at home

The young person was seen by ROC in a private room in the school. As it became clear that he was about to make disclosures, he was asked if he would like his teacher to be present. He declined, but after making the disclosures was told that in order to make sure that he stayed safe, his teacher and social work services would have to be told. He asked to be present while the discussion with his teacher took place and he contributed very well to this. Having previously told the school that he was leaving to attend college (at his parent's instigation) his uncertainty was noticed and he was enabled to change that decision. The headmistress was relieved as he believed that the young person would benefit from the support provided by school.

ROC contacted social services who had already begun an investigation based on earlier alleged physical abuse. As the young person was asking for refuge and social work had no appropriate place available, he was admitted to the ROC refuge where he remained for 7 days. During that time there was a Children's Hearing which was attended by a refuge worker. His parents were present and became angry and agitated, denying all charges and insisting their son's return home. The case was referred to the Sheriff for proof while the young person was accommodated by social work services. The young person is adamant that he will not return home and that if he is made to, he will be in grave danger from his father.

He has ongoing contact with ROC Outreach and continues to be supported to make any further disclosures and to come to terms with his past. A proof Court Hearing is imminent and ROC Outreach worker has been cited as a witness. Should the young person seek refuge again he will be helped by the Outreach worker to access this and any other appropriate resources. Links will be maintained with social work services and the school. The young person says that he feels very safe in the school and the atmosphere and ethic there is definitely open and supportive.

Case Study 3

C is a 14 year old girl referred by a care worker as she often ran away from the children's unit where she had a short term placement. She was there on Section 25 of the Children Scotland Act, which meant that her mother, a single parent, still had parental rights. She found it difficult to engage with the staff and also when referred to ROC had initial difficulty in trusting the worker. She fantasised a lot about people she claimed to be friends with and places she claimed to have been – wish fulfilment; and was both victim and perpetrator of bullying. She could also be aggressive toward adults in an effort to gain some power and control, and was described by care staff as manipulative

Each time she returned from care to her home, her relationship with her mum broke down quickly and she would return to local authority care. There was uncertainty about her whereabouts when she ran away, which was a regular occurrence. .During her time working with ROC there has been regular contact with social work who were encouraged to quickly recommend that parental rights be removed from her mother (who appeared to have mental health problems and who consistently disrupted any plans made by social work), and the Section changed to 70(iii), giving social work parental rights. Although this took some time, it has now been successfully implemented by her social worker.

CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) was contacted and a meting held between ROC worker, social worker and mental health professionals at CAMH. The advice was to allow her those fantasies, which she clearly needed, and just to ignore them. It was helpful to be able to pass that advice to care workers who found the issue very difficult and had previously been confronting her at every turn. The fantasies gradually subsided when ignored. She hated her placement and didn't trust the workers, but it was her fourth unit and she had never had time to settle or build relationships before being returned to her mother who was emotionally and (according to the young person) physically abusive. She regarded a younger sibling at home as having everything that she was denied, including her mother's affection.

She was excluded from school, having assaulted a teacher and being generally aggressive a lot of the time. A long spell without education was punctuated by ROC contacting social work to try to progress matters. Half day tuition a week was eventually arranged and now she is set to begin an educational placement very soon, although it remains to be seen how well she will cope with this. She now argues and niggles with a couple of other young people in her unit and this occasionally becomes physical, but it is within the bounds of normal adolescent behaviour.

Early in intervention there was a spell of running to adults who were known to the police and there were fears for her moral welfare at this time. Alternative safe places to run to such as the ROC Refuge were suggested and Refuge was accessed twice. Support was offered to help her accept and as far as possible cope with her mother's rejection. A worker from another voluntary project also sees the young person regularly and attachment is encouraged with care workers. Care workers now see her in a more positive light and as her behaviour becomes less extreme they are better able to empathise. Also links are now being made by social work between the young

person and her grandmother, who is very important in her life, but who was previously barred from contact by her mother.

There is current input from ROC Outreach, another voluntary agency, social services, education, grandmother, care workers.

Annex Five

Services

Barnardo's Glasgow Street Team makes contact with vulnerable and at risk young people who frequent Glasgow city centre and surrounding areas. The project provides a crisis service to young people - those who have nowhere to stay at night, who have run away, who are staying in temporary accommodation, who are at risk of sexual exploitation, who may be involved in drugs or alcohol, who are experiencing or living with a high degree of chaos and trauma in their lives.

There is a street work service four nights a week, Monday – Thursday between 6pm and 2am. Young people have access to a free phone during these times as well as between 9 am and 5pm, Monday - Friday.

The main areas of work include:

- active provision of relevant and accurate information
- street work
- case work
- referrals to mainstream and specialist services
- direct assistance with accessing a range of practical advice, support, assistance or advocacy
- linking young people back into mainstream services
- gender-based individual work for young men and women. We work with under 18s and runaways in particular
- family or couple and lone parent work
- targeted street work and group work in relation to sexual exploitation

ChildLine Scotland was launched in June 1990 in an effort to meet the growing need for children and young people to have access to a free telephone advice and counselling service. It currently operates from Glasgow and, thanks to Scottish Executive funding, ChildLine Scotland North and North East opened in Aberdeen in May 2004.

ChildLine Scotland is open ten-and-a-half hours daily, Monday to Friday and six hours on both Saturday and Sunday. At all other times calls from Scotland are automatically diverted to ChildLine's 24 hour UK service. In addition to the counselling service, ChildLine Scotland also offers support, on a training and consultancy basis, to schools, colleges and many other organisations. It works closely with statutory organisations including education and social work departments and the police. It offers training for other telephone helpline organisations, befrienders, nursing students, social workers, children's panel members, teachers, residential workers and specific training for children and young people.

INCLUDEM is a Scottish charity dedicated to redressing the social exclusion of the most vulnerable young offenders. Its aims are to tackle the social exclusion of young people at the greatest risk of offending and to reduce the offending behaviour of the most excluded young people by offering packages of personal support and

supervision. The projects endeavour to maintain young people within the community, to control their offending behaviour and promote social inclusion and reintegration of those in residential institutions. They aim to meet the support needs of young people who are experiencing a troubled transition to adulthood and to promote their wider social inclusion. It is the quality of supervision that is the distinguishing feature of INCLUDEM.

NCH is one of the UK's leading children's charities, helping children achieve their full potential. Its services aim to support some of the UK's most vulnerable and excluded children and young people.NCH was founded in 1869 and known for many years as the National Children's Home. The agency works with children, young people and families who face difficulties such as poverty, disability and abuse.

NCH runs more than 500 projects for some of the UK's most vulnerable and excluded children and young people, and their families, supporting over 160,000 people at children's centres throughout the UK; it also promote social justice by lobbying and campaigning for change.NCH is the leading UK provider of family and community centres, children's services in rural areas, services for disabled children and their families, and services for young people leaving care.

Running - Other Choices (ROC) was the first project in Scotland to focus on runaways and was set up to work with children under the age of 16 within Glasgow and East Renfrewshire. ROC currently offers vital support to children and young people of all ages and from all walks of life who run away or are at risk of running away. In addition to the ROC Refuge which was set up in 2003, ROC has an Outreach Service which works with young people experiencing difficulties within their home such as abuse, neglect, persistent conflict or who need to escape from their parents' own problems such as drug and alcohol abuse or mental illness.

Streetwork UK was set up in 1992 to tackle the problem of youth gangs in Edinburgh's city centre but very quickly found many young people on the streets in severe crisis, sleeping outdoors, involved in prostitution, underage runaways, injecting drugs and involved in crime. The project staff are out on the streets every night of the year, in all weathers. They look for the most vulnerable and give them crisis support, making sure they are safe and helping them to access emergency accommodation. In the housing estates, the project in involved in educating young people to help them stay off drugs, away from crime, and to make better choices about sexual health. The project aims to guide young people towards a better life, education, training and job opportunities.   The Runaways Action Programme also provides a much-needed service to young people who runaway from home or care in Edinburgh. It promotes the Runaways Helpline offering young people advice and assistance 24 hours a day. It also takes referrals from statutory and voluntary partners such as the police, social work and youth projects.

The Young Runaways Service is a joint initiative aimed at 'increasing the safety, and reducing the number of, young people accommodated in residential units, residential school and foster care in Aberdeen who run away'. The service was set up following concerns by Grampian Police about the risks facing young people who

runaway, leading them to commission a study carried out with Barnardo's into the extent of this problem.

Its aims and objectives are to explore with young people the reasons why they run away, to help them understand the risks of running away, help them develop alternative coping strategies and to reduce the level of Police intervention with them. The Service is staffed by a worker from Barnardo's and a part-time Police Officer.

Who Cares? Scotland provides a voice for children and young people who are looked after and accommodated in Scotland. The ethos of the organisation, maintained throughout its history, is that young people are central to all its work.

Its aims are:

- To provide an advocacy service throughout Scotland, accessible by all young people with experience of being looked after in public care.
- To provide information to them about their rights and responsibilities.
- To enable these young people to come together to identify issues of importance to them and to campaign for improved policy and practice.
- To ensure that their opinions are included in all consultations and discussions which affect their lives.