

Minutes of the First Meeting of the National Working Group on Young Runaways

Monday 25 June 2007 at COSLA, Rosebery House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh

Present: Maggie Tierney, Scottish Executive, Child Protection team (Chair)
Bryan Evans, Aberlour Child Care Trust
Boyd McAdam, Scottish Executive, Getting It Right For Every Child team
Martin Henry, Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders Child Protection Office
Martin Kettle, ADSW, South Lanarkshire CPC
Alison Clancy, Children 1st
Lynn Townsend, ADES, West Dunbartonshire CPC
Tam Baillie, Barnardos
Ian Milligan, Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care
Sylvia Murray, COSLA
Chris Ridley, Scottish Executive, Child and Maternal Health Division
Hugh Mackie, Grampian Police, for ACPOS
Patrick Down, Scottish Executive, Criminal Law Division
Peter Hope-Jones, Scottish Executive (Secretary)

Apologies: Rosie Ilett, Scottish Executive, Child and Maternal Health Division
Ewan Stewart, Grampian Police, for ACPOS
Maggie Mellon, Children 1st
Margaret McLeod, YouthLink Scotland
Jim Doherty, SCRA
Bill Atkinson, Perth and Kinross Council, for Child Protection Committees
Maria McCann, Scottish Executive, Support for Learning

Item 1 - Introduction

Maggie welcomed all to the meeting and gave a quick summary of the purpose of the National Working Group, which will be a relatively short-life group – the aim is to meet five times over the next ten to twelve months, before producing recommendations for Ministers.

Item 2 – Background

Bryan gave an overview of events of the last ten years which have led to the formation of the National Working Group, starting with the publication in 1999 of *Still Running: Children on the Streets in the UK*, research commissioned by The Children's Society (England and Wales), Aberlour Childcare Trust (Scotland) and EXTERN Organisation (Northern Ireland). This research suggested that one in nine young people (11%) run away or are forced to leave home and stay away overnight under the age of 16, and that there are at least 129,000 running away incidents (overnight or longer) per year in the UK.

This report led to a consultation by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2001, which in turn led to *Young Runaways: Report by the Social Exclusion Unit*, guidance published in 2002. *Missing Out* is the Scottish equivalent to *Still Running*.

A cross-departmental group was then set up by the Scottish Executive, which developed the 2003 guidance, *Vulnerable Children and Young People: Young Runaways*. In 2004, Aberlour received funding for the first refuge for young runaways in Scotland. In 2005, the Scottish Coalition on Young Runaways met for the first time. This group was set up in response to a seeming lack of activity and joined-up strategic guidance on young runaways in Scotland. The Coalition met with Robert Brown, then Deputy Minister for Education, in 2006. In Spring 2007, the Executive funded an audit of services for young runaways.

Maggie explained to the group that the Executive is funding a portion of Bryan's time to support the work of the National Working Group.

Bryan suggested that it would be helpful to look at what has been done in England, though we can't simply reproduce it here.

Action: Bryan to put together a summary of publications and action in England on young runaways

Item 3 – Discussion of Purpose, Remit and Scope of the Group

Maggie gave a summary of the reconfiguring of the Children, Young People and Social Care Directorate within the Executive, which has come about as a result of the change of government and also of the internal 'Taking Stock' exercise. The new structure for the Executive as a whole is based around strategic objectives rather than departments, which should make it easier for different areas, such as health and justice, to work alongside education and social care. One result of the restructuring is that Child Protection and Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) have been brought together under the banner of Preventative Services, within the Children, Young People and Social Care Directorate. It is important that strategic work on young runaways should fit within the context of GIRFEC.

Maggie invited the group to share thoughts about what is meant by strategic national action, and how this could be achieved. In discussion it was agreed that a national strategy would need to:

- consider the issues from the eyes of a child, and to understand signals children send in time;
- emphasise the need to engage early with children who are likely to run away, not just those who have already run away from home;
- instil further joined-up working among agencies, perhaps including looking at whether or how Children Missing from Education, School Truancy Alerts and Missing Family Alerts might be aligned - joined-up working needs to be about improving the systems, not just adding links;
- involve all parts of Scotland, not just urban centres;
- cover the continuum of involvement between mainstream and specialist responses, and between minimal and significant intervention – teaching children problem-solving and decision-making skills will be key; and
- do more than just provide guidance on setting up protocols – it would need to make a difference to what professionals are doing.

Maggie tabled the document *Scope and Remit of National Working Group on Young Runaways* and outlined the four planned areas of activity for the group:

- to develop methods of measuring numbers of young runaways and promote the reporting of young runaways - before we can accurately measure numbers there needs to be a clear and sensible definition of what a young runaway is
- to consider the 2003 guidance – we need to identify what was lacking in the guidance, and in the three-year reform programme, and why improvements were not implemented
- to develop support that could be offered to young runaways – including the possibility of alternative accommodation
- to decide what local and national measures will be needed in order to implement changes

There was some discussion of whether CPCs alone were the appropriate target for implementing the outcomes of the group, whether they were now better able to implement new thinking than they were with the 2003 guidance, whether they were sufficiently integrated with children’s services planning structures, and whether voluntary organisations are properly integrated. This will vary across Scotland, and will be a challenge.

Action: Bryan draft a paper on what a continuum of intervention would look like, and which agencies might lead at different points of that continuum

Three types of reporting may need to be promoted:

- Self-reporting – mechanisms for young people to report in confidence the fact that they’ve run away from home
- Parents – research suggests 60-70% of young runaways are not reported missing – the strategy should address why some parents do not report their children as missing
- Agencies – issues with inter-agency working and information-sharing

Tam pointed out the need for clear definitions of what a runaway is, as opposed to a truant or a missing child – this can be a difficult distinction. In addition, Tam noted that the strategy would need to be mindful that running away can sometimes be a sign of resilience.

Item 4 – Developing a Work Plan

Action: Bryan to draft a work plan for the group, which will include key outcomes of purpose, remit and scope discussion

Maggie laid out what a work plan might include:

- Vision statement
- Suggestions for outcomes we’re looking for e.g. should an outcome be “no reported runaways”? The assumption is that this would not be a useful outcome.
- Outputs – what actions and documents the group will produce, and who these will be aimed at
- A clear definition of the situation and terms being used
- Issues of measurement and reporting, including self-reporting, parents and agencies
- A starter paper on what a continuum of intervention will look like
- A paper on models of service which currently exist

Action: all to contribute examples of current practice if possible – there is no need to do a trawl for this, it just needs to give an idea of the types of services that would meet needs in the following key areas:

- Primary prevention – general services for children
- Secondary prevention – services focussed on children at risk
- Services which support children after they have run away from home
- Emergency provision

The results of the audit/mapping exercise will come out in late July, and will be publicised mid August. Bryan suggested the Coalition and Working Group meet along with CPCs to hear and discuss the results. This was provisionally agreed for the afternoon of Friday 31 August.

Action: Bryan to check this date with Margaret Malloch and arrange meeting

There was some discussion as to the format of meetings of the Working Group, with Bryan suggesting it might be beneficial to split into sub-groups. It was agreed that there would be at least one more meeting of the whole group to look at the work plan, before planning a split.

Item 5 – Any Other Business

There was no other business.

Item 6 – Next Meeting

The next meeting was agreed for Monday 10 September 2007, at 2.00 to 3.30 pm, at COSLA again. Some members will be unable to attend, but will contribute by email beforehand.

As discussed earlier, there will also be a meeting with the Coalition and CPCs to hear and discuss results of the audit/mapping exercise on the afternoon of Friday 31 August 2007. This will be confirmed by Bryan.