

# REACHING SAFE PLACES

EXPLORING THE JOURNEYS OF  
YOUNG PEOPLE WHO RUN AWAY  
FROM HOME OR CARE

Jane Thompson



**RAILWAY**  
**children**  
Fighting for street children

# **RAILWAY CHILDREN FIGHT FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN WHO LIVE ALONE AND AT RISK ON THE STREETS, WHERE THEY SUFFER ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION.**

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**SIMONA DEL MONTE**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A YOUNG PERSON WHO RUNS AWAY FROM HOME OR CARE AND HAS NO SAFE PLACE TO GO IS AT RISK OF ENDING UP ON THE STREETS OR IN OTHER EQUALLY UNSAFE PLACES WHERE THEY ARE VULNERABLE TO ABUSE, EXPLOITATION, OR INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME.

Railway Children has always focused on the plight of children and young people who run away and end up on the streets. In 2009 we published 'Off the Radar', an in-depth study on the lives and experiences of over a hundred children who were detached from parents and carers and/or had spent four weeks or longer on the streets. We responded to its findings by developing and implementing the 'Reach' model, which provides services before, during and after a young person runs away<sup>1</sup>. By 2014 we were concerned that the closure of all but one refuge for young runaways, and the inconsistent use of local authority emergency accommodation was leaving young people without a safe place at the time they needed it most. Alongside this, outreach workers were reporting that it was increasingly difficult to find young people on the street, meaning that they were less visible than ever.

This led us to conclude that we should be researching young people's journeys in more detail, both to identify possible points of intervention and to establish what factors helped or hindered the search for a safe place. Only by doing this would we be able to make recommendations that were rooted in young people's experiences.

The methods used were: Freedom of Information requests to local authorities on the use of emergency accommodation for young runaways aged under 16; consultation with workers through learning sets and a survey; and peer research interviews with young people with relevant experience, followed by workshops and a survey to test the findings. More detail about the methodology is given in the full body of the report.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work-in-the-uk/street-level/>





# FINDINGS FROM THE SCOPING EXERCISE

Out of 210 local authorities that replied to our Freedom of Information request, 206 said they had accommodation that they could use in an emergency, the majority citing foster care and residential children's homes. In just under half of replies (n=96) the local authority advised either that data was not held on the number of times accommodation had been used for a young person that had gone missing, or that to answer this would require a manual examination of case files, the cost of which would exceed the prescribed limit of £450. A number of local authorities said that going missing was not of itself a reason to accommodate a young person. This appears

to indicate an underlying assumption that young people will only access help retrospectively and that local authorities do not view themselves as having an intervention role during a missing episode.

**MOST YOUNG PEOPLE  
UNDER 16 WILL BE  
RELIANT ON THE  
LOCAL AUTHORITY TO  
PROVIDE EMERGENCY  
ACCOMMODATION  
WHEN NEEDED**

The partial picture we have indicates that 71 local authorities had not provided accommodation to any young people under 16 in an emergency in 2013/14 as a result of going missing, and 39 had done so. The total number of young

people accommodated was between 127 and 157.

The lack of refuge provision means that most young people under 16 will be reliant on the local authority to provide emergency accommodation when needed. Based on these responses, we cannot state with any certainty that there is an adequate safety net in place. Other research suggests that the situation of 16-17 year olds is equally bleak (Homeless Link, 2013).

# FINDINGS FROM THE CONSULTATION WITH WORKERS

Respondents to the survey were predominantly based in England and worked for charities. More of their services were targeted at working with the young person before and after they had run away; fewer offered a crisis response while the young person was away from home or care. This increases concern that young people may struggle to find a safe place during the runaway journey.

Workers were asked in their experience where young people went when they ran away. Four of the top five locations identified were behind closed doors: the houses of friends, family and acquaintances, and houses where there were parties. The only place identified in the top five where the young person would be visible to others was outdoor areas such as the park, wasteland or the streets. More public locations were chosen, but less frequently: workers also identified shopping centres, train or bus stations and takeaway/fast food places. Young people behind closed doors will not be visible to police or outreach workers, and those in shopping centres, transport hubs or takeaways may not immediately appear vulnerable, especially if with a group of friends. This presents some challenges to service provision.

**FOUR OF THE TOP  
FIVE LOCATIONS  
IDENTIFIED WERE  
BEHIND CLOSED  
DOORS**

The most common methods used to ensure that young people who had run away had a safe place to go to were: negotiating a return home; making a referral to social care for emergency accommodation; or organising or suggesting a temporary stay with extended family or friends. Despite these efforts, workers reported that they struggled to find safe places for young people because of a reduction in services, funding cuts and high thresholds for intervention. The services they most struggled to access were suitable accommodation, counselling or CAMHS<sup>2</sup>, and social care.

**WORKERS  
HIGHLIGHTED THE  
DIFFICULTIES  
16-17 YEAR OLDS  
HAD IN GETTING AN  
ASSESSMENT FROM  
SOCIAL CARE**

Over three-quarters of those who commented on the situation of 16-17 year olds felt that there were significant differences in the service received compared to under 16 year olds. A third highlighted the difficulties in getting an assessment from social care. There were also concerns that this age group was considered to be capable and making lifestyle choices when in fact vulnerabilities had not been properly assessed. The damaging consequences of these assumptions have been amply demonstrated in recent inquiries into child sexual exploitation (Bereelowitz et al, 2012).

Workers in the survey and the learning sets felt that more creative ways of providing safe places should be explored. Having someone to talk to and having safe spaces available during the day were highlighted as protective factors that may prevent overnight absences. The desirability of some flexible overnight provision for under 16 year olds that side-stepped the bureaucratic requirements of refuge, perhaps similar to the Nightstop<sup>3</sup> model, was also advocated.

<sup>2</sup> Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

<sup>3</sup> Nightstop is co-ordinated by Depaul UK and provides short-term accommodation for homeless young people in the homes of approved volunteer hosts. At present it is only available to 16-25 year olds.

# FINDINGS FROM THE PEER RESEARCH

## THE TYPES AND NATURE OF THE JOURNEY

Two distinct journeys were identified: circular and linear. In circular journeys the young person returned to their starting point, which was usually the place they lived before running away, whereas in linear journeys they ended up in a completely different place. The former was typical of, though not confined to, young people who ran away before they were 16, and the latter more typical of the 16+ age group. Some young people's journeys were made more difficult by their offending history or immigration status, which placed restrictions on the places they could go or the services they were eligible to receive. The journey summaries below are not presented as representative of all runaway journeys, but are broadly representative of the ones we heard.

The circular journeys were usually of short duration, but could be repeated multiple times. Young people usually ran away suddenly, after conflict, although some interviewees were running to an abuser or to meet friends. Risky situations could occur almost immediately and the people interviewees ran away with were a better predictor of risk than the length of time they were away. Many young people ran to or ended up in private houses and would be difficult to locate while away. The opportunities to intervene positively were generally back at the start and end points, which was usually the family home. The young people interviewed had been reported missing and this had triggered a referral from the police to services that could help, which had improved the situation in most cases.

The linear journeys were usually more protracted. Some young people interviewed who described linear journeys had had a series of circular journeys prior to being told to leave by parents or forced from home by criminal conflict. Finding shelter was a priority, and this was usually provided by friends in the early stages. People who were travelling from abroad or to another city had especially isolated journeys and started rough sleeping at an earlier stage. Survival crime and drug use were common features. Social relationships were the defining feature of the journey, for good and ill, and finding help and moving forward was sometimes associated with moving away from a particular social group.



## WHAT HELPS IN FINDING A SAFE PLACE?

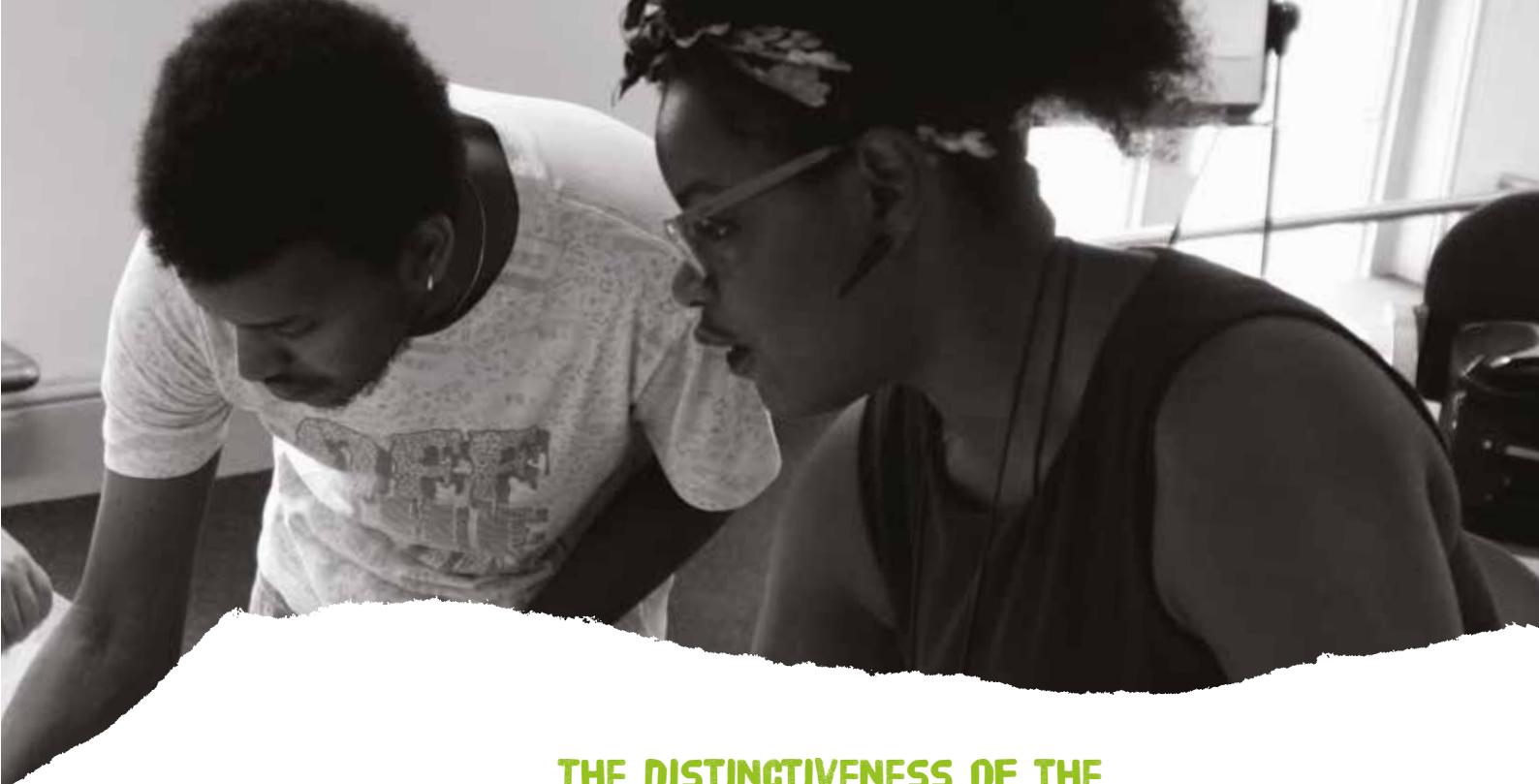
When analysing what helped young people find a safe place, peer researchers found that good relationships with people who were a positive influence, life skills and resilience were critical. These factors were seen as more important than money or having a permanent place to live. Where friends could not fill this role, workers with the time and skills to engage with young people were seen as a good alternative while new networks were built up. Peer researchers also felt that some young people with good life skills and networks would find a safe place if they had practical help like somewhere to charge their phone and information about services.

For young people who had circular journeys and ended up back at their starting point, it was felt that early identification and work in schools and youth centres, alongside family support where appropriate, may prevent further circular journeys as well as a later linear journey. Being reported missing was a route into services for some young people, and the support they then received from voluntary sector projects was highly valued.

The need for a safe location and the importance of friendship and social relationships were reinforced in the 'sense-checking' workshops and the young people's survey. Both workshops and survey respondents scored 'having somewhere safe to go' as the most important factor, and survey respondents identified that 'a friend to talk to' was the help they would want most. The role of family was a contentious issue in the workshops, and was also scored variably in the survey, presumably reflecting a range of positive and negative experiences, and suggesting that family support will not be appropriate or effective in all cases.

The emphasis on social relationships and resilience does not diminish the importance of having an effective crisis response that includes accommodation where necessary. This will be especially important for those young people that have a very isolated journey and an absence of positive relationships. It does mean however that an emphasis on empowerment through early development of personal skills and effective signposting of services may enable some young people to find safe places more easily.

**EMPHASIS ON SOCIAL  
RELATIONSHIPS AND  
RESILIENCE DOES  
NOT DIMINISH THE  
IMPORTANCE OF HAVING  
AN EFFECTIVE CRISIS  
RESPONSE**



## THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE PEER PROCESS

Peer researchers were all aged 18-21, but as well as being closer in age to the young people they interviewed, they had relevant experience to bring to the research. Their different interpretations of the language we use to describe running away, and preference for the term 'homeless' made us reflect on our own definitions and explore ways to enable all types of runaway journey to be heard. Ultimately the language they used built rapport with many interviewees and yielded some very empathetic and engaging interviews.

**SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFE SKILLS WERE AT THE HEART OF THE ISSUE AND MONEY AND LOCATION WERE OF LESSER IMPORTANCE**

Some of their analysis and proposed solutions challenged our assumptions. Their confidence that social relationships and life skills were at the heart of the issue and that money and location were of lesser importance was a surprise.

Equally, the prospect of phone charging points that could prolong a runaway journey as well as conclude it, and facilitate contact with negative as well as positive people, presents some challenges but has come through clearly as a peer recommendation.

Working with peer researchers has given us a layered perspective that has been embedded in the design, delivery and analysis, and made this element of the research far richer.

# SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## PROVIDING A SAFE PLACE

Legislation provides a safety net for those young people who have run away and have nowhere safe to stay, but only half of local authorities were able to report how often they had used emergency accommodation to safeguard a young person who had run away.

Those working with young runaways suggested some social care departments were reluctant to accommodate young people and that high thresholds for intervention hindered their attempts to find safe places for young people. They also raised concerns about the variable treatment of 16-17 year olds and the lack of assessment of their vulnerabilities.

In the workshops and young people's survey, 'having somewhere safe to go' was consistently rated the most important thing, but it is clear from the peer interviews that many young people are struggling to find that place, and that one type of place will not meet everyone's needs.

Some form of overnight accommodation is essential, but the provision of safe places during the day may reduce demand for such provision. Many young people described a need for 'breathing space', and workers believed that the timely intervention of a trusted person who listens, and a safe place to go for a few hours in the day, could prevent escalation and overnight absence in some cases.

**'HAVING SOMEWHERE  
SAFE TO GO' WAS  
CONSISTENTLY  
RATED THE MOST  
IMPORTANT THING**



## IN RELATION TO THE PROVISION OF A SAFE PLACE, WE RECOMMEND:

- 1.** Ofsted should inspect and report on the effectiveness of local authorities' responses to young people aged under 18 who require accommodation in an emergency as a result of running away or being forced from home.
- 2.** Local authorities should ensure that the vulnerabilities of 16-17 year olds are assessed by social care when section 20 of the Children Act (1989) applies, in accordance with the decision in R(G) v LB Southwark, and that housing services are included in multi-agency safeguarding training to facilitate awareness and referral.
- 3.** Local authorities should engage with the voluntary sector to commission alternative accommodation options for young people, such as Nightstop, flexible refuge models or specialist private placements.
- 4.** The Cabinet Office should develop and fund a coherent national programme of youth work and have a youth work champion. Youth services must be protected and built upon to provide safe places for young people not engaging in school or with statutory services.
- 5.** The Department for Education should recognise the importance of pastoral care and safe places in schools, and the vital role that good PSHE lessons can play in developing life skills and helping young people to stay safe.



## INTERVENING IN THE JOURNEYS

Workers highlighted the very real problem of funding cuts and there being fewer services available, but it is important that young people are aware of those that remain. A number of interviewees said that they had no idea that there were services that could help, and they wished that they had found help sooner.

This suggests some form of targeted advertising may be effective during the journey. Although many young people stayed in their local area, some of the more isolated journeys involved train, coach and bus travel. This may present opportunities for the delivery of some positive messages or information.

Different types of journey need different types of intervention. For young people who have circular journeys, the best place to create change seems to be back at the starting point, which is usually the family home. Without intervention, these journeys are likely to be repeated.

Peer researchers found that positive relationships, resilience and life skills would help young people to get through the journey and on to a safe place. They wanted young people to be empowered to help themselves where possible by being given good information and being able to connect to their existing support network or build a new one with the help of services.

Young people who take linear journeys and are old enough to live independently will need support to manage this transition. Peer researchers emphasised the importance of having something to aim for to increase young people's chances of being around positive people.

**INTERVIEWEES SAID  
THAT THEY HAD NO  
IDEA THAT THERE  
WERE SERVICES THAT  
COULD HELP, AND  
THEY WISHED THAT  
THEY HAD FOUND  
HELP SOONER**



## IN RELATION TO INTERVENTIONS AND SERVICE DESIGN, WE RECOMMEND:

- 1.** Public transport providers and those who own and manage public spaces such as shopping centres should ensure that information is displayed about runaway services, e.g. helpline numbers, and that staff have some awareness of the issue. Information could be displayed alongside phone charging points.
- 2.** Police and Crime Commissioners and/or local authorities should commission independent return home interviews for young people who have run away, to identify the reasons and offer follow-up support on a one-to-one or family basis where needed. Local Safeguarding Children Boards should ensure that information is shared between partners to enable an effective response. It is recognised that family support will not be suitable in all cases, e.g. forced marriage, where the young person will require other specialist support.
- 3.** Commissioners of services should ensure that services are sufficiently resourced and interventions are of long enough duration to enable positive relationships to be built between workers and young people.
- 4.** Practitioners and commissioners of services that support young people who are 16 or older and homeless should try to include vocational opportunities like music, sport and drama, alongside job search, or link up with others who can, to strengthen social networks.
- 5.** Those developing or commissioning services for children and young people should involve them in the process and ensure that their views help to shape provision.

# 1. INTRODUCTION



## **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

After the publication of 'Off the Radar' in 2009, Railway Children had a wealth of information about the experiences and needs of young people who run away and spend four weeks or longer on the streets. The 'Reach' model was developed as our practice response, and was designed to provide services that meet the needs of young people before, during and after a runaway incident. The model was subsequently evaluated and found to generate positive outcomes for young people and a good fiscal return on investment (Starks et al, 2012).

An important element of the Reach model is having some form of crisis response at the point that a young person is alone and at risk, in the form of a helpline and/or access to emergency accommodation if needed. When Reach was first developed there were two refuges for young runaways in the UK: now there is only one, providing just two bed spaces. Although some runaways will be able to stay safely with family or friends, those that cannot find somewhere safe to stay and cannot return home will be largely reliant on local authorities to provide them with a safe place.

The Reach model also includes street-based outreach work, engaging young people who are spending increasing amounts of time away from home. Although this has been successful in responding to young people on local estates in disadvantaged areas, it has become more difficult to find and engage young people in the cities through this mechanism. As estimates of running away rates have remained fairly stable, we know that a proportion of young people will always be away from home and at risk, yet refuge accommodation has reduced and these young people are less visible than ever. This led us to conclude that we needed to spend time exploring young people's journeys and the things that helped them to find a safe place.



## 1.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

### THE RESEARCH AIMED TO:

- explore young people's journeys when they run away from home or care, through the medium of peer research
- establish how young people find safe places and the barriers to doing so
- explore workers' perceptions of the situation and barriers that young people face
- establish whether existing emergency provision is an adequate safety net
- recommend appropriate interventions based on young people's and workers' experiences
- identify what needs to change within policy or practice to ensure that young people who have run away or been forced out find a safe place

## **1.3 METHODOLOGY**

This mixed methods research used both qualitative and quantitative data to elicit the views of young people and workers. There were three distinct parts to the research.

### **SCOPING OF THE USE OF EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR YOUNG RUNAWAYS**

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were sent to 216 local authorities, asking how many times in the year 2013/14 they had placed young people under 16 in accommodation in an emergency as a result of their going missing, and for how many bed nights. Replies were received from 210.

### **CONSULTATION WITH WORKERS**

Two learning sets were carried out with members of the English Coalition for Runaway Children (ECRC) to explore their perception of the safe and unsafe places that young people run to, and the barriers to accessing a safe place. Based on these discussions, a survey was compiled that was completed by 62 people whose job brought them into contact with young runaways.

### **PEER RESEARCH WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Peer researchers designed and carried out interviews with an opportunity sample of 32 young people who had run away, been forced out or been homeless, exploring their journeys and the factors that helped them find a safe place. Interviewees were aged 10-23 and sourced through voluntary sector projects. The interviews focused on the first steps they took, how they found shelter, their experiences during the journey, the role of social relationships, and the ways that they found help and got to a safe place.

Two 'sense-checking' workshops were carried out with 14 young people with relevant experience, to see whether their views were consistent with the peer researchers' findings on what would help. A survey about the findings was completed by 31 young people, 19 of whom had direct past experience of running away or homelessness and 12 of whom did not.

## 1.4 ANALYSIS

The themes that informed the various strands of enquiry were the safe and unsafe places that young people go to when they run away from home or care, the factors that help them to find a safe place or prevent them from doing so, and the extent to which there is an adequate safety net in place for young people who need a safe place in a crisis.

The Freedom of Information replies received from local authorities were organised and analysed according to the nature of their reply: disappointingly many said they were unable to source the information within the time and cost-limits prescribed.

The learning sets were analysed according to these themes and used to construct the survey that was sent out to professionals in relevant disciplines that had occasional or regular contact with young people who run away.

Peer interviews were analysed in facilitated sessions, during which peer researchers grouped the journeys that they learned about according to similarities in narratives, agreed common features and influences shaping these journeys, and identified factors that would make accessing a safe place more likely. As noted, their analysis of what would help was tested out by other young people in two workshops and a survey.

Each of the research stages and their analysis are described more fully in the sections that follow.





## **2. THE NEED FOR SAFE PLACES: AN OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

**THIS SECTION REVIEWS  
PREVIOUS RESEARCH  
ON THE NATURE AND  
EXTENT OF RUNNING  
AWAY AND THE NEED  
FOR AND PROVISION  
OF SAFE PLACES.**

## 2.1 DEFINING 'RUNNING AWAY'

'Running away' is the term favoured by Railway Children as being more young person centred than 'missing' which is defined by where others require or expect a young person to be. Since only a third of young runaways are believed to be reported missing, the term does not reflect the experiences of the majority (Rees, 2011).

In our first facilitated session, the peer researchers queried our use of the term 'running away', which they did not think should be applied to young people who had been forced out or told to leave. Most identified strongly with the term 'homeless' rather than 'missing' to describe young people of all ages who were spending time on the streets. In having this debate, we were in good company: many researchers have themselves debated these definitions.

Traditionally 'running away' has been considered an overnight behaviour. The shortcoming with this definition is that it does not explicitly apply to situations where young people go missing for short periods of time during the day. We know from recent research that these patterns can conceal sexual exploitation and that abusers have become adept at ensuring that absences are short enough to escape the scrutiny of police and statutory agencies (Barnardo's, 2011; Jago et al, 2011; Berelowitz et al, 2012). It may also not readily describe situations where the decision is not an active one, as 'running' implies, but evolves from having an unstructured lifestyle, being absent from school and spending an increasing amount of time with a vulnerable peer group or exploitative adults (Scott and Skidmore, 2006). This sense of drifting gradually out of contact with a low-warmth or conflicted household is better captured by the missing continuum (Biehal et al, 2003). Its focus on intentional and unintentional actions embraces a range of behaviours and motivations on the part of the young person as well as others.

Whilst acknowledging these issues, running away is Railway Children's preferred term and is used in this report to describe situations where a young person has chosen to leave or been forced out, including those incidents that happen during the day and are of short duration. Missing is used to describe specific situations where a missing person report has been made.

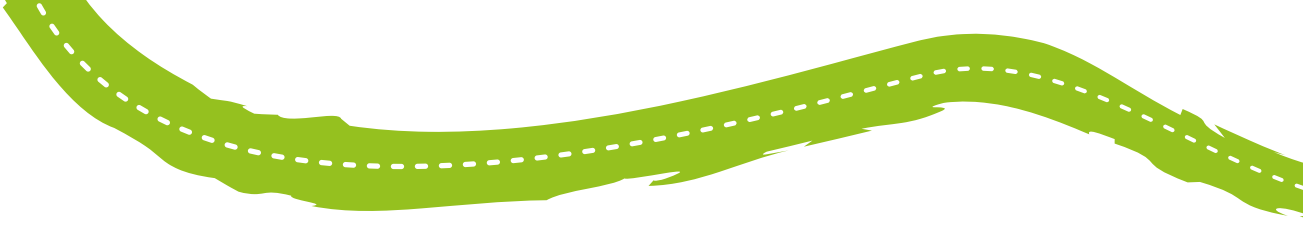
## 2.2 THE EXTENT OF RUNNING AWAY

When young people under 16 were asked whether they had run away and stayed away overnight without parental permission, the results were markedly different from official statistics on young people missing from home or care (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Rees and Lee, 2005; Rees, 2011). Analysis of their replies produced the commonly used estimate that 100,000 children and young people run away each year, 18,000 sleep rough or with someone they have just met and 11,000 are hurt or harmed. Running away rates are slightly higher for girls than boys, and over a third of those who run away first do so before they are 13. Although most return within one to three days, 16 per cent stay away for four weeks or longer (Rees, 2011).

**100,000 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE RUN AWAY EACH YEAR, 18,000 SLEEP ROUGH OR WITH SOMEONE THEY HAVE JUST MET AND 11,000 ARE HURT OR HARMED.**

## 2.3 REASONS FOR RUNNING AWAY

There are a number of recurring themes in the experiences of young people that run away: family instability, violence, abuse, neglect, drug misuse, bereavement and problems at school are just some of these (Macaskill, 2006; Smeaton, 2009b; Rees, 2011). Young people may run or be forced from abusive or chaotic homes and be exploited by people they meet on the streets; they may also run to someone they believe to be a boyfriend, who has been grooming them, or be abused by their peers (Barnardo's, 2011; Berelowitz et al, 2012). Children who have experienced high levels of family conflict and low levels of warmth are especially likely to run away (Rees, 2011).

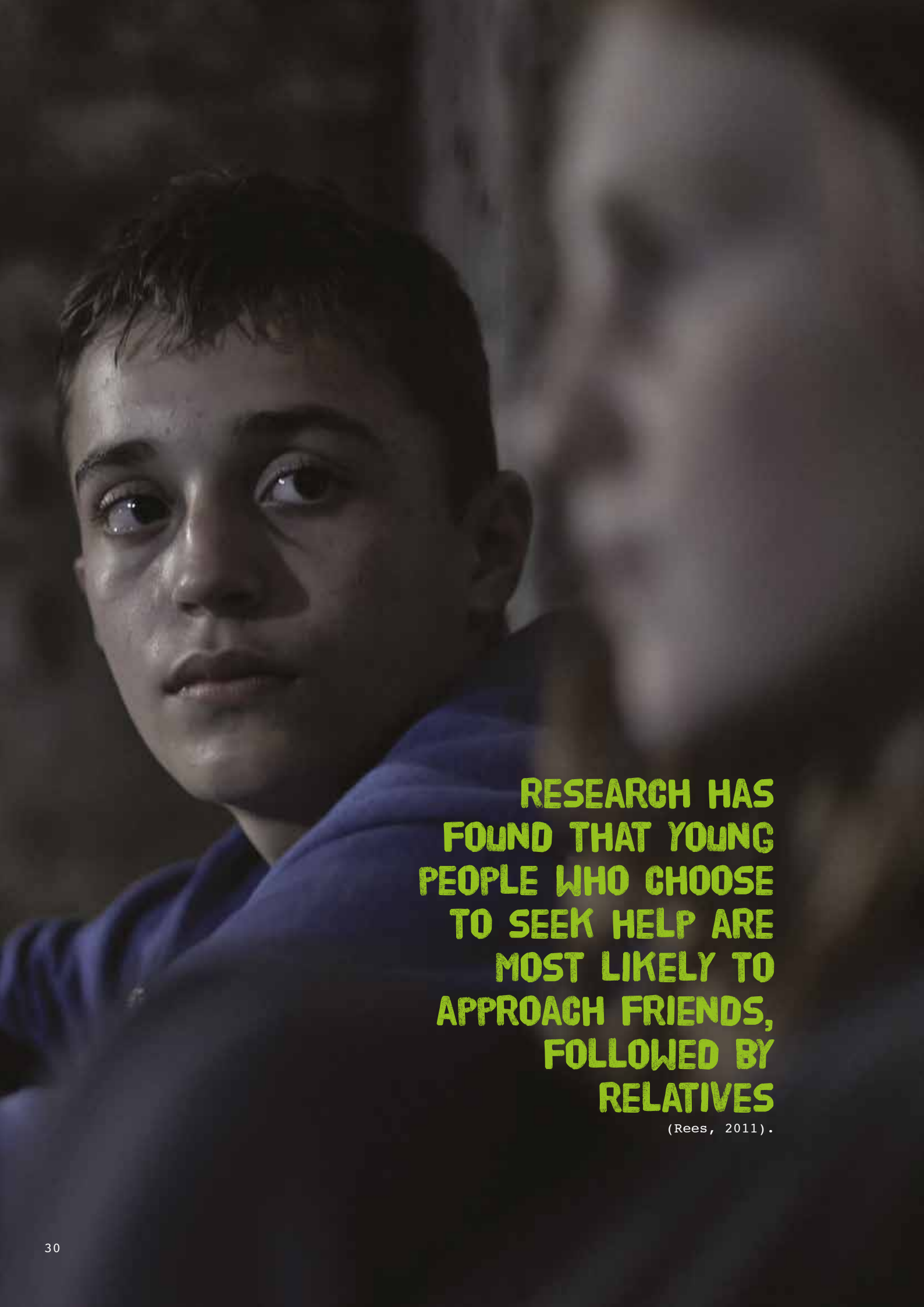


Young people who are taken into care are assumed to have been taken into a safe place; however some seek out their own alternatives:

**‘AT THE POINT WHEN I WAS GOING MISSING, AT 12 OR 13, THE SAFE PLACE FOR ME WAS THESE SO-CALLED FRIENDS, THAT WAS MY SAFE PLACE... BUT I LOOK BACK NOW AND IT’S FAR FROM A SAFE PLACE, IT WAS LIKE A WAR ZONE A DANGER ZONE, IT WAS FAR FROM A SAFE PLACE.’ (STORYWORKS, 2011:9)**

Children in care may run away because of dissatisfaction with their placement, the desire to see family and friends, or to meet someone they believe they are in a relationship with, but who may be grooming them for group or peer abuse. These children are three times more likely to run away than children not in care (The Children’s Society, 2011). A project involving young people as peer interviewers (Taylor et al, 2012) found that the main reasons young people interviewed had gone missing from care was because of tensions around authority, friction with others, isolation and wanting to be with their own friends or family and environmental issues such as boredom. The importance of having someone to talk to and sympathetic rather than punitive responses is highlighted along with the quality and stability of the placement. The detrimental effect of multiple placements and many different social workers is also identified by Berelowitz et al (2013) as compounding a young person’s sense of abandonment and distrust of adults.

This is echoed in a consultation with looked after children in which ‘running to somewhere you feel safe’ was identified as a reason for leaving, either to bring back happy memories or escape current unhappiness (Morgan, 2012: 9-10 ). Running back to the people who have caused you to be taken into care, and the potential attraction and dangers of this was also acknowledged.



**RESEARCH HAS  
FOUND THAT YOUNG  
PEOPLE WHO CHOOSE  
TO SEEK HELP ARE  
MOST LIKELY TO  
APPROACH FRIENDS,  
FOLLOWED BY  
RELATIVES**

(Rees, 2011).

## 2.4 RUNNING TO UNSAFE PLACES

In a study of young people who had stayed away for four weeks or more, all those interviewed had used drugs and alcohol, a majority had experienced violence on the streets, and many had survived by stealing, begging or selling sex (Smeaton, 2009b). It is widely accepted that the streets can be dangerous places for young people, and the Office of the Children's Commissioner's interim report into child sexual exploitation in groups and gangs highlights this, whilst also providing evidence of the unsafe places that young people end up in that are behind closed doors (Berelowitz et al, 2012: 41-42). The Inquiry was told of many locations where young people were abused, including parties, vehicles, streets and alleys, schools, private houses, parks, shopping centres, and bus, train or tube stations.

Research has found that young people who choose to seek help are most likely to approach friends, followed by relatives (Rees, 2011). However the same study found that young people who had run away in the previous year reported poorer quality friendships than those who had not, and that those who had experienced changes in family structure in the last year had running away rates three times higher than those who had had no change. Some young people may find safety with family and friends, but others may have family members and friends who present further risks because they are abusive, have chaotic lifestyles, or are too vulnerable themselves to offer support. This may particularly be the case for young people who have been removed from their family because of significant harm.

Ironically, there is evidence that when vulnerable young people are taken into care and placed in residential children's homes to protect them, this placement can be a source of further abuse:

**'THE OGC SUBMITTED EVIDENCE THAT IT HAD "BEEN INFORMED ABOUT CHILDREN'S HOMES BEING TARGETED BY PERPETRATORS OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, WITH MULTIPLE CHILDREN ACROSS EXTENDED PERIODS OF TIME BEING GROOMED AND ABUSED BY THE SAME PERPETRATORS".'**

(Joint All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into children missing from care, 2012).

## 2.5 PROVIDING SAFE PLACES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO RUN AWAY

The challenge therefore is to substitute a safe place for the many unsafe ones that young people may find or be offered. The best ways of doing this, and the cost-effectiveness of different models, has been the subject of considerable research.

Rees et al (2009) outline the need for a crisis response to young runaways, located within a wider framework of services that includes preventative work at one end, and longer-term follow up at the other. Emergency accommodation would be one of the possible crisis responses, but different types of emergency accommodation may be necessary depending on young people's needs and circumstances. It is suggested that local authority foster care may be suitable for younger children or young people who may be bullied in residential settings because of their ethnicity or sexuality, whereas levels of security at children's homes may be more suited to safeguarding a young person who is escaping abuse or forced marriage and at risk of ongoing violence. Voluntary sector provision such as refuge<sup>4</sup> may be particularly suitable for young people who have had negative experiences of statutory services, whilst schemes such as Nightstop<sup>5</sup> may also have a role to play.

Missing People's manifesto (2014) echoes the importance of Nightstop, but highlights that it is not available to under 16 year olds and there is also a need for flexible accommodation for this younger age group. Their recent research confirms the challenges that their helpline staff face in reconnecting vulnerable young people, sometimes because of a shortage of safe places to refer them to when returning home is not an option (Holmes, 2014).

Franks et al (2013) have looked again at the barriers to accessing safe emergency accommodation, citing young people's fears that they will be returned or removed to a place they dislike. This makes them unwilling to contact services, which in turn leads services to believe the need does not exist. They argue that a 'transitional person' is an essential component in helping young people to navigate services and find suitable accommodation. This supports our peer researchers' findings that a positive relationship with a friend or worker is key to finding a safe place.

<sup>4</sup> Refuge for young runaways aged under 16, registered under s51 of the Children Act (1989) or s38 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995

<sup>5</sup> Nightstop, co-ordinated by Depaul UK, provides short-term accommodation for homeless young people aged 16-25 in the homes of approved volunteer hosts. <http://www.depaulnightstopuk.org/>



The fact that many young people are reluctant to engage with statutory services and may be targeted by adults or already exploited peers within statutory provision strengthens the argument for confidential alternatives. These are particularly needed by the most vulnerable young people, such as those who have been trafficked. Much of the relevant literature about safe places looks at the effectiveness of refuge at meeting the needs of young people who run away.

Although it has been persuasively argued that refuge is cost effective when compared with the cost to society of not intervening (Smeaton, 2009a) it seems that cost has been a significant factor in the closure of refuges. Between 2004 and 2006 the Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills funded a pilot of six refuge schemes in different parts of England.<sup>6</sup> Flaws in the setting up and monitoring of this pilot have been documented: no consistent evaluation framework was put in place so projects all reported quite differently and none measured outcomes for young people (Smeaton, 2008). Nonetheless, overall numbers were low and this may have damaged the case for refuge funding going forward.

Evaluations that have taken an evidence-based approach and assessed outcomes for young people have demonstrated the impact that refuge can make (Smeaton, 2010). The importance of feeling safe, having breathing space and a rapport with workers is clearly demonstrated, whilst at the same time it is also acknowledged that the routine, rules and need to keep the location confidential will not make it suitable for all young people.

Although 16 and 17 year olds have more accommodation options set out in legislation, research has found that practice is inconsistent (Homeless Link, 2013). Responses to Freedom of Information requests made by Inside Housing show that over half of 16-17 year olds contacting councils surveyed were not properly referred to children's services or assessed.<sup>7</sup> Seventeen per cent were housed in unsuitable accommodation, including Bed and Breakfast or sharing with adults. Analysis of earlier Serious Case Reviews has highlighted the absence of effective protocols and working practices for this age group (Shelter, 2011) but five years after the Southwark judgement<sup>8</sup> and four years after new guidance was issued (DCSF, 2010) there still appears to be a lack of assessment.

In addition, 16 and 17 year olds who are being groomed and exploited are more likely to be considered to have given informed consent and therefore less likely to be offered services that may support them (Jago et al, 2011; NSPCC, 2013). This makes it even harder for this group to reach a safe place.

<sup>6</sup> Although termed a refuge pilot, only one of the six was a registered refuge complying with the terms of the Children Act (1989)

<sup>7</sup> This does not represent all local authorities as not all were able to answer.

<sup>8</sup> R(G) v London Borough of Southwark clarified that homeless 16 and 17 year olds are likely to need more than just a roof over their head and, where other conditions are met, should be assessed by social care.



## 2.6 YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF A SAFE PLACE

It is reasonable to assume that many young people will run away from home or care either because they are not experiencing that place as safe or are running to a person or place that seems more attractive. They may also be forced from home by abuse or coerced or manipulated into leaving by an abuser.

Smeaton (2009b) gives an insight into the decisions taken by young people on the streets, explaining that identifying safe places was part of a young person's survival strategy. Some young people said that they preferred to stay in city centres, where there were places to get free meals and more opportunities to survive through crime, whilst others actively sought out secluded places.

Advice for those who run away suggested by a group of young people (Missing People, 2013) includes staying with family or friends, or if you have to be on the streets, staying in public places and away from strangers, though it acknowledges the difficulties of that. Young people warn others explicitly of the dangers of meeting people you had only met online, and to understand that people who were 'nice or flirty' with you may expect something in return.

When the peer researchers discussed the concept of safe place they focused on the relationships with others that were required to be safe: the sense of belonging and emotion that was needed to want to stay in a particular location, and the need to be able to see themselves grow and move on from there. Their descriptions resonate with Billet's concepts of place and space for young people. Space is seen as a material location, a functional construct with little emotional attachment for the young person inhabiting it:

**'PLACE IS A MEANINGFUL LOCATION... BASED ON OUR FEELINGS OF BELONGING, ACCEPTANCE AND SENSE OF OWNERSHIP AMONG OTHERS. IT IS THE SUBJECTIVE AND EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT TO A PHYSICAL OR MATERIAL LOCATION... SPACES ONLY BECOME PLACES WHEN THEY ARE VESTED WITH MEANING – THE EMPTY ROOM BECOMES A BEDROOM AND A VACANT BLOCK BECOMES A HOME.'**

(Billet, 2014: 74)

Whilst spaces are simply functional, having access to meaningful places can help a young person accumulate social capital.

Overall, there is relatively little written about what young people themselves consider to be a safe place and the kinds of safe places they would prefer. This was the reason for exploring this issue through peer research.

# 3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND PROVISION

THIS SECTION LOOKS AT THE DUTIES AND POWERS THAT LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE POLICE HAVE TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO RUN AWAY FROM HOME OR CARE BY PROVIDING ACCOMMODATION WHERE NECESSARY, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH WE CAN TEST THAT THIS IS WORKING EFFECTIVELY.

As the previous section illustrates, a young person who runs away from home or care and does not have a safe place to go is vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (Smeaton, 2009b; Berelowitz et al, 2012).

## 3.1 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Children Act (1989) requires local authorities to identify children in need and to safeguard and promote their welfare. This can include providing accommodation in certain circumstances. If a young person has run away from home and cannot safely return they can be accommodated voluntarily in foster care or other local authority owned or commissioned provision under section 20. Alternatively, they can be taken into police protection under section 46 which places a duty on the local authority to make accommodation available under section 21. Parental consent is required for a section 20 placement where the child is aged 15 or under, but young people aged 16 and 17 can consent themselves. Under s13 of the Children Act (2004) safeguarding is overseen by Local Safeguarding Children Boards that include representatives from relevant partners.

### **REFUGE IS NOT ACCESSIBLE TO THE MAJORITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

An alternative is for young people to be admitted to a refuge. The term refuge is used here and throughout to mean the provision of short-term accommodation to young people under the age of 16 in accordance with section 51 of the Children Act (1989) or section 38 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Young people can stay for up to 14 days without parental consent at a confidential location and are able to self-refer. Refuges have traditionally been building-based services registered under the Children Act (1989), run by the voluntary sector and staffed either continuously or on demand. The provision of specialist foster care can also be considered a form of refuge. Refuges aim to provide some breathing space for young people to resolve issues in a safe environment while longer-term arrangements are made, and may be particularly suitable for young people who are disengaged and distrustful of statutory services. The Children's Society opened the first refuge for young runaways in 1985, and although others opened subsequently there is now only one refuge left, based in South Yorkshire and providing two bed spaces. This means that refuge is not a safe place accessible to the overwhelming majority of young people.

In 2009 the House of Lords decision in the case of R(G) v London Borough of Southwark<sup>9</sup> clarified that homeless 16 and 17 year olds are likely to need more than just a roof over their head and, where other conditions are met, should be assessed by social care rather than by the local authority's homelessness service. Although the Children Act has always provided for this, prior to the Southwark judgement it was usually only young people who were already known to social care who were referred to them; all other young people were dealt with by housing services under homelessness legislation.

<sup>9</sup>The full decision can be found at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldjjudgmt/jd090520/appg-1.htm>



**IN 2014, THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION (DFE) ISSUED NEW STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME OR CARE.**

**IN RELATION TO ACCOMMODATION, THIS STATES:**

40. It is important that emergency accommodation can be accessed directly at any time of the day or night. Bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation is not considered suitable for any child under the age of 18 even on an emergency accommodation basis.

41. The police have powers to take immediate action to protect a child. Should it be necessary to take the child into police protection, the child must be moved as soon as possible into local authority accommodation. The local authority should consider what type of accommodation is appropriate in each individual case. It is important that children are not placed in accommodation that leaves them vulnerable to exploitation or trafficking.

It is therefore clear that children and young people under 16 who run away and are at risk should have an appropriate 'safety net' in terms of emergency accommodation provided to them by the local authority where needed. Sixteen and 17 year olds should have an assessment of need under section 20 where the other conditions are fulfilled.

## 3.2 IS THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK BEING USED EFFECTIVELY?

As previously outlined, legislation provides a safety net for young people under 18 who may otherwise end up on the streets or in other unsafe places. However it is not easy to test whether that safety net is being provided when needed.

In the past local authorities were required to report on the actions they were taking to safeguard young people who were running away through National Indicator 71. Part of this was self-assessment on the effectiveness of protocols for responding to urgent out-of-hours referrals from the police or others. A local authority could only give themselves the highest mark if the following were in place:

- Out-of-hours referrals are made whenever any missing young person is found or presents themselves, and there is any reason to believe that their home or care setting may not be an appropriate place for them to be returned to.
- Multi-agency protocols for out-of-hours referrals are in place. These protocols include a system for monitoring whether each out-of-hours referral is handled in line with the protocols, and a way of ensuring that remedial action is instituted following the identification that the protocols have not been followed.
- The number of out-of-hours referrals is monitored and recorded.
- Young people who need emergency accommodation are placed appropriately, and the location of each placement is recorded. Onward referral procedures are in place.



National Indicators were abolished in 2010. Since then it has been hard to source meaningful data on emergency responses to young runaways.

In 2012, The Children's Society sent Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to all Local Safeguarding Children Boards in England and Wales asking what emergency accommodation they had for young people who had run away. They found that 107 did not have, or did not report having, any form of emergency accommodation for this group.

In June 2014 Railway Children sent FOI requests to all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, asking about emergency accommodation and its use in cases where young people under the age of 16 had run away. We asked

**1. WHAT TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION DOES YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY OWN/ COMMISSION IN AN EMERGENCY TO ACCOMMODATE YOUNG PEOPLE AGED UNDER 16? PLEASE LIST.**

**2. IN THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2013/14, HOW MANY YOUNG PEOPLE AGED UNDER 16 WERE PLACED IN ACCOMMODATION IN AN EMERGENCY AS A RESULT OF GOING MISSING FROM HOME OR CARE?**

**A. HOW MANY WERE HOUSED IN EACH TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION?**

**B. HOW MANY WERE NOT ALREADY LOOKED AFTER?**

**3. IN THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2013/14, WHAT WAS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF BED NIGHTS USED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 16 ACCOMMODATED IN AN EMERGENCY AFTER GOING MISSING?**

We sent 216 requests and received 210 replies. The majority of local authorities said that they could use foster care or residential children’s homes, and some referred to the option of secure accommodation. Only four local authorities said they had no provision in an emergency.

In just under half of replies (n=96) the local authority advised either that data was not held and could not be provided, or that to answer the remaining questions would require a manual examination of case files, the cost of which would exceed the appropriate limit of £450. Some pointed out that ‘missing’ was not a specified category in the reasons for accommodating that they sent to the DfE. The reason given would therefore be a primary one, such as ‘abuse or neglect’ even if one of the ways this manifested itself was through going missing. A number of local authorities said that going missing was not of itself a reason to accommodate a young person. This appears to indicate an underlying assumption that young people will only access help retrospectively and that local authorities do not view themselves as having an intervention role during a missing episode.

Nevertheless, 110 answered the second question with a number. Two indicated that the answer was anecdotal – members of staff were sure that it had not happened and therefore the reply was zero – but in the other cases it appears that relevant information could be retrieved without exceeding the prescribed limit. In some cases the answer was given as ‘less than five’ to protect against the possible identification of young people.

**Table 1. Local authority Freedom of Information responses: numbers of young people under 16 provided with emergency accommodation as a result of going missing in 2013/14.**

| <b>Answer given</b>           | <b>Numbers of local authorities giving that answer</b> |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Have no accommodation</b>  | <b>4</b>   |
| <b>Cannot supply the data</b> | <b>96</b>  |
| <b>0</b>                      | <b>71</b>  |
| <b>1-4 or &lt;5</b>           | <b>30</b>  |
| <b>5-9</b>                    | <b>6</b>   |
| <b>10 or more</b>             | <b>3</b>   |

**IT IS NOT POSSIBLE  
TO STATE WITH ANY  
CERTAINTY THAT THERE  
IS AN ADEQUATE  
SAFETY NET IN PLACE**

This data is of limited use on its own because we cannot accurately compare it with levels of need. It is also true that the same FOI request can be interpreted differently by different local authorities. Nonetheless this clearly demonstrates the difficulties inherent in trying to establish whether the safety net that is legally available to young people is actually being used. The partial picture we have indicates that 39 local authorities have provided accommodation to young people in an emergency as a result of going missing and 71 have not. A larger number of local authorities hold relevant information but cannot easily source it electronically. The highest number of young people accommodated for an individual authority was 15 and the total number of young people identified (given that some answered 'less than five') was between 127 and 157.

Even where figures are provided it is not possible to know the numbers of young people in each authority that needed or would have benefited from accommodation as a result of running away. Analysing data of young people reported missing to the police would not give a true picture, as only a fraction of these are likely to need accommodation. This is because many will return home of their own volition or stay safely with family members or trusted friends. It would be useful to know why some local authorities could search their data and provide an answer within the FOI cost limit and others could not, and whether this was about numbers of young people on their caseload or data management.

The reason for asking about bed nights was to establish how long young people stayed in emergency accommodation, but the fact that some young people were placed in an emergency in accommodation that then became a permanent placement meant that it was not possible to interpret this data usefully.

It is clear that it is not possible to state with any certainty that there is an adequate safety net in place for young people who run away and end up on the streets or with someone they have just met.

## 4. CONSULTATION WITH WORKERS

TWO LEARNING SETS WERE HELD IN LONDON AND MANCHESTER TO EXPLORE THE ISSUE OF A SAFE PLACE WITH MEMBERS OF THE ENGLISH COALITION FOR RUNAWAY CHILDREN (ECRC).

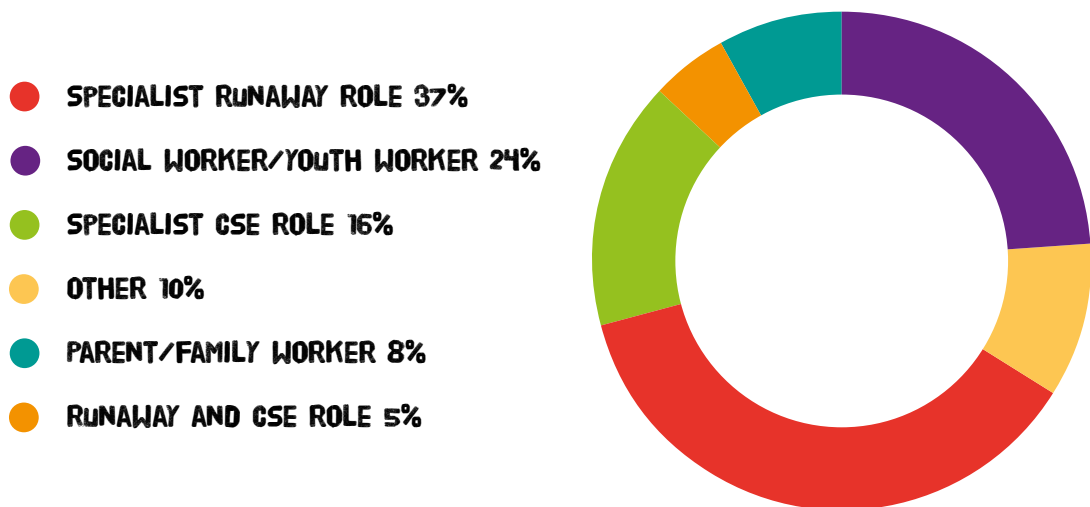
The sessions explored workers' perceptions of the safety of the places that young people ran to, the nature of the journey, and the barriers that workers faced in trying to find a safe place for the young people they worked with.

These provided the framework for the survey that followed, which was targeted at workers in any discipline who had contact with young people who run away (Appendix A).

## 4.1 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The survey had 62 respondents, over half of whom specialised in work with young people who run away, and/or are sexually exploited. These categories together accounted for 58 per cent of all respondents (n=36). A further 8 per cent (n=5) worked with parents or families, and 24 per cent (n=15) had a social work or youth work role not specific to running away or going missing.

**FIGURE 1: JOB ROLE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS**



Over two-thirds of respondents (69%) worked for charities (n=43), 15 per cent (n=9) worked in local authority social care departments and 8 per cent (n=5) in other local authority departments. The remaining 8 per cent (n=5) worked for the police, private sector and health service.

Three-quarters of the respondents (n=47) worked in England, with Scotland and Wales each only accounting for 3 per cent of the total. Sixteen per cent of the respondents had a national remit (n=10). Over half of respondents (57%) had frequent or regular contact with young people who run away or go missing, more than a quarter had occasional contact (27%) and 16 per cent had contact less than once a month.

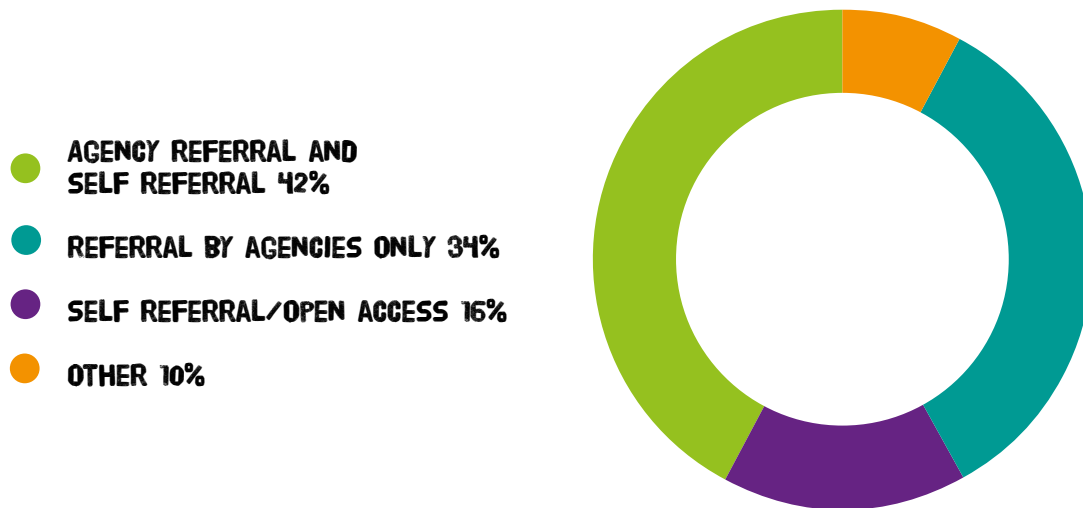
Overall, this is a very knowledgeable cohort: the majority of respondents specialise in this area, have high levels of contact with relevant young people, and work mainly for charities. They are mainly clustered in England. This is not surprising given that although the survey was promoted as widely as possible, respondents largely came through existing contacts who are predominantly charities specialising in this area. It does mean however that the views of those working in the statutory sector are under-represented.

## 4.2 PROFILE OF SERVICES

Forty eight per cent of respondents said their service covered urban and rural areas, 45 per cent worked in mainly urban areas, and 7 per cent in a mainly rural area.

Thirty four per cent of services were accessible by agency referral only, while 58 per cent had some element of open access or self-referral. Eight per cent of respondents stated that young people were referred in other ways.

**FIGURE 2: REFERRAL ROUTES TO SERVICES**



We were interested in knowing how young people might find out about these services, especially where self-referral was an option. Those that advertised their services did so via leaflets, their own website and posters in other agencies. These three methods were by far the most popular, significantly ahead of helplines, social networking and use of other websites. Word of mouth and promotion in schools was mentioned by a minority.

## 4.3 HARD TO REACH GROUPS

Ninety per cent of respondents said their service collected demographic information. Where services were not targeted at a specific group, we asked workers' opinions (not necessarily sourced from demographic data) on whether their service users were representative of the general population. Those that felt referrals were not representative said that girls and children in care were over-represented, especially those in out-of-borough placements.

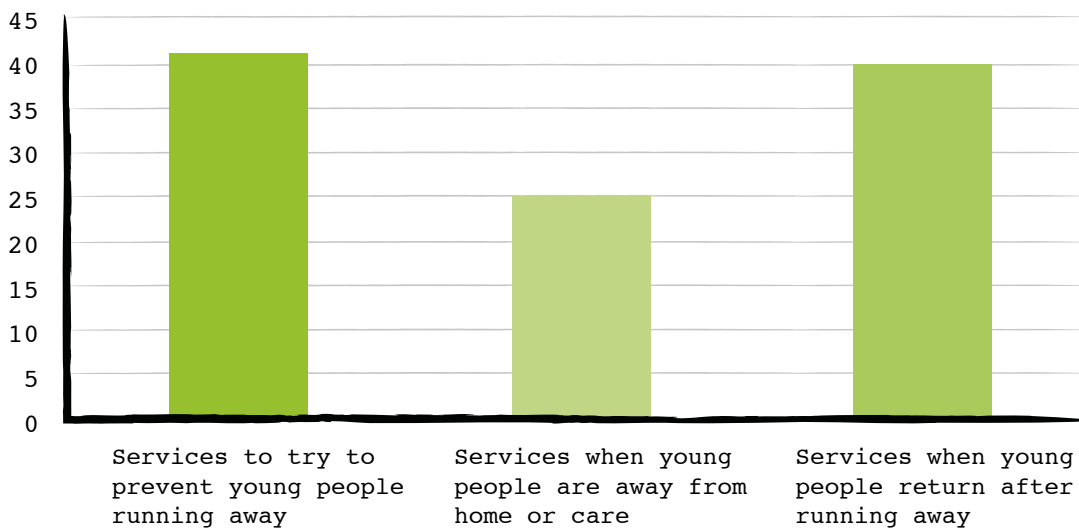
When asked to name any groups of young people that they had difficulty reaching, 11 out of 34 respondents said black and minority ethnic (BME) young people. Those that gave a reason suggested under-reporting of missing incidents owing to cultural differences and distrust of outside agencies, and the fact that BME young people may be less likely to disclose sexual abuse because of issues around honour and respect. This echoes discussions in the learning sets, where it was pointed out that asylum-seeking families were particularly reluctant to involve the police for fear of jeopardising their asylum application or because of bad experiences in their country of origin. The other groups mentioned more than once were disabled young people, travellers, boys and young men and Looked After young people. Respondents did not have to elaborate on their choice, but those that did said that referring agencies had different attitudes to risk when dealing with boys and young men and were therefore less likely to refer them.



## 4.4 INTERVENTION POINTS

More services identified themselves as working to support children and young people before and after incidents of running away had taken place rather than 'during' the missing incident – i.e. helping to find a safe place or emergency accommodation. Based on this sample, which is of course significantly weighted towards charities in England, there are fewer agencies providing services at this point.

**FIGURE 3: SERVICES PROVIDED BY RESPONDENTS**





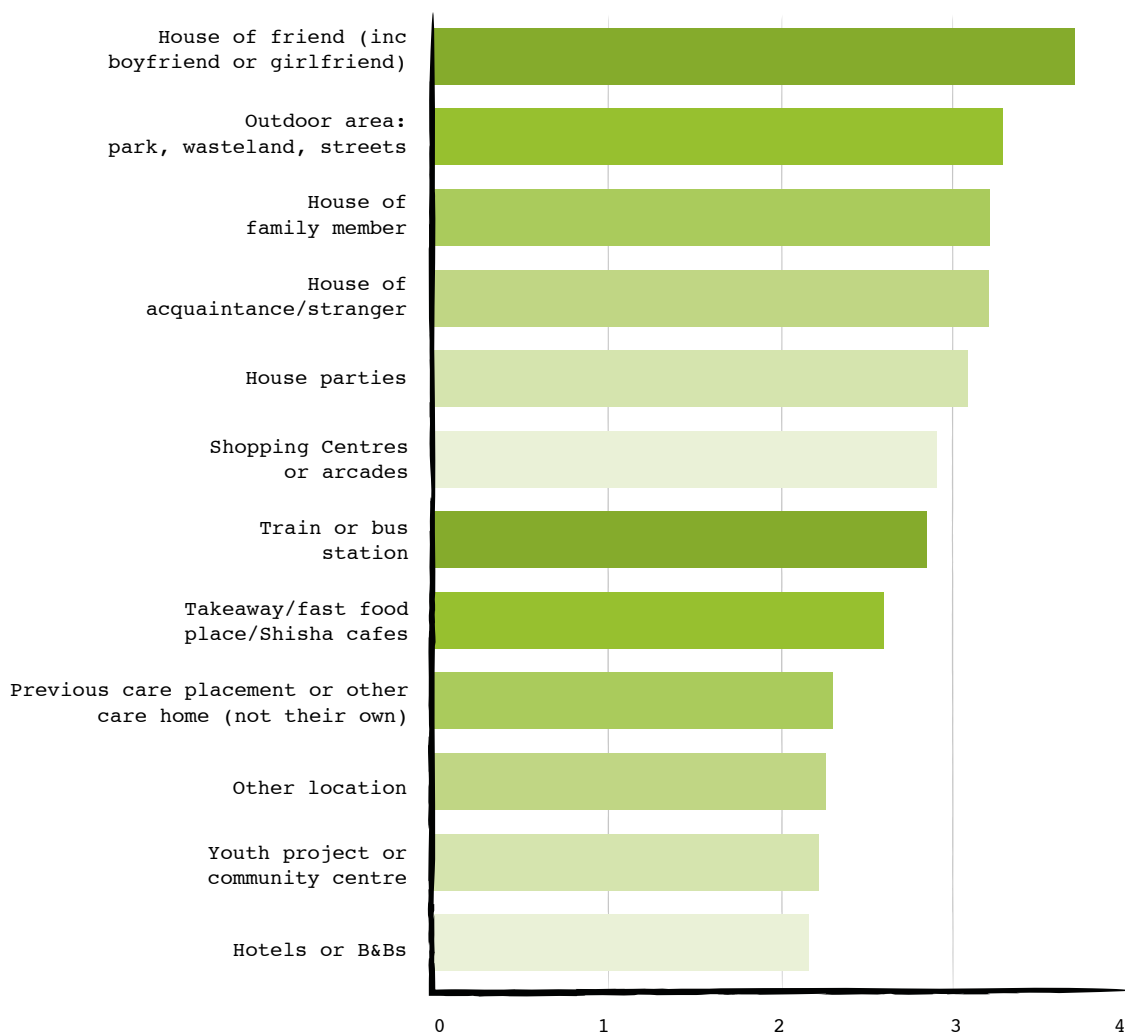


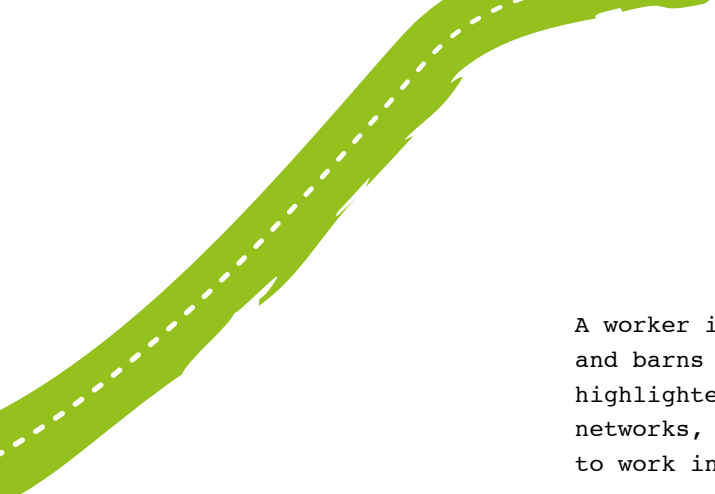
## 4.5 PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR

Workers were asked, in their experience, how often young people ran to certain locations that had been identified in the learning sets as common destinations. Friends' houses (including boyfriends and girlfriends) were ranked highest, followed by outdoor areas and houses of family members.

**FIGURE 4: LOCATIONS THAT YOUNG PEOPLE GO TO WHEN THEY RUN AWAY OR GO MISSING**

**Question 11. How often have you come across the locations below as places that young people go to when they run away or go missing?**





A worker in a mainly rural area said that farmland and barns were used occasionally. Two respondents highlighted that young people stayed within criminal networks, where they were sent out to steal or trafficked to work in cannabis factories and domestic servitude.

**IN TERMS OF TRANSPORT,  
THE MOST FREQUENTLY  
REPORTED OPTION WAS  
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO  
STAY LOCALLY AND TO  
TRAVEL ON FOOT**

In terms of transport, the most frequently reported option was for young people to stay locally and to travel on foot. The next most popular was to use buses and get lifts with friends. Bikes and scooters were mentioned in the 'other' category with one respondent highlighting that bikes were particularly important in rural areas where public transport was poor. In the learning set, the difference between rural and urban transport options was discussed at some

length, with information being shared about young people walking for miles along unlit country roads, at risk of being knocked down by a car.

## **4.6 OPTIONS USED TO FIND YOUNG PEOPLE A SAFE PLACE**

The most common methods used to ensure that young people who had run away had a safe place to go to were: negotiating a return home; making a referral to social care for emergency accommodation; and organising/ suggesting a temporary stay with extended family or friends. It was less common to refer to the local authority homelessness services or to use Nightstop or other charity-run provision. One respondent used refuge where appropriate, though with the closure of refuges in recent years this option was not available to the vast majority of workers.

## 4.7 BARRIERS TO FINDING A SAFE PLACE

When asked to choose what factors affect their ability to find a safe place for young people, having fewer services to refer young people on to was the most popular answer, followed by funding cuts to services and high thresholds for intervention.

In the comments section, workers highlighted the difficulties of finding suitable places for young people because of their vulnerabilities, offending history and disengagement with services after multiple interventions. A lack of hostel places, or places that are too far away, problems with benefits, poor relationships with and access to social care, and an expectation that young people were no longer vulnerable as they got older were also cited:

**‘THE THRESHOLD FOR EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION SEEMS EXTREMELY HIGH AND WE SOMETIMES FEEL WE HAVE TO WORK REALLY HARD TO EVIDENCE THE NEED FOR A SAFEGUARDING RESPONSE.’**

**‘SOCIAL WORK TEAMS ATTEMPT TO PERSUADE YOUNG PEOPLE TO STAY AT HOME OR STAY WITH RELATIVES IN ORDER TO PREVENT AN ASSESSMENT OR PLACEMENT IN CARE.’**

When asked what services they have difficulty accessing, 18 people mentioned suitable accommodation, 13 counselling and/or CAMHS<sup>10</sup> and 12 social care. Despite it being free text, these three were by far the most commonly mentioned services. Respondents defined suitable accommodation as local, easy to access and capable of supporting young people with complex needs.

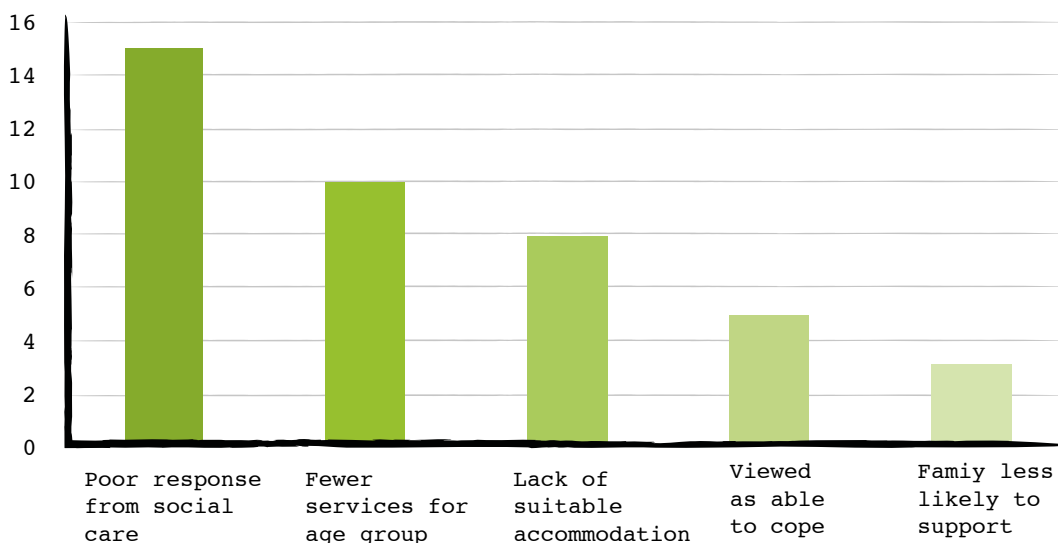
## 4.8 16-17 YEAR OLDS

Respondents were asked whether the issues were different for young people aged under 16 compared to those aged 16-17. Although 11 per cent (n=7) felt there was no difference, 61 per cent (n= 38) detailed the difference they saw. The most frequently mentioned difference was the response from social care, the lack of other services and the suitability of accommodation. Fifteen of those who highlighted the response from social care, noted a reluctance to assess 16-17 year olds and disputes arising between social care and housing about their respective duties that left young people in limbo.

**'16/17 YEAR OLDS OFTEN FALL INTO THE GREY AREA OF POTENTIALLY BEING CONSIDERED BOTH YOUNG AND ADULT AND OFTEN PROVIDERS (I.E. LOCAL HOUSING VS SOCIAL SERVICES) ARE RELUCTANT TO TAKE THE LEAD.'**

Ten people highlighted that there were fewer services generally for this age group or that the response to them was variable in different parts of the country. Eight mentioned issues with the suitability of accommodation. Although there were theoretically more options for young people from the age of 16, they could end up in Bed and Breakfast or other unsuitable forms of accommodation, for example sharing with adults, reflecting the findings of the literature review. Five people felt that older age groups were more likely to be viewed as making lifestyle choices and were therefore treated less seriously, and three felt that family conflict was more likely to result in the young person being told to leave home for good once they were 16 or older.

**FIGURE 5: ISSUES FACING 16-17 YEAR OLDS**



## **4.9 WORKERS' VIEWS ON EFFECTIVE SAFE PLACES**

Respondents were invited to make any further comments they wished about finding young people a safe place and 35 per cent (n=22) did so. The issue mentioned most frequently here was the need to have a cooling-off space, either in the daytime or evening or, in more severe cases, overnight.

**'WHILST OVERNIGHT REFUGE IS NEEDED, A SAFE SPACE IN THE DAY... WOULD BE HIGHLY USEFUL TOO. OFTEN YOUNG PEOPLE GO MISSING FROM HOME AS THEY FEEL THEY NEED SPACE AWAY FROM FAMILY PROBLEMS AND ARGUMENTS. A SAFE SPACE TO DO THIS AND RESOLVE ANY PROBLEMS WOULD PREVENT OVERNIGHT MISSING AND FUTURE EPISODES OF MISSING.'**

Suggestions varied from drop-in centres and crash pads through to Nightstop-type hosts and specialist foster carers. It was acknowledged that emergency overnight accommodation is needed on occasion. In one of the learning sets workers discussed the need for a more creative approach to offer some form of shelter to under 16 year olds without the bureaucratic requirements of refuge.

Another view expressed was the importance of relationships and having a young person centred approach, being accessible and building trust. It was pointed out that a timely phone call or conversation with a trusted adult could prevent a situation worsening:

**'YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR THEM TO HAVE SOMEONE TO TALK TO; SOMEONE WHO KNOWS THEM WELL, HAS TIME TO LISTEN TO THEM CAREFULLY AND TRIES REALLY HARD TO SEE THEIR POINT OF VIEW.'**

Four respondents mentioned the importance of early intervention and prevention, and three highlighted multi-agency working. A number of issues were mentioned by just one person. These included: raise public awareness, have mediation services, and offer a range of complementary services. One person pointed out that young people being sexually exploited may voice a desire to stay with their abuser but were in need of protection irrespective of age.

In the learning sets, we asked participants to write down words that came into their mind when they thought about a safe place. We also did this in the young people's workshops and survey. The workers' version is shown below and the young people's version is in section 6.7.

**FIGURE 6. WORD CLOUD: WHAT A SAFE PLACE MEANT TO WORKERS**



## **5. EXPLORING YOUNG PEOPLE'S JOURNEYS: A PEER RESEARCH APPROACH**

ONE OF THE KEY AIMS OF THE RESEARCH WAS TO EXPLORE AND BETTER UNDERSTAND YOUNG PEOPLE'S JOURNEYS WHEN THEY RUN AWAY OR ARE FORGED OUT, AND THE WAYS IN WHICH THEY FIND A SAFE PLACE. GIVEN RAILWAY CHILDREN'S COMMITMENT TO THE MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT OF SERVICE USERS, IT SEEMED NATURAL TO APPROACH OUR PROJECT PARTNERS TO WORK WITH US IN A PARTICIPATORY WAY TO EXPLORE THESE JOURNEYS.

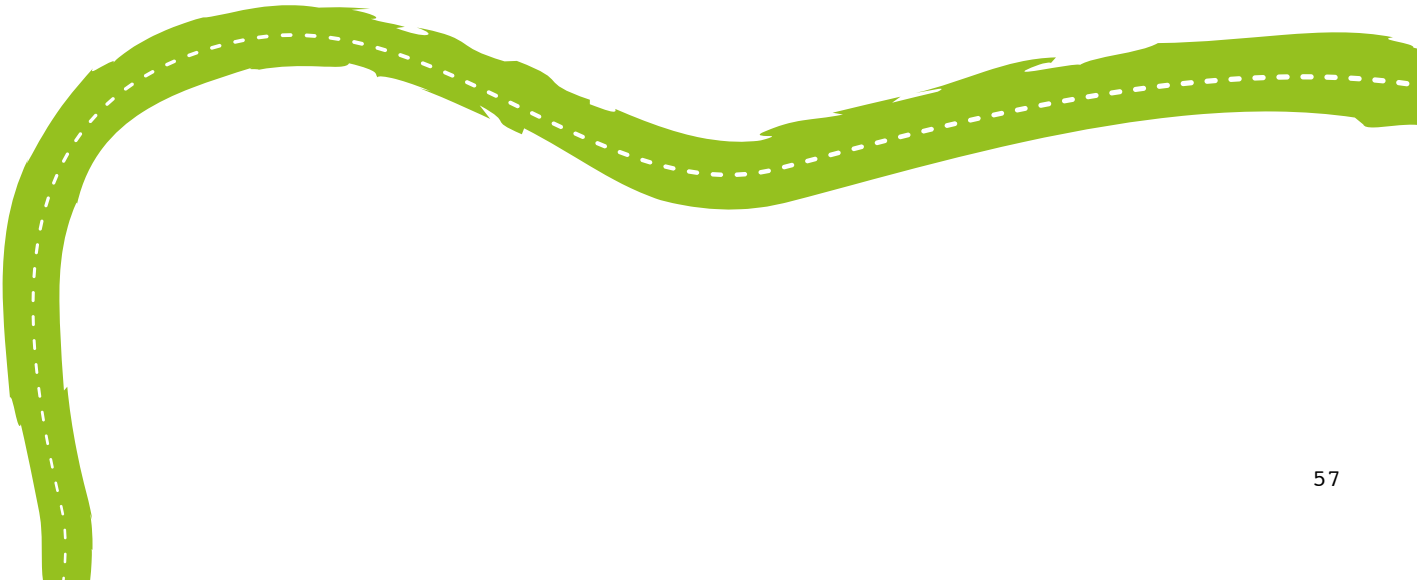


## 5.1 PARTICIPATION AND PEER RESEARCH

From the outset we were interested in peer research as a way of engaging young people in our partner projects. Peer research is in one sense a turning of the tables: those who would normally be the subjects of research become the researchers themselves. Instead of being analysed by an external expert, the group organises and conducts research for the benefit of its own 'community', and the experience and learning from the process stays with them, alongside any wider benefits from dissemination of the research findings.

As such, we were interested not only in the findings, but also in learning from the process of involving peer researchers in design, interviewing and analysis. The community of interest in this case was young people who had run away, been forced out, been homeless or been street-involved: all of whom would have valuable insight and contributions to make to an exploration of safe places.

Although peer research is only one of a number of participatory options, we felt that it fitted our aspiration to get closer to young people's journeys and understand the drivers and decision points at different stages. It also offered opportunities for genuine partnership and shared ownership of this element of the research.



## 5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE PEER RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section summarises the methodology including the nature of the partnership with the peer researchers, and which decisions were made by the workers on the research team and which by peer researchers. For brevity, these are referred to as worker-led or peer-led decisions. Subsequent sections explain and reflect on the process in more detail.

The research question had been decided by Railway Children, as it needed to complement the other components within the research. It was:

**‘WHAT JOURNEYS DO YOUNG PEOPLE GO ON WHEN THEY RUN AWAY FROM HOME OR CARE AND HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT THOSE YOUNG PEOPLE FIND A SAFE PLACE?’**

The aim was to understand:

- the nature of the journeys young people took
- the ways in which they found a safe place or were prevented from doing so
- their views on what constituted a safe place

Alongside this we highlighted two areas that were of particular interest to us: the beginning, middle and end of the journey and the differences between adults’ and young people’s views on risk.

## THE ORIGINAL METHODOLOGY WE PLANNED WAS:

- to recruit and support peer researchers aged 16–21 from a partner project to explore the research question and design the method of enquiry
- to source an opportunity sample of participants aged 13–19 who had had relevant past experience and were willing to share their journeys
- to source participants through projects so that ongoing support was available to them
- to facilitate the grouping and analysis of the transcribed journeys by peer researchers
- to identify suggested interventions based on the analysis
- to sense-check the findings through a young people's survey, distributed to those with and without relevant experience of running away

The peer researchers chose one-to-one semi-structured interviews as the method of enquiry and carried out 34 interviews with 32 young people aged 10–23 in London and two other cities. Further details about the sample are given in section 5.5.

## SOME ADAPTATION OF THE ORIGINAL METHODOLOGY WAS NEEDED AS THE PROJECT PROGRESSED. THE CHANGES WE MADE WERE AS FOLLOWS:

- the age range of participants was extended to reflect the sample of young people that were interested in the research and had relevant journeys to contribute
- one peer researcher interviewed with a worker in the background as he had difficulties obtaining the identity documents needed for a DBS check<sup>11</sup>
- young people in one project were interviewed with one of their own workers in the background, at the request of that project
- sense-checking workshops were added, at the suggestion of a peer researcher at the interim analysis session. These tested the findings with young people with relevant experience.
- additional analysis was carried out by the author on the key influencing factors in the journeys, as the sessions we had were not sufficient to draw out the richness of the material

<sup>11</sup>DBS checks have replaced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. People who have unsupervised contact with young people are required to obtain this clearance.

Not all peer researchers were involved in all stages and this was expected and allowed for in the research design.

| <b>Table 2. Worker-led and peer-led decisions</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <b>worker-led decisions</b>                       | <b>Peer-led decisions</b>                    |
| <b>Research question</b>                          | <b>Method of enquiry</b>                     |
| <b>Recruitment process</b>                        | <b>Themes to explore</b>                     |
| <b>Nature of facilitation and training</b>        | <b>Interview questions</b>                   |
| <b>Approximate number of researchers</b>          | <b>Categories of journey</b>                 |
| <b>Approximate number of interviewees</b>         | <b>Peer recommendations</b>                  |
| <b>Ethical framework</b>                          | <b>Role in writing up findings</b>           |
| <b>Timescale</b>                                  | <b>Inclusion of sense-checking workshops</b> |
| <b>Budget</b>                                     | <b>Extent of involvement</b>                 |
| <b>Structuring of final report</b>                |  |
| <b>Design of young people's survey</b>            |  |

The design of the final reports and the structuring of the launch event were decisions that were taken jointly, in collaboration with a designer and the Research Advisory Group.

The following sections describe and reflect on the process of undertaking the research.

## 5.3 RECRUITMENT OF THE PEER RESEARCHERS

Six peer researchers aged 18–21 were recruited from one of Railway Children’s project partners, New Horizon Youth Centre in London. Posters advertising the opportunity were displayed in the centre, but workers were also asked to identify young people they felt would be particularly suitable and encourage them to apply. The aim was to recruit young people who would have empathy with others who had run away, but were not in immediate crisis themselves and therefore likely to stay with the project for its duration. We offered the opportunity to another project partner as well, but they did not have the capacity to support peer researchers at that time. The recruitment was therefore carried out exclusively within New Horizon. Prior to this a nominated youth worker in the project had been identified who would support the research and be easily accessible to the peer researchers from start to finish.

Young people were not asked about their own personal experiences, but some chose to talk about these as their motivation for wanting to be involved. Although it had initially been hoped to offer this as a paid role, it became clear that the work would not be regular enough to make this practical, and registering as self-employed could have benefit and tax implications. The peer researchers were therefore recruited as New Horizon volunteers.

Two were happy to provide some more detail.

### DIONNE

“I was interested in voluntary work, then when I found out the cause and what you were trying to achieve it made me want to help and be part of it. I was 21 when the research started and things are good for me now but in the past I’ve been homeless so I know what it’s like. I think it’s good to talk about your experiences because it helps you to move on.”

### AKLILU

“I was 21 when the project started and I found out about it through New Horizon Youth Centre. I wanted to do it because it was about people running away and I could relate to it because I ran away when I was 12. I’ve been helped a lot of times and the fact that I could do this and give something back means a lot to me.”





## 5.4 CREATING THE METHOD OF ENQUIRY

Peer researchers attended a bespoke safeguarding session followed by two facilitated training days in which they explored the research question, decided on appropriate methods of enquiry, and practised their chosen method. All work undertaken was accredited through AQA unit awards. Training days were led by a consultant with extensive experience of participatory methods and peer research, and supported by New Horizon Youth Centre and Railway Children staff.

After a day discussing and mapping out what the journey of someone who runs away or is forced out might entail, the peer researchers identified six key areas. The list below reproduces the terms used on the day.

### FIRST STEPS TOWARDS HOMELESSNESS

Why did you run away?

How old were you? What plans did you have?

### FINDING SHELTER

Where did you go?

Which places were safest?

### EXPERIENCES IN 'THE MIDDLE'<sup>12</sup>

What did you come up against?

How did you cope?

Did drugs and crime affect you?

Did you experience anything that was a first?

What stopped you coming out of 'the middle'?

### SOCIAL EXPERIENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS

How did your friendships and social groups change?

Did you stay in touch with people from your past?

### FINDING HELP

Did you know about services?

How did you find them?

### MOVING FORWARD AND NEW BEGINNINGS

Where are you now? Where are you hoping to be?

How did this change you?

<sup>12</sup>'The middle' was identified by the group as the point when favours start to run out and young people are thrown onto their own resources. We tried out different terms over the two days, but this was the one the group kept returning to.



The group discussed and tested out two different options for finding out about other people's journeys. First they tried interviewing each other and then tried running part of a focus group. They were unanimous that the sensitive subject matter was better suited to one-to-one interviews. From the themes, a list of questions and prompts were compiled with an

acknowledgement that not all interviews would progress in a linear manner or indeed cover all areas. These are shown in full in Appendix B.

## **THE SENSITIVE SUBJECT MATTER WAS BETTER SUITED TO ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEWS**

After ten interviews had been completed, an interim analysis was held where the group reviewed the questions. It was agreed to ask about going missing as well as running away and homelessness at the beginning, as some young people who had been reported missing identified

with this term. The questions on social relationships and the way they changed during the journey were slightly refined as early indicators were that this was very influential.

The possibility of using creative methods to draw the journey or encourage the interviewee to do so were discussed, but the peer researchers were clear that they felt that interviewing people for the first time was challenging enough. In view of this we opted to visually map the journeys at a later stage.

## **5.5 FIELDWORK**

Workers on the research team contacted projects to arrange interviews. We aimed to interview an opportunity sample of at least 30 young people from projects running services for those who ran away, were sexually exploited or were homeless. We expected that they would have relevant journeys to share and valuable insight into the concept of a safe place. Interviewees were sourced through projects to ensure that ongoing support was available from workers if needed, though we asked specifically for young people to be put forward who were not in crisis. It was recognised that this would give the research some inherent bias as it would not reach young people who were completely detached from services, and may reach a slightly older group of young people but these limitations were accepted. An ethical framework for the involvement of young people, both as researchers and interviewees, was approved by the Research Advisory Group and is shown in full in Appendix C. Interviews ran from March to June 2014.

A total of 34 interviews were carried out with 32 young people aged 10–23 in London and two other cities. They were accessed through projects run by Barnardo’s, The Children’s Society, Depaul UK, New Horizon Youth Centre and SAFE@LAST. Thirteen interviewees were female and 19 male. Ten young people were aged 17 or under at the time of the interview, 21 were aged 18–21 and one was 23. Eighteen young people described their ethnicity as White British and four preferred not to answer the question. The remaining ten described their ethnic backgrounds as Albanian, Asian Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean (2), English, Mixed/other, Turkish, White (2), and White British/Irish. Two young people described themselves as gay and one as lesbian and four young people considered themselves to have a disability.

| <b>Table 3. Age that interviewee ran away or became homeless</b> |                    |              |              |                    |                  |
|--|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------|
|  | <b>13 or under</b> | <b>14–15</b> | <b>16–17</b> | <b>18 and over</b> | <b>Not known</b> |
| <b>Male</b>  | 2                  | 4            | 8            | 4                  | 1                |
| <b>Female</b>  | 4                  | 5            | 3            | 0                  | 1                |
| <b>Total</b>   | 6                  | 9            | 11           | 4                  | 2                |

Four peer researchers undertook the fieldwork. Three were able to obtain DBS clearance after a small delay and the fourth interviewed with a worker in the background. Those interviewees who gave feedback commented very positively on the process, and two asked to be interviewed again.

## 5.6 ANALYSIS

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and peer researchers spent time reading them and completing summary journey sheets (Appendix D) before the analysis sessions. To begin the analysis, the researchers grouped the journey summaries using the Consensus Workshop Method (Thayer-Hart, 2007: 16-17). Parts of the sessions were recorded, and excerpts are used here to highlight the group's thinking at different points.

**'THE CATEGORIES WE SPLIT THEM INTO IS JUST HOW THE JOURNEY WENT OVERALL, NOT ACTUAL EXACT DETAILS JUST THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE JOURNEYS. SO WE CATEGORISED UNDER 16S, PEOPLE THAT COME FROM ABROAD, PEOPLE THAT THEIR JOURNEY STARTED IN JAIL, AND OVER 16S.'** (PEER RESEARCHER)

Originally, peer researchers referred to 'under 16' and 'over 16' journeys. When the grouped transcripts were checked it became clear that not everyone in these categories fitted the age profile, so from this point on these journeys were called circular and linear journeys, as the endpoints were the defining difference.

The circular and linear journeys accounted for 29 out of 34 journeys. In circular journeys the young person returned to their starting point, and in linear journeys they ended up in a completely different place. As the peer researchers had highlighted, the former was typical of, though not confined to, young people who ran away before they were 16, and the latter more typical of the 16+ age group. Two young people described two distinct journeys – one before they were 16 and one after. These have each been counted in their own right, giving a total of 34 journeys.

| Circular | Linear | Jail | Abroad |
|----------|--------|------|--------|
| 13       | 16     | 2    | 3      |

It was recognised that the journeys where young people had been released from prison, and where they had travelled across borders to reach the UK, had distinct identities but the small numbers made it impractical to describe and map reliable journeys. From this point on the journeys were incorporated into the linear category, as the destination was different from the starting point, though their distinctiveness was highlighted where appropriate.

The peer researchers identified that circular journeys often began with family conflict or miscommunication, that young people were mostly under 16 and sometimes ran away with friends. Generally, someone cared and was trying to find them:<sup>13</sup>

**'WE FOUND THAT MOST OF THEM WHEN THEY DID RUN THE POLICE OR SOMEONE FOUND THEM AND TOOK THEM BACK. THERE WAS SOME SORT OF CARE AND SOME SORT OF HELP.' (PEER RESEARCHER)**

Friends were important, but not all friendships were positive. Young people ended up back where they started, partly because of their age and limited options:

**'YOU'RE A MINOR STILL, YEAH, SO IT'S GOING TO BE FORCED ON YOU WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU CAN'T JUST WALK OUT THE DOOR AT 11 O'CLOCK AT NIGHT.' (PEER RESEARCHER)**

Nonetheless, they were offered services when they returned, and peer researchers felt the act of running could be seen as a cry for help: 'if they run, people ask "why did you run? "'. Good relationships were a protective factor in the future, but without that the journey could happen again.

The linear journey struck a chord with most of the peer researchers. This was not surprising as we had recruited in a project that provides help for young people who are homeless or have housing problems:

**'THIS IS JUST THE JOURNEY FOR, WELL CAN'T SAY EVERYONE BECAUSE EVERYONE'S DIFFERENT, BUT THE TYPICAL JOURNEY FOR THE 16-25 YEAR OLD GUY OUT THERE.' (PEER RESEARCHER)**

<sup>13</sup>Interviewees in this sample had been reported missing to the police. It is acknowledged that this will not be the case for many young people who run away or are forced out.

The common features of the linear journey were that family were not supportive and in many cases had told the young person to leave. Friends were helpful at first but as time passed these relationships could become strained. Drugs and crime were seen as major issues and were strongly linked to the young person's associates and their attitudes. There was unanimity that moving on meant taking a conscious decision to stay away from some people and situations:

**'YOU'RE LIKE SEEING HOW OTHERS REACT  
IN THE SAME SITUATION BUT YOU YOURSELF  
DO NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE SO YOU'RE LIKE  
"NO, I'M GOING TO CHANGE".'  
(PEER RESEARCHER)**

Most people found some sort of help eventually, but they were expected to be able to sort things out themselves and had often struggled to do so.

Although the 'jail' and 'abroad' journeys were incorporated into the linear category, their distinctive features were discussed during analysis. Peer researchers identified that in the jail journeys families had become alienated by the offending behaviour and the young person had to find their own way. Sometimes they had to stay out of certain areas for their own safety or as a condition of their licence. In the 'abroad' journeys, two young people had issues with their immigration status and that was an added difficulty and a barrier to finding a safe place.

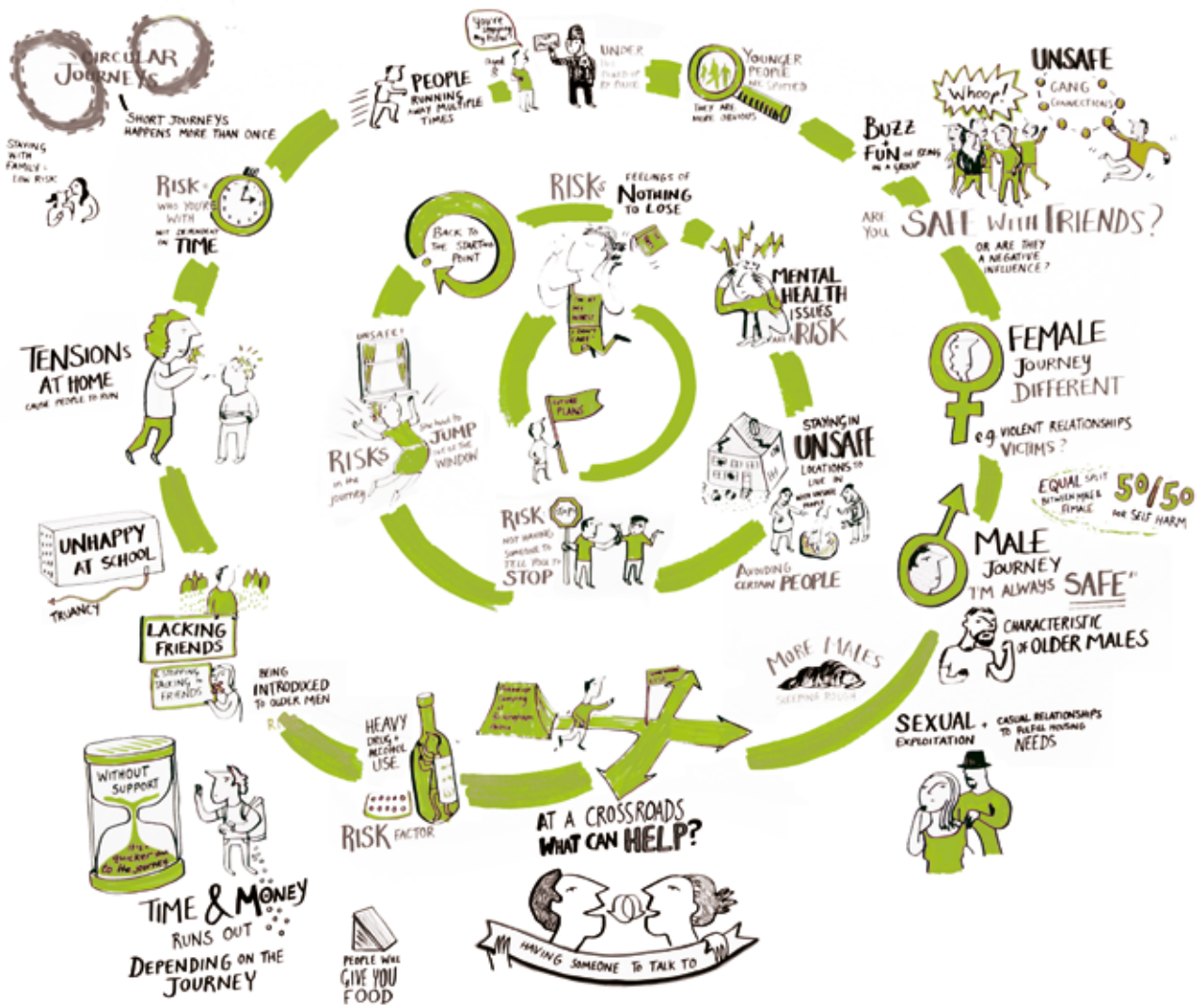
After the first analysis session, these descriptions were expanded upon by workers in the research team, using details from the transcripts, and reflected back to the peer researchers at the start of the second day. During the second day, verbal analysis was captured visually by a graphic illustrator working alongside the group, and her illustrations feature throughout this report.

## 5.7 OUTLINING THE CIRCULAR JOURNEY

### A. FIRST STEPS

This is usually a very emotionally charged time, when conflict builds up, usually with parents and/or siblings, but occasionally within school or the local neighbourhood. Sometimes there are external factors such as bullying. The decision to go is usually made suddenly and in most cases there is no clear plan in place, just a need for breathing space.

**'I JUST FELT LIKE EVERYTHING WERE GOING AGAINST ME AND MY WORLD JUST CAME CRASHING DOWN AND THAT'S THE ONLY THING I COULD THINK OF, TO ESCAPE AND RUN AWAY...I WANTED TO GO, I DIDN'T CARE WHAT HAPPENED, I JUST WANTED TO BE AWAY FROM HOME.'** (OLIVIA)<sup>14</sup>



The trigger in these journeys is often family conflict, supporting what is already known about the relationship between this and running away (Rees, 2011).

Most of these journeys are of relatively short duration and seeking overnight accommodation is not a common feature. Those who stay away overnight are often with friends or family, though strangers' houses and parties also feature.

If running away with a group of friends, the peer group are the main trigger rather than a specific moment of conflict. In other cases, the young person is running to something – an exploitative adult who they believe they are in a relationship with:

**'I JUST USED TO ALWAYS RUN TO...THIS MALE WHO I FELT THAT I WAS IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH. I CALLED HIM MY BOYFRIEND AND, BUT THEN AFTER, YOU KNOW, KNOWING HIM FOR A WHILE... I HAD A NEW NETWORK OF FRIENDS AND A NEW NETWORK OF KIND OF ADULT MEN WHO WERE EXPLOITING ME AND OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE AND, YOU KNOW, I WOULD GO MISSING FOR DAYS AT A TIME.'** (JACK)

It is unusual for young people to travel long distances unless they are travelling to family, travelling as a group of friends or travelling to an abuser. The places people go to and the people they are with are better predictors of risk than the length of time they are away.

This is often part of a pattern of behaviour which recurs.

**'WELL MY MUM USED TO BEAT ME SO LIKE I DIDN'T WANT TO LIVE THERE ANYMORE BUT EVERY TIME I RAN AWAY I JUST GOT TAKEN BACK.'** (EMILY)



## B. EXPERIENCES OF 'THE MIDDLE'

The circular journeys have some quite different 'middles'. There were three interviews where the journeys were significantly less risky than others. These all involved young people aged 15 and 16 who were walking out as a result of family tensions but either had plans to go to a friend or family member, or decided this very quickly after leaving. One returned within hours, and two stayed with relatives.

In the majority of circular journeys, the risks were far greater and became so quite quickly. In two cases in which sexual exploitation was a factor the risks were immediate. One girl aged only 11 went with friends straight to a house containing older men and did not wish to discuss what happened. A 13 year old boy had been groomed and then ran away repeatedly to his abuser.

In other cases there appears to be an escalation over time, linked to associating with a riskier group of people. One young woman began running away aged 14 because she felt trapped at home, but as a result of being out met drug dealers, increased her own drug use and met a friend who took her to a house with older men and locked the door:

**'I WEREN'T HAVING NONE OF IT. I GOT OUT, I CLIMBED OUT OF THIS WINDOW... IT WERE A REALLY SMALL GAP, I GOT OUT, BECAUSE I WERE REAL SMALL AT THAT TIME, I WERE RIGHT SKINNY SO I COULD JUST MANOEUVRE MYSELF, I GOT OUT AND I FOUND A RIOT VAN, SO I KNOCKED ON WINDOW, I TOLD THEM ABOUT IT AND THAT'S WHEN THEY TOOK ME HOME.'**  
**(MEGAN)**



Another ran away aged 13 because of tensions with her step-father but ended up staying with acquaintances who introduced her to others who were involved in crime.

In two journeys, both made by young women aged 13 and 14 there is a strong element of running away with friends for excitement and escapism. One stayed out in a party culture, going to clubs, using drink and drugs and waking up with strangers:

**'GETTING BLITZED... I'D SAY FOR A WEEK, JUST DOTTING ABOUT AT DIFFERENT PAL'S HOUSES, DIFFERENT PARTIES, DIFFERENT SESSIONS.'**  
**(COURTNEY)**

The other sofa-surfed, travelled by train to nearby places with friends, and once stayed away for as long as two weeks. Being with friends seems to give the journey momentum and make it last longer. One young person who had been running away since he was eight described going into derelict buildings used by drug takers, and people avoiding the police. A 14 year old female went to parks and fields on her own but felt scared and did not stay out overnight. A male of 14 stayed with friends when he could but had spent a few nights sleeping rough when favours had run out. Sleeping rough was not a common feature of the circular journeys and was mentioned only one other time by a young woman who had slept in an empty van with friends.

High risk in these journeys is strongly associated with the people you are with, and the nature of the peer group before running seems significant. Being part of a risk-oriented group makes it more likely that you will be introduced to a wider group of risk-taking people. Most of the highest risks described take place at private houses and would not be visible unless reported.

## C. FINDING HELP

As the circular journey returns to its starting point, help is usually focused on preventing the cycle repeating itself. In many cases help came after referral to a project and as a result of being reported missing to the police. This included support with addiction and drug use, managing emotions and family dynamics.

**'WHEN I THINK BACK ON IT I WISH I HADN'T DONE IT, BUT IF I HADN'T I WOULDN'T HAVE GOT THE STAFF AT [PROJECT NAME].'** (PAIGE)

In some cases a change in family composition or change of friends was a factor. In three cases a series of circular journeys ended with placements in foster care or with extended family, arranged or endorsed by social care.

With the support of peer researchers, a journey was constructed that reflected some common themes in the circular journeys. It is recognised that every young person's journey is unique to them and a composite journey cannot possibly reflect the range and depth of this experience. It is useful however to highlight common themes when thinking about interventions that may help young people find a safe place. The researchers wanted the journey to be told in the first person, as this was how journeys were described to them in interviews.

# HANNAH'S JOURNEY

How did it start? I guess it was a build up of so many things – my mum being stressed, and always taking my sister's side. Ringing my dad saying Hannah's done this, and Hannah's done that and getting him all stressed as well, so when I did see him he was always on about it. And that was when she was having a good day. Dad left on my 14th birthday and after that she just stayed in bed some days, just crying all the time.

Then the girls at school, meant to be mates but always backstabbing, sending messages then pretending it wasn't them. Teachers saying 'I know what you're going through, I know what it's like' when they don't, they don't know what goes on in my head. I just lost it and walked out, didn't know where I was going, just had to get away. They're not allowed to stop you so I just walked.

Ended up in town in a right state and this girl comes over says 'it's Hannah isn't it, remember me, Kelly?' and I started talking to her, hadn't seen her since primary, but she was like 'yeah they're all muppets aren't they' and it kind of cheered me up and I hung around with her for a bit. She said she was getting the bus to her sister's and I went along. There were a few of her sister's mates there, and some cans of cider and a bit of weed going around. I was that wound up it just relaxed me a bit. One of her mates, Shaun, was dead nice, really listened to me and knew what a bad time I was having. His parents had split up as well. Said anytime school was getting too much I could just come round to his.

I stayed there a couple of hours and then went back home. Mum was hysterical, had the police out and everything but she calmed down eventually. The police came round, just to see if I was okay, and I said yes and they tried to get me talking, asking where I'd been but I just said 'walking round town' and they said I'd really worried my mum and then went away.

**I JUST LOST IT AND  
WALKED OUT, DIDN'T  
KNOW WHERE I WAS  
GOING, JUST HAD TO  
GET AWAY. THEY'RE NOT  
ALLOWED TO STOP YOU  
SO I JUST WALKED.**

After that I spent more and more time with Kelly and her mates, round at different people's houses. Set off as if I was going to school but mostly didn't go. Just sat around with that lot and took anything I could get my hands on – mcat, ket, my mum's anti-depressants. I sold my phone to get the money for it first off. It felt good at the time, especially

**I GOT SO MESSED UP  
WITH THE DRUGS THAT I  
DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS  
DOING HALF THE TIME**

when me and Shaun got together. He was so different, always buying me little presents. Sometimes I stayed at his because I didn't want the hassle of going home and police coming round again, then listening to Mum, calling Dad going 'she'll have to live with you' and him making excuses.

My dad didn't like Shaun, he was on to the school asking them to talk to me. The head of year tried to tell me that Shaun was too old, that 25 was too old for me, but I didn't want to listen. I got so messed up with the drugs that I didn't know what I was doing half the time. One night about three months after I met him Shaun had a big party and I was in the bedroom with him and his mate when I started being sick everywhere and my heart was pounding and I couldn't walk, so they got me out the flat and got Kelly to ring 999. I woke up in hospital hooked up to a drip and I still felt like I was floating. Mum and Dad were in bits.

When I got home we got a letter saying I could talk to someone at this runaways project if I wanted to. I just left it, but then they rang and they sounded alright so I was like yeah why not. Then I started to see Lucy and after a while things started to change. We met up every week and she really listened to me. I told her stuff I hadn't told anyone like how I felt about mum and dad splitting up, and about Shaun and the way he treated me sometimes. We talked about what a good friend was and what a good boyfriend was and it made me think a bit. She got me referred to a drugs and alcohol project as well and I saw a worker from there – she was brilliant, didn't judge me at all. Then they had a family worker who talked to Mum as well and she was a bit different after that and we got on better. We still argue but I don't take off any more, I just go to another room.

## 5.8 OUTLINING THE LINEAR JOURNEY

### A. FIRST STEPS

In the linear journey, young people are usually told to leave the family home because of ongoing conflict, either with parents or siblings, but in some cases they leave the area for their own safety after conflict with criminal associates or rivals:

**'I WAS KIND OF FORCED TO LEAVE BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION I WAS IN, I GOT VIOLENCE OFF, YOU KNOW, OTHER GANGS AND THINGS LIKE THIS, SO I WAS FORCED TO LEAVE.'** (MATT)



Lifestyle, including offending, is a key factor in many interviews. Most young people describe a build-up of tension rather than one defining incident, and in some cases there have been earlier periods of running or being forced out:

**'I WAS GETTING THROWN OUT MY HOUSE FROM A YOUNG AGE, LIKE FROM FIFTEEN, SIXTEEN... I WON'T GO INTO DEEP THINGS BUT IT'S MOSTLY JUST CRIME AND THAT...KIND OF HANGING AROUND WITH THE WRONG PEOPLE AND DOING THE WRONG THINGS AND THE USUAL STORY.'**  
**(KYLE)**

Being told to leave happens mostly when 16 or older, but two young people chose to leave at 15 and did not return.

In the early stages young people usually go to family or friends and maintain the same friendship networks. This is not the case for young people who leave their home town, who have a more isolated journey, or for those who travel through other countries, where rough sleeping is a common feature and groups of 'friends' form and change quickly.

## B. EXPERIENCES OF 'THE MIDDLE'

In the linear journey, returning to the starting point is not an option so finding alternative shelter becomes a priority. Sofa-surfing is common in the early stages for people with friendship networks, but in the middle there is usually a point where continuing to rely on favours is problematic. Only two journeys appeared to be low risk. One young woman of 17, at risk of harm from her family, used the internet to research her options and was accepted into a hostel. A young man who was forced out after family conflict stayed with friends for over a year, and although depressed by his circumstances, said he had not slept rough or been affected by crime or drugs.

These low risk journeys are the exception. Many young people describe feeling depressed, overwhelmed, and doing things they would not normally have done. Sleeping rough, committing crime and problematic drug and alcohol use are common:

**'IT ACTUALLY CHANGED ME, MY BEHAVIOUR CHANGED, EVERYTHING ABOUT ME JUST CHANGED. I HAVE A LOT OF FRIENDS AND I ENDED UP OBVIOUSLY TELLING THEM TO, YEAH, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN, BECAUSE OF DRUGS, I WANTED TO BE WITH DRUGS, I DIDN'T WANT NOBODY AROUND ME, I JUST WANTED DRUGS AND, DRUGS WERE LIKE MY BEST FRIEND.'** (SABRINA)

Rough sleeping is particularly prevalent in the young male journey. Of 15 young men who described a linear journey, ten had slept rough at some point:

**'I WAS SLEEPING ROUGH HERE FOR LIKE ANOTHER MONTH OR TWO, AND I WAS USING PLACES LIKE, YOU KNOW, HYDE PARK? LIKE PLACES LIKE THAT, BUT YOU DIDN'T GET MUCH SLEEP THERE BECAUSE, YOU KNOW, THERE'S A LOT OF WEIRD PEOPLE THAT COME AT NIGHT TIME THERE.'** (MATT)

**'WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME, I DON'T KNOW, SOMEONE GOING TO KNOCK ME OUT OR SOMETHING, DRUG ME OR RAPE ME OR, I DON'T KNOW, ANYTHING.'** (JOZEF)



It was less common for young women to sleep rough, but some did so when other options had run out:

**'I STARTED SLEEPING AT THE BACK OF SHOPPING MALLS BECAUSE I DIDN'T HAVE ANYWHERE TO GO, NO-ONE TO HELP. THEN I STARTED SLEEPING ON BUSES AS WELL.'** (FEMI)

**'I HAD TO WAKE UP OFF OF BENCH, GO INTO BUS STATION TOILETS, PUT MY MAKE UP ON AND GO TO COLLEGE AND I FELT, IT FELT HORRIBLE, DO YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?'** (SABRINA)

Another young woman had slept on the balcony rather than inside the house to avoid abuse.

Most young people with linear journeys were 16 or older and entitled to some benefits, though many described problems claiming them. Offending is a recurrent theme, both as a reason for family estrangement and a source of income. Two young males who left home permanently aged 15 supported themselves entirely through crime, though it is worth noting that at that age they had no legal entitlement to benefits.



In the journeys that the peer researchers originally classified as 'jail journeys' offending was the reason for being homeless. Both young people had been released from prison with nowhere to stay and were unwelcome back home. Other young people involved in offending described being banned from an area as a condition of their licence, or making a decision themselves that returning to an area will mean returning to gang involvement. This weakened their social networks, but could be a positive move.



## C. FINDING HELP

The first stage of moving forward is usually a resolution of the immediate need for shelter. For rough sleepers this may be referral to a shelter or crash-pad, leading on to supported accommodation and/or referral to other services such as New Horizon Youth Centre. This is not in itself a satisfactory endpoint but a stepping stone or interim safe place. Relationships are a recurrent theme in this stage. Having a new partner or expecting a child are factors that motivate young people to leave more negative relationships and behaviours behind. In many other cases there is a recognition that they don't want to stay in 'the middle' and by making a conscious effort to seek help they move away from existing friendship groups. This seems to be pivotal to finding a genuine safe place.

**THE FIRST STAGE OF MOVING FORWARD IS USUALLY A RESOLUTION OF THE IMMEDIATE NEED FOR SHELTER.**

A composite linear journey was created, in the same way as Hannah's circular journey, and checked by peer researchers. As noted earlier, these composites cannot fully reflect the range of experiences we heard, but are useful for highlighting common issues and possible interventions.

# NATHAN'S JOURNEY

I think all the mates I've ever had have been the same – just into messing and having a laugh and all that. Got excluded when I was 14 and got into weed, stupid amounts of weed, but we were all doing it. I've cut right back now, right back, I mean just a bit of weed lasts me days, but back then I was a bit crazy. I was into this and that, you know, finding ways to make money, and my mum couldn't do nothing. Reckon if my dad was still here it'd be different like he'd have never put up with it, but he died when I was 7, so. Mum used to go off on one when the police came round and kick me out, she's been kicking me out since I was 15 but I just used to go to mates for a couple of nights, let things calm down and go back. Then when I got charged with burglary she just says I've got your brother to think of, you're 16 now and you got to go.

First week or so was sweet really – chilling with mates, sitting up all night in someone's place. Then it got a bit tricky you know, their girlfriends saying 'he can't stop here again', mates getting a bit touchy, money pretty much gone and there were a few nights I couldn't get anywhere. Walked round half the night and then got my head down in the park, the wooded bit where we used to make dens when I was a kid. Not easy to find so I was safe enough like but it was cold. Did that a bit but it was really getting me down, stopped looking after myself, just smoking all the time not even eating, it's miserable just waking up on your own. Weed takes the edge off, yeah, you've got no problems, then you wake up and the problems are back, and you got no money for more. So, not going to lie to you I got a chance to make some money and I took it. Got arrested and remanded but I'd rather be in prison than be homeless.

**THERE WERE A FEW NIGHTS I COULDN'T GET ANYWHERE. WALKED ROUND HALF THE NIGHT, THEN GOT MY HEAD DOWN IN THE PARK.**

When I got out I didn't have nowhere to go. Youth Offending worker told me to go to this place other side of London that helps people get into shelters and hostels and that. Went along and it was like a youth centre but with food and showers and everything – never seen anything like it, the one by us was just a room with a pool table. They should have them all over. They got me a place in a crash pad until I can get something else. They sorted my benefits, I used the gym and everything, went every day and started to get to know the people there. A couple of weeks later I got onto a training scheme in a cafe. I fancy being a chef now – always liked cooking, so looking to get into college next year. I don't blame my mum like, I know why she told me to get out. We talk a bit now, you know, on and off. She can see I'm starting to sort myself out.

## 5.9 RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The table below was prepared by workers in the research team and used to highlight the frequency with which these risks happened during the journeys. The group matched the risks with factors that increased them. They were then asked to reverse this and identify factors that reduced risk and made progress to a safe place more likely, based on their knowledge of the transcripts and the journeys that interviewees had described.

| <b>Table 5. Risk taking or exposure to risk</b> | <b>Male<br/>n=19</b> | <b>Female<br/>n=13</b> |
|---|----------------------|------------------------|
| Drug use (extensive/problematic)                | 6                    | 3                      |
| Drug use (self described as low level)          | 4                    | 1                      |
| Gang related crime or threats                   | 4                    | 0                      |
| Rough sleeping                                  | 10                   | 3                      |
| Self-harm/mental health                         | 4                    | 3                      |
| Selling drugs                                   | 2                    | 0                      |
| Sexual exploitation                             | 1                    | 4                      |
| Sleeping at strangers' houses/parties etc       | 2                    | 5                      |
| Survival crime (stealing, burglary etc )        | 5                    | 1                      |
| Unsafe locations (other than above)             | 1                    | 4                      |
| Use of alcohol                                  | 2                    | 2                      |
| Violence during the journey                     | 1                    | 1                      |

Peer researchers and support staff each identified the three things that they considered most important in reducing risk and making progress to a safe place more likely, giving their reasons. There was consensus on a number of factors and these were organised afterwards by the workers in the research team into three groups: people, places and practicalities, and self.

| <b>Table 6. Things that help young people get to a safe place</b> |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>People</b>   | <b>Places and practicalities</b>                          | <b>Self</b>  |
| Having friends that are a positive influence                      | Knowing about services and where to go for help           | Feeling positive about yourself (self esteem)                |
| Having a good relationship with a parent/carer or family member   | Having internet access and somewhere to charge your phone | Being able to cope with difficult situations and bounce back |
| Knowing a positive adult  | Having somewhere safe to go                               | Having future plans  |
| Having someone to talk to (a worker or friend)                    | Knowing the area you are in                               | Being able to assess whether people and places are risky     |
|   | Having enough money to meet your basic needs              |  |

The group discussion focused primarily on the difference that people made to the journey – family, friends and workers – and the importance of resilience and awareness of risk. This was pointed out by the facilitator and peer researchers were asked for their opinion on practical things, and specifically ‘having enough money to meet your basic needs’ which had had little attention. The peer researchers thought that it was of low priority if you have some support from people:

**‘YOU CAN CRASH ANYWHERE...IT’S IMPORTANT, BUT IT’S NOT PRIMARY.’ (PEER RESEARCHER)**

**‘IT DEPENDS ON THE JOURNEY...THERE’S PLACES WHERE YOU CAN GET FOOD IN LONDON AND THERE’S PEOPLE THAT ARE WILLING ACTUALLY TO BUY YOU FOOD RATHER THAN GIVE YOU MONEY IF YOU ASK THEM.’ (PEER RESEARCHER)**

It was further pointed out that without life skills, money would soon run out, leaving you back in the same situation:

**‘IF YOU’VE GOT SOME MONEY FOR ACCOMMODATION BUT YOU DON’T KNOW HOW HARD IT IS OUT THERE AND WHAT TO DO AND WHAT PATHS YOU SHOULD BE TAKING... YOU’RE GOING TO SPEND YOUR MONEY ON SOMETHING THAT AIN’T NECESSARY AND THEN TWO DAYS COME AND YOU’VE GOT NOTHING LEFT AND YOU’RE GOING INTO UNSAFE LOCATIONS BECAUSE YOU DON’T KNOW ANY BETTER.’ (PEER RESEARCHER)**

Potentially this challenges established thinking about the kinds of services that young people need, with money to meet basic needs seen as less important than life skills and building strong relationships with others. These are the true currency in this context, and need to be developed both within and beyond service provision. As a group, we were unsure whether free food was as readily available outside London, so decided to keep ‘having money to meet your basic needs’ in the categories for the sense-checking workshops and young people’s survey that followed.

The final task was to translate the risk reducing factors into possible interventions. In doing this the group drew on their own experiences as well as the transcripts.

## 5.10 SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

The discussion of interventions again focused on people and how to get the right people around you. It was pointed out that developing goals and future plans can give a young person the motivation to move away from people or situations that are unhelpful or damaging. Peer researchers had only interviewed young people who had found help through projects, and it is fair to say that the suggested interventions are mostly reflective of the services that they had seen and heard about.

### IMPROVE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICES

- use posters, the internet and information in schools
- have publicity that is easily carried around or easy to find
- don't advertise the location to everyone as it might attract the wrong people
- make sure agencies know about each other so they can tell you the ones you need



### IMPROVE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO HELP THEMSELVES AND DEVELOP THEIR OWN SKILLS

- understand healthy relationships and which people are good for you
- help to look differently at the situation you are in
- build self esteem and confidence
- help to make plans and have something to aim for



## PROVIDE HELP TO SORT OUT FAMILY PROBLEMS

- make home a 'safe place' so you don't want to run away



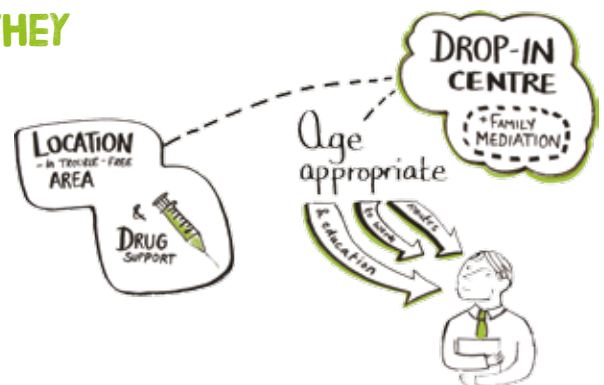
## IDENTIFY YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE HAVING PROBLEMS EARLY ON

- if you do this the circular journey might only happen once, or not at all
- if you don't it is likely to keep happening and lead on to a linear journey when older



## HAVE CENTRES THAT OFFER THE SERVICES YOUNG PEOPLE NEED IF THEY ARE NOT GOING TO RETURN HOME

- positive people/adults to talk to
- food, showers, laundry and storage
- help with finding a place to stay and a job
- sports, music and arts activities



We were conscious in moving on to check the findings with other young people that the peer researchers had been through a journey themselves during the research process and that the depth of their thinking may need to be put into context to be fully understood by others. Although we had originally planned only to do a young people's survey to test the findings, a peer researcher suggested that a group session would be useful so two workshops were arranged, one in a project where the young people's journeys were more likely to be linear and one where they were more likely to be circular.

## 5.11 CHECKING THE FINDINGS

Two 'sense-checking' workshops were held, one in New Horizon Youth Centre and one in SAFE@LAST to test whether other young people with relevant experiences agreed with the peer analysis of what would help. A total of 14 young people aged 9-22 attended, and two peer researchers attended the first of the two workshops.

| Table 7. Age that workshop participants first ran away or became homeless |       |       |             |                |
|---|-------|-------|-------------|----------------|
| 13 or under   | 14-15 | 16-17 | 18 and over | Not applicable |
| 6   | 2     | 2     | 1           | 1              |

The sessions were activity-based, asking participants to rank the things that had been identified as helping (detailed in section 5.9) in order of importance and then think about whether the proposed interventions would be a good way of delivering that help.

Although the ranking was interesting, the purpose was really to generate debate and identify disagreement and gaps. These groups were also used to check the wording of the young people's survey that followed, to minimise the chance of terms being misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Both groups felt that 'having somewhere safe to go' was the most important. 'Having a good relationship with a parent/carer or other family member' was the most contentious. The first group started by saying that this might stop you ending up homeless, but this led onto further discussion of how capable or willing some parents would be to support you even if you had a reasonable relationship. It was clear that some young people felt let down by the lack of support and care they had had in childhood. In the second group, this also generated debate and was ranked lower down.



'Having someone to talk to' was also fiercely debated in the first group. One person was dismissive of this, saying when he was on the streets he needed practical help to find shelter, not a conversation, and maintained this position strongly. Others felt people were essential in getting you through difficult situations, but the kinds of people you were around were critical, as if their lives and behaviours were chaotic you could start mirroring them and end up seeing that as normal. This strongly echoed the peer researchers' early discussions about the difficulties of shared living spaces and the need to make conscious decisions

**PEOPLE WERE ESSENTIAL  
IN GETTING YOU THROUGH  
DIFFICULT SITUATIONS, BUT  
THE KINDS OF PEOPLE  
YOU WERE AROUND WERE  
CRITICAL. IF THEIR LIVES  
AND BEHAVIOURS WERE  
CHAOTIC, YOU COULD START  
MIRRORING THEM.**

about the people you associated with, especially in the critical 'middle' period. This was reflected in one of their priorities: 'having friends that are a positive influence'.

The importance of being able to charge your mobile phone resonated with the older age range but was not of relevance to the youngest participant, who did not have a phone. Responses to internet access were also mixed, with some not identifying with this as a way to find out about services and seeing it instead as a luxury.

'Having money to meet your basic needs' divided opinion, as it had during analysis. Young people in both groups said initially that of course you needed money, but as the discussion developed the first group started listing cafes and churches that would give you free food and ways you could travel free of charge. This led to debate about how important it was compared to having somewhere safe to go and positive friends. Money was not dismissed entirely but after discussion it was ranked quite low.

There was general agreement about the interventions, although the second group said that they would not want to be in a hostel. After discussion, they decided that they would consider it if the only alternative was being on the streets. None of the suggested interventions were considered inappropriate or unhelpful.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S SURVEY

A survey was constructed based on the peer findings about the people, places and personal skills that could help you get to a safe place, and the interventions they had suggested, alongside other interventions such as local authority emergency accommodation and flexible Nightstop-type provision.<sup>15</sup>

It was necessary to simplify the language slightly after feedback from young people and adults, but it was kept as close as possible to the terms used by the peer researchers. The survey is shown in Appendix E.

Forty-three young people started the survey but 12 did not carry on after entering their age and gender. There are therefore 31 responses that can be analysed.

Twenty one females, nine males and one trans\* young person completed the survey. Ten were aged 17 and under and 21 were aged 18-25. Twenty-five people gave their ethnicity and they were all White British. Three people considered themselves disabled, out of 28 that answered; three people identified themselves as gay, one as bi-sexual, and 22 as heterosexual or straight, out of 26 responses. It is clear therefore that young adults and White British people figure prominently in this sample.

Respondents were asked to identify their experiences based on the categories below, and to select all those that applied.

- Ran away from home or care before you were 16
- Ran away from home or care when you were 16 or older
- Told or forced to leave home before you were 16
- Told or forced to leave home when you were 16 or older
- Been homeless
- Spent a lot of time hanging around on the streets

Nineteen respondents had had one or more of the experiences listed and 12 had not. The results were analysed overall, and checked to see if there were any differences in the responses between those with and without personal experience.

**19 RESPONDENTS  
HAD RUN AWAY,  
BEEN FORCED  
TO LEAVE, BEEN  
HOMELESS OR  
STREET-INVOLVED**

<sup>15</sup>Nightstop is overseen by Depaul UK and provides short-term accommodation for homeless young people aged 16-25 in the homes of volunteer hosts.

## **THINGS THAT WOULD HELP YOU IF YOU HAD RUN AWAY OR WERE HOMELESS**

Overall, 'having somewhere safe to go' and 'knowing about services' were rated most highly. These categories were the same in the groups with and without personal experience. Interestingly, both groups also chose 'having money to meet your basic needs' next, which the peer researchers and young people in workshops felt was less important. Having future plans was regarded as of lesser importance by both groups. The only categories that were considered 'not important at all' by anyone were being able to charge your phone (n=3) and self-esteem (n=1).

In terms of practical help, staying with a friend or in a hostel was the joint top choice overall. This was the same for the group who had not had one of the experiences listed, whilst the other group ranked hostel accommodation and drop-in centres marginally higher than staying with a friend.

## **PEOPLE THAT WOULD HELP YOU IF YOU HAD RUN AWAY OR WERE HOMELESS**

When asked what kind of people you would want around you, 'friends that are a positive influence' was the joint top choice overall, together with 'a member of the family you get on with' for those without personal experience. For the other group 'having a parent or carer you get on with and can trust' was marginally ahead of friends. Both groups highly rated having a friend to talk to. The group without personal experience then wanted there to be someone to talk to at school or college, whereas the other group wanted someone that could help with things like drug use, self-harming and similar issues.

## **WHAT WOULD MAKE THINGS SAFER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?**

When asked to say what one thing they thought would make things safer for young people who had run away or were homeless, the most common response was having somewhere safe to go. Well-signposted and accessible services and having someone to talk to that you could trust were also mentioned several times. Two people felt that being able to charge your phone would keep you safe and one person felt that young people should be able to access free bus travel in an emergency so that they could get to services.

Broadly speaking, the 'sense-checking' process substantiated the peer researchers' findings. Although some of the proposed help generated considerable debate in the workshops, there was consensus on the importance of people and the need to have somewhere safe to go. The survey also highlighted the importance of having a friend to talk to, whilst confirming that a safe place to go was fundamental. These preferences remained the most important when results were analysed by gender and by age (17 and younger vs 18 and older).

As previously discussed, the peer researchers had reflected on what a safe place was for some time, and it was hard to do justice to some of their thinking in a survey format. The importance of 'having future plans' was not rated highly in the survey, but was something peer researchers described repeatedly as being the thing that would move you forward, away from negative influences and towards positive people and the creation of a safe place.

## 5.12 REFLECTIONS ON THE PEER PROCESS

Qualitative interviewing is always influenced by the researcher, their subjectivity and the experiences they bring. In one sense, this is bias, which is a term usually used pejoratively, but an awareness of this personal position and vested interest can also bring extra depth to qualitative research. Peer researchers told us that they were used to being assessed by workers, and it was interesting to see things from the other side. In a couple of early interviews, trying hard to be professional and to get things right created some distance and the interviewees were less forthcoming. This was quickly overcome and subsequent interviews were generally empathetic, though some interviewees chose to share less than others. One peer researcher felt that meeting different people and getting to chat to them before and after the interview was one of the best parts.

In the event, some compromises had to be made regarding the conduct of the peer interviews. As already noted, one peer researcher was unable to obtain DBS clearance and interviewed with a worker in the background throughout, and one project asked to sit in on the interviews with young people, potentially impacting on the true peer to peer nature of some interviews. Whilst peer researchers had had some similar experiences to those they were interviewing, there were clearly going to be age, gender and cultural differences at various points. Despite this, peer researchers felt there was still a shared language, compared to the way in which they would talk to older adults. This was felt to be an important factor in the way that peer interviews were conducted and the way that interviewees responded:

**'YOU'RE ABLE TO RELAX MORE BECAUSE YOU KNOW THEY'RE GOING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SAYING.'** (PEER RESEARCHER)

In the earliest interviews, the researchers' preference for the term 'homeless' led to hesitancy from one interviewee at a project working with young people who had been sexually exploited. We realised after this that the peer researchers needed more background information about the projects they were going to, and we agreed at the interim analysis that researchers would use all three terms at the beginning – running away, going missing and being homeless – and see which one the interviewee identified with.





Researchers approached the interviews in their own different ways. Some were particularly good at making interviewees feel at ease by talking about a shared interest:

**Q** 'YEAH, I'VE GOT LIKE A FEW JACKETS LIKE THAT, GOT STUDS, LIKE LITERALLY.'

**A** 'YEAH, I LIKE GETTING STUFF LIKE THIS, LIKE EVEN IF IT'S A FULL SLEEVE ONE, YOU JUST TAKE THE SLEEVES OFF IT'

At other times, conversation like this leads directly into more sensitive topics. A discussion about tattoos leads naturally into the problem of not being able to have tattoos where there are scars from self-harming, which in turn leads on to the reasons for the self-harm.

In one interview a discussion of what the project was like led seamlessly into the reasons that the young person had needed the service. After around 20 minutes the interviewee seems to suddenly realise this is meant to be 'an interview' and asks if they have specific questions.

There are examples within the interviews of a particular word or phrase triggering a positive response and demonstrating a shared language. In this example, the use of the word 'random' seems to trigger a shared understanding and a very honest response:

**Q** 'YOU SAID YOU WERE AWAY, ROUND AT PEOPLE'S HOUSES, HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANYTHING, LIKE ANYTHING RANDOM HAPPENED, NOT JUST FOR YOU, OTHER PEOPLE LIKE?'

**A** 'ER, I'VE BEEN AT PARTIES BEFORE WHERE I'VE WOKE UP AND THERE'S BEEN LIKE THREE OR FOUR PEOPLE IN THE BED AND I'VE HAD LIKE NAKED PEOPLE BEHIND US AND STUFF AND I'VE BEEN LIKE, OH.'

Key:

**Q:** Question

**A:** Answer

An older interviewer may well have got a similar response in another way, but the reaction to the word 'random' seems to bear out researchers' earlier comments about feeling relaxed around people who share the same language. This is further demonstrated in a different interview when researcher and interviewee echo each other:

**A 'THE ONLY FRIENDS I HAD AT SCHOOL WERE THESE GIRLS TRYING TO BE MY FRIENDS FOR THE PURE FACT THAT I CAME OUT AS GAY WHICH I WASN'T GOING TO, YOU KNOW, I WAS LIKE I'M NOT...'**

**Q 'YOU'RE NOT ABOUT THAT.'**

**A 'I'M NOT ABOUT THAT, YEAH, AND, YOU KNOW, I WAS NOT ABOUT GOING SHOPPING WITH YOU AND WHATEVER.'**

In the course of exploring the young people's journeys, peer researchers were told about sexual and physical abuse,<sup>16</sup> crime, domestic violence, self harm, bereavement and excessive drug and alcohol use. We had anticipated this and had built in support from a worker in New Horizon Youth Centre. Although this supportive relationship worked well, researchers did not seem to become distressed by what they heard, and echoed some interviewees' views that talking about it was a positive thing:

**'IT'S QUITE A TOUGH CONVERSATION; IT'S NOT EASY TO TALK ABOUT YOUR PAST...BUT SOMETIMES TALKING ABOUT HARD STUFF IS BETTER THAN JUST KEEPING IT TO YOURSELF' (PEER RESEARCHER)**

The peer researchers also got support from one another:

**'EVERY TIME I SAY SOMETHING NEGATIVE ABOUT MYSELF THEY TELL ME NO, THAT'S NOT RIGHT.' (PEER RESEARCHER)**

The peer researchers' own experiences shaped the method of enquiry and brought perspectives to the analysis that were rooted in their lived reality. This layering was illuminating and beneficial to the research, even though on occasion the language of homelessness threatened to overwhelm the narration of earlier runaway journeys. Their focus on positive relationships and personal skills and their relative disregard for money challenged our thinking, but was reflected in many journeys. However, those young people who were least able to use networks of friends to support them had the most isolated journeys, so there is clearly a need for information and services to be targeted at the most vulnerable, alongside the adoption of some 'self-help' measures.

<sup>16</sup>Researchers had received appropriate training in safeguarding and the limits of confidentiality. In the event, all situations discussed had been previously disclosed and acted upon by other professionals.

## **6. FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY**

**AFTER COMPLETING THE PEER ANALYSIS, IT WAS RECOGNISED THAT THERE WERE A NUMBER OF INFLUENCING FACTORS ON THE JOURNEY THAT HAD BEEN TOUCHED UPON BUT WOULD BENEFIT FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS. THIS SECTION IS INFORMED BY THE PEER RESEARCHERS' ORIGINAL ANALYSIS, BUT IS THE AUTHOR'S ASSESSMENT.**



## 6.1 THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Social relationships are one of the key determinants of the journey. This was identified in the very first session with the peer researchers and continued to be a major theme. As previously discussed, the first step in both circular and linear journeys is often to seek out a friend for consolation, excitement, or practical help. Those young people who do not have these social networks experience high levels of isolation and higher risk from the start. This is especially obvious in the journeys of young people who travel to London from other cities:

**'I JUST LAID THERE ON MY OWN AND I WOKE UP IN MORNING ON MY OWN... IT'S GRIM, MAN, IT'S GRIM.'**  
**(LIAM)**

Some of the most isolated young people remain alone until they find a service that can help. In the longest journeys where young people are travelling alone across borders, one survival strategy is to link up with others, to pool knowledge and resources. Casual groupings and regroupings are common:

**'THEY ARE NOT BEING THE GOOD FRIENDS BECAUSE THEY SAID OKAY IF YOU WANT EAT SOMETHING, OR YOU NEED MUSIC OR ANYTHING, YOU MUST STEAL FROM THE SHOPS AND ALSO I START WITH THESE GUYS TO COLLECT MONEY ON THE STREET AND IT WASN'T A GOOD IDEA, IT WAS JUST GOING DOWN, DOWN, DEEPER.'**  
**(BARTEK)**

The nature of the group that you meet on the journey is critical, as is the subsequent decision to stay with or leave that group. In the circular journeys, young people may leave with a group of friends or meet up with a group quickly afterwards: this strongly influences the course of the journey, the locations and the nature of subsequent risks:

**'I WERE PROPER STRESSING, I WERE PUNCHING THINGS, AND I WERE GETTING REALLY AGITATED, AND SOME LASS COME UP TO ME AND SAYS ARE YOU ALRIGHT LOVE? I SAYS NO, I NEED A FUCKING JOINT. SHE WENT HAVE YOU GOT IT? I SAYS YEAH, I JUST CAN'T ROLL IT... SO OBVIOUSLY SHE ROLLED IT FOR ME, WE BECAME FRIENDS, SHE INTRODUCED ME TO HER FRIENDS AND THEN THAT'S HOW I GOT TO MEET ALL THEM, SO IT WAS A RANDOM PERSON AT BUS STATION.'** (MEGAN)

The young people making circular journeys stayed away longer when they were in groups or with friends who were relatively new acquaintances. These situations seemed to give the journey momentum and cause it to last for longer as it opened up more networks and potential destinations:

**'LIKE SAY IF I KNEW THEM AND MY FRIENDS DIDN'T, I WOULD INTRODUCE THEM AND LIKE THEY WOULD COME WITH US BUT IF I DIDN'T KNOW THEM MY FRIENDS WOULD INTRODUCE ME. ... THAT'S LIKE THE OTHER PEOPLE, LIKE FIVE OR SIX PEOPLE, THAT'S HOW I GOT TO KNOW THEM.'**  
(PAIGE)

At the time, these experiences are not necessarily seen as negative, making intervention a challenge. One young person who left home at 15 supported himself by crime, as did his friends, and was satisfied with that lifestyle at the time.

In some cases the nature of the journey strains or severs existing friendships. Sometimes this is a gradual and sometimes a conscious break. Two young woman had conflict with friends because they had told family of their whereabouts or refused to help them, another described feeling judged by her friends after being forced out of home:

**'I LOST MY FRIENDS, LIKE SOME FRIENDS LEFT ME BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T WANT TO BE FRIENDS WITH A HOMELESS PERSON... ESPECIALLY IF YOU'VE GOT LIKE IMMIGRATION PROBLEMS AND YOU'RE HOMELESS AS WELL.'** (FEMI)

In contrast, those who have a network of trusted friends to call on and stay within that local area face less immediate risk, and the early stages of the journey are generally more manageable. Even in these cases there is usually a point when favours run out and alternatives need to be sought:

**'IT MAKES IT ALL GOOD FOR A LITTLE WHILE BUT LIKE I SAID YOU START INVADING THEIR SPACE AND THAT, THEY START GETTING A BIT TOUCHY ABOUT IT, YEAH.'** (CONNOR)



At this point, the change in your situation can mean a new friendship group, who are acquaintances rather than friends and are not necessarily positive. These may be people you undertake short circular journeys with, or people who you meet in parties, shelters or other types of accommodation:

**'THEY WEREN'T MY FRIENDS NO, BECAUSE A LOT OF THEM SCREWED ME OVER IN ONE WAY OR OTHER, SO. NO, I WOULDN'T SAY THEY WERE MY FRIENDS, THEY WERE JUST PEOPLE THAT I LIVED WITH THAT GOT ME ON TO DRUGS.'** (SABRINA)

Who you choose to associate with at this tricky transitional time is an issue that is often returned to in the interviews, and can determine how successfully you manage to move on:

**'SOME PEOPLE ARE GOOD, RESPECT YOU AND THAT'S IT, BUT SOME PEOPLE JUST LOOKING TO GET YOU INTO TROUBLE, LIKE WEED AND STUFF LIKE THIS.'** (JOZEF)

For many young people moving on means rejecting the social networks that characterised the journey's middle. In the circular journeys this can mean refusing friends' requests to keep running away, and in the linear, consciously positioning yourself with the 'positive' people and making future plans:

**'I NEED TO SETTLE DOWN AND BE A BETTER MAN, YOU KNOW, ALL THESE GANGS AND ALL THAT, THEY'RE LITTLE KIDS STUFF MAN, SO. I HAVE NO CONTACT, THEY DO TRY AND GET IN CONTACT WITH ME BUT OBVIOUSLY LIKE IT'S BLOCKED ALL MY FACEBOOK AND ALL THAT NOW IN 'IT?'** (NAJAM)

Sometimes the trigger for this is a new relationship or pregnancy. In one case of sexual exploitation, only a prolonged stay in hospital broke the link with the chaotic middle, as the young person's abusers did not know his whereabouts and could not contact him.

## 6.2 THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

With few exceptions, conflict with a parent or carer was the reason for starting the journey. In some cases this was linked to physical violence from the parent, and in others to ongoing verbal conflict or rejection:

**'SOMETIMES SHE'S NICE TO YOU, SHE SUCKS YOU IN, AND THEN SHE JUST PUSHES YOU AWAY, AND SOMETIMES YOU, YOU JUST RUN OFF WHEN SHE PUSHES YOU AWAY.'** (ETHAN)

There was a distinct sub-group of young males who were told to leave directly because of their offending behaviour and its impact on the family. Family composition was not always discussed, but where absent parents were mentioned, the impact was great:

**'THAT'S PROBABLY ONE OF THE REASONS WHY I WENT DOWNHILL AS WELL IN 'IT BECAUSE MY DAD, LIKE HE'S A STRAIGHT GEEZER, DON'T DRINK, NOTHING, AND, YEAH, IF MY DAD WAS STILL LIVING WITH ME I WOULDN'T BE WHERE I AM IN 'IT.'** (KIERAN)



STAYING  
WITH  
FAMILY =  
LOW RISK



The presence of an oppositional parent or the absence of a positive one can therefore be seen as a key factor at the start of the journey. In some cases staying away was a pattern of behaviour that had begun with older siblings and continued with younger ones.

The journeys that do not fit this pattern are ones where the young person was actively seeking something: excitement, escapism or a loving relationship. In these cases the relationship with the parent was not the primary factor, but was also not sufficiently strong to prevent the journey. Young people in these interviews talked about becoming heavily involved in drugs and a party lifestyle. One young person who became heavily dependent on drugs had been abused in an intimate relationship when only 14 and had felt unable to talk to her mother about it.

The presence of positive family members also shapes the journey and can accelerate its safe conclusion. In the lower risk journeys, the young person runs to a grandparent or older sibling and does not experience significant risk. Even those young people on linear journeys who will not return to the family home usually maintain some contact with siblings and seem to find this positive. Two talk about the importance of trying to be a role model for younger siblings and not wanting them to follow in their path, and in some cases this is an incentive to change.

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## 6.3 THE INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY

The use of smartphones and the internet can have a positive or negative effect on the journey and the ability to find a safe place.

On the positive side, mobile phones contain contact lists of friends who may help a young person, and can also be a way of accessing the internet to find out about services. One young man on an isolated journey, unhappy with the casual friends he had met, was able to get in contact with a real friend via Facebook, who helped him get to England. Another young person aged 17 researched her options on the internet at the library, and was accepted into a hostel. Peer researchers viewed mobile phones as being an essential factor in maintaining social networks and improving a young person's chances of having somewhere safe to stay.

However, a mobile phone can also be the way that an abuser contacts and controls a young person, and Facebook can be used in a far riskier way:



**'THEN GO ON FACEBOOK OR SOMETHING, JUST BE LIKE ANYBODY ROUND THIS AREA GOT A HOUSE I CAN CRASH AT?' (COURTNEY)**

One young woman told of a friend taking her phone and texting abusive messages to her mother, to cause more conflict and prolong the journey. Another had to block friends who were gang-associated in order to be able to move on. Workers in the learning sets raised concerns that some young people would think of Facebook friends as genuine friends, even if they had never met them. They also noted the way in which technology was used to arrange parties with particular dress codes and that young people seeking same-sex relationships via websites could be particularly vulnerable to abuse.

Friends or acquaintances contacted virtually can be a good or bad influence, just like friends in real life. Although the internet is potentially a source of useful information about services, and most services have a website, it was rarely used to bring the journey to a safe conclusion. Peer researchers felt that properly targeted advertising was important, and it may be that there is a challenge here to use technology more effectively to get relevant messages to young people.

## 6.4 THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT IN THE JOURNEY

The majority of young people stayed locally in networks they knew, on foot or on local public transport. Those travelling around Europe across borders had the longest journeys, and used a mixture of hitchhiking, boats, trucks and trains, sometimes with tickets and sometimes without. Those escaping from threats in their home town also had long journeys, generally by train or coach, as did the young person who was systematically exploited and internally trafficked. He travelled long distances by train and taxis paid for by his abusers.

Those looking for parties or friends tended to use local buses and trains. One young person mentioned sleeping on night buses as a way of staying warm, and one young person had met a new group of people while waiting at a bus station.

It is fair to say that the most isolated young people had the longest journeys. In the majority of cases young people were travelling legally and would be unlikely to come to the attention of rail staff or others. These networks and hubs may however present opportunities for promoting services to those whose social relationships have become fractured and whose opportunities for peer support are weak.



## 6.5 HOW THE JOURNEY SHAPES YOUNG PEOPLE (THEIR OWN REFLECTIONS)

Many young people were positive about the way things had ended up even though many aspects of the journey had been extremely negative. All had accessed some form of service that had helped, and some felt that this had developed their own skills and enabled them to react differently to problems:

**'JUST DON'T RUN AWAY FROM IT BECAUSE RUNNING AWAY IS JUST, EVENTUALLY GOING CATCH UP TO YOU SO, JUST MIGHT AS WELL FACE IT THEN AND THERE.'** (CAMERON)

Some of the skills seemed to have developed as a result of intervention from services, but some seemed to have come out of the journey itself and the difficulties that had been faced. A number of the older males said they had had to rely on themselves to get their life back on track and this had made them more resilient and more reflective:

**'IF I WASN'T HOMELESS, IT WOULDN'T HAVE MADE ME THINK AND REALISE ABOUT LIFE, IT WOULDN'T HAVE MADE ME THE MAN I AM NOW.'** (NAJAM)

A young woman commented that initially she felt scared but when she realised how many other people were experiencing similar problems it gave her confidence that she could get through it. Even where young people had suffered high levels of abuse on the journeys they had taken, their outlook was philosophical and some were involved either formally or informally in supporting other young people:

**'IT'D HAVE BEEN GREAT OF COURSE IF THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN BUT I DON'T KNOW WHO I WOULD BE WITHOUT THAT, YOU KNOW, AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WOULD BE DOING WITH MY LIFE IF I DIDN'T HAVE THAT BECAUSE SO MUCH OF WHAT I DO NOW... I DO BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED TO ME.'** (JACK)





It is worth noting that interviewees were sourced through projects and had had some level of service and support. The views of young people who had these experiences but had no sources of support may have been different.

When asked their views on running away and homelessness, interviewees were clear that young people should do everything possible to avoid being on the streets.

**'I RAN AWAY WITHOUT EVEN SPEAKING TO ANYONE AND I ENDED UP ON STREETS FOR A WHILE, DO YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? AND IT WEREN'T NICE, WHEN A CAR'S PULLING UP, YOU WON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE AND I THINK DEFINITELY YOU SHOULD TALK TO SOMEONE... YOU CAN'T TELL PEOPLE NOT TO RUN AWAY BECAUSE THERE'S PEOPLE GOING TO DO WHAT THEY WANT BUT AS LONG AS YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE GOING TO BE SAFE AND YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE OUT ON STREETS.'** (SABRINA)

**'I WOULD LIKE FOR ANY TEENAGER WHO THINKS, YEAH, I'M GOING TO RUN AWAY TODAY, TO THINK, NOT TO DO IT FOR THE SIMPLE FACT, AS I SAID, IT GOT ME INTO A BAD PLACE AND IT GOT ME INTO A DEPRESSIVE STATE WHERE I WANTED TO TAKE MY OWN LIFE AND THAT AND I WOULDN'T LIKE SOME OTHER PERSON GOING THROUGH WHAT I WENT THROUGH.'** (JORDAN)

Although some of the older interviewees were still in temporary and insecure accommodation, and therefore still struggling to find a truly safe place, many had clear ambitions and plans how to achieve them. College, university, local training schemes and apprenticeships were commonly mentioned. The support received from services seemed to be a key factor in this:

**'I WAS IN A STATE WHERE I WAS NEVER SHOWERING AND I HARDLY EAT BUT WHEN I COME HERE I WANT TO, YOU KNOW, PEOPLE THEY GIVE ME THE STRENGTH, MOTIVATION TO WANT TO DO SOMETHING AND, YOU KNOW, FIND AN APPRENTICESHIP FOR EXAMPLE.'** (MATT)

## 6.6 BARRIERS TO FINDING A SAFE PLACE

When asked about the sorts of things that made it hard for them to find a safe place, young people gave a variety of answers, some practical and some to do with their own communication skills and the extent to which adults would listen. Among the practical things were having nowhere to charge your phone or no credit, so being unable to ring friends and services that could help, and being unaware that there were any services that could help. Immigration status and licence conditions or recall to prison were also factors that hindered progress. Some postcode areas were off limits for young people who had had previous gang involvement.

Difficulties finding and engaging with the right services were mentioned frequently, sometimes because of a lack of knowledge and sometimes because of communication problems. One young person had a learning difficulty and got frustrated when he could not understand workers, leading to outbursts of anger; another found it hard to speak up for himself because of long-standing mental health problems, and a third acknowledged that the abuse he suffered meant that he presented with a lot of 'attitude' and was difficult to engage. One young woman who was being abused where she was living could not explain that to housing officers because no private interview room was available. This delayed her move to safe accommodation. Another young woman now in foster care simply said that adults did not listen.





Of the young people interviewed, those who were reported missing were referred to local voluntary sector projects by the police. This option is not available to young people in areas where there are no such services, and may make it more likely that their journeys are repeated. From April 2013 police forces have been adopting new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent', with the absent category requiring a lesser level of response:

**Missing** - Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

**Absent** - A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be. (ACPO, 2013)

As the risk assessment of these cases varies between police forces, it is not possible to know whether any of the research participants would have been classed as absent under the new system, but anything that reduces the likelihood of referral on to appropriate services is of concern.

## 6.7 WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SEE AS A SAFE PLACE?

Young people's view of what constituted a safe place seemed to be influenced by their stage on the journey. The peer researchers, who had all spent some time reflecting on the research question thought that a place was only truly safe when it provided a stable platform for future plans. They valued shelters and hostels, but regarded them as stepping stones and not safe places in their own right. This was quite a philosophical position, and it was not surprising that young people who had recently been sleeping rough, had a more pragmatic interpretation:

**'FOR EXAMPLE SHELTER IS SAFE RATHER THAN SLEEPING IN A PARK, YOU KNOW, I FEEL A LOT MORE SAFE THERE, I CAN GO THERE, I CAN LEAVE MY STUFF ON MY BED AND I KNOW IT'S NOT GOING TO GO ANYWHERE.'** (MATT)

This tangible view of a safe place was shared by other young men with similar experiences, who talked about four walls and your own key, and a place you could return to. Two males in their 20s felt that safety was something they carried within them and they created their own safe places:

**'I DON'T KNOW, I'VE NEVER REALLY BEEN IN AN UNSAFE PLACE. I'VE EVEN GONE JAIL SO THAT'S, THAT'S MAYBE SEEN AS UNSAFE AND THAT, DANGERS THERE BUT I ALWAYS FIND MY WAY SORT OF THING.'** (CONNOR)



## **7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**IT IS ESTIMATED THAT EVERY YEAR 18,000 CHILDREN RUN AWAY AND SLEEP ROUGH OR WITH SOMEONE THEY HAVE JUST MET. THE RISKS THEY FACE BOTH ON AND OFF THE STREETS HAVE BEEN WELL-DOCUMENTED AND THERE IS CLEARLY A NEED TO HAVE SAFE ALTERNATIVES. WHILST SOME YOUNG PEOPLE WHO RUN AWAY CAN FIND SUPPORT AND BREATHING SPACE WITH EXTENDED FAMILY OR FRIENDS, OTHERS HAVE FAMILY WHO POSE A DIRECT THREAT, FOR EXAMPLE THROUGH FORCED MARRIAGE, OR HAVE FRIENDS WHOSE OWN VULNERABILITIES EXACERBATE THE RISKS THEY FACE.**

## PROVIDING A SAFE PLACE

Legislation provides a safety net for those young people who have run away and have nowhere safe to stay, but our attempt to map the usage of emergency accommodation by local authorities has been largely unsuccessful. All but four local authorities said they had accommodation they could use for under 16 year olds in an emergency, but 96 were unable to say how often they had used it to safeguard a young person who had run away. Of the 110 local authorities who could give a figure, 71 had not accommodated any young people for that reason in the year 2013/14.

Those working with young runaways suggested some social care departments were reluctant to accommodate young people under s20 of the Children Act (1989) because of budgetary constraints, and that high thresholds for intervention hindered their attempts to find safe places for young people. They also raised concerns about the variable treatment of 16-17 year olds and the lack of assessment of their vulnerabilities.

In the peer interviews, some young people described being turned away from statutory services and spending long periods of time sofa-surfing. Some faced additional barriers to accessing services as a result of mental health problems, learning difficulties, and the impact of the abuse they had suffered. One young person was ineligible for some types of accommodation because of her immigration status. In the workshops and young people's survey, 'having somewhere safe to go' was consistently rated the most important thing, but it is clear that many young people are struggling to find that place.

One type of accommodation will not meet every young person's needs. Some will be reluctant to engage with statutory services at all, and some young people in care will be running from the 'safe place' that social care has allocated to them. Others will require specialist provision. Some form of overnight accommodation is essential, but the provision of safe places during the day may reduce demand for such provision. Many young people described a need for 'breathing space', and those that could not find this safely with family and friends ended up in risky situations. Workers in the learning sets and who responded to the survey believed that the timely intervention of a trusted person who listens, and a safe place to go for a few hours in the day, could prevent escalation and overnight absence in some cases.

## IN RELATION TO THE PROVISION OF A SAFE PLACE, WE RECOMMEND:

- 1.** Ofsted should inspect and report on the effectiveness of local authorities' responses to young people aged under 18 who require accommodation in an emergency as a result of running away or being forced from home.
- 2.** Local authorities should ensure that the vulnerabilities of 16-17 year olds are assessed by social care when section 20 of the Children Act (1989) applies, in accordance with the decision in *R (G) v LB Southwark*, and that housing services are included in multi-agency safeguarding training to facilitate awareness and referral.
- 3.** Local authorities should engage with the voluntary sector to commission alternative accommodation options for young people, such as Nightstop, flexible refuge models or specialist private placements.
- 4.** The Cabinet Office needs to develop and fund a coherent national programme of youth work and have a youth work champion. Youth services must be protected and built upon to provide safe places for young people not engaging in school or with statutory services.
- 5.** The Department for Education should recognise the importance of pastoral care and safe places in schools, and the vital role that good PSHE lessons can play in developing life skills and helping young people to stay safe.



## INTERVENING IN THE JOURNEYS

As noted earlier, it is not always easy to identify young people during the journey if they are actively trying to escape attention. However, there may be opportunities to promote and advertise services in ways that will enable young people to find them when they wish to do so. This will be especially important for the young people who have the most isolated journeys and are divorced from any support networks. Such advertising could also potentially reach some young people who are never reported missing.

### **WORKERS HIGHLIGHTED THE VERY REAL PROBLEM OF FUNDING CUTS AND THERE BEING FEWER SERVICES AVAILABLE**

Workers highlighted the very real problem of funding cuts and there being fewer services available, but it is important that young people are aware of those that remain. A number of interviewees said that they had no idea that there were services that could help, and they wished that they had found help sooner. This suggests some form of targeted advertising may be effective. Stevenson et al (2013) in their study of adult missing journeys note the way in which some adults were drawn to railway stations as symbolic and hopeful spaces, even if they did not subsequently travel anywhere. Although we have not found large numbers of young people using the rail network, those that did had some of the most isolated journeys, as did the young person who was sleeping on night buses. Some young people travelled from other cities by train or coach, and many young people were using local buses. This may present opportunities for the delivery of some positive messages or information.

Different types of journey need different types of intervention. For young people who have circular journeys, the best place to create change seems to be back at the starting point, which is usually the family home. Without intervention, these journeys are likely to be repeated. Whilst police involvement was not always welcomed by young people, being reported missing led to referrals to local voluntary sector projects, whose input was highly valued. Most of the young people who described linear journeys that had ended in youth homelessness also described a series of circular journeys when they were younger. This is consistent with research indicating that running away carries an increased risk of later youth homelessness (Shelter Scotland, 2011).

Peer researchers found that positive relationships, resilience and life skills would help young people to get through the journey and on to a safe place. They found that these were more important than having money or a permanent place to stay. They wanted young people to be empowered to help themselves where possible by being given good information about services and places to charge their phones to keep connected to their support network.

Social relationships were critical factors in both circular and linear journeys and those who did not have good social networks were isolated and more likely to sleep rough. Where social networks are fractured, part of the process of finding a safe place is building these up again with the help of services; in these cases the worker is the surrogate 'friend' while other networks are created.

Young people who cannot return home and are old enough to live independently will need support to manage this transition and build up their support networks. Peer researchers emphasised the importance of having something to aim for and future plans, to keep young people motivated and increase their chances of being around positive people. Some interviewees spoke highly of services that offered vocational and recreational opportunities alongside advice and job search.

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JOURNEY AND ON  
TO A SAFE PLACE.**

## IN RELATION TO INTERVENTIONS AND SERVICE DESIGN, WE RECOMMEND:

- 1.** Public transport providers and those who own and manage public spaces such as shopping centres should ensure that information is displayed about runaway services, e.g. helpline numbers, and that staff have some awareness of the issue. Information could be displayed alongside phone charging points.
- 2.** Police and Crime Commissioners and/or local authorities should commission independent return home interviews for young people who have run away, to identify the reasons and offer follow-up support on a one-to-one or family basis where needed. Local Safeguarding Children Boards should ensure that information is shared between partners to enable an effective response. It is recognised that family support will not be suitable in all cases, e.g. forced marriage, where the young person will require other specialist support.
- 3.** Commissioners of services should ensure that services are sufficiently resourced and interventions are of long enough duration to enable positive relationships to be built between workers and young people.
- 4.** Practitioners and commissioners of services that support young people who are 16 or older and homeless should try to include vocational opportunities like music, sport and drama, alongside job search, or link up with others who can, to strengthen social networks.
- 5.** Those developing or commissioning services for children and young people should involve them in the process and ensure that their views help to shape provision.

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# APPENDIX A: SURVEY FOR PRACTITIONERS

## Safe Places research

Railway Children are conducting research into the journeys young people take when they run away from home or care. By exploring patterns of behaviour and understanding the issues workers face, we aim to provide and recommend even more timely interventions to make sure young people find a safe place. We are talking to young people directly, but we are also seeking the views of workers who come into contact with young people aged under 18 who run away or go missing.

You do not have to give any contact details. If you do, we will not attribute your comments to you personally or to any organisation. We may use anonymous quotes and say what type of worker said this unless you indicate at the end that you do not want to be quoted.

The research will be published on the Railway Children website in November 2014. If you would like to receive details of the findings and the launch, please leave your email address at the end. This survey closes on 4th July.

### **\* 1. This survey is intended for workers who have either occasional or regular contact with young people aged under 18 who run away or go missing from home or care.**

**Please choose the category that describes you best.**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Specialise in or manage work with young people who run away/go missing     | <input type="radio"/> Have an education or health care role not specific to running away/missing          |
| <input type="radio"/> Specialise in or manage work with young people who are sexually exploited  | <input type="radio"/> Have a youth offending or law enforcement role not specific to running away/missing |
| <input type="radio"/> Specialise in or manage work with parents and families                     | <input type="radio"/> Have a policy or research role, involving some contact with young people            |
| <input type="radio"/> Have a social work or youth work role not specific to running away/missing |   |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)   |   |

### **\* 2. What type of organisation do you work for?**

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Local Authority (Social Care)      | <input type="radio"/> Health Service |
| <input type="radio"/> Local Authority (other department) | <input type="radio"/> Police         |
| <input type="radio"/> Charity                            | <input type="radio"/> Private Sector |
| <input type="radio"/> Educational establishment          |                                      |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)             |                                      |

### **\* 3. Which Local Authority area does your work cover? Please list all if there is more than one.**

### **4. Please indicate whether the area is urban, rural or both**

- Mainly urban
- Mainly rural
- Both urban and rural

## Safe Places research

### 5. How often do you have contact with young people who run away or go missing?

- Frequently – most days of the week
- Regularly – one or two days per week
- Occasionally – less than once a week
- Rarely – less than once a month

### 6. How do young people access your service?

- Referral by other agencies only
- Self referral/open access
- Agency referral and self-referral/open access
- Other (please specify)

### 7. If you have a self-referral or open access policy, please say how you let young people know about your service.

- Not applicable - not open access
- Own website
- Links on other websites
- Helpline
- Facebook/other social networking
- Twitter
- Leaflets
- Posters in other agencies

Other (please specify)

### 8. Do you collect data on the demographics of young people who use your service (eg age, ethnicity, sexuality etc)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

### 9. Do your service users reflect the local population? If you answer 'no' please indicate how they differ.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Not applicable - service is targeted at specific groups

Please comment

## Safe Places research

**10. Are there any groups of young people that you are having difficulty reaching? If yes, who are they? Please comment.**

Yes

No

Not sure

Please comment

**11. How often have you come across the locations below as places that young people go to when they run away or go missing?**

|  | Frequently            | Occasionally          | Rarely                | Never                 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| House parties  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Youth project or community centre                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| House of friend (inc boyfriend or girlfriend)              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Takeaway/fast food place/Shisha cafes                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Train or bus station                                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| House of acquaintance/stranger                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| House of family member                                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Shopping Centres or arcades                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Hotels or B&Bs   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Outdoor area: park, wasteland, streets                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Previous care placement or other care home (not their own) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other location   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

If you chose 'other location', please specify



## Safe Places research

### 12. From your experience, how do young people travel around when they run away or go missing?

|                                 | Frequently            | Occasionally          | Rarely                | Never                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| National railway                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Local railway, tube or tram     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Night bus                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Bus (day)                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Cars of acquaintances/strangers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Cars of friends                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Stay local – on foot            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Taxi                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other transport                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

If you chose 'other transport', please specify

### 13. Does your service provide any of the following?

- Services to try to prevent young people running away or going missing (eg education, workshops, helpline etc)
- Services when young people are away from home or care (eg helpline, refuge, help to access emergency accommodation, etc)
- Services when young people return after running away (eg safe and well check, return interviews, one to one support, family work)

Other (please specify)

### 14. If your work involves negotiating 'safe places' for young people to stay when they have run away, please tell us which options you use. Otherwise carry on to Q15

|  | Frequently            | Occasionally          | Rarely                | Never                 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Use Nightstop or other charity-run provision     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Return home or return to care placement          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Refer to Social Care for emergency accommodation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Stay with extended family or friends             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Refer to Local Authority homelessness service    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other option                                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

If you chose 'other option', please specify

## Safe Places research

**15. If you sometimes have difficulty getting young people the services they need please indicate whether you think any of the following are factors.**

|   | Often                 | Sometimes             | Never                 | Not sure              |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Funding cuts to existing services         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Fewer services to refer young people to   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Poor attitudes to young people            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| High thresholds for intervention          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Reluctance to take young people into care | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Complex needs of young people             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other reason                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

If you chose 'other reason', please specify

**16. Please indicate what type of services you have difficulty accessing.**

**17. Are the issues different for u16 year olds compared to 16/17 year olds? Please comment.**

**18. Is there anything else you'd like to say about effective ways to make sure young people find a safe place instead of an unsafe one when they run away from home or care?**

**19. I am happy for you to quote me anonymously in the final report.**

Yes

No

**20. I wish to receive a link to the research report and have given my email address below.**

Thanks for taking the time to give us your views. If you are interested in knowing more about Railway Children and the Safe Places research, please visit our website: [www.railwaychildren.org.uk/safeplaces](http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/safeplaces)

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## SAFE PLACES PEER RESEARCH

**Just so we have it on the recording can you tell us your name please?**

**How old were you when you ran away/became homeless?**

**Tell me about what happened as you ran away?**

- Did you have any plans when you left? (What were they?)
- Did you know what you would do? (What was your plan?)
- What was going through your mind?

**Where did you stay?**

- What were your next steps?
- Did you go anywhere else? (Where did you go?)
- How long did you stay there for?
- Was that the only place? (Where were the other places?)

**How did you try to find help?**

- Did you get introduced to the help by someone? Was it word of mouth? Who introduced you?  
How did you find out?
- Where did you see information about that help?
- Did you see anything online? (What?)
- Were there any services you knew about? (What?)
- Was it easy or hard to find out about help? (Why?)

**Who did you meet along the way?**

- Was there anyone who led you into bad situations? (Can you tell me more about that?)
  - ◊ How did you come out of that situation?
- What friendships do you have now?
  - ◊ How often do you see them?

**What struggles did you go through?**

- Did drugs or crime affect you? (How?)
- How did you support yourself? (money/food)
- Was there a period of time when your emotions became so overwhelming you did something you wouldn't normally do? (Can you tell me more about that?)

**What would have helped you be safe, and when would you have wanted that help?**

- Where are you staying at the moment? - are you happy and safe there?
- How are you feeling now?
- What is it that makes you feel safe now?/ or What would make you feel safe?
- What is a safe place to you?

**What are your views on homelessness and running away now?**

# SAFE PLACES RESEARCH ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

Railway Children is an international charity, working with vulnerable children who live alone at risk on the streets, where they suffer abuse and exploitation. In the UK, Railway Children's work is focused on the Reach model, which provides services before, during and after a child runs away. The Safe Places research will explore the journeys young people take when they run away from home or care and identify the best ways of ensuring that those young people find a safe place. In doing so it will explore the differences between adult's and young people's perceptions of a safe place. The research has four elements:

- Literature review
- Learning sets and questionnaires to practitioners
- Peer research with young people
- Questionnaire to young people

## 1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF RAILWAY CHILDREN RESEARCH (APPLIES TO ALL FOUR ELEMENTS)

- Research undertaken will be consistent with the charity's aims and objectives
- Research methods will be appropriate and proportionate to the research in question
- Research will only be undertaken with the informed consent of participants
- Participants will be safeguarded and anonymity maintained
- Research findings will be reported accurately and truthfully
- Learning from the research will be disseminated widely

## 2. RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS PEER RESEARCHERS

Railway Children recognise their responsibility to equip peer researchers properly for the task and to support them throughout the process. In service of this:

- a) Peer researchers will take part in a recruitment process that makes clear the level of commitment and skills needed.
- b) Bespoke training on Safeguarding will be provided so that peer researchers know how to respond to a disclosure of significant harm.
- c) Peer researchers will be supported to explore the research question, design appropriate methods of enquiry and practise interviewing and/or group activity techniques.
- d) Peer researchers will be encouraged to think about the impact that the research might have on them, and how they will get support if they find it upsetting.
- e) Peer researchers will be able to access local support from a named worker who will be their point of contact throughout. Debrief, check in and supervision will be built in to the process. If queries relate to research methods or practice, further advice will be available through Railway Children's Research and Policy Officer and the Peer Research consultant.
- f) Interviews and any related group activities will take place in a project which has staff on duty.
- g) Peer researchers will act in a voluntary capacity but may receive gift vouchers in acknowledgement of their contribution. Necessarily incurred costs (eg travel) will be reimbursed.
- h) A team meeting will be arranged shortly after the initial activities or interviews have commenced, to encourage reflection and the resolution of any teething problems. This will be in addition to the one to one support available from the named worker.
- i) Additional support will be provided to analyse research results and produce the final report. Peer researchers will decide at that stage whether they wish to validate the findings with a young people's reference group.
- j) Peer researchers will have a choice about the extent to which they wish to be named and take part in media activity launching the findings. Support will be available from Railway Children's Media Consultant for those wishing to undertake media activity.

# SAFE PLACES RESEARCH

## ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3. CONDUCT TOWARDS YOUNG PEOPLE AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

*The following information applies to interviews and group activities. The basic principles of confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation will apply to the later questionnaire stage, but further thinking will develop about this when the peer researchers meet to design the questionnaire, especially in the event that there is an online element.*

a) We will ensure that young people being interviewed know the purpose of the research and what will happen to the information they tell us.

This information is on a sheet, written in simple language, that will be read out and given to the participant to take away.

b) We will only interview young people who have given informed and written consent.

We expect young people to be contacted via projects already working with them. Where projects require us to obtain parental consent we will adhere to this. Where projects do not require this we will accept that young people aged 13 and over can give their own consent to participate unless there is reason to believe otherwise. Consent forms will be stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

c) We will ensure that young people know that participation is voluntary and they can choose not to answer certain questions. Young people can choose to be interviewed by a male or female researcher.

We will try to ascertain that the young person is not feeling any obligation or pressure to be involved and will not carry on with interviews where this seems to be the case. We will only seek information that is directly relevant to the research and will respect the participant's right not to answer certain questions. This is explained on the information sheet.

d) We will try to manage interviewees' expectations by explaining what we intend to do with the findings and that change can take time and may not benefit them directly.

This is on the information sheet and will be explained verbally as well.

e) Participants will be offered the transcript of their interview. We will ensure that they know that they can withdraw consent at any time, even after the interview has taken place, up to the point of publication.

The right to withdraw consent will be explained on the information sheet and verbally.

f) We will only record interviews where consent is given for recording.

This will be noted on the consent sheet. Audio recordings will be transcribed and the originals deleted.

g) Interviewees will be modestly rewarded for their participation with a £10 gift voucher.

This is a standard amount that we do not consider large enough to cause any coercion to participate or skewing of results.

h) We will not interview young people if there is reason to believe that doing so would cause harm or extreme distress.

Where young people are accessed through other services, this will be checked with workers supporting them. If young people are not accessed through a worker, we will be especially mindful of gauging stress levels during the interview.

i) Young people will be provided with information on sources of support after the interview, in case they have found the discussion distressing.

Sources of support will be highlighted on the information sheet, and we expect that young people accessed through projects will be able to access some support from referring workers.

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# SAFE PLACES RESEARCH ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

## 3. CONDUCT TOWARDS YOUNG PEOPLE AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS CONTINUED

j) Young people will be advised of the limits of confidentiality, and our duty to pass on disclosures involving significant harm.

This is included in the information sheet which will be talked through before interviews or other activities begin.

k) All data will be anonymised and care will be taken not to use a level of personal detail in the narrative that may identify an individual. All data will be stored securely.

This will be checked by the Research and Policy Officer before publication.

l) Young people will only be interviewed by researchers who are suited to the role and have undertaken appropriate selection and training.

This will be covered by the peer research recruitment and training process.

m) Young people will be informed how they can access the final report findings, and a young person's summary will be produced.

The consent form invites young people to leave their email if they wish to receive their own copy. The information sheet gives the Railway Children website address, from which the research can be downloaded.

## 4. CONDUCT TOWARDS PRACTITIONERS

*Practitioners may at various times be invited to take part in Learning Sets, complete a questionnaire, and put forward young people to take part in the research.*

Railway Children will ensure that practitioners taking part in Learning Sets or completing questionnaires know that they are taking part in research, understand its aims and know how they can source the findings. Railway Children will ensure that Learning Sets are conducted with due regard for confidentiality and that cases discussed to illustrate particular points are not reflected in the research report in ways that could identify individuals. In the unlikely event that discussion revealed practice likely to cause significant harm to children and young people, this would be discussed with the practitioner and referred to a senior manager within their organisation.

When seeking young people to take part in the research, Railway Children will respect the rights of the workers not to nominate young people who may find the process distressing, and will observe the consent procedures in place at that organisation.

## REFERENCES

Barnardo's Statement of Ethical Research Practice <http://www.bris.ac.uk/education/research/centres/creole/resources/ethics/barnados.pdf>

NSPPC factsheet, Conducting safe and ethical research with children

[http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/briefings/ethical-research-factsheet\\_wda97712.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/briefings/ethical-research-factsheet_wda97712.html)

Univ of Bedfordshire Ethical Statement (Gang-associated Sexual Exploitation/Abuse of Children and Young People) [http://www.beds.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/213130/Gang-associated-Sexual-Violence-Research-Ethical-Statement.pdf](http://www.beds.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/213130/Gang-associated-Sexual-Violence-Research-Ethical-Statement.pdf)

# SAFE PLACES RESEARCH

## JOURNEY SHEET

NAME OF PERSON INTERVIEWED:..... YOUR NAME:.....

### START >>>

Mark the key things that occurred on the young person's journey along the line (think about events, relationships and risks)

### FIRST STEPS/ SHELTER

Why did they go?  
Where did they go?

### THE MIDDLE

Significant experiences  
and relationships

### MOVING FORWARD

Are they in a safe place now?  
What makes it a safe place?

### GETTING THERE

What helped them get to a safe place?  
Do they say what would have helped them get there sooner?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## APPENDIX E: SURVEY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

# SAFE PLACES RESEARCH

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUESTIONNAIRE

### ABOUT THE SURVEY

Railway Children is a charity that works with young people who run away from home or care.

As part of our Safe Places research, we have been interviewing young people about the things that happen when they run away or become homeless and the things that help them find a safe place. We would like your opinion on the things that help.

This survey is for young people aged 11-25 and should take about 15 minutes to complete. By taking part in this research you will be helping to make sure that the recommendations we make really are things that will help young people who run away, are forced out or end up homeless.

If you give an email address you will be entered into a draw for a £20 Love2shop voucher. There are 5 vouchers of £20 to be won. The answers you give will be treated confidentially and we will only use your email address to contact you if you have won a voucher.

This survey will close at midnight on **Thursday 25th September** and the draw will take place the next day.

### ABOUT YOU

1. Please tick all the things that have happened to you in the past or describe you now

- Ran away from home or care before you were 16
- Ran away from home or care before you were 16 or over
- Told or forced to leave home before you were 16
- Told or forced to leave home when you were 16 or older
- Been homeless
- Spent a lot of time hanging around on the streets
- None of these things

2. Please tell us your age

3. Please tell us your gender

- Male
- Female
- Trans\*
- Other

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# SAFE PLACES RESEARCH

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUESTIONNAIRE

4. BELOW ARE THINGS THAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAID HELPED THEM WHEN THEY RAN AWAY OR WERE HOMELESS. PLEASE TELL US HOW IMPORTANT YOU THINK EACH ONE IS

|   | Very Important           | Quite Important          | Not Very Important       | Not important at all     | Don't know               |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|  <p>Having future plans</p>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  <p>Feeling positive about yourself (self esteem)</p>                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  <p>Knowing about services or where to go for help</p>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  <p>Being able to work out if people and places are risky</p>         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  <p>Knowing the area you are in</p>                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  <p>Having somewhere safe to go</p>                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  <p>Having internet access so you can look for services</p>          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  <p>Having enough money to meet your basic needs</p>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  <p>Being able to cope with difficult situations and bounce back</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  <p>Having somewhere to charge your phone</p>                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

# SAFE PLACES RESEARCH

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUESTIONNAIRE

### 5. BELOW ARE PEOPLE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAID HELPED THEM WHEN THEY RAN AWAY OR WERE HOMELESS. PLEASE TELL US HOW IMPORTANT YOU THINK THEY ARE?

|   | Very Important           | Quite Important          | Not Very Important       | Not important at all     | Don't know               |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Having a member of the family you get on with and can trust               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Having friends that are a positive influence on you                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Having an adult outside your family you get on with and can trust         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Having a youth worker or other professional you get on with and can trust | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Having a parent/carer you get on with and can trust                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### 6. YOUNG PEOPLE SAID THAT OTHER PEOPLE WERE REALLY IMPORTANT IN HELPING THEM TO FIND A SAFE PLACE. IF YOU HAD RUN AWAY OR WERE HOMELESS, WHICH OF THESE WOULD YOU WANT TO BE AVAILABLE?

|  | Very Important           | Quite Important          | Not Very Important       | Not important at all     | Don't know               |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Youth workers to talk to   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Counsellors who can help you with how you are feeling                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Someone to talk to your parent/carers to try to sort out problems at home    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A confidential telephone helpline  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A confidential webchat or text messaging service                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A friend to talk to  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Someone who can help with issues like drug and alcohol use, self-harming etc | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Someone to talk to at school or college                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Have we missed out something important? (please say what) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# SAFE PLACES RESEARCH

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUESTIONNAIRE

**7. YOUNG PEOPLE SAID THAT PRACTICAL THINGS HELPED THEM TO FIND A SAFE PLACE. IF YOU HAD RUN AWAY OR WERE HOMELESS, WHICH OF THESE WOULD YOU WANT TO BE AVAILABLE?**

|  | Very Important           | Quite Important          | Not Very Important       | Not important at all     | Don't know               |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Being able to stay overnight with a volunteer family                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Being able to stay overnight with a good friend or family member     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Somewhere to charge your phone                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Being able to stay overnight with a foster carer                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Information on websites or social media about services that can help | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Posters and leaflets about services that can help                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hostels and crash-pads where you can sleep                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Drop in centres giving advice  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Have we missed out something important? (please say what) \_\_\_\_\_

**8. What one thing do you think would make things safer for young people who run away or are homeless?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**9. What words would you use to describe a safe place?**

A safe place is \_\_\_\_\_

**10. If you want to be entered into the prize draw please enter tell us your first name and an email address. We will only use this to contact you if you have won.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**You do not have to answer the following questions but if you do it helps us check that we have got the views of a wide range of young people.**

11. Do you have a disability?  Yes  No

12. Please describe your ethnic origin \_\_\_\_\_

13. Please describe your sexual orientation \_\_\_\_\_

Thanks for completing the survey. If you want to talk to anyone for advice or help the following free helplines are available 24 hours a day. Missing People (if you have run away or are thinking about running away): 116 000 or Childline (to talk about anything that is worrying you): 0800 1111. These helplines can also tell you about services near you if you would rather talk to someone face to face.

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**children** RAILWAY  
**Fighting for street children**