

Running Away in Wales
Patterns, needs and services

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May 2002

Acknowledgements

The research undertaken for this report was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and the authors would like to acknowledge their support and assistance. However, the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the National Assembly for Wales or the Welsh Assembly Government.

The original fieldwork upon which this report is partly based was funded by the Children's Promise and undertaken in partnership by the Children's Society, Aberlour Child Care Trust, the EXTERN Organisation and the University of York.

The authors would also like to thank the young people and professionals who made this research possible by contributing their time, views and experiences.

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1 Background

This report was commissioned by the National Assembly for Wales to explore the current extent of services for young runaways in Wales. However, the report goes further than this by being the first to provide reliable evidence on the incidence of running away in Wales and on the circumstances and experiences of young people who run away or are forced to leave their homes before the age of 16.

The research builds upon work previously undertaken by the Children's Society, Aberlour Child care Trust, EXTERN (Northern Ireland) and the University of York. In particular, it draws upon the fieldwork that was undertaken for the first UK-wide study of running away in 1999.¹ Further fieldwork was undertaken for this report in six sample areas in Wales to draw together agency perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of existing services for young runaways. The presentation of the findings for Wales will be set in the context of existing research knowledge about the phenomenon of running away in Britain.

Definitions

The concept of *running away* is used here to describe any young person under the age of 16 who spends time away from home or substitute care without the permission of their parents or carers or as a result of being forced to leave by them. Running away is therefore a generic term that includes those forced to leave. Where there is a need to look at these groups separately, it will be clearly indicated in the text.

The definition does not include a time limit. However, unless otherwise specified, all statistical data will relate to absences of one night or longer.

The legal status of children away from their homes

The primary focus of this report is on young people who run away before the age of 16. In large part this is due to their acute vulnerability while they are away from safe adult care. Children do not have a legal entitlement to live independently of the care of an adult with parental responsibility.

If a child under 16 stays with a person (other than a person with parental responsibility or a relative) for 28 days or more, the person providing care must notify the local authority that they are privately fostering the child under the Children Act 1989. Anyone in this position may do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's welfare (Children Act 1989 S.3.5). In these circumstances it might be considered reasonable to notify the police, social services or the child's parent (if appropriate).

It is an offence for anyone to 'take or detain' a child under 16 who has left home under Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. Enforcement could be problematic, however, if the young person has freely chosen to stay with this individual. In practice, children who run away are likely to be returned to those who have parental responsibility for them, unless to do so would be placing them at risk of significant harm.

¹ Findings from the UK study have been published as: Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999) *Stil Running: Children on the Streets in the UK*, London, The Children's Society.

A young person who wishes to leave home under the age of 16 may apply for a residence order under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 to live with another responsible adult who may then assume parental responsibility for the duration of the order.

While, in general terms, it is not legally possible for a young person under 16 to choose to leave home, there is one important exception. Section 51 of the Children Act 1989 provides a legal framework for the provision of short-term refuge to young people under 16 that have run away or been forced to leave their homes. Refuges have exemption from the laws on harbouring and may either be managed directly by the local authority, using children's homes or designated foster placements, or by an independent agency under local authority registration and inspection. Young people may stay for up to 14 days and refuge is intended to provide young people with breathing space and an opportunity to receive professional support. These provisions have been under-utilised. At the time of writing, only one independent refuge is operational in the UK (in London), although some local authorities do offer placements in residential or foster care in exceptional circumstances.

While the options for young people aged 16 or over who run away or are forced to leave home or substitute care are limited while they are away, they are greater than those that exist for the under 16s. The former are legally entitled to find employment, can claim benefits in exceptional circumstances and gain access to emergency hostel provision. Some observations on services for this age group will be made in Section 3. Young people under 16, who provide the major focus of this report, have no legal right to live independently, no entitlement to benefits, only a limited ability to work and, in consequence, no legitimate means of supporting themselves. It is difficult to over-estimate their vulnerability to exploitation by others.

Recent research on running away in the UK

The work undertaken by the Safe on the Streets Research team (1999) represents the largest survey yet undertaken into running away in the UK. The self report schools survey of over 13,000 young people aged 14-15 provided reliable evidence about prevalence and patterns of running away.

- It discovered that running away is a significant UK wide problem. Around one in nine (11%) young people will run away overnight at least once before the age of 16. Around 77,000 children under 16 run away for the first time each year.
- Rates of running away are broadly consistent in all countries of the UK and in all types of area – including cities, towns and rural areas as well as in areas of greater or lesser affluence.
- Females are more likely to run away than males. Although running away is primarily a feature of the mid teen years, around one in four first run away before the age of 11. Differences in rates of running away for young people of different ethnic groups is less marked than was previously thought.
- Young people looked after by local authorities are more likely to run away and to do so repeatedly.
- Young people are more likely to run away from step-parent and lone parent families than they are from families with two birth parents.
- Four in five young people run away as a result of relationship problems in the family home – including conflict and arguments, abuse and problems between parents themselves.
- Most young people only run away once or twice and stay away for one night or less. However, around one in seven stay away for a week or more and over one quarter run away three times or more.

- There was also considerable of the risks to which young people may be exposed. Around one in four slept rough, one in seven reported that they had been physically or sexually assaulted while away and around one in seven resorted to risky survival strategies.

The study identified four main sub-groups within the overall population of runaways.

- Young people who run away once or twice but have not spent a night away. Around 6% of the total population of young people have this experience before the age of 16.
- Young people who run away once or twice but spend one or more nights away, accounting for around 9% of all young people.
- Young people who run away overnight repeatedly (three times or more) but do not become detached from their families or carers, accounting for around 2% of young people.
- A very small minority who become detached and stay away from their families or carers for six months or more.

Compared to those young people who had never run away, each of the first three sub-groups (the fourth was not large enough for statistical analysis) were significantly more likely to have negative feelings about the quality of their family relationships and to report difficulties at school and in their personal lives. Those who had run away repeatedly were the most likely to report dissatisfaction with their lives.

Further findings from this and other relevant studies in the field will be integrated into our discussion of the survey findings for Wales in Section 2.

The policy framework

A number of legislative requirements and policy initiatives relate to the needs of young runaways, albeit often indirectly, and should help to ensure that they are given appropriate attention in service planning and delivery.

Previous research has demonstrated that running away may be an indicator of abuse or neglect or symptomatic of serious conflict within families and that young people may be at risk of physical harm or sexual exploitation while away from home (Abrahams and Mungall 1992; Rees 1993; Stein et al 1994; Wade and Biehal 1998; Safe on the Streets, 1999). Many young people that run away will therefore form part of the population of children 'in need' under the terms of the Children Act 1989 and should therefore be entitled to receive advice, guidance and counselling under the family support provisions of the Act (Section 17).

The *Children First* programme sets out 11 key objectives for transforming children's social services (National Assembly for Wales 2001a). Most of these objectives are pertinent to the needs of young runaways. Objective 7, which refers to effective and timely assessment may be particularly helpful in ensuring that serious attention is given to assessing young people's reasons for running away and to planning an appropriate response in both family and care contexts. The new *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (National Assembly for Wales and Home Office, 2001) provides helpful guidance on the development of a systematic approach to assessment.

Each local authority has a responsibility to generate a Children's Services Plan to identify local service needs and map out local objectives for children's services in responding to them. The recent *Social Services Guidance on Planning* does not refer directly to running away (National Assembly for Wales, 2000a). However, earlier guidance on children's services planning does make reference to running

away as an issue to be considered by local authorities (The Welsh Office 1996). Local authority planning should identify the extent of local need for services, involve local statutory and voluntary agencies in the construction of plans and develop arrangements for monitoring needs and services. This approach is consistent with the principles for inter-agency collaboration outlined in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (National Assembly for Wales 2000b).

The establishment of *Children and Young People's Framework Planning Partnerships* (National Assembly for Wales, 2001b) may provide an appropriate forum for consideration of the needs of young people running away in a local authority area. The intention that frameworks should provide an overview of the work of all bodies, review local levels of need and the demand for support to inform the development of universal and targeted services, may be significant for developing an integrated approach to running away and the issues that underpin it.

The recommendations contained within *Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales* (National Assembly for Wales, 2000c) are significant for the needs of young runaways. For example, the extension of entitlement to personal support and advice for young people, where and when they need it, with clear ground rules on confidentiality, as it is described in the report, would be of considerable benefit to young people who run away. The report's focus on the development of a coherent local structure designed to prevent problems by providing early and accessible support echoes many of the recommendations made in research reports on running away.

The report, *Missing from Care*, issued by the Local Government Association and the Association of Chief Police Officers Care provides a framework for local procedures in relation to children who are absent from local authority care or accommodation (Local Government Association 1997). The Assembly's response to the findings of *Lost in Care* (Waterhouse 2000) also reiterated the importance of social services and the police working together to respond to children absconding from care (National Assembly Wales 2000d). The introduction of the Care Standards Act (2000) and a subsequent Welsh Statutory Instrument requires that there is a procedure in place to be followed when any child accommodated in a children's home is absent without permission (Welsh Statutory Instrument 2002 No. 327 (W.40)).

Two further planned developments should also provide helpful guidance to local authorities in Wales. First, the Social Exclusion Unit is preparing a report on policies and services for young runaways with a view to developing a national framework for services in England. Second, the Department of Health is due to issue guidance to local authorities in England on children and young people who go missing from public care (Biehal and Wade, forthcoming). The National Assembly is currently drafting a report on the Implications of these developments for Wales.

The study design

The report draws upon three existing sources of information collected as part of our earlier UK-wide study of running away that had not previously been fully exploited – a survey of school pupils, depth interviews with young people with previous experience of running away and with agency professionals working in the field. New information has also been collected by extending the agency interviews to new areas of Wales and through key informant interviews with practitioners in leading national agencies.

A more complete description of the methodology is provided in Appendix B.

Survey and young person interviews

A survey of 1706 young people aged 14 and 16 was conducted in 1999 in a representative sample of schools in five areas of Wales – Cardiff, Barry, Cwmbran, Merthyr Tydfil and Gwynedd. The survey included information about young people's family, school and personal lives as well as on their experiences of running away.

At the same time depth interviews were conducted with 30 young people who had experience of running in three of these areas – Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and Gwynedd. The young people were identified through agencies in the local area and, although the sample was not representative of all runaways, the interviews provided insight into their experiences of running away and how these fitted into the broader context of their lives. Young people were also asked to reflect on what might have helped them and to consider the kinds of services that would assist runaways.

The data gathered in Wales had not previously been analysed as a discrete sample. It provides the largest and most reliable evidence to date on the prevalence of, motivations for and patterns associated with running away in Wales. These findings, which are presented in Section 2, provide a basis for considering the service needs of young runaways and the likely level of demand for such services.

Agency interviews

Telephone interviews have been conducted with 107 agency professionals in six sample areas – Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Gwynedd, Wrexham, Cwmbran and Carmarthenshire. A list of the range of agencies contacted during the UK wide study and during the follow up for this report is included in Appendix C. The purpose of these interviews was to provide a description of existing services for runaways, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of these arrangements and consider in what ways policies and services may be further developed. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with practitioners in leading statutory and voluntary agencies to provide a national overview of policies and services. These findings are presented in Section 3. Section 4 draws together our findings and makes suggestions to inform future policy and practice.

2 Patterns of running away

This section of the report will draw on the schools survey and evidence from our interviews with young people to provide an estimate of the number of young people under the age of 16 who run away or are forced to leave home and to identify some of the characteristics of those who go missing in Wales.² We will also consider why young people run away, what happens to them when they do and explore patterns of return. Finally, we will also look at young people's views about what might have prevented them from running away and what kinds of services might have assisted them once they had.

Numbers and characteristics of young people who run away

An adequate understanding of the prevalence and nature of running away is a necessary pre-condition for the development of effective policy and service responses to the problem. To date, there have been no reliable estimates of running away in Wales.

Previous attempts to establish UK wide estimates of running away have been mostly based on police missing persons statistics (Newman 1989; Abrahams and Mungall 1992). The limitations of this approach have been acknowledged. Police reports may include a wider group of young people than just runaways and not all young people are reported missing in the first place, perhaps especially where they have been forced to leave (Abrahams and Mungall 1992). There is also considerable evidence of variations in local recording practices by both the police and social services (Morgan-Klein 1990; Wade and Biehal 1998). A consistent recommendation of research reports has been the need to make improvements in the recording and collation of information about young runaways as a basis for service development (Local Government Association 1997; Wade and Biehal 1998; Safe on the Streets 1999).

The recent UK wide survey of running away by the Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999), to which this report is linked, has generated the most reliable estimates of running away. The schools survey overcame some of the above difficulties by not relying on 'official' sources of information. We were able to ask young people directly about their experiences. It was administered in a fairly representative sample of schools in five areas of Wales to give a broad picture of running away in different contexts. It was also retrospective and gathered young people's experiences over the course of their lives. In consequence, we are able to generate quite good estimates of the prevalence of running away in Wales. However, it is still likely to under-estimate the problem. The survey was only conducted in mainstream schools and we know from previous research that running away is closely associated with school non-attendance (Brennan et al 1978; Kurtz 1991). A snapshot schools survey is likely to miss those not attending on a given day, more of whom are likely to have run away.

² Where statistical data are presented as significant in this report and the p-values are not given, this will be at a minimum of 99% ($p < 0.01$). Where findings are presented at a 95% level of *confidence* ($p < 0.05$), the appropriate p-value will be indicated in the text.

Numbers

The proportions of young people surveyed who had run away in city, town and rural areas in Wales are shown in Appendix A, Table 1. This table also shows the comparable figures in other areas of the UK.

In Cardiff, 8.2% of the young people surveyed had run away overnight at least once. This figure is comparable with that for other large cities in the UK. The rates in major cities such as London, Cardiff and Glasgow tend to be slightly lower than for other urban areas. The reasons for this trend are not clear. It may be that young people feel less safe being away from home in these areas. Whatever the reason, the observed trend dispels any notion that running away is predominantly a problem in large cities.

In the other urban areas surveyed in Wales (Merthyr, Barry and Cwmbran) running away rates averaged 10%. Again these figures are comparable with rates in similar areas elsewhere in the UK.

The situation in rural Wales is more difficult to interpret. The survey was carried out in Meirionydd. The reported running away rate amongst this sample of young people was 3.1%. This is much lower than in other rural areas surveyed in the UK. In England, Scotland and Northern Ireland running away rates in rural areas are not significantly different from those in urban areas (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Raws, 2001; Wade, 2002). In view of these findings, without surveying a second rural area in Wales it is difficult to come up with a tight estimate of the level of running away in rural Wales.

Running away rates in cities and other urban areas in Wales are therefore in line with those observed elsewhere in the UK. Making some allowance for under-reporting due to the age of young people surveyed (see Appendix B for discussion of this point), we would estimate that the proportion of young people that run away overnight before the age of 16 is between 9% and 11% in cities in Wales and between 10% and 12% in other urban areas. The picture in rural areas is less clear but we would estimate that the average running away rate across these areas is between 5% and 10%.

These figures suggest an overall running away rate across Wales of between 8.2% and 11.2%. On the basis of these ranges, it can be estimated that there are between 2,900 and 4,000 young people running away overnight in Wales for the first time each year, and a total of between 4,900 and 6,700 overnight running away incidents per year.

Characteristics

Females are more likely to run away than males (Rees 1993; Safe on the Streets 1999). This is also the case in Wales. Around one in nine (11%) females reported having run away overnight compared to just 6% of males.

Previous studies have pointed to an over-representation amongst runaways of African-Caribbean young people and an under-representation of young people from Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi backgrounds (Abrahams and Mungall 1992; Rees 1993). The UK-wide study found that differences between ethnic groups were less marked than previously thought (Safe on the Streets 1999). African-Caribbean and white young people in Wales were likely to report having run away in similar numbers (10.5% and 9% respectively), although Asian young people were less likely to have run away (3%).

Running away is primarily a feature of the mid teen years (Abrahams and Mungall 1992; Rees 1993; Graham and Bowling 1995). Three in five (59%) of those who ran away overnight in Wales did so for the first time between the ages of 12 and 14, which is broadly consistent with patterns elsewhere.

However, almost one quarter (23%) first ran away before the age of 11. This group may be particularly vulnerable and not just because of their age. They are more likely to have extended careers of running away. Over half (52%) of those who had run away more than three times had first run away before the age of 11. In addition, where they do continue to run away, there is evidence that they may face a heightened risk of social exclusion as young adults, including homelessness (Simons and Whitbeck 1991; Craig and Hodson 1998). Strategies aimed at early intervention are therefore likely to be helpful and may need to include children of primary school age.

The vast majority (81%) of young people that had been missing from home overnight reported that they had run away, however nearly one fifth (19%) reported that they had been forced to leave. Evidence from the larger UK-wide sample suggests that those forced to leave are likely to be away longer, are more likely to be able to stay with relatives while they are away and are less likely to sleep rough (Safe on the Streets 1999; Wade 2002).

There is considerable evidence that looked after young people are more likely to be reported missing to the police (Newman 1989; Abrahams and Mungall 1992) and that they are more likely to run away than are young people living in the family home (Rees 1993; Safe on the Streets 1999). The issues that surround running away from care have been dealt with at length elsewhere (Wade and Biehal 1998). Only 34 young people in the Welsh survey had ever been looked after away from home (2% of the whole sample) and, unfortunately, this group was too small to permit further conclusions to be drawn in this area.

Running away from home

The family home, and the tensions and difficulties that can arise within it, have been viewed as a primary influence on running away (Brennan et al 1978; Rees 1993). This section will explore whether running away varies according to the type of family young people live in and the perceived quality of relationships within them. It will also draw on our survey and interview data to consider the immediate reasons young people gave for running away from their homes.

Family forms

Previous studies have pointed to an over-representation of young people from lone parent and step-parent families amongst those who run away (Rees 1993; Stein et al 1994). The Welsh survey reinforces this picture. Young people living in step-families were the most likely to have run away overnight (17%), followed by young people in lone parent families (11%). Those living with both birth parents (6%) were the least likely (see Appendix A, Table 2). The disruption, discontinuity and tensions that often surround divorce, separation and the re-constitution of families therefore form part of the underlying context to running away and, for a minority of young people, can directly prompt them to leave (Rees and Rutherford 2001).

These variations cannot be satisfactorily explained by differences in the level of economic prosperity in these family forms. Although lone parent and step-parent families surveyed were more disadvantaged in this respect, multivariate analysis showed no direct relationship between economic disadvantage and the likelihood of running away. Conversely, if running away is not primarily about disadvantage,

young people are likely to run away from more affluent as well as less affluent families and it may have more to do with young people's perceptions of the quality of their family relationships.

Family relationships

Six questions were included in the questionnaire to tease out young people's perceptions of the quality of relationships with their parents or carers. While it needs to be borne in mind that their parents might have made a different assessment, there is evidence to suggest that young people do give a reasonably accurate portrayal of the family situations they choose to leave (Whitbeck et al 1997). For each one of these measures, young people who expressed negative feelings about these relationships were significantly more likely to have run away (see Appendix A, Table 3).

Combining these measures clearly shows that there is a significant relationship between the *degree* to which young people feel these relationships are poor and the likelihood of them running away. Just 6% of those who felt their relationships with their parents/carer were positive had run away compared to 34% of those who made three or more negative responses to these questions (see Appendix A, Table 4). This provides firm evidence that negative perceptions about the quality of family relationships are associated with a higher incidence of running away.

To what extent can differences in young people's perceptions of the quality of their relationships *explain* differences in the rate of running away according to family form? In short, the answer is not very much. Further analysis of the larger UK sample found that, while there were no significant differences between young people living with two birth parents and those living in lone parent families, young people living in step-families were significantly more likely to feel negative about their relationships with their parent/step-parent. However, while these differences explained some of the increased likelihood of running away from step-families, they could not explain it all, and quality of relationships had no effect on the higher incidence of running away from lone parent families. The type of family young people live in and the perceived quality of relationships within families are therefore separate contextual influences on the likelihood of running away (Rees and Rutherford 2001).

Immediate reasons for running away

The survey included an open-ended question on why young people had run away for the last occasion they were away and also asked them to identify in which broad area of their lives - home, school, personal - the difficulties that gave rise to running away lay.

Almost four in five (78%) of the young people in Wales who had run away overnight reported that they had done so due to difficulties they were experiencing in the family home. Reasons for running away from home can be grouped under three broad headings:

- conflict and arguments
- maltreatment
- problems between parents

The most common cluster of reasons was rooted in conflict and arguments with parents, step-parents or siblings. Some appeared to be relatively mild or one off encounters, while others seemed to be connected to a more persistent or deep seated conflict within the family that corroded relationships. The following quotes give a flavour of this range.

I ran away because I had a big argument with my mum. I can't even remember what the fight was over.

I was like arguing with my mother and then my step-father would jump in... We were just always arguing and didn't get on.

The literature on running away has identified a clear link between abuse within the family and running away (Janus et al 1987; Stiffman 1989; Cohen et al 1991; Rees 1993; Spatz et al 1994; Barter 1996). The UK sample identified that around one in four young people run away to escape physical, emotional or sexual abuse or feelings of neglect or rejection (Safe on the Streets 1999).

A number of young people in the Welsh sample identified the experience of physical abuse as prompting them to run away. As the following illustrations suggest, it was not just the beatings that they needed to escape, though these often seemed severe, but also the feelings of neglect and rejection that could interplay with them.

As I was being badly beaten at the time and (was) told to leave in the next week or my bags would be packed and I'd be chucked out.

She (her mother) didn't give a fuck about me... She had no food in the cupboards... nothing like that.

The final cluster of family-centred reasons that can prompt young people to run away relates to conflict between parents or the need to gain respite from problems parents themselves are experiencing. The intensity of the conflict between parents at times of divorce, separation or re-constitution could directly prompt a minority of young people to run away - although, as we have seen, it could represent a background context in a wider range of cases.

I ran away because it was a time my mother and father were splitting up and I felt I couldn't handle the pressure of them arguing. Every time they would argue it would make me feel more upset and lonely because I felt I could not talk to either of them about my problems.

My mum fell out with my dad and stopped me seeing him.

In other circumstances, ongoing patterns of conflict between parents, including domestic violence, proved too much for young people to cope with. For a minority of young people, running away was explicitly linked to parental mental health problems or to difficulties associated with the misuse of drugs or alcohol. However, there could be a fine dividing line between the problems themselves and the tensions and conflict to which they gave rise.

The personal and school context

Around one in three (32%) of the young people surveyed in Wales identified problems in their personal lives as part of the context for running away and almost

one in five (19%) identified problems at school. In most cases, however, problems in these spheres of life overlap with difficulties young people are experiencing at home and only act as a direct prompt to running away for a minority of young people (Safe on the Streets 1999).

The range of personal problems identified by young people included broad mental health issues (feelings of depression, difficulties with anger management or coping with grief at the death of a relative); difficulties with offending or the misuse of drugs or alcohol; or problems with peer relationships. In some instances, these behaviours formed a package in which involvement with peers was connected to staying out or running away, use of drugs or alcohol and involvement in offending. As the following quotes suggest, running away was often linked to the tensions these behaviours could create within the home or to fears of parental reactions.

I ran away because I had been caught drinking by people who told my mum...If I'd stayed that day my mum would have hit me.

I couldn't stop getting into trouble. It was bringing my mum down. I couldn't handle it at home anymore.

Recent studies of runaway and/or homeless young people have provided evidence of higher rates of mental health problems amongst these groups when compared to their peers (Craig and Hodson 1998; Ayerst 1999). The link between running away and offending is also well established (Graham and Bowling 1995). The Welsh survey confirms this picture, since those who had run away overnight were significantly more likely to report feeling depressed and experiencing problems with drugs, alcohol and offending (see Appendix A, Table 5).

Running away tends to be associated with problems at school (Brennan et al 1978; Kurtz 1991; Stein et al 1994), even though school related problems may less often provide an immediate reason for running away (Safe on the Streets 1999). A small minority of young people mentioned this a direct reason for running away, mostly linked to parental expectations or reactions to problems at school, to lack of support within school or to the effects of bullying.

Nobody would listen to me when I had a problem at school.

I was getting bullied in my junior school and she (the bully) was going to run away and threatened me to run away with her.

However, the survey did identify a clear relationship between running away and associated problems at school. Those who had run away overnight were significantly more likely to have negative views of school and to have truanted or been excluded from school in the past (see Appendix A, Table 6). In addition, those who had run away *more often* in the past were more likely to have truanted frequently ($p .02$) and to report problems with the police ($p <.01$) than were those who had only run away once or twice. Running away frequently may therefore be associated with an increased risk of disaffection and detachment (Wade and Biehal 1998; Wade 2002) and this association reinforces the need for appropriate early interventions.

Experiences of being away

Young people's experiences of being away from home are quite diverse. Some stay away from home for a short period of time in relatively safe circumstances while the absences of others are marked by considerable risk and uncertainty. Being away can have positives as well as negatives attached to it. This section will briefly explore this diversity of experience in Wales.

Most young people who run away are away for only a short time. Two fifths (40%) of those who reported having run away did not stay away overnight. Of those who did, just over half (55%) were away for just one night. So almost three quarters (73%) of runaways were away one night or less. At the other extreme, around one in six (17%) were away for one week or more. Not surprisingly, those who were forced to leave stayed away longer – two fifths (41%) were away for a week or more compared to 11% of those who had run away.

Most young people do not travel far (55% stayed in their immediate area) and around three in five return voluntarily. Where young people are found and returned, they tend to be brought back by family members, the police or, in a small number of cases, by social workers, teachers or family friends (Safe on the Streets 1999; Wade 2002).

Young people stayed in a variety of places the last time they were missing. Just over one third (36%) stayed with friends, around one quarter (26%) with relatives and nearly one third slept rough (29%). Just as worrying, a small minority (4%) reported that they had stayed with a stranger. The likelihood of rough sleeping was not associated with the length of time young people were away nor was it linked to the number of times they had gone missing in the past. Young people are therefore as likely to sleep rough the first time they go missing (Safe on the Streets 1999).

Evidence from the larger UK sample also highlights other immediate risks attached to being away. While the large majority of young people survive through informal support from family or friends while they are away or through their own means (taking food or money with them), around one in seven resort to more risky survival strategies – including stealing, begging or survival sex. Furthermore, around one in seven young people report being physically or sexually assaulted while they are away from home (Safe on the Streets 1999). This evidence of risk highlights the need for strategies that help young people to avoid exposure to the streets.

Young people's service ideas

A brief consideration of young people's views about the kinds of services that would be helpful to them will provide context to our description of existing services in Wales. Young people were asked to consider what, if anything, might have helped to prevent them running away and what kinds of services had or might have assisted them once they had.

One cross cutting issue for young people was the need for **information** about national and local services that were available to help them. Some young people did not know where to turn for help. This included information about services that could help with problems associated with running away – for example, help with drugs or alcohol, or places where young people could gain respite and support before running away becomes necessary. Further thought could therefore be given to how and where services are publicised.

Many young people wanted someone who would **listen** to them and offer counselling and advice, preferably before they ran away.

Somewhere where you can go and know you are welcome. You can sit down and have a good chat with somebody and say why you want to do it...your reasons.

This may help young people to explore other options. Some young people also felt that the use of peers with past experience of running away could be helpful – *I'd have people working there who've been there and done it.* A few young people mentioned that this advice should be impartial, non-judgemental and confidential. Some felt that social workers, for example, especially where they had involvement with the family as a whole, might not be best placed to provide this.

The potential for **mediation** was also mentioned. It was felt that this could help to improve communication between young people and their parents and offer some arbitration at times of conflict.

If they had a problem with their parents they could have someone talk to that person and to come up and talk to their parents.

Counselling – somewhere families can go, work things out and stop fighting.

Some young people were critical of their parents' ability to love and care for them. In this context a few young people discussed a need for **parenting support** where parents could - *learn to look after their kids more.*

The need to avoid the streets was prominent in the minds of many young people. At present there are few **safe places that young people can stay**, especially when they are away from home before the age of 16. Even some of those who had been away at 16 or 17 had found adult hostels frightening places to stay.

If people have run away there should be different centres...People who have been released from prison or have done crime should have their own hostel and people who have run away from home through problems with their family should have their own place...I came from a good family and they put me in a (particular hostel) and I learnt a life of crime and everything.

They should have hostels really for young people...(to provide)...shelter, food, advice and support.

Provision of safe refuge was the most common need identified by young people under 16 in the much larger UK sample. The type of shelter envisaged by young people is one that is safe and secure, homely and small in scale; one that would provide young people with space to gather their thoughts, obtain advice and counselling and plan their next steps (Safe on the Streets 1999). As one young person put it – *get counselling and hostels together...where you could stay and talk about your problems.*

Although these views are drawn from a small sample of young people in Wales (30), they are consistent with the perspectives of young people across the UK and help to set the scene for our description of current service provision.

3 Services for young runaways in Wales

Agencies working with young people in six different areas of Wales were surveyed to explore the extent of current service provision for young runaways. In this section we draw on information collected from interviews undertaken with representatives of 107 agencies. The areas - including cities, towns and rural areas - were selected to provide a good cross section of service provision in different contexts.

In the main, this section focuses on services available to young people under the age of 16, due to their particular vulnerability, although it does include a brief section exploring services for those aged 16 and 17. The description of existing services for those who have run away or been forced to leave will consider, first, specialised or targeted services and then describe the role of mainstream agencies.

A targeted response?

We did not identify any local services currently working exclusively, or primarily, with young runaways as their target group in our six areas. Nor were we made aware of others nationally.

Reference was made to two projects, both Children's Society run, that had worked exclusively with young runaways. Both of these projects are now closed. The Porth Project was based in Newport and provided a refuge service using foster carers. Two Way Street was based in Cardiff and provided drop-in and streetwork services.

Several UK-wide help-lines are available to young people in Wales who are experiencing difficulties. These include, for example, Childline and the National Youth Advocacy Service and one, Message Home, that specifically targets young people (and adults) who are missing or otherwise away from home. The staff of the help-line will assist them to send a message home or access support appropriate to their needs in their local area.

Joint protocols on young people missing from home and care

The only other evidence of a targeted response to young people running away was the existence of joint protocols between local police authorities and individual social services within some of the areas surveyed. From the interviews undertaken with police representatives it appears that these protocols most often apply only to young people reported missing from care. General missing persons procedures guide the police response to young people reported missing from home. However, we did identify protocols that make provision for both groups in two of the areas surveyed.

A joint protocol between Torfaen Social Services and Gwent Police makes provision for both groups of young people going missing. It includes clear guidance to residential staff, managers, field social workers and foster carers on action to be taken when young people go missing from placements and clarifies the responsibilities of those involved. This guidance is supplemented by an information leaflet for young people entering the looked after system. A separate section of the protocol details the actions to be undertaken when a young person is reported missing from home. Missing incidents reported within this area are closely monitored and a quarterly review of the figures is undertaken by the Area Child Protection Committee.

A number of issues on the implementation of the protocols emerged from the interviews undertaken with police representatives:

- A need to raise awareness amongst officers. Officers felt this would ensure that the provisions made by a protocol are carried out and that the *'correct response'* is made to young people who go missing.
- A need to create an environment in which young people feel comfortable enough to discuss their reasons for going. Some officers felt that young people were reluctant to talk to police officers. Despite attempts to improve the communication skills of key officers, one officer suggested the attitude amongst young people is: *'go away Mr policemen' in no uncertain terms'*. Earlier research on runaways has also pointed to young people's discomfort in sharing personal information with the police (Rees 1993).
- A need to introduce protocols in areas where they are not already in place to promote a consistent approach across different force areas. Evidence from the interviews suggested that, where forces lacked protocols, liaison could be more difficult. Where responses were based on custom and practice, concerns about missing young people were not always shared.

Studies in this area have consistently pointed to the need for formal protocols as part of a co-ordinated response (Local Government Association 1997; Bridge Child Care Development Service 1996; Wade and Biehal 1998). However, they are a first step, not a panacea. Many young people are never reported missing to the police and protocols lose their effectiveness if they are not supported by a range of follow on services.

The need for targeted services

There was consensus among many of the practitioners that young runaways have particular needs. Most often workers suggested a need for:

- young people to have an opportunity to talk through the difficulties they were experiencing both before running away became necessary and once they had;
- somewhere safe for young people to stay if they felt that they could not go home or it was not safe for them to do so;
- follow-up support tailored to the individual needs of each young person.

Practitioners felt that it was important for young people to have the opportunity to talk to someone and to have their concerns taken seriously. They saw a need for this person to be accessible, independent and able to respond in a non-judgemental way.

This type of service could be provided in a number of settings - schools were suggested, along with youth services or drop-in advice centres. However, there was agreement that such a service had to be easily accessible and that it had to be clear to young people running away from home where they could go for help. Some emphasised that it was particularly important that there was a service available to young people 'out of hours', given the limitations of existing emergency duty services.

Reference was made to the potential for peer support or peer education initiatives, where young people with past experiences of running away could share their experiences.

Services also need to be flexible and capable of providing a quick response. Some practitioners felt that mainstream agencies were often unable to provide an effective crisis response.

There was a consensus that young people needed to have somewhere safe to stay as often they could not or did not want to go home. Practitioners felt that it should be appropriate to their needs and, in most cases, for that reason specific to that target group. Suggestions differed on the model of provision that could be adopted. One

professional suggested a model similar to foster placements but that it should be '*something entirely separate*' from the looked after system:

...almost like foster carers. [So that] if a child does actually leave home, we can place them fairly quickly without taking them into the care system. Some sort of respite situation... to give the parents a break for a while until things are sorted out.

Others suggested refuge in the form of a safe house or a 'crash bed' system where young people could go until things get sorted out: '*where a young person can get space to get their head together and then return home*'. One woman considered the gap so acute that she is working to establish and co-ordinate a voluntary project that will set up a house, together with a bank of voluntary foster carers, to provide refuge to young people away from home.

It was consistently felt that there were limitations to the existing network of services and that, at present, young people often have to rely on friends, sleep rough or go home when it was not appropriate.

The role of services working with young people under 16

There are many agencies and projects that provide services for young people who run away as part of a wider target group. We made contact with a number of agencies who could, or in some cases do, come into contact with young people who have run away or been forced to leave home. These included social services and the police who have a statutory responsibility regarding the welfare of young people under the age of 16 away from home. Other statutory and voluntary agencies contacted included youth offending teams, inclusion projects within youth services (such as youth outreach workers), advocacy services, drop-in centres, education welfare services, housing and homelessness projects, and help-lines working with young people.

The role of social services

The response of social services to young people who run away tends to differ according to whether a young person has run away from care or home.

Missing from Home

Social services may become involved with a young person who has run away if a referral is made to them (unless they have prior involvement with the family). Referrals may originate from the police, voluntary agencies or young people themselves. Following a referral, social workers should follow the procedures for assessing children 'in need' under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

The response provided by social services appeared to be variable. Some social workers felt that the new *Framework for Assessment* provided helpful procedures for assessing the needs for young people such as these and for linking in with other service providers. However, it was noted that: '*running away is not necessarily a referral issue*'.

Some social workers also suggested that the impact of resource constraints on the delivery of services was considerable. Where departments lacked sufficient resources, social workers felt they needed to prioritise and, in these circumstances, running away was not always viewed as a priority. These problems could be further exacerbated in rural areas where, as one social worker pointed out, the geographical spread of clients cuts down the amount of direct work that can be done. There is broader research evidence from outside Wales that the needs of teenagers tend to

be overlooked by the preventive family support services provided by social services and that, in consequence, young people find it difficult to access support (Rees and Stein 1999; Biehal et al 2000).

Social workers referred to difficulties in securing foster placements at the time they were needed and in the right area. Many suggested that they made use of informal and temporary arrangements with extended family members, particularly as they felt it was important to place young people within their local area. Social workers in rural areas suggested that family networks were particularly strong and represented a resource that could be utilised for young people experiencing difficulties at home.

Missing from Care

From the perspective of social workers, their role in responding to young people that go missing from care seemed clearer. Procedures laid out in the joint protocols, where these existed, helped to inform their response. In many instances, young people that had gone missing would receive an interview from their social worker after they had returned. Some suggested that this would be used to identify any issues that needed to be addressed, such as a need to review their placement, and that if a young person ran away frequently a strategy meeting could be convened.

However, more specialist studies in this area have pointed to considerable variability in the response of social workers and carers to looked after young people that have run away (Wade and Biehal 1998). With respect to runaways from home, there is also evidence that young people are not always comfortable talking to social workers about their motivations and experiences, especially where social workers have involvement with their wider families (Rees 1993).

General considerations on social services response

There were a number of general issues that social workers highlighted in the interviews:

- The need for interventions such as family support work at an earlier point: *'There is very little done to help families cope – social services don't do it. Nobody is interested in working before things reach crisis point'*.
- The need to raise awareness among staff of the risks associated with running away. This might include increasing awareness of their vulnerability to sexual exploitation while away and of the impact that running away might have for the lives of young people and their families.
- A need to find ways of making young people aware of the risks of running, including a need to get these messages across to looked after children

Other agencies' responses to young runaways

In many cases agencies recognised a role for themselves (within their existing remit) in responding to the needs of young runaways. Some had experience of working directly with this client group. Others had not had any contact with young people who had run away, to date, but considered it possible that they might in the course of their work. A number of different types of services can and do provide assistance to young people away from home in Wales.

Drop in centres

A number of statutory and voluntary youth projects operate drop-in centres, which provide information, leisure facilities and support services to young people. The centres contacted were usually centrally located, accessible and appealing to young people as they often included arts and sports activities, cafes and inter-net access. Trained youth workers were also available to provide advice, guidance or counselling to young people who needed it. Some remained open late (until 9 or 10) or provided outreach within the city or town centre in the evenings.

Outreach and street based work

A number of detached youth workers, linked to youth services, community regeneration projects or specialised agencies such as those focusing on drug and alcohol interventions, were available to young people out on the streets. In one of the rural areas surveyed, youth workers served outlying rural areas from the urban centres of the region.

Grassroots Youth Project, Cardiff extends the drop-in services they offer to include outreach workers working in the city centre 2 or 3 evenings a week. The project also links in with the largely street-based City Centre Team which is a partnership of social services and housing working to support vulnerable people of all ages.

Community based initiatives

Initiatives that focus on developing opportunities for young people and for the wider community also appear to have a role in supporting young people experiencing difficulties in their lives.

Caia Park Partnership Ltd, Wrexham is a community regeneration initiative based on a large social housing estate. It runs a community café and provides a range of services to people of all ages. Services include targeted work with a social inclusion agenda, detached work on the streets, parenting programmes, training and education to assist young people to get back to work. The project works to support young people in a variety of ways.

These types of agencies together with others surveyed such as advocacy services, helplines, education welfare projects and housing or homelessness projects represent a range of contact points for young runaways. The way in which they then respond varies.

Responding to young runaways

In general, responses appear to be influenced by a number of factors. These include the context in which a young person makes contact with an agency (i.e. whether or not they are an existing client of an agency); the needs and circumstances of an individual young person and the role of the agency (i.e. how far they are able to respond within their remit). In some cases, where agencies felt unable to respond within their own remit, their response involved a direct referral onto social services. In other cases, agencies felt they were able to tackle the situation with the resources they had. These responses took a variety of forms dependent upon the needs and circumstances of an individual - the watchword was flexibility.

Listen

There was agreement amongst those who had some experience of working with young runaways that the starting point was to 'listen'. Many considered it to be crucial for young people experiencing difficulties to have the opportunity to speak and to have their concerns taken seriously. Some felt that in certain circumstances the advice or support that can be offered, at this very basic level, might be enough to assist young people to resolve their difficulties.

One professional working within a community regeneration project suggested that in her experience young people often '*just want to talk and to be listened to*'.

However, it was also clear that in some situations such a response would not be sufficient. Practitioners frequently emphasised the importance of understanding what was going on, to identify any risks to which the young person might have been exposed and to tailor their response accordingly. Some felt that responsibility rested with each professional to build a trusting relationship in which young people felt confident and able to express themselves.

Mediate

A number of agency workers described situations in which they would mediate with family members on behalf of young people experiencing difficulties at home. For example, a practitioner working within a youth offending team described mediating with parents following the breakdown of the child-parent relationship as a result of the pressures caused by a young person's offending behaviour.

Advocate

Representatives of a number of different kinds of agencies - including specialist advocacy services, those providing outreach and those providing educational support - referred to the importance of advocacy. These agencies assisted young people to identify and access services appropriate to their needs. One worker described the importance of securing a timely response from social services.

The National Youth Advocacy Service provides an example of a flexible model of working. They provide advocacy and legal assistance to young people, many of whom are looked after or have left care. They operate a freephone helpline (assisted by Childline) and have a network of advocates located across England and Wales. Young people in difficulty, whose needs cannot be resolved by telephone, can therefore be put in touch with an advocate local to them.

The flexibility of this model would appear to have potential in delivering a locally based service. Whether advocacy as such offers the best approach for helping young people that have run away to resolve difficulties with their parents, is a more open question. Recent work has indicated that counselling and mediation work may be more appropriate in this context (Rees 2001).

Refer on

If agencies failed in their attempts to assist young people in reconciling their difficulties then most said they would then attempt to secure the services of a social worker. Some workers suggested that the most appropriate response at the outset was to refer young people on to social services. Referral was particularly necessary where there was a need for accommodation. However, practitioners also identified a number of problems in being reliant on one statutory agency.

Support

Some workers continued to offer support to young people if they thought it was appropriate and this was particularly the case where a young person was an existing client. This could be in addition to the support or accommodation provided by social services. For example, one practitioner, a personal adviser to young people who are not participating in education or training, felt that the anger management courses, drug and alcohol counselling, sexual health awareness offered by her agency, could be of benefit to young runaways.

The limitations of responses or services available

The above description of current service provision for young people suggests that there are a number of services available to young people who have run away or been forced to leave home or care placements. However, we have also found that a

number of issues emerged from the interviews that indicate that there are limitations in how the existing network of services responds to the needs of young runaways.

Limited awareness amongst practitioners

No agencies, with the exception of the police and social services, had set procedures guiding their staff on how to respond to young people who run away. A manager of a drop-in centre felt that there was a need for more information for staff to raise awareness of the issues and to inform them of the services that are available to runaways. Another manager, of an accommodation project for over 16s, suggested that there needs to be recognition of the problem by agencies and how to deal with it. She described examples of women, now housed within her project, who had protracted histories of running away and who had experienced little support.

Limited information for young people

Linked to the above, many practitioners felt that young people who had run away tended to lack information about services that were available to help. Information about services therefore needs to be more visible and accessible.

If a young person had been thrown out of home, for the first time say, they wouldn't know where to go for help out of hours.

Information should be everywhere, in schools, in public places.

Uneven access to services

These limitations make it more difficult for agencies to identify young runaways, especially where they have no prior agency contact, and for young people to gain direct access to services. The facility with which young people may access services is also affected by two further factors that we have previously mentioned. First, the absence of specialist services that seek to identify young runaways and target their needs is likely to inhibit access. Second, apart from the gradual development of police/social services protocols in some areas, there appeared to be few other formal arrangements in local authority areas designed to encourage agencies to work together to make service access easier for young people who have run away or are at risk of doing so.

At present, it would appear that young runaways are more likely to be identified by services where:

- they are already an existing client of social services (because they are looked after or because there is current involvement with the family) or they are explicitly referred;
- they are an existing user of other services or projects (for example, an education project, a drug/alcohol project or through attendance at community centres or drop-ins);
- they are contacted by an outreach or street based service;
- or they make direct contact with a freephone helpline.

Section 4 will consider strategies to promote and publicise services and highlight a range of service initiatives that may help to improve access to services at an early point.

Inconsistencies in approach

The evidence presented in Section 2 concerning the wide range of motivations that may underpin a decision to run away and the risks associated with doing so, point to the need for careful follow up once young people return. Many young people

suggested that it would have been helpful to have had an opportunity to talk through their reasons for running away and to receive further support, where this was necessary – a view reinforced by practitioners.

It has not proved possible, within the confines of this study, to evaluate how agencies currently assess young people's needs nor to consider the outcomes of assessment in individual cases. This would require more detailed research. The preceding discussion does highlight a considerable amount of positive practice by individual agencies in responding to young people's needs. However, at present, these responses tend to lack co-ordination across each local authority area and this is likely to result in an inconsistent approach to service delivery. The kinds of help young people can expect to receive are likely to vary both geographically and for individuals approaching the same service. A number of practitioners mentioned that responses tended to depend upon the dedication and resourcefulness of individual workers and others stressed the limitations of their role (especially if young people's needs fell outside the remit of the agency).

Section 4 will consider the need for a co-ordinated approach to the development of services for runaways, including the potential of new planning mechanisms such as the Children and Young People's Framework to provide a basis for planning more integrated services. Difficulties with the role of social services

Professionals described a number of more specific difficulties that they had experienced regarding the role of social services:

- They felt constrained by the lack of an alternative to social services if a young person required accommodation. Young people were sometimes reluctant to make contact with social services even when sleeping rough.
- There was the suggestion that a shortage of staff and/or placements meant that social workers were reluctant to take on cases (particularly if the young person was not already known to them) or that they were unable to fully address a young person's needs.
- A shortage of foster placements had a significant impact upon their ability to access emergency accommodation for young people or to secure placements appropriate to a young person's needs.
- The emergency duty team was the only option available to young people outside of working hours and usually provided only a skeletal service across a large area. In consequence, young people's needs could often only be addressed the following day. An alternative service was considered necessary.

Gaps in the existing network of services

General gaps in existing services were identified by practitioners pertinent to the needs of young runaways. Practitioners felt that situations were only addressed when they reached crisis point and that there is a lack of interventions for families at the time of need.

Families are often at the end of their tether, the young person may have behavioural or mental health problems and the family can no longer cope so force them out. There is a general lack of interventions for families at time of need

Other gaps noted included a need to make mental health services more accessible and appropriate to under 16s, counselling (e.g. for those who had experienced sexual abuse) and the need to find ways of engaging isolated and vulnerable groups of young people more effectively, such as those excluded from school.

Services for young people aged 16 or 17

Although this report has focused on young people away from before the age of 16, the agency interviews also raised issues about services for those aged 16 or 17 who had run away or been forced to leave.

Agencies reported that they offered support to young people aged 16 and 17 in a similar way to those away from home under 16. They will listen, attempt to mediate, advocate on their behalf and refer them onto other agencies that may be able to address their needs. A major difference in working with young people over 16 stemmed from their legal status. Although young people in this age group are more likely to be forced to leave and are therefore at risk of homelessness (Safe on the Streets 1999), they do (formally at least) have more options than younger children - they can access hostel accommodation, access benefits (in exceptional circumstances) and attempt to find work. However, the interviews identified shortcomings in the network of services available to this age group.

A range of issues emerged about the accommodation needs of this group.

- Although a number of projects provided accommodation services, they often prioritised one client group (e.g. women, gay and lesbian young people, care leavers or young people involved in training and education). There is a need to provide supported accommodation to all groups of young people who need it.
- The range of supported accommodation options available to young people needs to be improved, since what was available (and this was often very limited) did not always meet young people's needs. Particular comments centred on the lack of direct access emergency accommodation appropriate to this age group. Workers often had to resort to bed and breakfast or adult hostels that were generally unsuitable.
- This age group was often treated as a low service priority and young people were consequently at risk of falling through the welfare net - '*nobody wants this age group – neither children or adult's services*'. The role of advocacy in accessing limited services was emphasised, as were the barriers young people encountered in accessing housing, social services and benefits.
- Difficulties were experienced accessing permanent social tenancies for young people (due to the requirement of bonds or guarantors) and practitioners suggested that housing departments often failed to recognise the vulnerability of young people. However, some suggested that this had begun to change as a result of the Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001 - which established young people aged 16 and 17, care leavers and young people at risk of sexual exploitation as priority need groups for housing - and would improve further with the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002.
- Considerable thought also needs to be given to where accommodation should be sited. The localised nature of communities, and the strength of informal supports within them, meant that young people were often reluctant to leave their home areas to access accommodation. Analysis of rural areas in the UK-wide study also highlighted this problem for young people. Given the shortage of accommodation in rural areas, young people who became homeless had limited choices - to sleep rough (relatively rare), stay with friends, relatives or acquaintances (more common) or leave the area altogether (Safe on the Streets 1999).
- We also know that young people from minority ethnic backgrounds experience particular difficulties accessing appropriate accommodation. The UK-wide study found that accommodation was often sited in the wrong place or not appropriate to their needs. Young people often experienced racism from other residents and/or found that staff sometimes lacked cultural sensitivity (Safe on the Streets

1999). There is a case for projects that specifically target the needs of Black or Asian young people (Wade 2002). This is also consistent with other research undertaken in Wales (Hutson and Liddiard 1989; Patel 1994).

Homeless young people in this age group often have complex needs and a number of agencies pointed to limitations in services to meet these broader needs - in particular, support with mental health and drug and alcohol difficulties.

- Accessing mental health services on behalf of young people often proved difficult. Comments related to the limited availability of services and waiting times. Some also identified, for this age group, difficulties that were encountered in the transition from CAMHS to adult services.
- In some areas, the need for more appropriate drug and alcohol services, targeted to the needs of this age group, was also identified. Substance use by young people could exclude them from accessing hostel accommodation or jeopardise an existing placement.

The Compass Project, Wrexham operates a supported accommodation scheme which includes tenancy support, a bond scheme and the provision of emergency accommodation through a 'night stop' project. The project works in partnership with other agencies, including a project working to support young people using drugs or alcohol.

Young people who run away or are forced to leave at this age are at risk of social exclusion and, as we have seen, they may contain within their ranks many young people who first ran away at an early age and went on to do so repeatedly. This brief discussion has pointed to the need for a comprehensive range of services to provide young people with a safe and supported environment and with assistance to tackle broader problems in their lives that may affect their chances of making a successful transition to adulthood.

4 Messages for policy and practice

This report has provided the most reliable evidence to date on the scale of running away in Wales and has highlighted young people's motivations for running, their experiences while they are away and the risks to which young people can be exposed. It has also provided a description of young people's service needs and of the services that are currently available to them. This section will draw on this evidence to consider its implications for the further development of policy and practice, with an emphasis on young people under the age of 16. We will also provide illustrations of positive practice with young runaways from the UK and abroad.

The research has demonstrated that running away is a national problem in Wales. Overall, between 8% and 11% of young people will run away overnight at least once before the age of 16 and 3,000-4,000 young people will run away for the first time each year. Rates of running away in towns and cities are similar to those for the UK as a whole, although there was evidence of a lower running away rate in the one rural area surveyed, and there was little variation in running away according to levels of economic prosperity. A national strategy is therefore likely to be necessary to tackle this problem effectively.

The anticipated demand for services

It is not possible to come up with very accurate estimates of the potential level of demand for services targeted at runaways. However, we can give a very rough indication of the scale of demand on the basis of the estimated rates of running away found in the survey in Wales and the experiences of projects set up in other countries of the UK.

The survey would suggest that in city and other urban areas in Wales around 10% of young people will run away at least once before the age of 16. On this basis, it can be estimated that for an area with a total population base (all ages) of 100,000 there will be:

- around 140 young people under the age of 16 running away (for at least one night) from their family each year;
- at least 170 running away incidents amongst these young people each year;
- of which at least 40 incidents are likely to involve the young person sleeping rough.

Based on the experiences of some of the longest established projects for runaways (e.g. the ASTRA Project in Gloucester and Leeds Safe House) we estimate that around 40% to 60% of these young people would contact a specific runaway service and be in need of at least a short-term intervention. This equates to around 55 to 85 young people per year. In the region of 15 to 20 of these young people are likely to be in need of emergency accommodation, although in most cases this will only be needed for one to two nights.

Given the uncertainty about rates of running away in rural areas (see earlier in the report) it is not possible to give estimates of the demand for services in these areas.

The need for a co-ordinated approach

At present the services that are available to prevent young people running away and to assist them when they do are limited. Evidence of the development of targeted or specialist services in our sample areas was scarce, although in some areas protocols

were being developed to assist the response of police and social services. Nor were we made aware of other services nationally.

Although mainstream services were accessed by a proportion of young runaways, arrangements for responding to their needs were inconsistent. Service responses are therefore likely to vary according to the area in which young people live and/or to the agency concerned. Evidence from agency professionals suggested that responses tended to be governed by the remit of the agency, the resources that are available and the degree to which the needs of a young person are given priority.

Existing services for young runaways therefore lack co-ordination. Recent policy initiatives designed to promote collaboration between agencies and to provide local joint planning frameworks to meet the needs of children and their families should provide a helpful mechanism for responding to young runaways (see Section 1). So far these documents have not addressed running away directly, although they do address many of the difficulties that underpin it.

The development of a more integrated national framework for services is likely to require four broad elements.

First, there is scope for the Assembly to take a lead with local authorities and partner agencies to stimulate the development of services in this area. In this respect, we understand that the Assembly is considering the development of further guidance taking into account the findings of the Social Exclusions Unit's work on runaways from home and the forthcoming guidance from the Department of Health on young people who go missing from substitute care.

Second, strategies are needed to improve the co-ordination of services at the local level. Running away from home or substitute care is associated with a broad range of difficulties in young people's lives. Young people may therefore come to the attention of a variety of agencies and need help from a variety of sources.

- The partnership planning arrangements envisaged in the *Children and Young People's Framework* and *Extending Entitlement* could provide an important vehicle for integrating the needs of young runaways into the local planning of children's services. Guidance should ensure that the needs of runaways and those at risk are written into the remit of local planning forums. The resources attached to these initiatives could also help to stimulate the growth of specialist services.
- Co-operation between agencies is likely to be enhanced through the adoption of formal protocols that clarify reporting arrangements, response procedures and the respective roles of the police, social services and other statutory or voluntary agencies involved with young runaways. Protocols should include procedures for runaways from home and substitute care. The relationship between these and other protocols - such as those developed by ACPCs on child protection and on children at risk from sexual exploitation - would also need to be clarified. The effectiveness of protocols is likely to depend upon their spread to all areas (to create consistency of response across Wales), the degree to which participants are aware of the procedures and their responsibilities and the extent to which follow up services exist (see Section 3).

Third, improvements in recording and monitoring local patterns of running away from home and care are essential for planning effective services (see Section 2). The absence of reliable information has impeded awareness of the problem and inhibited service responses. Protocols should provide for a local forum to monitor and regularly review local patterns of running away.

Fourth, procedures are needed for evaluating the effectiveness of services that address the needs of young runaways. Not enough is known about 'what works' with which groups of young people and in what contexts. As services develop, arrangements for monitoring and evaluation, including the involvement of service users, can both contribute to an understanding of the effectiveness of different approaches and to the Best Value agenda.

Prevention

Not all running away can be prevented. Much running away is spontaneous and, as we have seen, up to one in four young people are likely to be escaping abusive family settings. Having said this, there is very little evidence that running away helps to resolve problems and, given the risks associated with it, there is a need to develop preventive strategies designed to assist young people with problems in their lives before (or as soon as) running away becomes necessary.

Universal approaches

The high incidence of running away points to the need for a widespread discussion of the problem to generate greater awareness amongst young people, their families and practitioners and provide information about local services. Running away is not an invisible problem to young people; many know others that have run away (Safe on the Streets 1999) and these were issues identified by young people and professionals in this report.

Running away could form part of the school curriculum and be delivered through personal and social education. Discussions could also be held in youth centres, children's homes and other youth settings. Young people also pointed to the benefits that may accrue from involving experienced peers or voluntary agencies with experience of this area of work. So far as we are aware, developments of this kind have not yet occurred in the UK.

National Runaways Curriculum, USA

In the US, the National Runaway Switchboard has developed a curriculum for use by staff in schools with young people. The purpose of the curriculum is to raise awareness of the issue of running away, the risks associated with it, and to equip young people with the skills and knowledge to deal with problems in other ways. There is also a component aimed at raising awareness amongst parents. The curriculum is available for free download at www.nrscrisisline.org.

Peer education initiatives, Canada

A number of agencies in Canada have developed preventive peer education initiatives which involve young people with experience of running away talking about their experiences in schools and other youth settings. Many of these schemes are listed in Caputo, Weiler and Green (1996) which also contains guidelines for running peer helper initiatives.

A common concern amongst young people and professionals was the need for more accessible information about services that are available (see Sections 2 and 3). *Extending Entitlement* also addresses this problem and highlights the importance of developing both virtual and physical media to publicise services (National Assembly for Wales 2000c). Imaginative use of the internet could provide a bank of reliable information, a portal to more specialist websites and also provide a Wales-wide network for workers to exchange information and identify best practice. Additional

resources for pilot initiatives, such as Canllaw Online, would therefore be welcome. These developments should address running away and point young people to sources of support for difficulties they may be experiencing at home or school.

Printed publicity should also be widely available in schools, youth centres, health and leisure centres, libraries and so on. More thought could also be given to exploiting television and radio to raise awareness about the issues. However, dissemination strategies will not reach all young people and careful thought will be required to meet the needs of particular groups (Safe on the Streets 1999).

- Running away is often spontaneous.
- Young people are often cautious about approaching formal agencies and, especially when fleeing abusive homes, may be fearful of the implications of contact for them and their families.
- The tone and content of materials will be influential, as will the extent to which services can guarantee confidentiality.
- Providing young people with confidential points of contact may be more difficult in smaller tight knit communities (Franks 2001).
- Publicity should target young people from minority ethnic communities explicitly and take account of potential difficulties they may face in coming forward for help (Safe on the Streets 1999).

Focused approaches

We were unable to identify any projects in Wales providing focused preventive services that addressed running away. Initiatives of this kind could be provided by specialist projects, by mainstream service providers alert to the issues of running away or by a combination of both. Preventive services may also be appropriate to young people at any stage of the running away continuum - from those at risk of running to those who have run repeatedly.

Section 2 demonstrated that most young people who run away are experiencing problems at home. The context for running away may include problems associated with the separation and re-constitution of families and difficulties in the lives and relationships of adults, as well as between parents and children. Services that can help to improve parenting, prevent the mistreatment of children and assist communication between adults and children at times of stress may also help to reduce running away. Some young people also run away from problems at school or in their personal lives. Difficulties in these areas also represent warning signs for running away. The immediate and longer-term risks associated with running away - including school non-attendance and problems with drugs, alcohol or the police - point to the need for early intervention.

Evidence from our interviews with young people and practitioners (see Sections 2 and 3) and from previous studies (Stein et al 1994; Barter 1996; Safe on the Streets 1999), point to the importance of:

- professional and peer counselling;
- family mediation;
- and to the potential of family group conferencing.

Young people often report that, at times of family stress, they feel relatively powerless and that their voices and needs go unheard. The need to provide young people with opportunities to talk, to have their feelings taken seriously and to provide advice and guidance about alternatives to running away, have been a consistent finding in this area. Family mediation can help to resolve family difficulties at an early point or, where young people have run away, help to negotiate a successful return

home. Family group conferencing, although little used in relation to running away, has considerable potential by drawing on the strengths of the wider family network to seek solutions to conflict within families.

Safe on the Streets - Leeds

A Children's Society project has set up a peer counselling project in secondary schools. Project workers train pupils at the school to offer listening support to other pupils who contact them. The aim of the scheme is to try to ensure that young people who are at risk of running away may get support and help to tackle the problems they are facing at home.

Bradford Young Missing Persons Scheme

This project, run by Barnardos, has developed specific approaches to working with young people in care. The aim of these approaches is to prevent running away and sexual exploitation. This includes providing accessible educational material (books, videos, etc.) for young people to raise awareness about risks whilst away.

Preventive services of this type can be provided by a range of statutory or voluntary agencies working together across a local area - including small-scale pilot initiatives (such as those illustrated) working alongside services provided by mainstream agencies.

Specialist services for runaways

Most young people only run away once or twice and for relatively short periods of time. However, one in five (20%) of the overnight runaways surveyed in Wales had run away more than three times. Furthermore, a small proportion of young people will become detached from their families for considerable periods of time. This heterogeneity points to differing levels of need and provision of a range of services to meet them, including:

- independent interviews for all reported runaways;
- safe places to stay if an immediate return home could place a young person at risk;
- detached and streetwork projects;
- centre/community based services - the potential for designated posts.

Independent interviews

The importance of offering young people an independent interview at the onset of running away has been a consistent recommendation of research reports (Abrahams and Mungall 1992; Rees 1993; Wade and Biehal 1998; Safe on the Streets 1999). Recent inquiries into abuse in children's homes have reached similar conclusions (Marshall et al 1999; Waterhouse 2000). Young people and practitioners in this study identified the importance of having access to an independent ear.

Such interviews offer an opportunity to explore young people's reasons for running away, make an assessment of risk and agree an appropriate response. Given that, as we have seen, young people may be wary of confiding in police officers or social workers, thought will need to be given as to who is best placed to provide this kind of service. The question of confidentiality will be important, especially for young people in rural areas who may be highly visible within the community and at risk of stigmatisation (Franks 2001).

Recent developments have included the growth of missing persons' schemes managed by voluntary agencies and working closely with the police and other statutory services (see Rees 2001 for a discussion of these schemes).

ASTRA

The ASTRA (Alternative Solutions to Running Away) Project was set up by a consortium of local statutory and voluntary agencies in Gloucester in 1998, partly as a result of the West case. The project takes referrals from a range of sources but the most common source of referrals to the project stem from police missing person reports. A key aim of the project's work is to reduce the repeat incidence of young people being reported as missing to the police. The project makes direct contact with missing young people when they return home and offers to work with them to try to resolve the problems which caused them to run away.

For many young people this response will be sufficient. For others, especially where child protection concerns are raised, follow on support for them and their families will be required.

Refuge

Section 51 of the Children Act 1989 makes provision for local authorities to provide refuge to children under 16 at risk of harm, either directly or through an independent agency (see Section 1). These provisions have been under-utilised. There is strong evidence (from this and other studies) that, whatever other services are available, a significant minority of young people will be in need of short-term emergency accommodation to avoid exposure to the streets and to receive advice, counselling and mediation services.

The only functioning independent refuge in the UK, based on the residential model, is the London Refuge (St Christopher's Fellowship/NSPCC). An alternative model involves placing young people temporarily with foster carers with parental consent.

Home & Away Project, London

The Home & Away Project is a centre-based project, run by the Catholic Children's Society, which works with young people aged 13 to 20 who are at risk of becoming homeless or needing to be accommodated by the local authority. A focus of its work is to try to resolve the family situations that threaten to make young people homeless. As part of its service the project sometimes offers emergency foster care provision to young people under the age of 16 with parental consent as part of a crisis resolution package.

Refuge, in whatever form, may be appropriate for a relatively small sub-group of the runaway population - those with nowhere to sleep, for whom a relatively quick return home is feasible, and those who have not run away repeatedly or been detached for lengthy periods (Rees 2001).

The consistency in patterns of running away across Wales suggests that provision of refuge could have serious resource and planning implications for local authorities. Careful thought will therefore need to be given to providing lower cost and flexible models of refuge.

Detached and streetwork projects

A minority of young runaways will spend periods of time on the streets of cities and larger towns. These young people are likely to have experienced a high degree of family disruption and to have multiple problems. Outreach services can offer immediate practical help, advice and information and help young people negotiate a return to safe adult care. However, they are likely to be less effective in meeting young people's longer-term support needs and therefore need to work in partnership with other service providers (Stein et al 1994).

Youth Link, Birmingham and Safe in the City, Manchester

These two Children's Society projects work with young people on city centre streets. Workers spend time in areas where young people congregate and try to engage with them. The work aims to minimise the risks young people face and offer crisis intervention work to help them find a safe place to stay. Both projects also have a drop-in centre but a feature of their work has been a commitment to working with young people in the street environment.

Centre based and community initiatives

In Section 3 we identified a range of community and centre based youth work services (sometimes also offering outreach) in our sample areas that, as part of their general work, could respond to the needs of young runaways locally, despite this not being a primary focus of their work. Young people in the larger UK sample described services of this kind as helpful in meeting their immediate needs (Safe on the Streets 1999).

Where such services operate, the potential exists to attach a specialist runaway worker to undertake short-term crisis intervention work directly with young people and their families and, where necessary, to link them in with other services in the area that can provide longer-term family support. This could represent a relatively inexpensive way of providing runaways in each local authority area with a first point of contact. The specialist focus can also help to ensure that young people's needs can be addressed more comprehensively than would be the case by agencies with less experience of running away. One example is provided below.

South Coast Runaways Initiative, Torquay

Checkpoint is a well-established drop-in centre for young people in Torquay run by The Children's Society. It has over 6,000 contacts per year with young people. It operates a 'hub and spoke' model and includes a number of specialist services focusing on specific issues such as drugs and sexual health. The South Coast Runaways Initiative was added to the project in 1999. Appropriate young people are referred to the SCRI specialist runaways worker who undertakes short-term focused work with them.

The inter-face with mainstream services

Section 3 identified that many mainstream service providers had contact with young people 'at risk' of running away as well as with those who had. These included social services, education, health and mental health services (CAMHS), youth offending teams and drug and alcohol services. Specialist services for runaways need to work in partnership with mainstream providers in both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Given the present lack of specialist services in Wales, a considerable amount can be done to improve the responsiveness of mainstream providers.

A number of limitations to existing arrangements have been identified:

- a limited awareness of the issue of running away amongst practitioners;
- inconsistency in service responses (both geographically and for individuals approaching the same service);
- lack of flexibility and responsiveness amongst mainstream providers;
- lack of early preventive help for families (especially in relation to teenagers);
- limitations in resources and options (especially for emergency placements, supported accommodation and therapeutic services);
- lack of formal arrangements to provide integrated services.

We have already noted some strategies that would help to improve the consistency and co-ordination of services, including the development of formal protocols on running away and the potential of new planning mechanisms such as the Children and Young People's Framework to integrate running away into children's services planning.

However, more effective responses to running away will also need to become more firmly embedded within the everyday working practices of agencies. A widespread discussion and information exchange amongst practitioners about the factors associated with running away (reinforced by formal guidance from the Assembly) would help to raise awareness, alert practitioners to the potential risk for existing and future clients and help to encourage more pre-emptive and consistent responses.

Each service sector (Social Services, YOTs, CAMHS, Drug and Alcohol Teams and so on) is required to produce written action plans to meet the needs of 'vulnerable' and 'in need' children and young people. As we have seen, there is a reciprocity between running away and difficulties young people may experience in these areas of their lives. Explicit reference to running away in these strategic plans would help to place the issue at the centre of agency thinking.

Finally, the question of resources cannot be ignored. Social services have lead responsibility for providing Section 17 and Section 20 services to children 'in need'. Evidence from the interviews highlighted how thinly their resources are spread. Limitations in the supply, location and appropriateness of emergency placements severely constrained the response that was possible for young people in crisis. Preventive services are rarely offered at a sufficiently early point and tend to focus on younger children. The recent growth of specialist adolescent support teams in some local authorities offer promise, but evidence suggests that they still tend to offer primarily a crisis response service (Biehal et al 2000). The needs of teenagers and their families need to be given a higher priority.

Substitute Care

Research on runaways has highlighted the over-representation of looked after young people amongst those reported missing to the police (Newman 1989; Abrahams and Mungall 1992). Other studies have also indicated that looked after young people are more likely to run away and to do so more often than young people living at home (Rees 1993; Safe on the Streets 1999). At the same time, very few young people are looked after – around 0.5% in Wales in 1998 (National Assembly for Wales 1999) – and they therefore only account for a small proportion of overall running away.

Although the very small numbers of young people that had ever been looked after in this study prevented us from including them in our analysis, other more specialist studies in this area have highlighted a number of messages for policy and practice (Wade and Biehal 1998; Biehal and Wade, forthcoming).

- Providing young people with a greater choice of placements, offering them a stable and positive placement experience and a chance to build secure attachments is likely to be protective;
- Improvements to the quality of care provided in children's homes are also likely to be helpful. Poorer quality of care (and running away) are more likely in children's homes that are disorganised, lack clear leadership and where negative peer cultures take hold (Sinclair and Gibbs 1998; Wade and Biehal 1998).
- A greater focus on educational attendance and attainment and on holistic child care planning may also have a beneficial effect on running away. Going missing is more likely where young people have little structure to their day and where their underlying needs are not being satisfactorily addressed, including any needs for therapeutic services.
- Improvements in support to help young people prepare for adulthood and to assist them once they cease to be looked after may reduce the risk of homelessness. The proposals contained within the Children (leaving Care) Act 2000 both to delay and provide continuity of support through transition will be of particular relevance.

The messages that flow from this body of research are consistent with the objectives and targets outlined in the *Children First* initiative to improve quality of care and promote social inclusion. However, the evidence suggests that these strategies need to co-exist with a targeted approach to reducing running away. This includes:

- protocols to co-ordinate the response of police, social services and other agency partners;
- guidance and information for staff (social workers, residential workers and foster carers) and young people on how to manage missing episodes;
- systems for recording and monitoring all unauthorised absences from placements;
- the provision of independent interviews for young people that run away;
- and more pro-active strategies to dissuade young people from going and to educate them about the risks of being away.

The risk of social exclusion

This report has attempted to portray running away in Wales and to provide a description of the current services available to help young people. As we have seen, most young people do not run away often, stay away for relatively short periods of time and return of their own accord. However running away, even for a few hours, is usually linked to difficulties young people are experiencing in their lives; it is rarely something young people undertake lightly.

The failure to intervene effectively to help them address these difficulties engenders a number of risks. Some of these issues, such as experiences of abuse or neglect, may require long term structured interventions while others may only require a relatively small amount of concern and support to assist young people to get their lives back on track. The provision of appropriate support at an early point may guard against increasing distress or the exacerbation of problems experienced by young people. Failure to provide a timely response carries the risk that young people will continue to run away.

We have identified a number of immediate risks associated with running away. Young people may resort to risky survival strategies such as begging, sleeping rough or staying with strangers and are at risk of misusing drugs or alcohol, offending, sexual exploitation and sexual or physical assault. Young people who start running away at an early age and continue to do so repeatedly may be at risk of becoming progressively detached from their families, schools and communities. Furthermore, young people who run away or are forced to leave at 16 or older may be at considerable risk of homelessness.

Tackling running away should therefore represent a key component of the social inclusion agenda. The evidence of the problems and risks associated with running away highlights the importance of establishing a comprehensive framework or programme to tackle the issue at a number of levels. There is a need to ensure that there is an awareness of the issues at the strategic level, in the policies and frameworks which guide service delivery, and at the service level, in the procedures and practices implemented by professionals. This report contains a number of findings and recommendations that can help to inform the development of more effective policies and services to address running away in Wales.

Appendix A List of tables

Table 1 Reported running away rates from the survey in Wales and for comparable areas in England

	Wales		England	
	Weighted mean*	Range**	Weighted mean	Range
City	8.2%	n.a.	8.3%	7.3%-10.5%
Other urban	10.0%	8.5%-11.9%	10.9%	7.5%-16.0%
Rural	3.1%	n.a.	10.2%	5.9%-13.6%

*The weighted mean is a mean of the running away rates across the areas, giving equal weight to the sample in each area (i.e. controlling for variations in sample size)

**The range shows the highest and lowest reported rates in each group of areas. This is not shown for the city and rural areas in Wales as only one area was surveyed in each of these categories.

Table 2 Family forms and running away rate (Wales and UK)

<i>Family form</i>	<i>% running overnight (Wales)</i>	<i>% running overnight (UK)</i>
Two birth parents	6	7
Lone parent	11	14
Parent and step-parent	17	22

The differences in running away rates for the UK as a whole are significant for each family form (Rees and Rutherford 2001). The pattern in Wales is very similar, although the differences in rates for lone parent and step-parent families did not reach the threshold for significance ($p .08$). This may be an effect of the smaller sample size.

Table 3 Perceptions of the quality of family relationships and running away

<i>Question</i>	<i>% with negative views of relationships</i>	
	<i>Not run overnight</i>	<i>Run overnight</i>
Parents too strict	9	20
Do not get on with parents	4	18
Feel treated unfairly	13	25
Do not feel understood	9	20
Parents hit me a lot	2	12
Not feel cared about	1	10

Each of these measures is significant at a minimum level of 99% confidence ($p < .01$).

The six questions were as follows:

- Are your parent(s) too strict?
- Do you get on well with your parents?
- Do your parent(s) treat you fairly compared to your brothers and sisters?
- Do you feel your parent(s) understand you?
- Do your parent(s) ever hit you?
- Do you feel your parent(s) care about you?

Table 4 Relation between quality of relationships and running away

<i>Quality of family relationships</i>	<i>Run away overnight (%)</i>
Good (no negative responses)	6
Moderate (1 or 2 negative responses)	12
Poor (3 or more negative responses)	34

The above questions were combined to produce Table 4 showing the relationship between the degree to which young people felt unhappy with these relationships and the likelihood of them having run away ($p < .001$).

Table 5 Running away and personal difficulties

<i>Personal problem</i>	<i>Not run away overnight (%)</i>	<i>Run away overnight (%)</i>
Feeling fed up or depressed	31	48
Problem with drugs	4	22
Problem with alcohol	6	27
Trouble with the police	6	16

Each of these measures is significant at a minimum level of 99% confidence ($p < .01$).

Table 6 Running away and problems at school

<i>School problem</i>	<i>Not run away overnight (%)</i>	<i>Run away overnight (%)</i>
Not like school	19	40
Truancy (often/sometimes)	24	51
Past exclusion	16	31

Each of these measures is significant at a minimum level of 99% confidence ($p < .01$).

Appendix B – Study design and methods

Purpose of the research

The study provides:

- an overview of the prevalence and patterns of running away in Wales
- a description of current services for young runaways
- an assessment of the extent to which existing services are accessed by and meet the needs of young people
- an assessment of further initiatives that may be necessary to reduce the need for young people to run away and to assist those who do

Design

The study has drawn on five main sources of information:

- a review of UK and international literature about running away and appropriate service responses
- a representative survey of young people aged 14 to 15 conducted through schools and other educational establishments in Wales
- interviews with young people in Wales who have had experience of running away
- interviews with professionals working in relevant agencies in different parts of Wales
- collation of written materials from agencies

The survey and interviews with young people were conducted in 1999 as part of a larger collection of information about running away across the UK (Safe on the Streets Research Team 1999). A first sweep of interviews with agency professionals was also undertaken at that time but these have been further extended for this study.

Survey of young people

The schools survey was conducted in five areas in Wales - Cardiff, Barry, Cwmbran, Merthyr Tydfil and Gwynedd. Although these areas were not randomly selected and cannot therefore be said to be strictly representative of all areas in Wales, they provide a reasonable spread by population density - including a city, towns and a large rural area. It does therefore permit an exploration of running away in different geographical contexts and in areas of greater or lesser affluence.

The survey was conducted with school pupils aged 14-16 (mean age 15.6 years in Wales) in a representative sample of schools in each area. Since the survey was undertaken during the spring, it would not have been feasible to include a representative sample of young people aged 15 to 16 due to examination schedules and the numbers leaving school. One effect of sampling a younger age group would be to under-estimate the numbers of young people who run away before the age of 16, since some of this sample may go on to do so. However, as we saw in Section 2, it was possible to generate a projected estimate of the incidence of running away amongst young people under 16.

The questionnaire was usually administered in schools by supply teachers employed for the purpose and trained by the research team, although a few schools administered the questionnaire internally. An initial presentation was made to young people in the relevant year groups to explain the process and the questionnaires

were completed by young people during assemblies or in personal and social development classes. Very few young people refused to participate or to take the questionnaire seriously when filling it in. Responses were received from 1706 young people.

The questionnaire gathered baseline information from all young people about their demographic characteristics, their family backgrounds and living arrangements, the quality of their relationships with carers and their experiences at school and in their personal lives. With respect to those who had run away, detailed information was collected about their experiences on the last occasion they were away from home. Finally, young people were asked questions about the kinds of help that might prevent young people running away or assist those who do. The questionnaire incorporated a mix of tick box responses and more open-ended questions.

The questionnaire was designed to provide a reliable estimate of the prevalence of running away, identify significant differences in the lives of those who had or had not run away and provide descriptive information about young people's experiences of being away. A further purpose of the survey was to identify differing levels of need amongst the population of runaways as a basis for thinking about policy and practice responses.

Data from the questionnaires was initially entered onto an Access database. Statistical data was then transferred to SPSS (Statistical Products and Service Solutions) for analysis and answers to the open-ended questions were analysed directly in Access. Bivariate and multivariate analysis of the statistical data was undertaken. A variety of bivariate non-parametric tests were employed including Chi-square, Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis and Kendall's tau-b. Some multivariate analysis was carried out using log-linear modelling. Where findings are presented as statistically significant in this report and the p-values are not given in the text, this will be at a minimum of 99% *confidence* ($p < 0.01$). Where findings are reported at a 95% level of *confidence* ($p < 0.05$), the appropriate p-value will be indicated in the text.

Young person interviews

Thirty interviews were conducted with young people who had past experience of running away in three areas - Cardiff, Merthyr and Gwynedd. Young people were accessed through agencies that participated in the study. The interviews took place in a variety of settings, including hostels, drop-in centres, youth projects and on the streets. Arrangements were made to visit projects and written material was sent in advance for both workers and young people. One or two interviewers would make the visit, discuss the research with young people who were interested in participating and undertake the interviews. All young people were paid £5 for participating. This was given to them in advance and was not conditional on them completing a 'successful' interview.

At the start of the interview young people were briefed about the research, informed what would happen with the information they gave us and our confidentiality policy, and its limits, was carefully explained. Young people could exercise their right to withdraw at this point. The substantive semi-structured interviews were tape recorded, provided young people gave their consent. The interview encouraged young people to talk about their lives and experiences. It explored their experiences of running away, their experiences at home, at school and in other facets of their lives. Finally, it covered any involvement they may have had with other agencies and elicited their views on services, including their views on the kinds of interventions that may be helpful. At the end of the interview, there was space to review the interview

with young people, check out how they were feeling, consider any concerns that may have arisen and to point them towards services where this seemed appropriate.

The information was entered onto an *Access* database and a thematic analysis was carried out across all cases.

Agency interviews

As part of the UK-wide study in 1999, telephone interviews were conducted with a wide variety of agency professionals in three areas - Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and Gwynedd. For this study, these areas have been re-visited and the agency interviews have been extended to a further three areas - Cwmbran, Carmarthenshire and Wrexham - in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the extent of current services for young runaways. Interviews have been conducted with 107 professionals in total, including youth workers, social workers, housing and hostel workers, police officers, advice and education workers from a variety of statutory and voluntary agencies.

The purpose of these interviews was to:

- identify the range of local organisations that were delivering services to young runaways and describe the services that were being provided;
- explore how these services were accessed by young people and how appropriate service responses were identified and delivered;
- generate examples of positive practice with young runaways;
- provide a basis for identifying further initiatives that may be necessary to limit running away and to respond effectively to those who do.

There were two aspects to this work. An initial mapping exercise was undertaken in each area to identify all those agencies that had a direct link with young runaways. A snowballing method was employed until no new contacts emerged. A short interview was conducted at that stage with each practitioner to gather information about local patterns of running away, the service needs of young people, the services currently being provided by their and other agencies and local policies and procedures for responding to the problem. The interviews were also used to identify practitioners with the most relevant knowledge and arrangements were made to follow up with a depth interview.

The depth interviews were conducted by telephone and tape recorded. The interviews covered similar ground in greater depth. Information from both the long and short interviews, together with any local reports that were available, were entered onto an *Access* database and a thematic content analysis was undertaken.

In addition to the local agency interviews, a small number of key informant interviews were undertaken with practitioners and policy makers in leading statutory and voluntary organisations to provide a national overview of policies and services for young runaways.

Ethics

The research was guided by an ethical policy that applied to all young people, professionals and schools that agreed to participate.

- The first principle was that of informed consent. All participants were given as much information as was practical about the research aims and methods and the uses to which information would be put to enable them to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

- The right of participants to withdraw this consent or to refuse to answer particular questions was respected at all stages.
- A guarantee of confidentiality (and its limits) was explained to all participants. All schools were guaranteed anonymity and all questionnaires from young people were completed anonymously. With respect to the interviews with young people and professionals, confidentiality was guaranteed unless information was divulged about a young person who was at risk of serious harm. If a breach of confidentiality was considered necessary, this was done with the participant's knowledge.
- The guarantee of confidentiality also covered the storage and subsequent use of data to protect the identities of all participants.

Appendix C – The types of agencies contacted

Data was analysed from interviews undertaken with professionals during the 1999 UK wide survey and interviews conducted specifically for the purposes of this research study. The following types of agencies were approached during the course of our research on running away in Wales:

- **Social services departments:** The teams contacted varied according to the structure of the departments in the six different areas. These included teams responsible for: child and family social services within localities; referral and assessment; placements and through care; young people over 16 and/or leaving care. Professionals responsible for the planning and development of children's services were also interviewed.
- **Education and careers services:** These included education welfare services and schemes providing alternative curriculum services, community education programmes and careers advice to young people.
- **Housing and homelessness agencies:** These included housing and homelessness officers within Local Authority housing departments, social housing providers, staff within supported housing projects such as foyers and hostels. A number of agencies providing support to homeless through drop-in or open access centres and street based services were also contacted.
- **Youth offending teams** providing crime prevention services and support to young offenders.
- **Youth services.** A number of professionals working at the planning level and practitioners with experience of specific projects (e.g. advocacy or drugs advisory services) were contacted.
- National and local **helplines** providing advice or information to young people on a range of issues.
- **Children's rights and advocacy services** usually provided through voluntary agencies and often focused around the needs of looked after young people.
- **Drug and alcohol misuse support services** including projects developing preventive initiatives to promote awareness and provide crisis intervention and support.
- **Mental health services.** These included practitioners providing mental health advocacy, counselling and links to other therapeutic services.
- Agencies providing **drop-in** and **leisure facilities for young people.**
- **Police.** These included units responsible for child and family protection, community policing and missing persons.
- Representatives from the **National Assembly** and **ADSS** were also contacted to assist with an overview of policies and services for runaways.

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