



**NPIA**

National Policing  
Improvement Agency

**MISSING PERSONS  
BUREAU**

# Missing person investigations: Good practice examples

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The NPIA Missing Persons Bureau is working with forces to share good practice in investigating and managing missing persons helping safeguard vulnerable repeat missing persons in particular and reduce costs.

Examples of good practice we have received from forces show they are applying a problem-solving approach to missing persons, in particular around reducing the number of people who go missing. By addressing why people repeatedly go missing the force should be able to reduce the number of these incidents and free up resources to focus on other policing issues. Research shows that taking a problem-solving approach - by systematically identifying and analysing problems, developing responses and subsequently assessing whether these have been successful - has a positive impact on the policing problems targeted<sup>1</sup>.

Some these approaches are summarised below. If forces have other examples of good practice they can load them onto the Police Online Knowledge Area Knowledge Bank:

<https://polka.pnn.police.uk/en/Communities/Home/?clubId=38>

### Understanding the problem

Analysis of the nature and extent of missing persons will assist forces in developing targeted approaches to tackling the problem. By taking time to understand the pattern of missing persons incidents, forces have started to identify particular individuals who repeatedly go missing and issues with particular care homes. Taking a preventative approach to reducing missing from care incidents means police forces may be able to reduce the reactive routine burden and focus resources on the higher risk cases.

- *Lancashire Constabulary* - analysts produced problem profiles using data from their missing persons incidents. The analysis identified that 41% of incidents were repeat missing persons and 81% of these were from children's homes/hospitals. The analysis provided the force with a better understanding of their missing persons and allowed them to focus their approach on tackling the greatest area of demand. The divisional analyst now produces a quarterly report on the number and nature of missing incidents to inform tasking.
- *Sussex Police* – analysts produced a "Strategic Assessment of Missing Persons" (2008), which identified that those who run away from care used a disproportionate amount of police time.
- *Cheshire Police* - the project 'Talk Don't Walk' interviewed children and young adults who had run away from home to identify and understand the reasons. Information from the interviews was used to develop preventative solutions. The project reported that between 2004 and 2007 it reduced the number of young runaways in the Warrington area by 72% and saved approximately £3.2m (includes reduction in crime costs attributed to the project). Between 2007 and 2009, the project reported that an additional £570,000 was saved through a reduction in the number of children and young people running away. Since its inception the project has reported reducing repeat missing incidents by more than half.

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<sup>1</sup> Weisburd D, Telep CW, Hinkle JC, Eck JE. (2008) The effects of problem-oriented policing on crime and disorder. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2008:14. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2008.14.

### Tackling the problem

Forces are reporting successful results from a range of approaches to tackling missing persons. These approaches include working in partnership with other agencies, having dedicated resources to co-ordinate the response to missing persons incidents and freeing up frontline resources by improving processes.

#### *Multi-Agency working*

- *Lancashire Constabulary* – used the problem profiles which highlighted repeat missing children from care homes/hospitals to develop a specific approach drawing in other partner agencies. The force raised partners' awareness of the nature and extent of the problem and used this to inform the joint development of solutions. Lancashire County Council, private care companies and hospitals worked together with the police to develop a strategic document to prevent and manage missing person cases from the establishments driving demand and establish protocols to address various aspects of the problem. A police liaison officer was assigned to each care establishment and made responsible for coordinating the responses of multi-agencies and reporting quarterly on their efforts.

*West Mercia Police* - engaged with care homes, established joint protocols and co-ordinated with Ofsted to ensure that the care homes work with the police to prevent this from happening. By implementing protocols and engaging with one care home, West Mercia Police reduced missing person incidents from that address by 90%. If these successes were replicated across all care homes with high missing person reports, West Mercia estimate a 30% to 40% reduction in missing person incidents, which would mean approximate cost savings of £1.8 million.

- *Leicestershire Constabulary* - engaged with care homes and developed protocols to tackle their missing person issue. They reported a marked reduction in reporting of people missing from local authority care and a reduction in those reported missing from hospital which they estimate, has saved up to £380,000 in police time.
- *Devon and Cornwall Constabulary* – applied Lancashire's multi-agency work in Plymouth and reported savings of approximately £70,000 in the first quarter. The project also reported reducing the number of missing persons' reports by 35% by late 2007 and by a further 17% in 2009.

#### *Missing Person Co-ordinators and Investigators*

- *Bedfordshire Police* – introduced dedicated missing person investigators and missing person co-ordinators responsible for liaising with other agencies and overseeing cases. They reported a 30% reduction in incidents.
- *Plymouth* - Plymouth Young Runaways Project established a missing person co-ordinator and estimated reductions of 35% and that a further estimated 17% reduction may be possible year on year.

#### *Improving processes*

- *Devon and Cornwall Constabulary* – released officers from inputting missing

persons reports by employing 4 members of staff located in the call centre to undertake direct entry of reports into its Compact case management system. The force estimated that the change to the process saved them approximately £31,000 per year with the additional benefit that officers could focus on the search and investigation rather than form filling.

### References

Lancashire's 2005 Mole Hills from Mountains. Accessed in December 2010.  
<http://www.popcenter.org/conference/conferencepapers/2004/MoleHillsfromMountains.pdf>

Weisburd D, Telep CW, Hinkle JC, Eck JE. (2008) The effects of problem-oriented policing on crime and disorder. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2008: 14. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2008.14.

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