

CORPORATE PARENTING REPORT

Children and Young People Missing from Care: Summary of Annual Report (2018/19)

Introduction: Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty on local authorities which requires effective joint working between agencies and professionals. When a child goes missing or runs away they are at risk. Safeguarding children therefore includes protecting them from this risk. Local authorities are responsible for protecting children whether they go missing from their family home or from local authority care.

Children and young people who go missing from home or care can be among the most vulnerable in our society. Often there are links to criminal and sexual exploitation, county lines or complex family issues which impact negatively on the child or young person's health, general wellbeing and safety. Research shows that children in care are three times more likely to run away than other children and many go missing repeatedly¹.

Both the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Executive and the Corporate Parenting Group have a key role in monitoring the incidents of children and young people who go missing from care. This briefing is a summary of the full report presented to The Corporate Parenting Group in September which provided detailed information to assist in this task.

Why Children and Young People go Missing: There are numerous reasons why children and young people may go missing. Some can be characterised by 'push or pull' factors, examples of which are as follows:

'Push' factors may include:

- Arguments or conflicts at home
- Conflict within a placement
- Physical and emotional abuse and/or neglect
- Bullying

'Pull' factors may include:

- Pressure from peers/friendship groups
- Alcohol/substance misuse
- Being groomed for exploitation
- Criminal activity

Whatever the reasoning behind the missing episode the risks that are associated with it can have life long consequences. These include:

- Being sexually or criminally exploited
- Education being substantially disrupted
- Becoming involved in criminal and/or anti-social behaviour

Return Home Interviews (RHIs²): In England local authorities have a duty to offer children and young people who go missing an offer of a RHI³. It is the placing (responsible) authority's duty to ensure their Children in Care (CiC) receive an offer of a RHI. Host authorities (where children live out-of-area) are not required to offer them. The expectation is that these take place within 72 hours of a child/ young person returning and Ofsted measure this performance indicator. The aim of the RHI is to:

¹ The Children's Society (2011) Make Runaway's Safe

² Known as Return Interviews in Gloucestershire as young people fed back that they didn't want them to be called return home interviews, as they stated that they were often not returning home

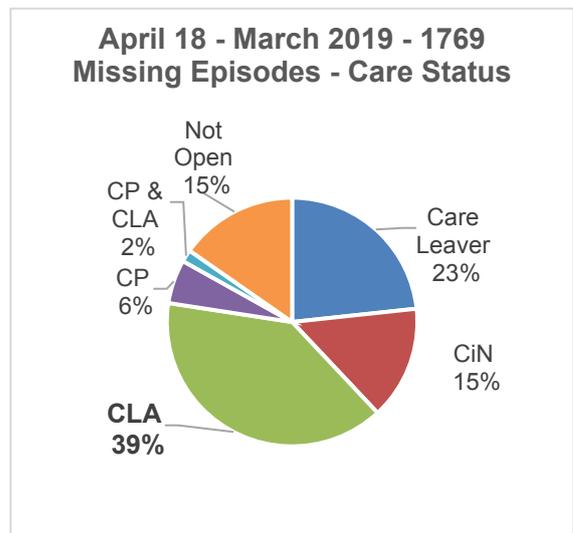
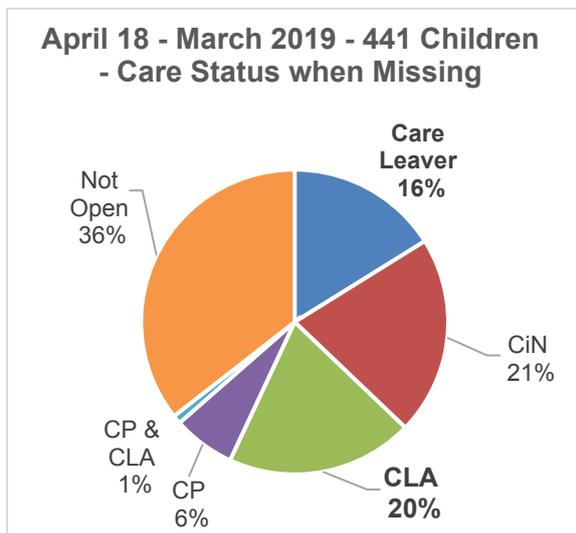
³ DfE (2014) Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care

- Identify and address any harm the child has suffered
- Understand the reasons the child went missing
- Establish the circumstances which led to the missing episode
- Inform future prevention strategies
- Inform any future missing person investigation
- Gather information about who harboured the child to enable proactive strategies such as the use of a Child Abduction Warning Notice

In Gloucestershire the key practitioner in the young person’s life is supported to complete the RHI, usually the social worker. However, a young person may prefer to speak to someone slightly more anonymous or independent, so every young person will be offered an independent RHI and a trained Case Responsible Officer from the Youth Support Team will undertake the RHI if this is the young person’s preference.

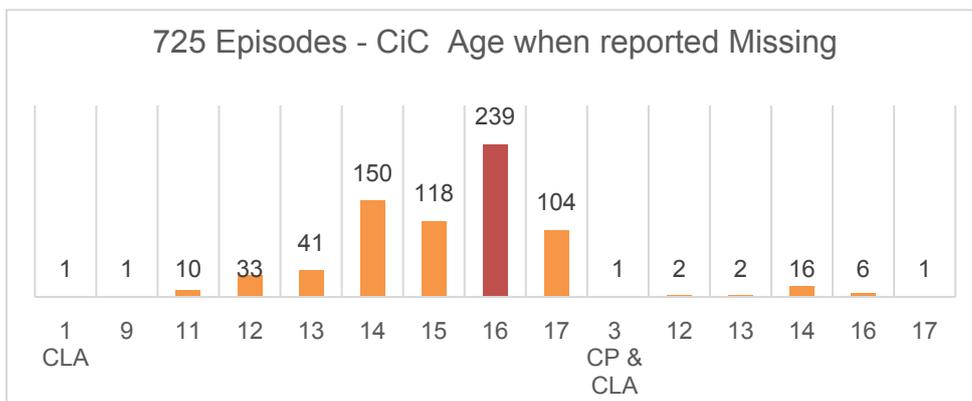
Statistical Information:

Statistical information regarding the number of CiC who went missing in 2018/19



During 12 months (April 2018 – March 2019) 91 CiC were reported missing equating to 725 episodes (mean = 8 times per child).

Ages and frequencies of missing episodes



73% of CiC who went missing were living in foster placements

Performance in terms of return home interviews for all young people:

Over the course of the financial year 2018/19 RHIs were offered in response to 88% of all episodes of missing. Of those, 77% took up the offer.

There are a number of reasons for the offer not being 100% and this is predominantly in relation to recording and training issues. This is being addressed via the 'Essentials Training programme'.

Improving performance in respect of the offer and take-up is integral to Gloucestershire's improvement journey and is included within the Improvement Plan.

Messages from RHIs

On a national level, data collection regarding CiC who are missing has improved and indicates that the number of children going missing continues to increase, as does the frequency of missing episodes. Between April 2017 and March 2018, 11% (11,530) of children who were looked after at any point during the year went missing. These children went missing from care 70,250 times, an average of 6.1 incidents per child.

In terms of messages from RHIs the following are examples of identified issues contributing to CiC missing episodes:

- Wanting to visit family and friends and be in a familiar place
- Substance use
- Involvement with criminal activity
- Wanting more independence
- Feeling that they had unfair restrictions placed on them
- Pressure from friends

Conclusion:

Gloucestershire recognises the issues and risks facing young people who go missing and are working closely with partners to reduce episodes of missing and provide support and risk management where it occurs.

Whilst there is some excellent practice and supporting data to aid the targeting of interventions, there is also work to be done to ensure that RHIs happen regularly and within timescales and that the information is used appropriately and consistently in plans.

Children's Social Care in Gloucestershire is committed to improving the response to children and young people who go missing and have therefore increased the resource to three workers who have the strategic oversight and support social workers to complete the RHI's. The information gained assists in developing processes to reduce the prevalence of missing and inform the risk management processes for children and young people in care with the most complex needs.

Clr Richard Boyles

Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member – Children's Safeguarding & Early Years

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