

Feedback from Young People on the SEU Recommendations for Young Runaways - Report for the Social Exclusion Unit

Authors: Claire Turner and Samantha Jagusz

Background

The initial analysis for the Young Runaways project was based on research conducted by the Children's Society with 13,000 young people. A formal consultation period followed the launch of the project, which captured the views of key professionals and agencies working with young runaways. Since then the advisory group of key government and agency representatives have been developing the recommendations from the Young Runaways project.

In developing the recommendations the SEU wanted to check with young people that the recommendations will make a difference for them and that they are appropriate for a diverse range of children and young people. The SEU commissioned Barnardo's to consult young people on the subject of runaways in order to validate the emerging recommendations.

Objectives of the Consultation

The emerging recommendations relate to: prevention, immediate safety needs, the longer term needs of young runaways and specific issues for 16/17 year olds. The consultation set out to explore the following issues:

Prevention

- What support should be offered to young people at risk of running away and by whom?
- What are the elements of an effective support service at this stage?
- What are the information needs of young people at risk of running away? What should be the format of such information?

Immediate safety

- What risks do young people face when they run away?
- Where would a young person go first if they ran away? Who would they contact?
- What support should be offered to young runaways and by whom?
- What are the elements of an effective support service at this stage?
- What are the information needs of young runaway? What should be the format of such information?

Longer-term needs

- What are the key elements to an effective follow up service for young runaways? How best would the initial contact be made? Where would young people prefer to meet the person offering support?
- If a young person did not or could not return home, what kind of help would they need?

Specific issues for 16/17 year olds

- Are there specific and different needs for young runaways aged 16/17?

Methodology

The fieldwork for this report was carried out during December 2001 and January 2002. Nine focus groups were held (8 carried out by Barnardo's and 1 by The National Children's Bureau). Groups were recruited from a range of geographical locations: large metropolitan areas, small urban areas and semi-rural areas. This geographical spread included Kingston upon Thames, Kirklees, Tyne and Wear, Bedfordshire, Grimsby, Milton Keynes and Leeds. (See Appendix 1 for a full list of groups and composition.)

65 young people took part in the consultation: 28 males and 37 females. The young people were aged from 11-20 years; the majority were aged between 13-16 years. Most of the young people who were interviewed were white/British, 3 were of dual heritage, 1 was Asian/British, 1 described their ethnic background as of African descent and 1 described themselves as of Caribbean descent.

We spoke to young people who had experienced running away, and those who had not. We also spoke to specific groups which may be at particular risk from running away: e.g. gay, lesbian and bisexual young people and young people in care.

The consultation was conducted mainly via focus groups, although some young people were interviewed individually. The groups were accessed through Barnardo's projects and contacts with other relevant organisations. A scenario involving a young person who had run away was used to prompt discussion (See Appendix 2). This was adapted to reflect the circumstances of each group. The discussion was structured around three key areas: prevention, immediate safety and longer term needs.

Prevention

Key messages:

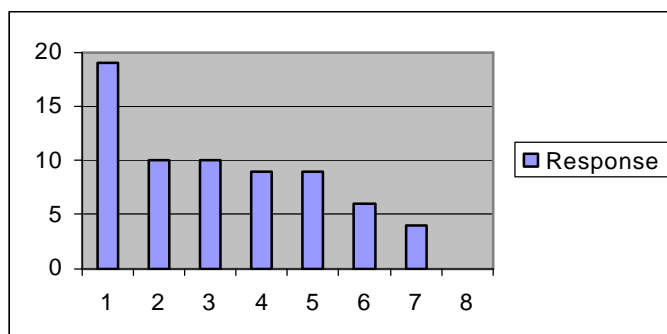
- Someone to talk to who will listen
- Responding to individual needs
- Respecting confidentiality
- A safe space outside of school
- School is a convenient place to provide information
- Information provided out of school should be provided in a public place

This section focuses on three main questions:

1. Who do young people feel they can turn to if they are at risk of running away?
2. What are the elements of effective support at this stage?
3. What information do young people think is required and how should it be accessed?

1. Someone to talk to about your problems

The most common response from young people was that they would talk to a family member. Outside of family and friends, there was no real consensus or preference; teachers, youth/project workers and helplines were the most frequently cited.



1. Family 2. Friend 3. Teacher 4. Youth/Project worker
5. Helpline 6. Other 7. Social Worker 8. Police

The young people's responses depended on their experience. Some had regular contact with social workers or youth workers and therefore gave these as examples whereas young people who had no contact or knowledge of such workers were more likely to suggest teachers.

Professional	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social Worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fear of severe action ▪ Distrust ▪ Viewed as the 'enemy'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth Worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relates to young people ▪ Less likely to act on information without the young person's permission 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confidentiality – may tell parents ▪ Reliant more on certain individuals rather than the professional as a whole
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Helplines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Empowers young people (e.g. can start and end conversation when they choose) ▪ Less pressure than face to face contact ▪ Free of charge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Phone lines frequently engaged

2. Key elements to providing effective support

Regardless of the type of professional suggested, young people were clear about the key requirements of effective support. These were common to all services at all levels: prevention, immediate safety and long-term support.

Listening and talking

Many young people said that a lack of communication with the people around them was a contributory factor to them running away. As a result, being listened to was of high importance, as was being believed and being taken seriously:

“but if you get to talk to someone then it probably wouldn't get to that stage [running away] and you would feel a lot better about yourself cos you have talked to somebody.”

Confidentiality

From a young person's perspective, a fundamental element of any support service was that there was mutual trust and that confidentiality would be respected:

“As long as that young person isn't at risk then you have to keep your mouth shut really. You know, young people need the confidence that it will go no further.”

“...you would want to get a sense that they were really interested in you and that it was safe for you to talk to them.”

Responding to the individual

Young people wanted support but in different forms and on their terms. Young people gave a variety of responses based on personal preference (e.g. some preferred group work whereas others felt more comfortable with support on a one to one basis). The key message was that young people wanted services to be flexible in order to meet their individual needs:

“...it's about giving that young person the chance to have that support if it's needed and not just at a certain time but when they decide that they need the support.”

A safe space

Young people felt that an important requirement of effective support was a safe space. Young people felt that there needed to be more safe places for young people to access in the evenings:

“...if there was somewhere to go. There's never anywhere to go at night and that.”

“Say if there was a small building for young children to go, just to chill out, someone to talk to, some games.”

3. Information

The provision of appropriate information was seen as crucial to a good service. This was on two levels; firstly providing young people with enough information about the nature of service (e.g. who can access it, the time it is open). Secondly, providing young people with appropriate and accessible information (e.g. leaflets) in order to help tackle their problems. A common response amongst those with experience of running away, was that young people should be given information on the dangers of running away:

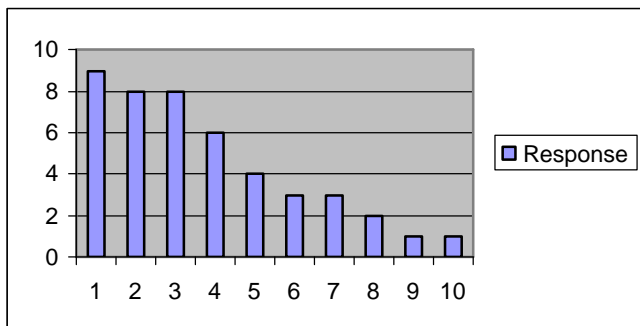
“...to be told about the dangers on the roads and on the streets.”

“...get people to talk [to young people] that have actually been there and done it.”

Access and format

Young people felt that the best way to provide written information would be via posters. Many young people also suggested leaflets, though there were concerns that they might not be read or maybe thrown away. Young people believed that verbal information delivered by professionals and peers was an effective way to get messages across to young people. Several groups reflected positively on previous peer group work experience and gave ideas on how this could be replicated:

“I think people should do a web site on bullying...and they [the young people] can talk to other people who have been bullied and that, instead of talking to your social worker...getting help from someone else who has been bullied.”



1. Posters 2. Leaflets 3. Professionals 4. Peers 5. T.V
6. Intranet 7. Booklet 8. Radio 9. Text 10. Help Line

Young people discussed information provision inside and out of school. Not all young people felt that school was an appropriate place to provide information. Young people most at risk of running away are also the most likely to have negative school experiences or poor attendance. However, for the majority of young people who do attend school, it is a convenient place for information.

The school setting

Young people felt that on a practical level, information within school time was easier to access:

“If you are at school then you are there anyway, its easier to get to... whereas if it was in the community you might think that it is more [far] away...say for example you weren’t getting on with your parents for any reason you would then have to explain where you were going and stuff but in school its more private.”

Of those who suggested school, many recognised the barriers to accessing information within this setting and young people suggested ways to overcome these barriers.

Barriers	Ways to overcome barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teacher/pupil relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased communication between teachers and pupils

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer pressure Attitudes of other students Lack of privacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A quiet, private place to access information ▪ General information booklet to all students (to reduce stigma)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of discussion within school of issues affecting young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More classroom time to raise awareness and stimulate discussion on issues that are important to young people. It was recommended that this be carried out by both teachers and outside agencies.

Outside of school

The key message about providing information outside of school was easy access. The most common suggestion was public places, particularly where young people 'hang out'.

Public Places to access information – popular responses

- Billboards – on streets and around town
- On public transport
- Bus stops, train stations
- Phone boxes
- McDonalds

Young people had no real preference amongst the above. Furthermore, many young people suggested a combination of media in order to ensure that messages reach young people:

“Then they can actually see it if they don’t hear it on the radio or TV or they say it too fast then at least they can see it on a billboard.”

The shared theme was the perception that young people would be able to access information in a public place without drawing attention to themselves:

“...a campaign of posters on the buses...you don’t have to be seen to be picking anything up, anyone on a bus can just punch the number in their mobile phone and nobody is going to raise an eyebrow. Or if you don’t have a mobile you could memorise...”

Young people also provided creative ideas for what could be included on publicity material:

“...you can have like case studies of people and have quotes about the young people and what they thought of the place...”

“...like a teenager talking to the other guy on the phone and ‘we’re here to help’ and the number underneath”

“Have a diagram giving directions...”

“they could put it on the McDonalds bag, on the actual bag.”

Immediate Safety

Key messages:

- Drug and alcohol use, attack and rape seen as the main risks of running away
- Safe Houses
- Outreach work
- Someone who will offer emotional and practical support
- Peer support

This section focuses on four main questions:

1. What do young people perceive as the main risks faced by young runaways?
2. Who would young people contact if they ran away?
3. What kind of short-term support could be offered to young people once they have run away?
4. What are the elements of effective support at this stage?

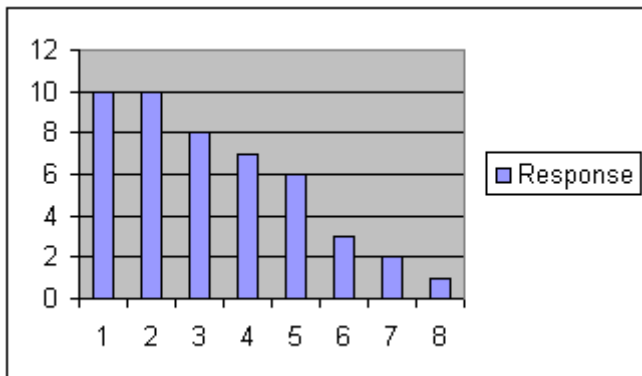
1. The risks of running away

There was a general consensus amongst those who took part in the consultation that young people were at risk when they ran away:

“I think they do face risks of either harming themselves in some way or harming the family.”

The most commonly perceived risks were being attacked or raped and drug/alcohol use (alongside risk taking strategies in order to fund drug addiction: stealing, prostitution). In addition, young people worried about ill health (both physical and mental).

However, most young people with experience of running away said that they had not thought about the risks at the time. In addition, some young people felt that they were safer on the streets than at home (e.g. those fleeing abuse, conflict at home etc). Furthermore, not all young people spoke of running away in negative terms. For some it represented freedom, fun or time to think:

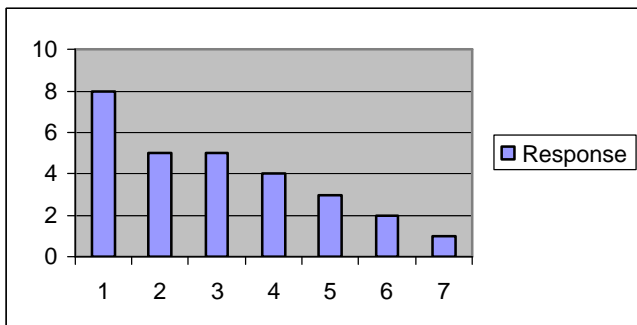


1. Drugs
2. Attack
3. Alcohol
4. Rape
5. Ill health
6. Theft
7. Prostitution
8. Wrong crowd

“I ran away and I had the best two weeks of me life – freedom.”

“No you need your own time, you need your own time and your own space to wander back up on your own. You’re probably the most selfish person in the world when you’re running away. But you just don’t think about anyone else.”

2. Contacting someone



1. Family
2. Social Worker
3. Childline
4. Youth/Project Worker
5. Friends
6. Police
7. Teacher

Of those young people who said they would contact someone if they ran away, friends and family members (not home) were popular choices. Some said they might send a message home but it did not appear to be a main concern:

“Some people might want a message home but they might not think of it when they run away.”

Apart from friends and family, Childline was commonly referred to, particularly by under 16s. There were a number of factors that encouraged young people to access this service. It was seen as easy to access; the number is displayed in phone boxes or is easy to remember and the service is free. Other strengths were high levels of confidentiality and the fact that young people could exercise control over the support: they chose when to ring and when to end the call. Young peoples’ only criticism was that Childline was often engaged.

Those who were currently accessing voluntary sector services that supported young people gave these as examples. They particularly valued the informal approach of staff working within these agencies; young people and youth/project workers were viewed as having a shared

understanding. Furthermore, young people felt that they would be able to talk in confidence without being pressured to return home.

Some young people said they might contact social services, although young people were distrustful of social services. Few young people said they would feel comfortable contacting the police:

“The police don’t do anything...they just take you home.”

3. Short-term support

Young people recognised the challenges of informing young people who had run away about appropriate services. Much of what was said is reflected in the earlier discussion around providing information out of school. Suggestions to overcome this were to advertise services in public places or places where young people went (e.g. McDonalds), providing contact details, simple information about the service and reassurance that it is safe and confidential.

When asked about where they would stay if they ran away from home, most young people said that they had or would stay with family or friends. Other young people had occasionally slept rough:

“I slept in a bus stop once.”

“They [friends] all went to the woods and tried to get comfy and like I just stayed around the streets and found an alley...just anywhere with a shelter or shed or something.”

When discussing places to stay, young people felt that they had few options outside family and friends. Some talked about hostels and refuges in their locality but most were not aware of the details of the service. Most young people felt that there was a clear gap in service provision which met the immediate safety needs of young runaways. Suggestions on how to fill this gap came in two main forms: ‘safe houses’ and outreach work with young people on the streets.

Safe Houses

The most popular response from young people was the idea of a safe place or house for young people to stay:

“I think they should open, I don’t know like a hostel for young people...like a runaway house.”

“If you think you just need a bit of breathing space then something like that [refuge/drop-in] would be good for a couple of days and you’ve got someone there to talk to if that’s all you need...”

Many young people felt that runaways who were 16 and under would need more support than older runaways:

“...cos they’re younger they can’t deal with things that maybe someone over 16 could deal with...I reckon you should have two projects. One for 16 and under, one for 16-25 or something like that...they [young people 16 and under] need a lot more support than us older ones...”

Outreach Work

Some young people put forward the idea of outreach workers who could make contact with young people on the streets:

"I also think there should be a team of workers going round and speaking to young people that are homeless...targeting making sure they are alright and see what is going on."

"...or you could have people on the streets looking out for young homeless people."

Whilst they believed that such services were important, some young people felt that having somewhere to stay or support on the streets might encourage young people to run away. However, this was presented as an area of difficulty rather than a reason not to provide them.

4. Key elements to providing effective support

When exploring the most important thing a service could offer young runaways the following were consistently raised:

A safe place to stay

Most young people felt that this was important. Security was a key concern amongst many of the young people.

Practical support

The provision of food, drink and medical treatment were viewed as an essential element of a support service for young runaways.

Confidentiality

Again, this was seen as integral to any service supporting young people. Young people wanted reassurance that they would not be 'forced' to return home.

Emotional support

Most young people felt support needed to be emotional as well as practical. A non-judgemental listening ear was an important factor in service provision for young runaways:

"There should be trained people there who could help them out with their problems. Not just like food and things but why they ran away. I mean they obviously ran away for a reason so it would be good to try and solve that."

As with preventative support, confidentiality, listening and talking were all linked together and of high importance to young people:

"...have a one to one base to talk to someone...in full confidentiality. I mean it doesn't really matter where you are, whether its out on the streets or wherever, at least you would know that you have someone you can talk to and that they are listening."

Staff who 'understand'

Several young people said that they would value peer support or support from staff who had experienced running away:

“They should have people who have experienced stuff cos its much easier talking to somebody whose been through what you’ve been through then talking to somebody who doesn’t know.”

To negotiate the situation at home

Some young people mentioned this but it was not viewed as a top priority. Furthermore, it was stressed that this was dependent on how long the young person had been away from home (the longer the period of time, the greater the need for negotiation). Also, that any such support had to be on the young person’s terms.

Long Term Support for Young People who Return Home

Key messages:

Good idea to have a professional who provides support to young people who have previously run away

Initial contact should be made by letter

Allow young person to make the decision whether to access the support

Let the young person decide on when, where and how often they would like this support

- Professionals should not give up. If there is no response from the initial letter there should be a follow up letter within a month of the first.

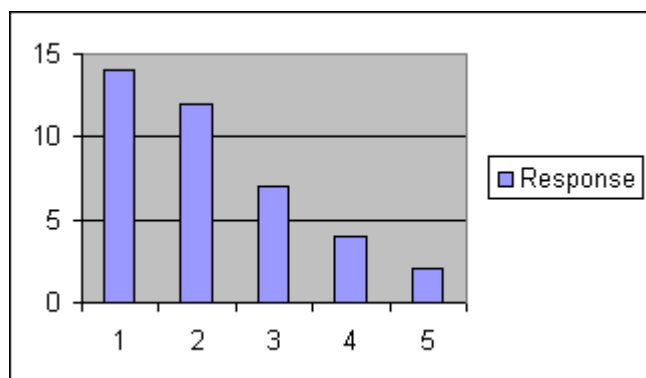
This section focuses on three main questions:

1. What form of support do you think should be provided?
2. Where should this support be accessed?
3. How often should this be provided?

1. Forms of support

A person to provide support

Young people felt that those who had experienced running away should have access to an individual who could provide support once they had returned home. When considering suitable professionals to take on this role the following suggestions were made:



1. Social Worker
2. Teacher
3. Non Teaching staff (in school)
4. Youth/Project Worker
5. Police

Obviously, responses very much depended on each group; who they were most likely to have regular contact with, and their personal experiences. For example, the group interviewed within school primarily suggested teachers or non-teaching staff. Teachers were not a source that the lesbian, gay and bisexual group would seek support. This was because they felt that 'coming out' was a common reason for this particular group running away and they felt that schools were not generally a supportive environment for young gay and lesbian people. They were more inclined to speak to a youth worker or social worker.

Qualities to look for in a person providing support

However, all groups were consistent in what qualities they would look for from an individual providing support:

- Someone they could trust/ confidentiality
- Someone who could give good advice
- An adult, but someone who can relate to young people
- Someone who could be available when needed/ be flexible

Young people were asked whether they felt that it should be mandatory for every young person who has run away and returned home to be contacted by a support worker. This person would be there to assist them with the issues that arose before, during and after running away. The majority felt that it should be automatic that someone made contact with the young person on their return:

"I think it's a good idea and I think it would be good to have a scheduled time where they could meet up with them so then they could go on and explore what is going on for that young person..."

"...if they ran away in the first place they are probably going to do it again so yeah, I think it is good, they should be checked on..."

However, a small minority felt that this would be an invasion of their privacy. There was much debate on the subject. Most young people who disapproved of the support system did so because they presumed contact would happen within the home:

“The main problem here though is that if you’ve got this person coming to see you then they [parents/carers] might get more and moreoff.”

“They might feel that they can trust the person more if they don’t have to involve the parents.”

2. Where to access support

The main concerns about a home visit were possible breaches of confidentiality and the possibility of causing further distress within the family. The majority agreed that an individual providing support would be beneficial, but that other venues needed to be looked at. The theme was explored more and practical issues of where, when and how often the young person and support worker could meet were discussed.

Again personal preference dictated the best place for young people to meet a support worker. The following remark summarises why a choice of places to meet is imperative:

“Just make sure that wherever the problem is not where you meet up to talk about it.”

However, there were 2 particular settings which young people thought would be appropriate; either within school or a public place such as a café. The following tables summarise the arguments for and against each:

Accessing support within school

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is no need to make special arrangements- already there ▪ Confidentiality- in school hours so family have no need to know ▪ Could access them at any time in the day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some young people do not attend school or too old to attend ▪ Teachers may not keep information confidential- talk of non teaching staff to take up the role ▪ Other classmates may know that you are going there and question you about it. ▪ Wouldn’t be able to access them outside of school hours

Accessing support in a public place

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relaxed and informal environment ▪ On neutral ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public place- could be exposed to friends or family.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexibility of meeting times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May not be easy to access for some ▪ Would have to make prior arrangement
--	--

3. How often support should be provided

It was also suggested that the most appropriate way to make initial contact with young people who had previously run away would be by letter. The reason being that it empowered the young person and allowed them to make the choice to access further help and support and decide where and when to meet with the professional. Young people also discussed how often young people would need to meet with such a professional, again this would very much depend on the individual. However, every two weeks was the most common response.

Long Term Support for Young People Who Do Not Return Home

Key messages

Adverts around town and city centres advertising local resources

Drop in centres for young people to access essentials

Practical and emotional support should be provided to help young people move forward.

This section focuses on two main questions:

1. How would they like to get access about services available to them?
2. What would be their immediate and long term support needs?

The following recommendations primarily reflect the needs of 16 and 17 year olds.

1. Gaining access to information

When asked how they would wish to access information about services available for homeless young people, an overwhelming majority favoured posters. The reason being that they could be easily placed in city centres where everyone could see them. It was also felt that information displayed in this way could be remembered easily and accessed discreetly.

Public Places to access information – popular responses

- Posters
- Adverts in public places- on bags
- Leaflets

- Text messaging
- People approaching young homeless
- Public Transport

2. Immediate and long term support needs

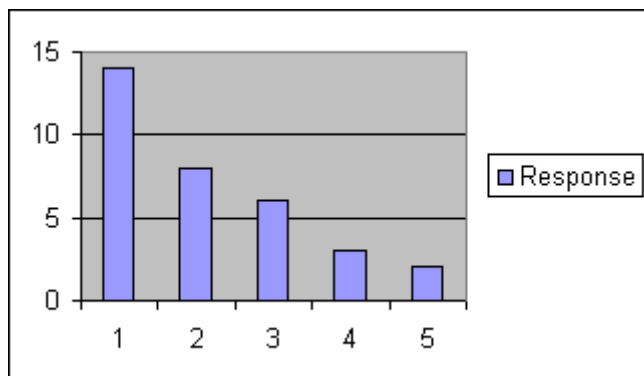
Drop in centres

Young people felt that it would be useful to have drop in centres that they could access for essential items such as food, clothes, have health check ups and a chance to have a wash. It was also felt that these centres should contain professionals who would be able to advise them on long term support issues such as housing, benefits, education and employment.

Emotional support

Support provided should also look at the difficulties that young people have faced during their lives, which have led to them running away, and also any difficulties that may have arisen since running away.

It was evident that young people felt it important to receive a mixture of practical and emotional support. The following graph shows what young people considered to be the most important support that they could receive:



1. Emotional Support
2. Housing
3. Employment/Benefits
4. Education
5. Health Services

Issues for Specific Groups

During the consultation there were specific issues that arose for particular groups that we spoke with. In this section we will be highlighting issues which arose from two focus groups: a lesbian/gay and bisexual group and another with young people in care.

Specific Issues for Gay/Lesbian and Bisexual Young People

This section highlights the key messages which emerged from a lesbian, gay and bisexual focus group.

Seeking support

At the preventative stage, the majority of young people from this group felt that it would be extremely difficult for a young person to seek advice or support. The reason being that it was felt that the young person would not be ready to come to terms with being gay, lesbian or bisexual and therefore, would not be able to discuss these feelings with other people. Help lines were seen as an important source of support because they ensure discretion, confidentiality and anonymity:

“...I wouldn't be able to cope with all that rejection and I would need to remove myself for my own sanity and safety and be able to think about things on my own...”

Support within the school setting

The majority felt that having someone available in a school to talk to would be useful because it is easily accessible. However, it was clear that they felt that the individual should be non-teaching staff. Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people felt that they would not be able to trust teachers as they felt that school does not offer them a particularly supportive environment:

“Section 28 is a real problem because teachers think that it stops them so effectively it does stop them.”

Young people felt that homosexuality should be spoken of more in schools. It was felt that it would help young people and encourage them to come forward if they had a problem and also promote tolerance with other pupils in the school, which may lead to less homophobic bullying:

“They need to be giving you the information...go through sex education, homelessness and things like that in lesson time.”

Vulnerability on the streets

In terms of immediate safety one particular concern was that young people who are lesbian/gay or bisexual may face being bullied whilst living on the streets (by passers by or other homeless people.) There was also concern that young people from this group are vulnerable to having to sell themselves for sex whilst on the streets.

Specific services for lesbian and gay young people

In relation to long term support, it was felt that there needs to be most specialist services for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people. It was suggested that there should be more hostels targeted at this particular group. Where this is not possible hostels which are open to everyone should reassure minority groups that strict anti-discrimination policies are in place:

“Perhaps there should be some specialised service that deals specifically with gay and lesbian runaways.”

Specific Issues for Young People in Care

Key messages

Lack of trust in social workers

More support should be given to young people throughout time in care to reduce their vulnerability to running away

Support to be delivered face to face and with someone already known to the young person.

This section addresses the particular concerns that young people in care have, with regards to running away.

Social workers

Saw that a social worker would be someone that they could talk to but there was a lack of trust as they felt that things would get reported back to their carers or other professionals:

“...with a social worker they might not inform you that they are going to tell someone else and inform them as well.”

Acknowledging young people in care’s vulnerability

Young people in care felt that they are more vulnerable to running away because they have the own issues to deal with but are also exposed to added difficulties because of living with a foster family. It was felt that more support should be given to young people whilst in care, so that they are less likely to run away:

“...more problems to run away from.”

Face to face contact

Most young people that were in care preferred face to face contact, rather than the use of telephone help lines for support. This may be due to the fact that they often have to meet with professionals and are used to this form of communication. On a similar note, young people in care felt it would be better to be able to discuss things with an individual they already knew, rather than someone new. Help lines were seen to be very impersonal whereas for most other groups this was seen to be a benefit to the resource:

“I don’t think that people like to use them [help lines] because their discussing things not face to face.”

Key Messages from this Consultation

- The most important message which emerged from young people was the value of non-judgmental support from a concerned adult. The issue for young people was not **who** provided the support (e.g. whether it was a teacher, youth worker or social worker) but **how** support is provided. The important characteristics identified by young people were flexibility, choice and support tailored to the needs of the individual. There needs to be a range of adults available to provide support. This clearly has implications for the information to and training of staff likely to be in regular contact with young people.
- Confidentiality was a key concern for all groups of young people. Feeling able to talk about problems in confidence is an essential prerequisite of building up trust. However, this clearly poses some dilemmas for staff, particularly those working with young people below the age of 16. Some consideration may need to be given to a review of the exceptional circumstances when a breach of confidentiality might pose more of a risk than failing to disclose a concern.
- The value of support from peers, especially older peers was highlighted by many of the young people. The key issue was support from someone who had gone through similar experiences or had a demonstrable understanding of the circumstances of young people at risk of running away.
- Whilst the majority of young people expressed the view that information and support could be provided in school (as the place that most young people access on a regular basis), there remain significant concerns whether schools are able to reach those young people at greatest risk. In reality, those most at risk of running away are also those who are most likely to be alienated from the school setting. Some young people feel quite strongly that they are highly unlikely to receive the support and understanding they need within the school environment.
- Most young people (even those who are quite settled in school) felt there was a real lack of young people-friendly spaces in most areas. This was identified as a critical preventive strategy: having somewhere safe to go with someone to talk to in a non-school environment.
- Any strategy to prevent running away needs to acknowledge that for some young people it is a positive experience, representing freedom, excitement and space to think. These benefits can easily prevent young people from considering the risks and even when the risks are made clear, for some young people these will still be outweighed by the positives.

Appendix 1 - Composition of Groups

Gender	Numbers interviewed
Female	37
Male	28

Age	Number interviewed
11	1
12	3
13	8
14	1
15	6
16	15
17	15
18	5
19	1
20	2
21	2
23	0
24	0
25	1
Total	65

Ethnicity	Numbers interviewed
African	1
Asian	1
Caribbean	1
Dual heritage	3
White	59

COMPOSITION OF INDIVIDUAL GROUPS

GROUP ONE	Youthline
Location	Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
Numbers present	6
Female	2
Male	4
Ages	2x 18 year olds, 2x 21 year olds,

	1x 22 year old 1x 25 year old
Ethnicity	6 white
Comments	Lesbian, gay and bisexual group.

GROUP TWO	Easedale Children's Home
Location	Leeds
Numbers present	4 although only 3 contributed
Female	4
Male	0
Ages	4x 14 year olds,
ethnicity	4 white
Comments	Residential home for girls.

GROUP THREE	The Foyer (YMCA)
Location	Grimbsy
Numbers present	5
Female	3
Male	2
Ages	1x 16 year old 2x 17 year olds 1x 18 year old 1x 20 year old
ethnicity	4 white 1 Asian/British
Comments	Hostel for young people.

GROUP FOUR	YP Inc
Location	Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
Numbers present	8
Female	2
Male	6
Ages	2x 13 year olds 4x 15 year olds 2x 16 year olds
Ethnicity	8 white
Comments	Youth group for young people in care. Had just produced a video about young people in care running away from foster homes.

GROUP FIVE	Kirklees SOS Scheme
Location	Mirfield, Kirklees

Numbers present	2
Female	0
Male	2
Ages	2x 12 year olds
Ethnicity	2 white
Comments	Follow up service for young runaways.

GROUP SIX	Kirklees SOS Scheme
Location	Mirfield, Kirklees
Numbers present	7
Female	7
Male	0
Ages	1x 11 year old 1x 12 year old 2x 12 year olds 1x 14 year old 2x 15 year olds
Ethnicity	1 dual heritage 6 white
Comments	Follow up service for young runaways.

GROUP SEVEN	The Base
Location	Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear
Numbers present	8
Female	5
Male	3
Ages	1x 11 year old 1x 12 year old 2x 12 year olds 1x 14 year old 2x 15 year olds
ethnicity	2 dual heritage 6 white
Comments	Project that looks at poverty, unemployment, homelessness and poor health for 14 to 25 year olds in Tyne and Wear.

GROUP EIGHT	Redborne School
Location	Amphill Bedfordshire
Numbers present	21
Female	13
Male	8
Ages	10x 16 year olds

	11x 17 year olds
ethnicity	21 White
Comments	Sixth formers from a school within a rural community in Bedfordshire.

GROUP NINE	Young People's Forum
Location	Kingston upon Thames
Numbers present	4
Female	1
Male	3
Ages	4 x 14 year olds
ethnicity	2 White, 1 African descent, 1 Caribbean descent
Comments	Project working with young people in care

Appendix 2 - Methodology used for focus group interview

Scenarios were used to generate discussion amongst the young people. The scenarios were adapted in order to reflect the circumstances of the young people interviewed. The scenarios were based on real life experiences of young people from various library sources. The following story is one such scenario.

EMMA'S STORY

Emma is 14 and lives with her mum, dad and younger brother Joe. Her mum and dad have been arguing a lot recently and last week her parents told Emma that they were getting a divorce. Her dad has now left the family home and her mum's new boyfriend who has moved in. Emma and her mum do not get on very well and sometimes her mum drinks too much and hits her. Emma feels like she is always the one in trouble and that her younger brother Joe can do no wrong. To top it all, Emma has fallen out with a group of girls at school, who have started bullying her.

Emma feels that she has nobody to turn to and that everything is getting too much for her. She feels her only option is to run away.

What choices does Emma have?

Who would be a good person for Emma to talk to? (*Rank replies*)

Prompt: friend, family member, teacher, social worker, police, project worker

What would Emma want to get from this person?

Prompt: information, help accessing information, someone to talk to, someone to talk to her parents/school, confidentiality, friendship

What kind of information might help Emma?

Prompt: on counselling, bullying,

How should this information be made available and where?

Prompt: posters, leaflets, credit cards, websites, telephone helplines, TV, radio, drop-in centre, in school, out of school

Emma's teacher has noticed that she has looked a bit down lately and is not sure how to approach Emma about this. What should she do?

Emma does run away. Her friend Louise, who is 17, has her own flat so Emma goes to stay with her. There are always loads of people round the flat, mainly Louise's boyfriend and his friends. Most evenings they sit around drinking and taking drugs. After a few days Emma and Louise have an argument. Emma leaves but she now has nowhere to stay for the night.

What choices does Emma have?

What potential risks do you think Emma has faced since she has run away? (in the flat/on the streets)

Prompt: drugs, alcohol, abuse, rape

What could have helped reduce these risks?

Prompt: someone to talk to, a safe place to go

Who do you think, if anyone, Emma should contact?

Prompt: family, friends, Childline, police, school, social services,

Where could Emma go for help? (*Rank replies*)

Prompt: drop-in centre, the police, social services, school, hostel, safe house

What kind of support should be available to young people like Emma once they have run away?

Prompt: confidentiality, food, drink, somewhere to sleep, message home, help negotiating the situation at home/school

Emma decides to go back home. However, the same problems are still there. Emma and her mum are still arguing and the bullying at school has got worse. Emma starts thinking about running away again.

What choices does Emma have?

If someone wanted to offer help to Emma, what would be the best way for them to get in touch?

Prompt: write to or phone her, contact her through school or via her parents

Who would be the best person to offer help to Emma? (*Rank replies*)

Prompt: teacher, social worker, counsellor, police, family, friends

Where would be a good place for them to meet?

Prompt: school, home, at a drop-in centre, a café, with parents?

What would Emma want to get from this person?

Prompt: advice, support, information, help negotiate the situation at home/school

After a huge row with her mum, Emma decides to run away again. It really isn't safe for Emma to go home. What could she do now?

What choices does Emma have?

What kind of help would Emma need?

Prompt: help going back to school, money, housing, improving relationship with parents/carers

Where would Emma go to get this help?

Prompt: a charity, social services, school, drop-in centre.