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**Independent Return Interview Service for Children who go missing from home or care**

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**Service Specification**

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**Service specification**

**ROYAL GREENWICH CHILDREN’S SERVICES**

**INDEPENDENT RETURN INTERVIEWS FOR CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Royal Borough of Greenwich is seeking to commission an independent organisation with the requisite skills and resources to provide an efficient and effective Independent Return Interview Service for Children who go missing from home or care.

1.2 Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities and other named statutory partners to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. This includes planning to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do.

1.3 In January 2014 the Government published statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care setting out the steps local authorities and their partners should take to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they go missing. The Statutory guidance requires that when a child is found they must be offered an independent return interview.

1.4 Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to speak to the child in confidence to ascertain the factors that led to the child going missing and any risks they may have been exposed to while missing and enable the local authority to institute measures to prevent reoccurrence and to safeguard the child and young person from harm

1.5 This specification sets out the scope of the provision we are seeking to commission; the outcomes we want the service to deliver and the monitoring requirements over the period of the contract.

1. CONTEXT

**2.1** The Royal Borough of Greenwich is a great place to grow up. We want every child, living in a great borough in a great capital city, to be able to take full advantage of the opportunities available. Some children will need more support and, for them, every day matters and every action counts.

2.1.1 The Greenwich Children and Young People’s Plan 2014-17 sets out our ambitions for children and young people and is built around three priorities:

* Resilience
* Prevention
* Protection

<http://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/downloads/file/624/children_and_young_people_plan_2014_to_2017>

2.1.2 Royal Greenwich is well known for its naval and architectural heritage as well as being the home of Greenwich Mean Time. The borough boasts the longest riverfront in London and in 2014 was host to the Tall Ships Regatta. We are proud of becoming a Royal Borough and LGC Council of the Year in 2013, and we think the 2012 Olympics and Paralympic games helped show the world what Greenwich has to offer.

2.1.3 Our profile of children and young people is our local strategic needs assessment and can be accessed here: <http://edition.pagesuite-professional.co.uk/launch.aspx?pbid=fc749135-cd09-4e7a-97e1-b036eed74a28>

2.2 **Looked After Children with Royal Greenwich**

2.2.1Children become looked after when their birth parents are unable to provide on-going care in either a temporary or a permanent capacity. Children can either be looked after as a result of voluntary agreement with their parents, following a child being taken into police protection or as the result of a court order.

2.2.2 As at 31st March 2014 there were 544 looked after children in Greenwich. The predominant reason children became looked after during 2013/14 were abuse or neglect, or at the request of their parents.

The table below indicates the age range of Looked After Children

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Age** | **Number of LAC at 31/03/2014** | **%** |
| Under 1 | 20 | 0.4% |
| 1-4 | 67 | 12% |
| 5-9 | 114 | 21% |
| 10-15 | 204 | 38% |
| 16+ | 139 | 26% |
| **Total** | **544** |  |

2.2.3 As at 31st March 2014 there were 34 Looked After Children missing from care placements. From 2010/11 to 2013/14 there has been a 48% decrease in Looked After Children missing from care.

The table indicates the number of Looked After Children missing from care and Children missing from home.



**2.3 Missing from Home**

2.3.1 A significant proportion of children who go missing from home are 15, 16 and 17 year olds who are often “sofa-surfing” with friends or partners at weekends, and do not tell their parents where they are staying. Most children go missing from home on one occasion only (78% - 64 out of 82 children). Some children who go missing are affected by gangs and criminal activity or they are at greater risk of sexual exploitation.

2.3.2 Local research on missing children at risk of gang involvement and sexual exploitation (2013) found the following:

* Two thirds of boys who go missing on more than one occasion are much more likely to be involved in criminal activity; to have problems in family relationships; to experience emotional and psychological problems; to have problematic drug use (often cannabis); and to have difficulties making good progress at school.
* Girls who go missing more than once are at greater risk of sexual exploitation, more likely to misuse substances and more likely to have mental health needs (Profile of children and young people in Royal Greenwich, 2014)
1. SERVICE AIMS

3.1 To provide an independent return interview service for children who go missing from home and care within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting.

3.2 Ensure the interview is held in a neutral and safe place where the child feels safe.

The interviewer will be required to build up trust with the young person and create a conducive environment for the young person to discuss the reasons why they ran away.

3.3 The interview must be undertaken by a trained officer who has the skills to carry out an in- depth child friendly interview and be able to produce a high quality report of the interview using the return questionnaire attached at Appendix 1.

3.4 To work with the child or young person and family to ascertain the factors that led to the child/young person going missing; whether going missing is linked to the quality of care received in the home or placement or other factors and how these can be addressed.

3.5 As part of the return interview the interviewer will conduct a risk assessment with a view to making recommendations in terms of actions necessary to prevent further episodes of running away /going missing and highlight any causative factors identified during the interview with the child or young person

3.6 The interviewer must provide the child or young person useful information on keeping safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers.

3.7 For those placed away from the borough an assessment of whether or not they were accessing services. Where the child is placed in a residential or children’s home it is the expectation that the interviewer will make contact and liaise with the residential or children’s home to undertake the interview.

3.8 In case of non-engagement the interviewer must inform the social worker and seek relevant information from carers to identify support required to prevent reoccurrence.

3.9 To offer one to one support, family mediation and other appropriate support to facilitate reintegration back to the family or care setting.

3.10 Office accommodation will be provided from The Woolwich Centre to promote closer working between the service and the children’s safeguarding service to facilitate efficient intervention and support. Service representatives will be required to participate in RBG team meetings or multi-agency meetings as and when required in relation to individual cases or to provide a strategic perspective, advice and information on missing children.

3.11 The service shall be delivered to the requirements of the statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home and be compliant with RBGs Safeguarding and Ofsted standards.

1. SERVICE PRINCIPLES

The London Procedure for Safeguarding Children Missing from Care and Home sets out a number of principles for agencies working with children who go missing.

4.1 **Principles**

The following principles should be adopted by all agencies in relation to identifying and locating children who go missing:

* The safety and welfare of the child is paramount
* Locating and returning the child to a safe environment is the main objective
* Child Protection Procedures will be initiated whenever there are concerns that a child who is missing may be at risk of significant harm
* Notification to the Police will only take place following a Risk Assessment and in clearly defined circumstances as set out in this Procedure
* The Police will act on **any** report of a child missing on the understanding that a Risk Assessment has been completed.
* Every ‘***missing***’ child who returns will be interviewed by someone other than the direct carer.
* Where the child is known to the Children’s Social Services or meets the criteria for referral to the Children’s Social Services, the Local Authority will ensure that there is a range of service options to address the child’s needs when they return.
* The care, support and management of children missing from home or care is undertaken in accordance with the London Procedure for Safeguarding Children Missing from Care and Home.

4.1.1 This, and all areas of this specification, must be delivered in line with Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 to ensure that young people’s interests are safeguarded, they understand their rights and procedures during their interview and clear communication is facilitated.

4.2 **Interviews
Independent interview:** Children should be informed that they would be expected to talk about their absence to someone independent of their parents/carers on their return. Providing children with an opportunity to talk is key to safeguarding them. The interview and the actions that following from it must:

* Identify and deal with any harm the child has incurred (his/her medical condition should be discussed immediately and any need for medical attention assessed)
* Understand and address the reasons the child ran away (the child’s living arrangements/placement might need to be reviewed)
* Try to avoid it happening again
* The child must receive the interview with the independent person within 72 hours of being located or returning from absence. For Looked After Children, it is the responsibility of the residential unit Manager/Supervising Social Worker and placing Authority to ensure that this happens

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The independent person could be a social worker other than the child’s social worker, if they have one, or a teacher, school nurse, Connexions, Youth or YOT Worker, a voluntary sector practitioner or a police officer whom the child knows and trusts. The independent interview should be with someone the child trusts and who is separate from the police and children’s social services interview. The child should be asked who they wish to speak to.

4.2.1 The successful organisation will conduct independent return interviews on behalf of Royal Borough of Greenwich, in accordance with London Procedure for Safeguarding Children Missing from Care and Home.

1. **STAFFING AND TRAINING**

5.1 The service provider is required to recruit, support and supervise sufficient levels of suitably qualified staff and volunteers to deliver the service. It is a requirement of this contract that paid staff are not paid below the London Living Wage and that zero hour contracts are not used in the delivery of this service.

5.2 The service provider is responsible for ensuring that all staff are recruited under safer recruitment procedures, inducted and have a probationary period, trained, DBS checked and actively manage all staff and volunteers, to be used for the delivery of the service, to the standards required by Royal Borough of Greenwich. Staff training and safer recruitment procedures will be monitored regularly by Royal Borough of Greenwich.

5.3 The service provider will ensure that the service is adequately and consistently covered at all times and staff work flexibly to respond to the need to provide return interviews within 72 hours and at a place and location convenient for the child/ young person.

5.4 All staff and volunteers involved in direct delivery of the service must demonstrate sufficient skills and experience for their role at all times.

5.5 The Service Provider is required to arrange suitable training for their staff and volunteers on a regular basis including disability awareness, confidentiality and good communication skills, including use of different communication methods.

5.6 We are seeking innovation and creativity in service delivery particularly in terms of how the service will engage and safeguard this vulnerable group of children and young people.

5.7 The service provider will be flexible and adaptable in order to respond to the changing needs of service users and the commissioner, and to work collaboratively with the commissioner and strategic partners to secure the welfare and safeguard children who run away from or are missing from care.

1. OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS OF THE SERVICE

6.1 The service will be expected to deliver the following outcomes:

* Young people feel safe and supported.
* Young people return to a safe environment
* A reduction in going missing episodes.
* A reduction in reoccurrence of going missing (total number of reasons)
* A better understanding of why individual young people go missing from care
* Appropriate measures have been instituted to prevent repeat episodes

6.2 The service will deliver the following outputs:

* Children at risk of CSE and/or gangs are identified and referred to the Safeguarding service
* All children and young people referred to the service receive verbal and written information within the agreed timescales and where appropriate signposted and referred to services that can meet their identified needs in respect of preventing (further) episodes of going missing, offending and antisocial behaviour.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Outputs** | **Indicators** |
|  | Timeliness of interviews100% children and young people are interviewed within 72 hours of returning to their care setting or referral | 100% children and young people are interviewed within 72 hours |
|  | A minimum of 200\* independent return interviews  | Number of interviews held |
|  | Provision of packages of support to meet the individual needs of children and young people | % of referred cases receiving direct one to one supportRecord of support provided |
|  | Support integration of children /young people back into family/care setting | % of cases receiving family mediation support |
|  | Promotion of the service to potential services and their families | Number of information sharing sessions per year |
|  | Provision of appropriate information on resources that can help safeguard the child | Record of information given to individual children and young people including helpline numbers |

\*The minimum target of 200 interviews is based on a budget of £50,000 per annum. The service provider is expected to develop a strategy for adding value to the contract by drawing in additional resources to expand the capacity of this service. The final target will be agreed between the commissioner and service provider at the start of the contract..

6.3 Final output targets will be agreed between the commissioner and service provider at the commencement of the contract based on the additional funding that the service provider proposes to lever-in as set out in their tender. The Provider will also be expected to suggest additional outcomes for the service and indicators for measuring performance.

1. REFERRALS

7.1 Referrals will come from a range of sources including:

* Referrals directly by social workers
* Referrals by the Police
* Referrals by other professionals via Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
* Referrals by a voluntary sector or community groups via agreed referral form other than CAF
* Referral by any other person known to the child/young person who does so with the knowledge and consent of the child or young person
* Self-referral by the child or young person

7.2 At the end of each month the Service Provider shall submit a list of all referrals received in that month and the referral sources to Andrew O’Sullivan (Senior Assistant Director, Children's Safeguarding & Social Care) or his nominated representative.

1. MONITORING

8.1 Royal Borough of Greenwich requires that the service is provided to the highest standard at all times performance will be monitored by the commissioner’s representatives using an agreed performance monitoring framework.

8.2 Commissioners will want to monitor the outcomes delivered in respect of the individual children and young people referred to the service. The monitoring data will include:

* The. number of children and young people receiving the service with age, ethnicity and disability breakdown
* The nature of referrals to the service, source of referral, whether running away from home or care; number of repeat episodes, reasons for running away and where to and any harm they may have experienced;
* Number of referred cases at risk of child sexual exploitation
* Number at risk of gang involvement
* 2 Case studies per quarter showing outcomes delivered
* Support provided by staff to each individual child / young person
* Meetings attended in relation to safeguarding the young person or enhancing the service
* Quarterly returns on outcomes using agreed outcomes measurement framework
* Feedback from service users including complaints and/or compliments, and how complaints have been addressed
* The number of completed return questionnaires for service users.

8.3 A template for collating this data shall be developed and agreed with the service provider at the start of the programme.

1. COMPLAINTS/COMPLIMENTS AND INCIDENTS

9.1 The Provider shall have in place a complaints policy/procedure that ensures the service user complaints are addressed and outcome of such complaints are made known to the service user.

9.2 The Provider will record and monitor all incidents, compliments and complaints. On request, the Service Provider must supply the Authorised Officer with a copy of records and responses relating to complaints and compliments made in relation to the service.

1. SAFEGUARDING

10.1 The Provider shall have in place appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures and ensure the procedures are regularly updated and compliant with Royal Borough of Greenwich’s requirements.

* All information, data and files relating to service users must be maintained and shared in suitably secure and confidential recording systems.
* Services will be delivered in an appropriate and safe environment.
1. DATA PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY.

11.1 The provider will comply with Royal Borough of Greenwich’s information sharing policy. This policy will be made available to the provider.

11.2 The provider’s staff and volunteers will be required to sign a confidentiality clause based on information that they have received as part of their duties. It will be the responsibility of the provider to ensure that this process is satisfactorily implemented and provide written records if requested.

11.3 The provider will ensure that written procedures and training is supplied to ensure all staff (including volunteers) comply with the Data Protection Act of client confidentiality.

11.4 No personalised data will be submitted beyond the provider. It is permissible to exchange anonymised data to the parent organisation for statistical and funding purposes only.

11.5 Where Freedom of Information requests are made to Royal Borough of Greenwich, the provider will cooperate by providing the requested information within the agreed timescales. Where the provider receives a Freedom of Information request regarding the service, they shall notify Royal Borough of Greenwich.

1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

12.1 The Provider will ensure its resources are planned and delivered in line with the principles of equality of opportunity and that individual needs and circumstances are appropriately met.

1. CONTRACT TERM AND VALUE

13.1 The contract will be for 3 years with option to extend for a further 1 year.

13.2 The budget available for the service is £50,000 per annum.

**Appendix 1**

**Children Missing from Care and Home:**

**Return Questionnaire**

**Introduction**

Children who go missing may sometimes be running from something which places them at risk and may run into or to, situations which also place them at risk.

Children may be to talk about these issues; however professionals need to find out why the child goes missing in order to safeguard them.

**Who Interviews the Child?**

Professionals must liaise to ensure that children are not interviewed more than is absolutely necessary about the same thing. The Police will interview all children when they return. In addition all children should be offered the opportunity to talk to an independent person whom they trust.

According to the *Young Runaways Report (SEU, 2002)* the professionals most closely involved with the child are often frustrated by the child’s behaviour which means that children are likely to receive a negative response when they return. This response can stop the child talking about their experience and exacerbate the situation rather than resolve it for the child.

The independent person could be a social worker other than the child’s social worker, if they have one, or a teacher, school nurse, Connexions, Youth or Youth Offending Team Worker, a voluntary sector practitioner or a police officer whom the child knows and trusts. The child should be asked who they wish to speak to.

**Areas to be covered**

The fullness of the interview will depend on the circumstances and the degree of risk to the child.

|  |
| --- |
| **1. Is the child happy where they are living, or are they worried/upset about anything?** |
| **2. Where was the child and who were they with?** |
| **3. What did the child do whilst they were missing?** |
| **4. Did the child feel safe and looked after?** |
| **5. What happened when the child got home?** |
| **6. What does the child want to have happen now – short term/long term?** |
| **7. Parents/carers view of the incident?** |
| **8. The interviewer should provide the child with information about how they can access further or on-going support services. Record the information here.** |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interviewer Name**  | **Designation**  | **Date**  |

**NB: The interviewer must ensure that other professionals who are involved with the child/ young person are copied into this information.**

**Appendix 2**

**Current Research Findings in Relation to Children Going**

**Missing from Care and Home**

**The majority of children under the age of 16 who go missing are runaways.**

**1. Prevalence:**

* Research has shown that every year approximately 77,000 under 16s run away overnight.

**2. Profiles of the children:**

* Peak ages for running away are between 13 and 16 years old and a quarter are under 11 years old. The risk of harm to a child is increased the younger the child is, and the more frequently they run away
* The main causes of running away are family conflicts and personal problems such as relationships, substance misuse, bullying and truancy. Children who run away from care are often unhappy with their placement or are influenced by others and do so to ‘fit in’ with the group
* Girls are more likely to run away from home than boys, but boys are likely to first run away at an earlier age and to run away more often
* Among children who go missing from care, those assessed as having emotional and behavioural difficulties are a high risk group often*.* They go missing at a younger age, more often and to stay away longer. They are far more likely to have been excluded from school and to have past convictions for offending than others who go missing

**3. Patterns of going missing:**

* Four out of five children who run away do so only once or twice
* Twenty percent of children going missing under the age of 16 had been forced to leave home
* Very few children go outside their local area while away
* Children under 16 are most likely to run away because of abuse and neglect. Whilst those who first run away or are forced to leave at the age of 16 or 17 are more likely to do so for reasons of family conflict and breakdown
* Children in residential placements were likely to have gone missing more often in the past than those going missing from foster placements. Children aged 14 and 15 tended to stay away longer
* For children who go missing often, there is a progressive risk of detachment from family*,* carers and school (exclusion or non-attendance)
* Evidence would suggest that once patterns of school non-attendance and running away become established they are mutually reinforcing
* Children who go missing often are also more likely to have problems with depression, drugs and alcohol and to have involvement in offending
* Children with previous convictions were far more likely to run away than those who had none

**4. Reasons for going missing:**

* For those who ran away repeatedly, particularly high levels of family problems and disruption were identified.
* Conflict with parents or step-parents is the most common reason by children for running away. The need to escape difficulties between parents – including domestic violence, drug and alcohol problems and persistent arguments – were a major influence for some young people; as were boundary and control issues and feelings of unfair treatment for others. Running away was rarely motivated by the need for excitement
* Over a quarter of the children in the Safe on the Streets survey were attempting to escape physical and emotional abuse, rejection or neglect. British and American studies support the finding that abuse and neglect are important factors underlying the decision to run away, especially for children who first run away from home before the age of 11; and even among those who have run away only once or twice
* Problems at school are only likely to be a direct trigger for running away for a relatively small minority of children

**5. Follow-up Schemes**

* Follow-up schemes which: i) Provide children who run away with an opportunity to talk about their reasons for running away, and
* ii) Link children who run away and their families into longer-term help if they need it,
have been successful in reducing the numbers of young people who run away repeatedly by up to two-thirds and have also achieved a reduction of one-fifth in the number of runaways arrested