

Commissioning, Delivery and Perceptions of Emergency Accommodation for Young Runaways

Gwyther Rees, Myfanwy Franks and Ros Medforth
The Children's Society

Jim Wade
Social Policy Research Unit, University of York



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*Gwyther Rees, Myfanwy Franks and Ros Medforth
The Children's Society*

and

*Jim Wade
Social Policy Research Unit, University of York*

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

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Executive summary

Background

This study was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in England, in association with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales to explore solutions that will meet the emergency accommodation needs of young runaways.

The project is part of an ongoing development of policy, practice and research on this issue. In England, the project is also a component of the Young Runaways Action Plan.

Methodology

The study consisted of a series of interviews and consultation exercises with professionals and young people.

The professional consultation consisted of 38 one-to-one telephone interviews with statutory and voluntary sector professionals in 12 geographical areas of England, Wales and Scotland; an e-mail consultation to professionals in other areas; 10 national stakeholder interviews; and 10 consultation events involving over 100 professionals.

The consultation with young people consisted of 22 one-to-one interviews with young people with experience of running away; and 3 focus group discussions with 18 young people.

The study also reviewed and utilised previous UK research and other literature on the issue of running away.

Scope

This report provides an overview of the material generated through this study and a set of overarching recommendations. Three supplementary reports will be produced relating the recommendations to the specific policy and service contexts in England, Wales and Scotland.

Evidence of need

Chapter 2 explores the evidence of need for emergency accommodation for young runaways.

At a national level there is evidence of such need from survey work which suggests that around 100,000 young people under the age of 16 run away overnight each year in the UK. Furthermore, over 20% of these young people sleep rough and/or are harmed whilst away from home. However there is a lack of more localised evidence of need.

Professionals contributing to the consultation expressed divergent views on their perceptions of the level of running away and the level of need within their local areas.

Evidence from young people gathered through this and previous studies suggests that many young runaways do not seek help whilst away from home, and in some cases actively avoid contact with helping agencies. Research and practice evidence also suggests that most young runaways are not reported missing to the police.

This latter evidence provides a potential explanation for the difference between national survey findings and varying local perceptions of need. This chapter concludes that there is a substantial incidence of young runaways away from home and in need of emergency support. However, this level of need may not be visible to local agencies.

The chapter recommends a more effective communication strategy to disseminate evidence on this issue to key local stakeholders and decision-makers; and the inclusion of questions about running away in national and local self-report surveys of young people's needs.

Responding to need

Chapter 3 considers the type of emergency support (including emergency accommodation where necessary) that young runaways might need. The chapter introduces and focuses on the concept of 'crisis response' (which may or may not include the provision of emergency accommodation) to meet the immediate needs of young runaways whilst away from home.

The report recommends that crisis response services should be embedded within a network of responses which also includes generic prevention, targeted prevention and early intervention, and - after running away incidents - follow-up response including assessment of need, and longer-term support where appropriate. A comprehensive package of services would also include support for parents and carers of young runaways.

An initial crisis response to young runaways might explore alternative options - such as a negotiated immediate return home or temporary informal accommodation with relatives or friends - as well as the provision of formal emergency accommodation. In some cases these alternative options may be appropriate. However, there are child protection / safeguarding issues to consider here. Evidence from the study also suggests that the option of an immediate return home may not be viewed positively by young people and may hinder trust and the prospect of ongoing work. It is concluded that the initial crisis response is a particularly crucial opportunity to engage with young runaways and that there will be a need for this to include the option of formal emergency accommodation provision. The report recommends the development of a good practice guide for professionals who provide crisis response services to young runaways.

Whatever the outcome, it is vital that crisis response is linked with effective and prompt follow-up work with young people. The report recommends that all young people who run away or are reported missing should receive a follow-up assessment of their needs

The accessibility of crisis response services is another critical issue. The report considers the relative strengths and weaknesses of providing this service through existing emergency duty teams, specialist local or regional services, and/or national helplines. Whichever option is chosen, it is vital that such services are available 24 hours a day and they are effectively publicised to enable young runaways to gain direct access to immediate support.

Models of emergency accommodation provision

Chapter 4 goes on to review the different options for the provision of formal emergency accommodation provision, including an overview of different operational models.

First, the possibility of meeting the emergency accommodation needs of young runaways through existing local authority provision is considered. Several examples are provided of models of this kind currently in operation. However, the consultation with professionals suggests that in many areas existing provision is already stretched, and also that there may be some other potential drawbacks to this approach.

Second, the strengths and weaknesses of the different models of specialist provision which have been tested in the UK are discussed, including fixed refuge, flexible refuge and foster care. The study has also highlighted some additional suggestions for models of provision that may be effective in more sparsely populated areas.

The discussion also highlights the diversity of backgrounds and characteristics of young runaways, which together with diverse geographical contexts, suggests that more than one form of emergency accommodation may be required to meet the full range of needs.

The report recommends that, in areas of sufficient population density, specialist flexible or fixed refuge provision should be available (potentially on a regional basis) to complement existing local authority emergency accommodation provision. The availability of emergency foster care will be important to meet the needs of particular groups of young runaways.

The chapter provides some examples of positive developments in local authority provision in rural areas, but concludes that there is also still a need to test appropriate models of specialist emergency accommodation provision in these types of areas.

Strategic issues

Chapter 5 of the report considers a range of broader strategic issues.

This study confirms the importance of effective leadership and inter-agency working regarding young runaways at a local level. This includes the crucial role which is played by local 'champions' within local authorities and the Police, and active engagement of voluntary sector projects. The report recommends that attention is given to the possibility of multi-disciplinary approaches in future service development.

The report attempts to estimate the costs of providing emergency support including accommodation to young runaways. The analysis presented here confirms that there are likely to be significant cost advantages to flexible forms of emergency accommodation for many areas, but that for large conurbations the cost differences between fixed and flexible refuges may not be substantial. The analysis also notes that a major component of the cost of flexible emergency provision to young runaways relates to the provision of an accessible referral route and initial response and that there is a financial case for such services to be shared amongst clusters of areas where appropriate.

The chapter also considers some of the issues involved in setting up emergency accommodation services. The report draws attention to the need for lengthy initial funding periods for these services to take into account lead-in times, and the establishment of local awareness amongst professionals and young people. The study has also raised issues about inspection requirements for refuges for young runaways, and the report recommends that these should be reviewed.

Finally, issues of inter-area working are considered. The study has confirmed the potential for regional or sub-regional responses to the needs of young runaways in many areas. It has also highlighted the geographical mobility of young runaways which supports the case for a national network of emergency accommodation provision. Some unresolved issues regarding funding arrangements for such a network of provision are discussed and some options are identified.

16 and 17 year-olds

The project has also highlighted some specific issues relating to young people aged 16 and 17 who are away from home and in need of accommodation. Information and views from the consultation with professionals suggests that young people in this situation may be falling into a 'grey area' in terms of service provision; and that there is a need to rationalise existing services and clarify responsibilities. The report recommends that the legal and practice issues in relation to this group of young people require further attention.

1 Introduction

This is the final report on a project commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in England, in association with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

The overall aim of the project was to generate a set of recommendations which will help local authorities and other key stakeholders to develop solutions that will meet the emergency accommodation needs of young runaways.

This introductory chapter provides information on

- the background to the current project
- the aims, principles and methods of the project
- the scope and structure of the remainder of the report

1.1 Background

The UK's first refuge for young runaways - the Central London Teenage Project - was established in London in 1985. At the time this was a bold move because there was no legal framework for providing refuge accommodation without parental consent to young people under the age of 16 who were away from home. Consequently there was a risk of a parent or carer taking legal action against such a project for 'harbouring' a young person.

In the subsequent 25 years there has been an ongoing series of practice, policy and research developments. We now know a great deal about the issue of young people running away including the scale of the issue, characteristics of young runaways, background and associated factors, and young people's experiences whilst away from home. We know much less, however, about the appropriateness and effectiveness of different interventions to tackle the issue of running away.

Within this picture the issue of the provision of emergency accommodation for young runaways remains controversial. Section 51 of The Children Act 1989 and Section 38 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 made legal provision for the establishment and running of registered refuges for young runaways in England and Wales and in Scotland respectively. Yet relatively few such projects have been set up and there are currently only three registered refuges in the UK in Glasgow, South Yorkshire and London, between them offering accommodation for up to nine young people at any time.

As we will go on to discuss in this report, refuge is not the only means of providing emergency accommodation for young runaways. This project has adopted a broad view of what forms of emergency accommodation might meet the needs of young runaways. This might include specific projects which exclusively provide accommodation for runaways, and also more generic forms of accommodation such as a local authority provision for children in need of immediate accommodation.

A number of other models of emergency accommodation for young runaways have been piloted including facilitating access to existing emergency bed spaces within local authorities. However a survey of local authorities in England in 2007 (Evans et al, 2007) found that emergency accommodation was only available for young runaways in 20 out of 62 areas participating in the survey, and none of the responding authorities felt that the accommodation available fully met the need in their local area. Similarly a survey of police

forces as part of the same project found that emergency accommodation was only available in 10 out of 24 police force areas, and in only five areas was it perceived as meeting the need. The police survey also found that in 10 areas there were recorded instances of young runaways staying in police stations overnight due to the lack of appropriate accommodation for them.

The findings of the above project, which had been undertaken with support from the DCSF, prompted the publication of the Young Runaways Action Plan in England in June 2008. One of the key action points from the plan was to

Support the development of local, regional and sub-regional commissioning and provision of emergency accommodation following consultation with local authorities on the successful provision of emergency accommodation for young runaways

DCSF, 2008: 10

The Young Runaways Action Plan related only to England. At the same time a survey of provision in Scotland (Malloch, 2007) found that less than half of responding local authorities provided dedicated accommodation for young runaways.

It was against the above backdrop that the DCSF, in conjunction with the devolved administrations in Wales and Scotland commissioned, in November 2008, the project which has led to the production of this report.

Defining the issue

The term 'young runaway' requires some clarification as it has been used in different ways in the UK in different periods and contexts over the last 25 years.

The current definition in England appears in the latest statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care:

The terms 'young runaway' and 'missing' in this context refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts [are] unknown

DCSF, 2009: 6

The Welsh Assembly Government has not yet adopted a formal definition of a runaway, but for working purposes the term is taken to describe any young person under 16 who stays away from home or substitute care without the permission of their parent or carer. In addition the term 'runaway' also includes those children or young persons (under the age of 18) who have been forced by their parents or carers to leave.

In Scotland a different definition has been agreed by the Scottish Government as follows:

A child or young person, under the age of 16, who is absent from their domicile without the reasonable authority of those responsible for or in charge of them, and who needs a service either to find and return them to that place (where it is safe or in the child's interests to do so), or to

(a) keep them safe

(b) ensure an appropriate and proportionate response to their needs

(c) meet statutory obligations

Children between the ages of 16 and 18 will be included in this definition when

(a) they have a history of running away which predates their 16th birthday OR

(b) they are looked after, or looked after and accommodated.

Source: Scottish Government

As the first definition above clarifies the term 'young runaway' has come to include not only young people who have literally run away from their usual home, but also other young people who are away from home, including those who have been forced to leave and those who view themselves as 'staying away' without parental permission. This definition could also be seen to include young people under the age of 16 who have become 'estranged' from their parents. It is also worth noting that many young people in the above situations may not categorise themselves as having 'run away'.

There is also a need, for the purposes of this report, to draw a distinction between the terms 'running away' and 'missing'. The term 'missing children' has often been used to refer to young people who are reported to the police as missing from home by their parents or carers. We know that this group includes a substantial proportion of young runaways. However we also know that the two terms are not interchangeable:

- First, the 'missing children' group also includes a number of contexts which do not fit into the definition of a young runaway given earlier. These include younger children who may only be away from home for a very short period of time; and also children who have been prevented from returning home against their will. Depending on local authority practices this group may also include substantial numbers of 'looked after' young people who return late to their care placement.
- Second, we know from research and other evidence reviewed later in this report that it is likely that a majority of 'young runaways' are not reported as missing to the police by their parents and carers.

This project has highlighted that there is still a lack of clarity about the distinction between 'running away' and 'going missing'. In some interviews it was apparent that professionals were primarily responding in relation to 'looked after' young people going missing. There still appears to be a lack of awareness of the research findings on the relative proportions of young people running away from home or care, with a tendency to over-estimate the proportion running away from care, perhaps due to the higher reporting levels for this group¹.

For these reasons, we will not use the term 'missing' in this report unless we are specifically referring to young people who have been reported as missing to the police. In all other contexts, we will use the term 'young runaway' or 'running away'. These terms refer to young people who:

- *have run away from home or care;*
- *have been forced to leave home;*
- *or are otherwise away from home or care without parental permission for at least one night.*

This includes young people who usually live with their families and those who are looked after. It includes all young runaways, whether they are reported missing to the police or not.

In addition, the majority of this report focuses specifically on young runaways under the age of 16. The reason for this approach is that there are a substantially different set of legal and practical issues relating to young people aged 16 and 17 who are away from home which overlap with the issue of youth homelessness. It has not been possible to fully explore these issues within this project, but we have included a brief chapter on points raised in consultation events with professionals in relation to this age group.

¹ Estimates from surveys suggest that between 5% and 10% of young runaways are currently 'looked after' by local authorities (Stein & Rees, 2002: 148).

Finally, it is worth acknowledging that some contributors to this project felt that there was merit in considering the emergency accommodation needs of other vulnerable groups of young people along with those of runaways. There may well be a case for this, but it has been beyond the scope of this project to consider these issues.

A brief historical overview of emergency accommodation provision in the UK

Finally by way of introducing the context of this project and report, we provide here a brief historical overview of emergency accommodation provision specifically for young runaways in the UK.

The first refuge for young runaways in London was what has since come to be known as a 'fixed' refuge. Fixed is used here in the sense that the refuge consisted of a residential establishment with a fixed number of bed spaces which was always staffed irrespective of the level of demand. The reason for the setting up of the refuge was a growing awareness by agencies of substantial numbers of young people under the age of 16 on the streets in central London. Early practice at the refuge demonstrated that many of these young people originated outside London and this led to the establishment of a small number of additional refuge projects in other locations, with the aim of providing more localised support. By 1991 there were two further 'fixed' refuges in operation in Bournemouth and Leeds, and a foster care model in Newport in South Wales. All four of these refuge projects were run by The Children's Society.

In 1991 the Children Act 1989 came into force and Section 51 of this Act made legal provision for refuges for children '*who appear to be at risk of harm*' for the first time. The provision allowed for the certification of refuges (including residential homes or foster care) by the Secretary of State. Certification provided exemption from prosecution in relation to harbouring and abduction. Effectively this meant that refuges could accommodate young people without parental consent. Refuge projects were, however, required to notify the Police when young people were accommodated in and left refuge. The Police in turn were given the role of then informing the parent or carer. However, refuges could operate at confidential locations which would not be disclosed to parents or carers. The number of nights in refuge for a young person was restricted to 14 days in any continuous period and a total of 21 days in any three months.

The above Act related to England and Wales and all four of the above refuge projects subsequently received certification under Section 51.

Subsequently, Section 38 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 made similar provision in Scotland and provided similar exemptions from prosecution. There were some key differences in this legislation. First, the responsibility for approval of a place of refuge lies in the first instance with the local authority in which the refuge is situated. Second, the time period for stays in refuge is defined as seven days, or 14 days as prescribed by the Secretary of State in exceptional circumstances.

During the 1990s the original London refuge was closed and subsequently a new refuge was established by NSPCC and Centrepoint. This project is still in existence and is now run by St. Christopher's Fellowship in partnership with NSPCC.

By 2001 the last of the other three original refuges - Leeds Safe House - ceased operation due to financial factors and the London refuge was the only available provision of its kind in the UK.

However in 2004, with funding from the Scottish Government, the Aberlour Childcare Trust opened the first refuge in Scotland, in Glasgow. One of the innovative and distinguishing features of this project is the provision of 'flexible' refuge in the sense that the project is only staffed when there is a need. This helps to reduce running costs.

In the same year, in England, the Department of Health and the (then) Department for Education and Skills funded a pilot programme of community-based refuges with the aim of exploring alternative models of provision. This programme provided some funding for the London refuge and also for five new initiatives in Durham, Bradford, Liverpool, Leicestershire and Torquay. Two of these projects were run by the local authority, one by the voluntary sector, and two by a statutory/voluntary sector partnership. The projects piloted provision for young runaways in children's homes, foster care and other 'flexible' forms of accommodation. The pilot programme ended in 2006, although some of the initiatives have continued in a different format. Further detail on these projects is provided in Chapter 4.

Most recently, a new 'flexible' refuge has been established by the Safe@Last charity in South Yorkshire. The refuge offers emergency accommodation for young people in the four local authorities in that area. Again, this project is described in further detail in Chapter 4.

Thus currently there are three dedicated refuges for young runaways in the UK. In a number of other areas there are local authority initiatives in place to facilitate emergency accommodation for young runaways within more generic accommodation provision (mainly children's homes and foster placements).

1.2 The project

This project was commissioned jointly by the DCSF in England and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales through a competitive tendering process in August to September 2008. The contract was awarded jointly to The Children's Society's Research Team and the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York. Work commenced on the project in November 2008 and data collection for the project extended until October 2009.

The project was managed jointly by two senior members of staff within the partner organisations. An advisory group was formed for the project consisting of policy, practice and academic representation. The group met on three occasions to inform the development of the project. Members of the group also provided feedback on emerging findings and a draft of this report.

Aims

The primary aim of this project was to generate a set of findings and recommendations which will provide a framework for the development of effective emergency accommodation for young people who run away in England, Scotland and Wales.

In order to achieve this, the project has sought to answer the key research questions listed below.

1. What are the most appropriate models for providing emergency accommodation to young runaways in different contexts?
2. What are the factors which enable the establishment and operation of emergency accommodation provision, what are the factors which hinder this, and how can these factors be overcome?

3. What are the most appropriate ways of funding and commissioning emergency accommodation provision?
4. How can the need for emergency accommodation be effectively identified?
5. What are the most appropriate thresholds and qualifying criteria for access to emergency accommodation?
6. What referral routes can enable effective targeting of services for young runaways and maximise access for those in need?
7. How can emergency accommodation provision effectively link with other services for vulnerable young people?
8. What additional measures and support would be most helpful in facilitating the provision of emergency accommodation to young runaways?

Objectives and principles

In order to support the achievement of the above aims the following were identified as key objectives and principles for this project:

1. Maximise professional stakeholder involvement and engagement.
2. Incorporate the views of young people.
3. Build on previous learning.
4. Facilitate debate and resolve key issues.
5. Focus on solutions.

Methods

The project involved three key strands of information gathering and consultation with a range of key stakeholders:

- Strand 1: Information-gathering from individual professionals through a variety of means consisting of key informant interviews in 12 geographical areas; an e-mail consultation of key stakeholders in all remaining areas; and national key informant interviews.
- Strand 2: In-depth interviews with young people who have experience of running away.
- Strand 3: Consultation events with professionals and focus group discussions with young people

Ethical approval for the project was gained from the IRISS Ethics Committee at the University of York.

The work undertaken under each of these three strands was as follows:

Strand 1

Strand 1 consisted of four components:

1. Twelve local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales were selected as a focus for individual interviews with local stakeholders. These areas were chosen, in consultation with the Advisory Group for the project, to represent a range of areas in terms of:
 - a. Type of area (city, suburban, and rural). The final sample included four areas of each type.
 - b. Extent of previous work with runaways - to include three groups - those areas which have currently or previously provided some form of specific emergency accommodation provision for runaways; those who have not done so, but have undertaken other initiatives to tackle this issue; and those who do not fit into the first two categories. The final sample included four areas of each type.
 - c. National and regional spread. The final sample included nine areas in England (one in each Government region); two areas in Scotland and one area in Wales.

Within each area the target was to undertake a minimum of three interviews with a local authority, police and voluntary sector representative, with a small number of further interviews to be undertaken with other professional groups (e.g. Connexions staff) where appropriate and practically possible. These interviews were semi-structured, focused around the broad questions identified above. Where consent was obtained, these were audio-recorded.

In total, 38 interviews were conducted in the 12 areas, including at least three in 10 of the 12 areas, and two in the remaining two areas.

2. An e-mail consultation with local authorities, police and other key stakeholders. For this component, consultation questions were circulated² along with invitations to consultation events (see Strand 3) and other mailing lists. A total of 18 responses were received to this consultation.
3. Interviews were conducted with a sample of key national stakeholders in England, Wales and Scotland including representatives from the Police, national voluntary sector organisations and national co-ordinating bodies. A total of 10 telephone interviews were conducted. Again, where consent was obtained these were audio recorded.
4. In addition to the above three components, a small number (eight) of additional interviews were conducted with local stakeholders in the later stages of the project to discuss and check emerging findings from the work.

Strand 2

Strand 2 consisted of individual interviews with young people who had experience of running away. The aim was to gain a range of perspectives from 20 young people, including some young people who had experience of using emergency accommodation and some who had not. These interviews were focused primarily in the areas included in the first component of Strand 1 above.

² At the time of writing, this component has not been completed in Wales. This consultation is due to take place in November 2009 as part of the process of preparing a supplementary paper for the Welsh Assembly Government - see Chapter 7.

In total 22 interviews were conducted. All interviews were retrospective and accessed through projects. With consent these interviews were audio-recorded. The breadth of this sample of young people was constrained by timescales and cannot be seen as a representative sample of young runaways. A profile of the young people is as follows:

- Ethnicity: Of the 22 interviewees 4 were known to be of minority ethnic young people as follows - one south Asian, one black African; one Iranian; one Moroccan
- Gender: Of the 22, only five were male. The overrepresentation of female interviewees might relate to the fact that it was an opportunity sample, the issues of males experiencing difficulties seeking help (Franks and Medforth, 2005) and indeed gaining help from projects.
- Age: between 15 and 19, with the exception of one young person who was 22 years of age. All were being interviewed retrospectively - they had run away, or been thrown out from the age of 10
- 3 interviews were known to be with rural young people

Strand 3

Strand 3 consisted of two components:

1. Consultation events for professionals. A total of 11 events were planned. Nine of these events were to take place in the nine Government regions of England and one each in Wales and Scotland. Invitations to events were circulated to all local authorities and via a range of other means including Local Safeguarding Children Boards in England, and mailing lists provided by the Welsh Assembly Government and Scottish Government.

Unfortunately in England, two of the regional events generated very limited interest and therefore did not go ahead. So, in total seven events were held in England, plus one each in Scotland and Wales. A total of 102 professionals attended these nine events with representation from a wide range of agencies including local authorities, Police, voluntary sector, education and Connexions.

Each of these events began with a presentation to set the context for the current study, including an overview of key policy, practice and research developments in this field over the last 20 years. The events focused on a discussion of the key questions identified for the project. The discussions were not audio-recorded but notes were taken of each event.

2. Focus groups with young people. Three focus groups (two of which were part of a single consultation event) were held with a total of 18 young people - 16 female and two male. These groups were attended by young people from five different project and locations. Another group was arranged for the West Country but was cancelled because of swine flu in the locality. With consent, the group discussions were audio-recorded. The discussions were focused primarily on gathering views on seeking support whilst away from home and also on the advantages and disadvantages of different models of emergency accommodation.

Analysis

Analysis was undertaken in two stages.

The first stage involved analysing data from each component of the study separately, using the key questions for the project as an initial framework, and identifying a set of key themes and issues under each question. Attention was also paid to any relevant topics which fell outside the original set of key questions, and these were included in the set of themes and issues derived from this stage of the analysis.

The second stage involved revisiting the data to provide verification of these themes and to identify any gaps. In addition, we also reviewed previous UK research and evaluation studies for further material under each theme, and findings from these studies are referred to at various points in the report.

1.3 The structure of the report

The interviews and consultations with professionals highlighted some strongly divergent views about the whole issue of provision of emergency accommodation for young runaways.

Three questions seemed particularly contested:

1. Are there significant numbers of young runaways in need of emergency support?
2. If yes, can the emergency needs of these young runaways be met without the need for emergency accommodation?
3. If not, can these accommodation needs be met by existing statutory provision?

Much of the report focuses on attempting to answer these questions making use of the evidence gathered for this project and findings from previous research.

Chapter 2 focuses on the first question above. It looks at the evidence on levels of need for emergency accommodation amongst young runaways based on previous research and on views gathered from professionals and young people.

Chapter 3 focuses on the second question. It discusses an overall framework for provision of accessible emergency support to young runaways, including consideration of the ways in which this provision might fit into an overall network of support services to respond to the issue of running away, and consideration of the potential to provide a crisis response which does not include the provision of emergency accommodation.

Chapter 4 begins by focusing on the third question through considering the strengths and weaknesses of providing emergency accommodation for young runaways through existing statutory provision. It then goes on to look also at some of the models of emergency accommodation which have been developed in the UK specifically to work with runaways and some additional ideas identified through this project. The discussion takes into account differences in local context and the diversity of potential needs of young runaways.

Chapter 5 moves on to the broader issues of strategy, planning and management involved in providing services for young runaways. It discusses leadership; costs and resources; the commissioning, funding and setting up of services for runaways; issues of independence and joint working; and inter-area working.

Chapter 6 is a very brief chapter which discusses some specific issues identified by the project in relation to 16- and 17-year-olds away from home.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter of the report. It draws together the key points from the preceding chapters and provides an overview of the key recommendations and issues identified by the project.

2 Evidence of need

One of the key issues which this project has sought to address is to estimate the likely level of need for emergency accommodation for young people who run away from home.

In terms of young people reported as missing to the police, there have been considerable improvements in recent years in the quality and availability of data in many areas, although this is still 'work in progress' in some areas. Figures on the number of missing person incidents seem to be now available to most local authorities, although some limitations were reported in some areas, and in some cases there was still a tendency to focus on statistics relating to 'looked after' young people. However there was a recognition amongst professionals from all agencies that, as the research reviewed earlier has indicated, many young runaways are not reported to the police as missing.

Turning to the incidence of running away in local areas, the information gathered for this project suggests that there is still a lack of reliable statistical evidence at a local level which could be used to estimate the need for services.

Given this lack of statistical evidence, we have addressed the issue of levels of need through three means:

- Review and secondary analysis of existing data, primarily gathered through surveys.
- Exploration of evidence of and perceptions of need amongst professionals.
- Exploration of young people's experiences whilst away from home and their perspectives on gaining access to emergency accommodation.

In the first section of this chapter we present existing survey evidence. The first section looks at evidence about the prevalence and incidence of running away; the second looks at evidence of risk and need for accommodation whilst away from home. These sections include some previously published findings and some new analysis undertaken specifically for this report.

We then go on to consider the perspectives of professionals and young people on this topic.

2.1 Survey evidence

In this first section we review evidence on levels of running away and levels of need for emergency accommodation amongst young people. We base our analysis on several surveys of running away which have been carried out in the UK over the last decade (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Wade, 2002; Smeaton & Rees, 2004; Rees & Lee, 2005).

Before reviewing this evidence, it is worth clarifying that, for reasons explained in the introductory chapter, we have chosen not to place too much emphasis on missing person statistics. However, briefly we note that the recent *Stepping Up* report collated evidence on young people under the age of 16 being reported missing which suggested that there were between 6 and 11 incidents per 1,000 children in a given area. This would equate to around 84,000 incidents nationally in England. A series of previous reports (Newman, 1989; Abrahams & Mungall, 1992; PACT, 2005) have arrived at similar estimates in the region of 100,000 children going missing in the UK each year. A recent fact sheet from Missing People (2007) suggests that the number of incidents of young people under 18 being reported missing each year in the UK could be as high as 140,000 to 153,000.

The primary source of information on running away in the UK is two national surveys on the topic undertaken in 1999 and 2005. The first of these surveys (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999) covered a representative sample of around 13,000 young people aged 14 to 15 in 25 areas of the UK. The second covered a representative sample of around 11,000 young people aged 14 to 16 in England (Rees & Lee, 2005). Both these surveys involved self-completion of questionnaires by young people in mainstream schools, special schools and pupil referral units. For brevity, in the remainder of this chapter we will refer to these surveys as *Still Running 1* and *Still Running 2*.

In addition, three further surveys have been conducted using a similar methodology in Scotland (Wade, 2002); South Yorkshire (Smeaton & Rees, 2004); and Dorset (Franks, 2004).

Levels of running away

Still Running 1 was the first study to attempt to estimate the numbers of young people running away in the UK using self-report methods. The key finding was that 10% of the young people surveyed had run away or been forced to leave home for at least one night on one or more occasions under the age of 16.

However, the median age of young people surveyed was 15 years and 1 month. Thus, some young people surveyed would be likely to have run away or been forced to leave home between the time of the survey and their 16th birthday. To take this into account, data from the survey was used to calculate the projected additional prevalence of running away before the age of 16. This led to a projected estimate that 11% of young people run away or are forced to leave home overnight at some point before their 16th birthday. On the basis of these findings it was possible to estimate that 77,000 young people ran away for the first time each year in the UK and that there were around 129,000 incidents of young people running away annually. Due to the survey methodology it was not possible to directly estimate the total number of young runaways each year (i.e. including young people who had run away in previous years) but the figure must lie somewhere between the above two figures and a rough statistic of 100,000 young runaways per year in the UK has come to be accepted as a reasonable estimate (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

In the above survey, prevalence rates were slightly higher in England and Scotland than in Wales and Northern Ireland, but these differences were not statistically significant. A survey was conducted in a further three areas of Scotland in 2000 and the combined results for Scotland from this and the Scottish areas covered in *Still Running 1* were published by Aberlour Childcare Trust in a report entitled *Missing Out* (Wade, 2002). This report also estimated a prevalence figure of around 11%. As far as we are aware no further survey work has been undertaken in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland since that study.

Still Running 2 repeated broadly the same survey in a similar sample of 16 areas in England in 2005. The overall rate of running away was almost the same as for *Still Running 1* and there was therefore no case for revising the above estimates.

Still Running 2 also included a new question on recent running away experiences. At least 6.5% of young people said that they had run away overnight during the last 12 months. Allowing for a margin of error of 1% in either direction on this proportion, it was possible to estimate that between approximately 70,000 and 100,000 young people per year solely in the 14 to 15 age group in England run away overnight on at least one occasion. This estimate, relating to a two year age band in England only, suggests a higher prevalence than the 100,000 figure for all young people in the UK derived from *Still Running 1*.

The two *Still Running* surveys were conducted in a sample of geographical areas. There was no evidence of systematic variation between these areas on the basis of indicators of prosperity or population density. It was on this basis that national estimates were produced.

A further survey was conducted in South Yorkshire in response to concerns that the national figures may not be applicable to the South Yorkshire region (*Still Running 1* had included one South Yorkshire area - Rotherham - in the original sample in 1999). In order to address this issue, the Safe@Last project commissioned a regional school-based survey in the remaining areas of South Yorkshire. The survey covered a sample of over 1,600 young people. This survey estimated that between 10% and 11% of young people in the region ran away overnight on at least one occasion before their 16th birthday, broadly in line with the previous national estimates (Smeaton & Rees, 2004).

A smaller survey of 474 young people in Dorset commissioned by the Dorset Rural Runaways Project found a slightly higher rate of 13% (Franks, 2004).

In summary a series of national and regional surveys undertaken in the UK over the last decade have arrived at broadly similar estimates of running away rates in the region of 10% and above.

Extent of immediate risk

The previous section reviewed evidence on the numbers of young people who run away from home. Of course, this does not provide evidence of a need for emergency accommodation amongst young runaways. We know that there is a considerable diversity in the experiences and situations of young runaways whilst they are away from home. In this section we explore the issue of the proportion of young runaways who are without somewhere safe to stay whilst they are away. This includes young people who have nowhere to stay at all, and also young people who stay with relatives, friends or acquaintances but are nevertheless at risk of harm. The main source of information on this topic in the UK is the two *Still Running* surveys both of which asked specific questions about experiences whilst away from home.

We focus here primarily on *Still Running 2* because it is more recent and also because it included improvements to some questions.

Young people with nowhere to stay

The *Still Running 2* questionnaire asked young people where they slept on the most recent occasion that they were away overnight. Note that more than one response was possible because young people who stayed away for more than one night may have been in several different situations whilst away, so the figures that follow add up to more than 100%. Just over half (51%) of young people said they stayed with friends for some or all of the time and 35% stayed with relatives. However around one in six (16%) said that they had slept rough at some point whilst away. Amongst those young people who had run away during the last 12 months the proportion was higher at around 20%.

Based on national estimates of 100,000 young people running away overnight per year in the UK this suggest that between 15,000 and 20,000 of these young people will be without anywhere to stay for at least one night whilst away from home.

Young people who were hurt or harmed

In addition, the *Still Running 2* questionnaire asked young people if they had been 'hurt or harmed' on the most recent occasion that they had run away or been forced to leave home. Between 8% and 9% of young people said yes to this question. Figures were higher amongst those young people who had slept rough (17%) and amongst the small number who had stayed with a stranger. However, around 8% of those who had only stayed with a friend and 4% of those who had only stayed with relatives had also been hurt or harmed. This does not mean that these young people experienced harm whilst staying at this particular place. However it does indicate that, even where young people had somewhere to stay for the night with someone they knew, there was still some level of risk to their welfare whilst away from home.

Young people 'at risk'

Clearly any young person who is away from their usual home is at some level of risk. The above finding indicates this is true even for those young people who stay with relatives whilst away. However it is also apparent that some young people may be at greater risk than others whilst away. In order to explore this issue, *Still Running 2* suggested several composite indicators of risk. One of these - combining the following factors:

- sleeping rough or staying with a stranger, and/or
- being hurt or harmed whilst away

seems pertinent to the current project as it focuses on young people who may be considered to be particularly in need of emergency support whilst away from home.

Around 21% of all runaways, and 22% of those who had run away in the last 12 months, fell into one or both of the above categories. Making use of this combined variable we undertook some additional analysis³ of the *Still Running 2* data set in order to identify which young people were most likely to belong to this 'high risk' group.

This analysis suggests that there are a complex set of interactions at play here. As noted in *Still Running 2*, males who run away are more likely to say that they were hurt or harmed than females, and this is at least partly related to the much higher rates of sleeping rough amongst males. Our additional analysis also suggests that young people in some minority groups (including disabled young people, young people born outside the UK, and young people who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual) were at higher risk whilst away.

The likelihood of belonging to this 'high risk' group (i.e. falling into one or both of the above categories) was significantly related to aspects of running away experiences. Young people who had started running away at an early age and had run away more often (these two factors are also associated with one another) were more likely to be 'at risk'. Young people who had been reported missing to the police were also more likely to be in this 'risk' group (31%) than those who had not (19%).

³ Fuller details of this analysis will be published separately. Please contact the authors of this report for further information.

Summary

In summary the evidence suggests that a significant proportion of young runaways - in the region of 20% to 25% - have nowhere safe to stay for some or all of the time that they are away from home. This includes young people who sleep rough and also those who sleep with friends or relatives but who also reported being hurt or harmed. Evidently, a higher proportion of young runaways can be regarded as being at some risk of one of these experiences. This evidence suggests that some form of immediate support should be made available and accessible to these young people whilst they are away from home.

2.2 Differing perceptions of need

There were sharply divergent views amongst professionals involved in the interviews and consultation events regarding:

- the numbers of young people running away and
- the level of need for emergency accommodation or other forms of immediate support within their local areas.

Some of this divergence seemed to be linked to the presence or absence of emergency accommodation services for young runaways within the locality.

As reviewed in the introduction, there are currently three geographical areas where refuge is available for young runaways in the UK - Greater Glasgow, South Yorkshire and London. Generally, across the range of professionals in the statutory and voluntary sectors in these areas who contributed to this study, there was a view that there was a need for emergency accommodation for young runaways in certain circumstances and that the refuge projects formed a valued component of an overall network of services for young people in the locality. One local authority professional interviewed for the project described the views of senior local authority staff on the local refuge project as being '*very positive*'.

In other geographical areas opinions were much more mixed with some professionals feeling that there was a need for emergency accommodation provision and other forms of emergency response whilst others expressed doubts about the likely level of this need.

Adding to this picture, evidence from professionals gathered for this project indicates that there are still cases of young people being accommodated in police stations overnight in some areas due to lack of alternative options, as reported in earlier research (Evans et al, 2007). This was illustrated by one of the young people we interviewed who actually experienced extended stays:

I used to be in the cells for three or four days. They can't let you out until your mum and dad come for you. They just kept me in the police cell because I didn't want anyone else there - a stranger.

Interview with young person

A second point of divergence is between rural and urban areas. Although it is difficult to generalise, there seemed to be a lower perception of need in rural areas. This appeared to be partly to do with the distinction between proportions and absolute numbers - the small population base in many rural areas implies a relatively low, and potentially sporadic, level of need in absolute terms. It appeared also to be partly to do with a belief amongst professionals that there are more extensive informal support networks in these types of areas than in urban areas.

In brief, the views expressed by professionals who did not feel that there was a need for emergency accommodation provision fell into the following categories:

1. Lack of local evidence of young people running away. This was sometimes linked to a lack of awareness of the national research findings on this issue, and sometimes linked to queries about whether these findings were applicable to the particular local area. In the context of the latter concern, it is relevant to note the rationale and findings of the regional survey conducted in South Yorkshire as discussed earlier.
2. A view that existing services - in particular, emergency duty teams and emergency residential and foster care placements - were sufficient to meet the need that existed.
3. A view that it was generally possible to find somewhere temporary for young people to stay with family or friends.

We will address the third point above in the next chapter of the report. In terms of the first and second points, this project has therefore highlighted a mismatch between:

- on the one hand, available research evidence on the levels of running away and risks faced by young people
- on the other hand, the perceptions of professionals in some geographical areas regarding the nature and extent of this need.

We now turn to the evidence gathered from young people on experiences of running away, focusing specifically in this chapter on their attitudes to and experiences of seeking help. It will be seen that this evidence offers a potentially coherent explanation for the mismatch between evidence of need and perceptions of need identified above.

2.3 Evidence from young people

Survey findings

Previous research has highlighted the hidden nature of much of the incidence of running away.

The *Still Running 2* questionnaire asked young people about seeking help whilst away and also about being reported as missing to the police during the most recent occasion that they were away from home. The results were as follows.

In terms of help seeking, only a fifth of young people who had run away overnight answered 'yes' to the question '*Did you go anywhere for help?*' Young people who answered 'yes' to the that question were asked '*Where did you go?*' The key finding in relation to the topic of this report is that most of the 20% of young runaways who did seek help did so through informal support networks such as friends or family. Only around 5% of the total sample of overnight runaways said that they had sought help from a professional agency.

With respect to missing person reports young people were asked the following question: '*Did your parents or carers report you missing to the police?*' This was a closed question with the three possible responses being 'Yes', 'No' and 'Not sure'. Results are shown in the table below.

Table 1 - Whether young people were, to their knowledge, reported as missing to the police

Yes	19%
Not sure	13%
No	68%

N = 1,041. Missing cases = 13.

Rees & Lee, 2005

Clearly there are potential limitations to young people's knowledge about parents' actions whilst away from home - although young people would often be aware of having been reported missing after they returned home as a result of the 'safe and well check' which police conduct after a young person who has been reported missing returns home.

However, the above finding is corroborated by projects providing emergency accommodation to young people, who confirmed during the interviews and consultation events that a substantial proportion of young people they worked with had not been reported as missing.

In general, professionals were aware of this under-reporting and suggested a number of reasons for it - including parents knowing young people's whereabouts whilst away and parents' reluctance to have contact with the police.

Overall, the picture presented by the above findings is that the majority of young runaways are likely not to be visible to professional agencies whilst they are away from home. Lack of awareness amongst professionals about the scale of running away locally and the circumstances of young people while they are missing may therefore be connected to this problem of relative invisibility.

Data gathered from young people for this project

The information gathered from young people for this project through individual interviews and focus groups throws further light on the above findings. It suggests that there are a number of barriers to young people accessing support of any kind whilst they are away from home. We will first consider situations where young people might have wanted support of the right kind⁴ if it had been available.

The first barrier is lack of awareness of helping services. This issue has also been highlighted in previous research studies (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999). A second major barrier is young people's perceptions of professionals. A number of young people said that they felt that they would not be listened to, taken seriously, or cared about if they went to agencies for help. Sometimes these perceptions were based on previous experiences - including previous running away incidents where professionals had been perceived as unhelpful or as offering the wrong kind of interventions. Young people sometimes felt they were being sidelined and had to put themselves at greater risk in order to get help

So I had to put myself at risk for them to understand I can't go home.

Young person focus group York

⁴ Please see Chapter 3, Section 3 for a discussion of the possible characteristics of effective emergency support.

Many young people were aware of their need to talk about what was going on but trust confidentiality and consistency were key issues. There were also some specific issues in this category relating to diversity - for example, a belief that agencies would not fully understand the cultural issues involved for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

A third barrier was concern about the consequences of seeking help from agencies. Young people in certain situations were concerned about the consequences for themselves. Typically there was a fear (again sometimes based on previous experience) that they would immediately be returned to the place they had run from, without attention being paid to the reasons why they had run away. Some young people specifically referred to needing some time to think - a respite from the home situation. Other young people were concerned about the possible impact on the family. Some young people wanted to protect their parents and avoid agencies becoming involved with the family. Others feared the consequences if they mentioned the abuse they were experiencing which had led to them running away.

So, there were a number of reasons why young people might not seek help from agencies whilst away, and the following quotes illustrate some of the risks faced by young people as a consequence:

I'd rather stay on the street and be nearly dead than just turn to somebody and say this is where I am... Once when I was away I didn't eat or nothing for three weeks and I collapsed and it got to being taken to hospital some stranger found me on the street and rung an ambulance. Cos I didn't want to turn to nobody.

And

Once I stayed in a crack house just to hide. They are not bothered... the dealer and other people are not bothered why you're there because they're off their faces obviously so they're not bothered why you're there.

Extracts from interview with young person

In summary, the above evidence would suggest that there are substantial barriers to young runaways seeking formal help whilst away from home and for these reasons there will be many young people who may be in need of some form of emergency support, but who will not be visible to local agencies.

The interviews also highlighted situations where young people might not seek help or support from agencies, even if the above barriers were resolved. These included young people who were running away to someone or something. Examples included 'looked after' young people who had run away from care to be with their parents; young people who were running away to be with a boyfriend or girlfriend; and young people who wanted to be out with friends. These groups of young people were unlikely to perceive themselves as being 'in need' of emergency accommodation and were unlikely to use it even if it were offered, although from an adult professional point of view they may be judged to be at significant risk whilst away from home, as the following quotes illustrate:

He understands yer - he's the same age as you... Even if your boyfriend is abusive towards you, you know he loves you... Even if he hits you it doesn't matter you've still got a place to stay. It may not be the best option by the eyes of authorities but for you it is.

Young person in focus group discussing hypothetical scenario of running to boyfriend

I was addicted to heroin that's part of the issue why I ran away. I was addicted to it at 12 ... I got off it totally a year ago.

Young person who repeatedly ran away to his mother

I'd do anything I'd do absolutely anything to just stay away ... If people run away cos they're angry they will turn to people but ... If you want to run away to disappear from your life then you're not going to be found.

Young person (female) who ran from foster care

2.4 Concluding comments

Summary

To briefly summarise the material presented in this chapter:

- There is substantial evidence through surveys of young people of a significant level of running away amongst young people in the UK. Exact estimates are difficult to reach, but the previously published estimate of around 100,000 young people running away overnight per year in the UK is well supported by the existing evidence.
- There is huge diversity in the experiences of young people whilst away from home. However, research suggests that more than 20% of young runaways will either sleep rough, or with someone they have just met, and/or experience harm whilst away from home. Clearly a larger proportion of young runaways can be regarded as being 'at risk' of being in one of these situations.
- Despite this evidence there is substantial divergence in professional knowledge, opinions and perceptions about the level of running away and level of need amongst runaways in local areas. This seems to be particularly true for areas which do not have a dedicated emergency accommodation service for young runaways.
- Evidence from young people goes some way towards explaining this gap between evidence and perceptions. It would seem that most young runaways are not in contact with professional agencies whilst away from home. This is due to a number of barriers including lack of knowledge of services, trust and fear of consequences. Some of these young people, rather than simply not seeking help, will actively avoid any contact with professional agencies whilst away from home. Their lack of visibility to agencies may therefore affect professional perceptions of local need.

Recommendations

One of the key questions which this project has aimed to address is how the need for emergency accommodation for young runaways within local areas can be effectively identified. Despite substantial evidence from national surveys this project has confirmed that more specific local evidence of levels of running away and need for emergency support continues to be lacking. We also know that many young people are not reported missing to the police and are not known to agencies. Therefore the only practical option for accurately assessing need would appear to be self-report surveys of running away. However such surveys conducted in isolation would be very costly. Therefore we would recommend that questions about running away should be integrated into more general self-report surveys of young people which may be undertaken at a local or national level. It would be important for such work to use consistent question formats in order to generate comparable findings.

Recommendation 1:

There is a lack of reliable evidence of need at local level and it is recommended that questions about running away should be integrated into self-report surveys of young people as a means of filling this gap.

At the same time, the evidence from national surveys is now substantial and this, taken together with the local and regional surveys which have been conducted, suggests that there is no systematic variation in running away rates between areas. There is therefore currently no reason to assume that need does not exist in particular geographical areas. However, there appears still to be a need to effectively disseminate the findings from this research, particularly that relating to levels of running away, the risks that young people face, and the likely hidden nature of the issue, in order that there is a good knowledge of the issue amongst key local decision-makers and stakeholders. There is a need for a continuing dissemination and communication strategy (led by government departments) with key stakeholders in order to contribute to effective policy and practice development in relation to runaways. Contributors suggested it would be helpful to link the findings in this report with other national policy initiatives, such as the work around National Indicator 71 in England.

Recommendation 2:

There is a need to more effectively communicate with key local stakeholders and decision makers regarding the learning from the last two decades of research and practice with young runaways.

In addition the information from young people presented in this chapter has pointed to some of the barriers which exist to providing accessible emergency accommodation and support services to young runaways whilst they are away from home. We explore this issue further in the next chapter.

3 Responding to need

In the previous chapter we examined the evidence regarding the level of need amongst young runaways for some form of immediate support. We concluded that, whilst local evidence is still scarce, the research evidence that does exist suggests that there is a need for some form of safety net for young runaways in all areas. In this chapter we move on to consider what form this response might take, based on previous research and the new information gathered through this project. This chapter focuses on initial crisis response rather than the detail of the provision of emergency accommodation services which is the topic of the next chapter.

To begin with it is worth noting that some professionals queried the focus of this particular project. For example:

Emergency accommodation is the wrong focus. We need more intervention / prevention projects .. that respond rapidly to families when things go wrong, which take systemic family approaches and build communication and mutual respect / understanding, and are solution focused.

E-mail feedback from local authority

This quote highlights a point which has become clear through the course of this project - that it is not possible to consider the topic of emergency accommodation without also considering the wider context. This is because the level of need for emergency accommodation within an area is intrinsically linked to the extent and quality of the network of local services for young people. For example, on the one hand, early prevention may reduce the number of running away incidents in an area. On the other hand, accessible support services may increase the likelihood of young runaways requesting emergency help thus increasing the known (rather than hidden) need for emergency accommodation.

Thus, any discussion of emergency accommodation provision needs to give consideration to the place which this provision can take within a coherent network of services.

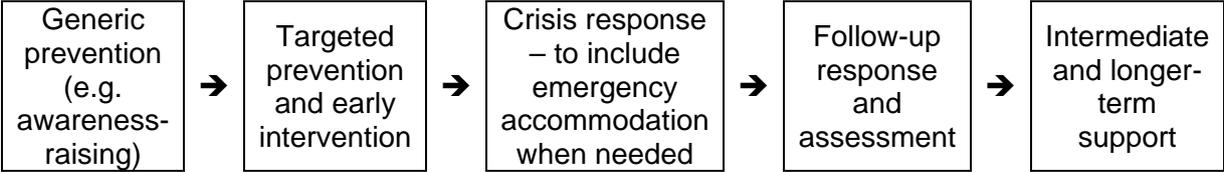
It is well beyond the scope and resources of this particular project to consider in detail the broader issue of the provision of such a network of services. However, in this chapter we present a brief overview of the continuum of services which may be needed in order to effectively respond to the issue of young people running away. This overview is based on views gathered during this project and also previous research on the topic. We then move on later in the chapter to discuss crisis response services for runaways in more detail, breaking down the discussion into two key strands - the nature of the crisis response service, and the accessibility of services. This then naturally leads on to the provision of emergency accommodation as one aspect of crisis response, which is the topic of Chapter 4.

3.1 A network of services to tackle running away

So, a key point to emerge from the project is that emergency accommodation cannot be considered in isolation from a coherent set of services for young people who run away. There are two main aspects to this.

First, it may be more helpful to think in terms of crisis-based response services for young people, of which emergency accommodation would be one essential component. Second, these crisis response services need to be seen as the central part of a continuum of services to tackle the issues faced by young people who run away which also include preventative work at one end of the continuum, and assessment and longer-term follow-up work at the other end:

Figure 1 - A continuum of responses to tackle the issue of running away



An additional point of clarification in presenting this continuum is that it is not meant to imply that all the services required need to be targeted specifically at young runaways. In particular the second and fifth components of the continuum may be generic services which can be inclusive of the needs of young people who run away.

Generic prevention

The first component of the continuum of responses would be universal rather than targeted. The purpose of this would be to raise awareness of the issue of running away, the risks and the alternatives amongst young people and possibly also amongst the general public. The aims of this approach might be first to enable young people to access appropriate support at an earlier stage, before they get to the point of running away; and, second, to ensure that they know what options are open to them if they do run away. There have been several pilot educational schemes along the above lines aimed at young people in the UK, although to date we are not aware of any evaluations of the efficacy of such initiatives in reducing running away rates. Some examples of suggestions made by professionals in consultation events include peer education initiatives and inclusion of this topic in relevant parts of the school curriculum.

The awareness-raising might also focus on the general public as we know that young people are more likely to turn to informal support such as relatives or the parents of friends than to professional agencies. If such informal supporters were well informed about available services then this could play an important role in ensuring that young people gain access to agencies.

Targeted prevention and early intervention

The second component of the continuum would involve targeted support for young people and families to tackle the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that contribute to running away. This might take place before a running away incident has occurred or in response to an early incident such as running away during the day. Such services need not be exclusively focused on running away as the background family factors associated with running away are also risk factors for a number of other issues and problems in young people’s lives.

Several agencies contributing to the consultation made the point that effective preventative services could substantially reduce the rate of running away in an area therefore also reducing the likely level of need for emergency accommodation. These agencies argued that there is therefore a need to balance the resources available to set up and run emergency accommodation with the resources available to undertake preventative work. This applies equally to other components of the above continuum. This is also an area where there has already been some practice development in the UK. There are some emerging promising examples of good practice in respect of preventative work - for example the *Talk Don’t Walk* project in Warrington. We would note that the issues of accessibility discussed later in this chapter in relation to crisis response work are likely to apply equally to preventative work.

In addition, professionals in one consultation event identified a local initiative led by the police to reduce the 'pull' factors associated with running away by targeting known adults and places that tend to attract young runaways.

Crisis response services

The third component of the continuum would be the availability of accessible and appropriate crisis response services for young people. We suggest, on the basis of the views gathered through this project, that the initial focus of these services should be on immediate support to resolve the situation. This could involve a return home arrangements to stay with friends or relatives, or the provision of formal emergency accommodation. Within this component, the emergency accommodation could be more or less flexible or fixed depending on the level of need and demand within a particular area. It seems likely this may need to evolve over time in response to learning and evidence of need. We discuss the above in more detail in the later sections of this chapter.

Follow-up response and assessment

Feedback from young people also highlighted follow-up support as a critical issue. Some young people felt that once their immediate crisis had been resolved, agency commitments to provide follow-up help had not been kept.

Before, my auntie kicked me out and my Dad was still refusing for (me) to go home and I had nowhere to go. So I went to school and they contacted social services, and they didn't help at all. They phoned up my Nan, my Nan said: 'yeah, I can have her for a night' and this person come and pick me up and said: 'I promise you this isn't the last time you'll hear from us, we will work with you' and stuff, and I've heard nothing from her since.

Interview with young person

This meant both that the underlying issues were not addressed and that young people's confidence in professional interventions was eroded. It seems reasonable to think that this experience not only does little to reduce the likelihood of further running away incidents, but also makes it more unlikely that young people will seek professional help if they do run away again - as suggested by some of the quotes from young people presented earlier in the report.

A national evaluation of pilot runaways projects operating in 2003 to 2004 (Rees et al, 2005) identified examples of the positive benefits of a speedy and appropriate intervention, from the perspective both of the young person and parents (see for example Case Study 1 on page 40 of that report).

Balancing the above point, some professionals felt that it was important to consider the timing of follow-up interventions on a case-by-case basis, and that sometimes such an intervention might be more effective if it is undertaken a little while after the running away incident.

Research has indicated that running away is often a symptom of serious underlying problems within the home environment and also that there is substantial overlap between the likelihood of running away and the likelihood of other problems and issues including depression, offending, truancy and substance misuse. On this basis a substantial proportion of runaways are likely to have 'additional needs'. There was agreement with this viewpoint from many professionals attending the consultation events and also a reasonable level of support for the proposition that all young people who run away should have some form of assessment of their needs.

There was considerable discussion in the consultation events about how this might most effectively be achieved, which agencies would be most appropriate to take a lead role in this respect, and the nature of assessment processes to support this. Some of this discussion in the regional consultation events in England focused on experiences and views of the implementation of assessments under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). This included variations in understanding and implementation of CAF in different local authorities, and some concerns about the time commitment involved in acting as the lead professionals which appeared to be a potential barrier to widespread implementation. However, much of this evidence is anecdotal and cannot be considered to offer a representative picture. Clearly it is beyond the scope of this project to explore these issues in detail.

Evidence gathered through this project also indicates that the use of other professionals (e.g. voluntary sector agencies) to undertake return home interviews is still quite patchy. Police representatives were clear that assessment is not part of their professional remit in terms of 'return home' interviews or 'safe and well' checks for young people reported as missing. At the time of writing, a pilot scheme is being undertaken in the Grampian region in Scotland to explore the strengths of different models of undertaking these interviews.

In some areas it appeared to be standard practice for police to make referrals of young runaways to local authorities for a needs assessment. However there were understandable concerns about the potential resource implications of this. There was also discussion in England about the use of the CAF pre-assessment form but it was felt that this was perhaps not specific or detailed enough to be helpful in this context. An alternative proposal was to devise an initial assessment form specifically for use in follow-up work with young people known to have run away from home.

Professionals in several consultation events commented on the overlap between the needs of young runaways and issues of child protection and safeguarding in relation to older young people. Some professionals felt that there was currently insufficient recognition of, and attention to, these issues by agencies. There were also concerns about the capacity of statutory services to meet an increased level of demand for services for young people in this age group.

Intermediate and longer-term support

Finally, in terms of longer-term support, many professionals contributing to this project were of the view that, where longer-term work is needed, this would fall under the remit of mainstream services. One of the key reasons for this was the recognition that 'young runaways' is not a description of a distinct identifiable sub-group of young people but rather is a description of a temporary situation of young people with a potentially much wider range of needs and issues.

Nevertheless there are still issues to consider regarding thresholds for services, the capacity of mainstream services to respond, and young people's willingness to engage with them. An alternative option, suggested through this consultation, might be for alternative professionals (for example, social workers or mental health practitioners) to be attached or seconded to a specialist runaways service to deliver some of these medium term services. This would be consistent with moves towards the development of multidisciplinary services for children and young people.

Support for parents and carers

The above discussion has focused primarily on the support needs of young people. However, support for the parents and carers of young runaways is important (and sometimes crucial for long term change), whether this takes the form of mediation or relationship

building, or of supporting parenting skills with adolescents. The problems that lead to running away are not generally located within the young person who runs away, and so working with the parents (if they agree to it) is helpful (see for example an evaluation of family support work at the ASTRA Project - Rees & Medforth, 2004). This issue was highlighted by a number of local authority and voluntary sector professionals working in this area and should be a key component of the overall range of services that are available to respond to the issue of running away.

3.2 Crisis response

Throughout this report we make a distinction between the need for a crisis response service and the need for emergency accommodation. We take this approach because there was considerable reference both in the consultation events and in the individual interviews about this distinction. Whilst some professionals expressed doubts about the level of need for an emergency service in their area, others accepted this need but questioned the need for this service to include the provision of accommodation. Participants who held the latter view felt either that young people would usually be able to return home, and/or that it would usually be possible to find them an alternative temporary place to stay with extended family, friends and other local support networks.

Professionals in the consultation events often focused on the choice between three immediate options for a young person who is currently away from home:

- a) Return home (i.e. to the place which the young person ran from or left)
- b) Informal solution (extended family or friends)
- c) Emergency accommodation provision

There was in fact a broad agreement amongst participants that in some circumstances one or both of either (a) or (b) were viable options - i.e. no participant expressed the view that a young runaway should always be provided with emergency accommodation. So the question really revolves around the extent to which each of these options is viable and appropriate in different contexts. We will deal with these two aspects separately.

Firstly considering viability, some professionals reported that in practice they had always or almost always been able either to negotiate an immediate return home or find a temporary informal solution. This appeared to be more often the case in rural areas linked to a view about better informal support networks in these types of areas as compared to urban areas (this is a tentative suggestion rather than a definitive finding).

Second, there is a central debate here regarding the perceived appropriateness and desirability of each of the options. It appeared that, for many professional participants contributing to interviews and consultation events, there was a hierarchy of preferences with a return home being seen as the best option, followed by an informal solution, and then the provision of emergency accommodation being seen as a final safety net when the above options have been exhausted.

Clearly the costs of formal provision may be a motivating factor here, but there was also an argument that returning young people home immediately increased the likelihood of positive outcomes. This stemmed from a concern that the provision of formal emergency accommodation might be damaging to relationships between the young person and their parents or carers. There is evidently some risk of this happening if the intervention does not adequately address this potential. However, on the other hand, there are also indications that short-term emergency accommodation can provide a breathing space and time to reflect,

both for young people and for their parents and carers, and that there is the potential to use this as an opportunity to work with all members of the family to help to resolve issues. The recent independent evaluation report on the ROC refuge in Glasgow provided an example of this:

One parent emphasised how the refuge had provided her and her daughter with support that she was unable to obtain from any other agency. While she had struggled to get support from social work, the family obtained a quick response from ROC workers who came out and spoke with the family. This gave the family a bit of 'breathing space' and the parents felt that finally, someone was prepared to listen to both parents and the young person. Importantly, she notes that 'we never felt judged as parents, they never asked us to do anything unreasonable and would take into account things that we didn't agree with'. She emphasised, 'to be perfectly honest, they saved my sanity'. Her daughter was admitted to the refuge on more than one occasion, but it was important that she was able to contact ROC when tensions rose at home and it provided her with an alternative to running away.

Malloch, 2006: 37

It would seem that there are potential advantages as well as disadvantages in this respect regarding the provision of emergency accommodation, and much is likely to depend on the style and nature of the project's work.

The evidence we have gathered from young people and from professionals also highlights some other relevant issues to consider in terms of weighing up the benefits of the different options.

First, as will be discussed in more detail later (see section on Accessibility) the experience of feeling listened to is of fundamental importance to young people. Some of the main barriers to seeking help related to the likelihood of being returned home:

[When you run away] They just see it as a bad thing. They don't see why, they just ... they ask why but just put me back where I was. What's the point in asking? ...

This young person did not seek help whilst away:

Cos they'd just stick me back where I left ... and like if the police found me I'd tell them straight If you go and you put me back there I'm just leaving again ... but then they put me back and I'd say I'm just going to leave again when you've gone and they knew I would. I don't see the point...

Young people also had mixed views about informal solutions. One young person who had stayed at a friend's mother's house had positive experiences:

A very familiar environment, I can get everything off my chest, I can relax. And silly things, like getting to school on time, because my Mum's always making me late... it's just easier there, I get more...comfort and everything whereas at my Mum's house, say I was upset at school, my Mum wouldn't give me any comfort.

On the other hand the same young person's friend:

Doesn't like it because her mum doesn't mind if I smoke so I sit downstairs with her mum and have a fag and we have a good old chat till 2 o' clock in the morning but [the friend] has to go up to bed at like eleven she gets really angry and I say 'I'm sorry .. it's just I've got problems and stuff', and it causes an argument and I feel guilty cos I've just come round her house crying and that causes an argument.

There are also clearly safeguarding / child protection issues to weigh up in making a decision about accommodation options for a young person in crisis. As an illustration from the current study, the following extracts are from an interview with a young person who was repeatedly thrown out of home by her father from the age of 11. She was thrown out once or twice a week and overall 'more than a hundred times'. She linked this experience to wider problems at home:

Like something had gone wrong even in my mum and dad's relationship and it used to get blamed on me.

Sometimes she stayed at friends' houses, but sometimes she had nowhere to stay:

I'd just used to sit there and be scared. In a hut in people's gardens. In like this shed thing

If there was someone there that can talk to you and get you somewhere to sleep just for that night that's what I think instead of staying on the streets where there's people that could kidnap you or rape you ... I think I'm quite lucky me... I had a lot of bad past like... someone could have killed me when I were on them streets that's why I don't understand why my mum could actually stick up for my dad and throw me out

She didn't feel that anyone in her family would listen to her:

My dad used to be proper quiet ... none of my family believed me but [on one occasion] they saw what a knobhead he can be. He's proper quiet and stuff ... I were just an arguing post and a kicking out post.

She said, eventually, her father: 'nearly killed me, I had black and blue neck'. Although she tried to hide the bruising because she was scared of her dad, her social worker saw it. When she went back with the worker to get her stuff her bags were packed by the door.

Two key issues in this case study are the willingness to listen and the level of trust that are required for young people to disclose the full story of why they have run away. Professionals who have worked in refuges, interviewed as part of the study, drew attention to the potential for the development of trust whilst in refuge, leading to new disclosures:

When children come into refuge it's not just about meeting their immediate needs. It's also an opportunity to try and help them get support to prevent them from running away again ... so it's important for any model that's developed to take account of that real opportunity to engage with children and families. When you look at social work models and crisis intervention models - historically that has been a time to look at their needs afresh and get a different perspective - and be able to engage with people - so that's really important for emergency accommodation to be able to offer - not just 'we are going to keep you safe for one night', but ... actually to reassess what's going on... You will notice lots of things about young people - for example eating disorders... you also build up a relationship with children if you've got skilled staff which obviously is very very important and ... children ... disclose issues to them around child protection issues but also around other things, other needs that have not been noticed in the past. It's an opportunity to engage with very vulnerable children and that opportunity needs to be taken and that requires a particular model with the staff around but obviously those staff need to be skilled, they need to be able to engage with young people and think about the range of issues that those young people may have.

Interview with professional

This perspective was highlighted also by an independent evaluation of one of the current refuges in operation in the UK, in Glasgow:

High levels of physical and/or emotional abuse were identified as an issue for a number of young people, as were problems at school. Refuge staff who were in close proximity to young people, living alongside them during their stay in the refuge, were able to obtain insights into the lives of young people which other agencies may have struggled to identify. As one social worker commented:

“This stay highlighted what was going on in the young person’s life. In actual fact it uncovered much deeper issues. Assessment highlighted emotional abuse - turned things around - we realised it wasn’t safe for the young person to go home, something we wouldn’t have noticed previously”

Malloch, 2006: 14

Whilst the above points were made in relation to refuge provision, they are equally applicable to the provision of other forms of immediate support to young runaways who are away from home. We would suggest that it is vital that professionals view this as an opportunity to meet young people’s needs and this should involve a balanced assessment of the most appropriate immediate solutions.

It could be argued that even if there may be some level of risk at home it would be possible to pick this issue up with young people through follow-up work. From a professional perspective this may make sense. However from a young person’s perspective it may not. Our interviews with young people suggest that some may view an immediate return home (however skilfully negotiated) as evidence that professionals are not really willing to listen to and acknowledge the reasons that they ran away in the first place. This is understandable bearing in mind that young people in this situation have already made the very difficult decision to leave their home and we know from extensive research evidence both in the UK and elsewhere that this is often a sign of serious problems (as acknowledged in the ministerial foreword to the Young Runaways Action Plan, DSCF, 2008). If young people perceive being returned home negatively then it seems likely that they will be less inclined to meaningfully participate in follow-up work.

We have anecdotal evidence from young people we have worked with running away from home. Especially where there is a real disagreement with mum and or dad and/or who cares for them. Where everything is blown up, and at a particular moment in time they are not going to be taken into care - but equally there needs to be some kind of breathing space. I can think of a number of occasions where the young person is saying ‘I am not going back’, but the mum is saying ‘I want her back’. And there has been a big row. This particular young lady said ‘that’s it I am not going home - I’m gonna go to the park - I’m gonna go for a wander - I might go to my mate’. For me that’s a sort of classic one of if we have somewhere, that was emergency accommodation, whatever that may look like, it could provide some kind of breathing space. But emergency accommodation in itself is not enough, somewhere to have a bit of a night, is not enough. The important work is to go straight back to work with that family. To reconnect to look at both the short- term ... and some of the longer term issues that are around the family.

Runaways project

We also raised, at the consultation events with professionals, the issue of agencies negotiating emergency accommodation through informal support networks, and this topic elicited mixed views. Some professionals felt that this was a viable and realistic solution in some contexts, whilst others felt that there were significant risks involved in agencies engaging in such work. Again, much is likely to depend on the way in which such

arrangements are made and the checks and balances that it is possible to put in place to ensure the safety and welfare of young people. It would also seem vital that, where such arrangements are made, there is prompt follow-up over the following days to maintain contact with the young person and help to find a longer-term resolution to the issues that led to the running away incident.

In summary the approach taken at the initial contact with a young person, and the project philosophy underlying this approach, may have significant implications for the prospects of establishing trust and successfully engaging with young people; and may also have repercussions in terms of safeguarding and welfare both in the short-term and the longer-term. We would therefore highlight that this is a critical area in terms of working effectively with young runaways. The evidence presented in this section suggests that it is vital that this initial work is carried out on a case-by-case basis, with a balanced assessment of risk, taking into account young people's views and wishes and without preconceptions about which type of accommodation solution is generally to be preferred.

3.3 Accessibility of services

In this section we focus on the issue of how crisis response services might be perceived and accessed by young people. As indicated in the previous chapter on evidence of need, one of the main reasons why agencies might not be aware of the level of need amongst young runaways in their locality is that young people in this situation may often adopt a strategy of actively avoiding contact with professionals whilst away from home. The reasons for this strategy include perceptions about the usefulness of services; fear of being immediately returned home or to a placement, being taken into care; and the potential consequences for the young person and their family of professional involvement. In addition, some young people we interviewed for this research and for previous similar studies indicated that they simply were not aware of services that they could approach. For these reasons the issue of accessibility of services is a fundamental one.

In this section we first look at some of the factors that need to be considered in providing a suitable crisis response service and then move on to consider options for how these services might be provided. As pointed out in one of the consultation events, it should be borne in mind that young people may not define themselves or present themselves to services as having 'run away'.

Characteristics of an effective crisis response model

Timing

The availability of services at the appropriate times is a key aspect of accessibility. Monitoring statistics from young runaways' services provide some indication of the likely timing of young people's need for emergency support and indicate that a majority of young runaways are likely to seek help outside office hours. For example, data provided by Missing People indicates that more than two-thirds of the 2,646 calls logged by the Runaway Helpline project in the six months from April 2009 to September 2009 inclusive were received outside office hours (i.e. not between 9am and 5pm on Mondays to Fridays)

Clearly, then, a genuinely accessible service needs to be available 24 hours a day. This presents challenges, particularly in areas with a small population base as discussed later in this section.

Capacity and skills

The importance of the initial contact between a professional and a young runaway has already been discussed in the previous section. We would therefore note that it is essential that:

Any first time engagement with young people who run away or go missing needs to be handled very carefully as they may be distrustful of services run by adults. This incident may be a chance to engage them, either to counter-balance their previous experiences or perceptions of services. The practitioner's approach will dictate whether young people will engage in the service or not, young people will try and challenge the practitioners. They must be sensitive and believe what the young person says. The young person will either begin to trust you or disengage straight away. How you engage young people in the first form of contact will dictate whether they trust you or not.

Interview with professional

The interviews and focus groups with young people conducted for this study generated a list of aspects of working style which young people felt were important for working with young runaways. This includes - confidentiality, time to develop trust, consistency of ongoing support, availability at the right time, commitment, a non-judgemental approach, active listening and valuing the young person and their perspective. Clearly these attributes are not specific to the issue of young runaways and can be applied more generally.

Young people's perceptions of services

The interviews with young people conducted for this project suggest that the credibility and trust in professional agencies are key issues for many young people who run away from home, often linked to previous experiences of helping agencies as outlined in Chapter 2. There are therefore some critical issues to consider in terms of young people's perceptions of services. In particular the perceived independence of services from statutory services may be a key issue for many young people (and in some cases for parents also). We discuss this issue in more detail in Chapter 5.

Young people's awareness of services

Given the issues about lack of awareness of services, and the hidden nature of many running away incidents, it is important that emergency support services within local areas are effectively publicised directly to young people, as well as to other members of the general public who may be in a position of supporting them. Some emergency accommodation projects have found that, for example, presentations in schools have led to a noticeable increase in referrals from particular localities.

Some professionals expressed concern about the idea of publicising emergency accommodation provision on the grounds that this could create a demand that would not otherwise have existed. This type of concern has been expressed throughout the history of emergency accommodation provision in the UK (see, for example, Rees, 2001). In practice, projects which have provided emergency accommodation for young runaways have not experienced this as an issue. These projects have typically operated very strict referral and admission criteria, and these means would seem a more appropriate way of tackling the issue than setting up a service but then choosing not to publicise it. As one member of staff from a runaways project put it: '*young people run away because of a need, not because of an advert*'.

As suggested above, an initial emphasis on crisis response which explores a range of options - rather than specifically on emergency accommodation provision - may provide a useful avenue for establishing clear expectations and understandings of the nature of the service.

Finally, we would note from previous research that 'word-of-mouth' recommendation between young people can be an important source of knowledge about services (Rees, 2001). As noted in previous studies, this type of awareness will develop gradually over time and this links to some of the issues concerning the commissioning and funding of services discussed in Chapter 5.

Options for provision of emergency support

We now turn to the issue of how the type of crisis response service discussed above might be provided.

Emergency Duty Team

One obvious option is that existing emergency duty services could perform this role. Indeed, there was much discussion during the consultation events about the potential role of emergency duty services in responding to running away incidents. Some representatives from local authorities wished to emphasise that young people should make use of such services and that local authorities had a duty to respond to their needs.

Our EDT team has its own discrete foster carers who provide short term emergency placements to enable an adequate assessment of need to be undertaken
E-mail consultation response from local authority

There was a good example of a crisis-response model for young people in general linked to the local emergency duty team in Durham (see Chapter 4).

However, representatives from some other local authority areas and many participants from the voluntary sector and the police expressed doubts about the viability of this option in their areas. The main concern was about the capacity of emergency duty services to respond. There was an impression that these services were extremely stretched in many areas and that this might lead to a variable response to young people. Some concerns were also expressed about the range of needs and issues which these services dealt with, given their generic role, and whether there would be sufficient capacity for targeted specialist support for young runaways.

As an example, one local authority representative interviewed saw a key role for the local emergency duty services in terms of responding to runaways:

you want to do a proper assessment on whether a child needs accommodation away from home when they have been missing from home.

Interview with professional

But this respondent felt that currently the service was under-resourced to undertake this role.

One example of a solution which potentially addresses this issue is that the ROC refuge in Glasgow has an arrangement with the local emergency duty team that they can jointly assess young people's need for refuge.

Additionally, some professionals were concerned about the high thresholds in operation for access to emergency support and felt that these might mean that young runaways needs were not met.

It is beyond the scope of this project to explore in more detail the role of emergency duty teams. This ought, however, to be an area for further research.

The views of young people are also relevant here. The interviews confirmed previous findings that many young people would be reluctant to contact a service which they perceived to be part of 'social services'; and that some young people would also choose to actively avoid these services (see above).

Additional local or regional services

Given the potential limitations of reliance on existing emergency duty services, a second option to be considered is the establishment of additional dedicated services specifically to deal with the issue of young people running away.

For refuge projects, this has been an essential aspect of the service. All three refuges currently in existence, and those which have run in the past, have provided a direct means of contact for young people. In effect these projects have then offered an immediate crisis response service of the kind suggested earlier through telephone support and through going out to meet young people. This service has also played an important role in providing an initial filtering process - enabling some young people to return home immediately and ensuring that young people admitted to refuge meet the relevant criteria. Self referral has been an important referral source for refuges - for example 32% of referrals to the ROC refuge in Glasgow during a period in 2004 to 2005 were directly from young people (Malloch, 2006).

Two of the pilot community-based refuge projects in Liverpool and East Midlands also provided a local access point for young people and received substantial numbers of referrals.

A key issue in terms of local provision is the cost of providing an 'out-of-hours' response, particularly in smaller areas where demand for such services may be sporadic. This was highlighted in an evaluation report (Gilchrist & Rees, 2004) of an out-of-hours service provided by ASTRA as part of the runaways pilot programme funded by the Department for Education and Skills in 2003 to 2004. The service operated between 5pm and 10pm, seven days a week. The service received 150 calls in a 12 month period - an average of 13 per month, of which an average of around three referrals per month were assessed by the project staff as meeting the intended criteria of the service - i.e. young people in emergency or crisis situations. The ASTRA project concluded that the service was not sustainable at a local level given the costs.

One way of tackling this issue is to provide services across a cluster of local authority areas, which we discuss further in Chapter 5. A second option - as identified in the above evaluation report - is to create links between local services and national helplines as discussed in the next section. A third option would be to have young people's resource centres, tackling a number of crisis issues for young people (including 16/17 homeless) of which runaways would be a key group.

The role of national helplines

The potentially important role which national helplines can play in providing an immediately accessible service to young people and in signposting back to relevant local services has been consistently emphasised in previous work on runaways in the UK. One of the key

recommendations of a feasibility study commissioned by three national helplines (Childline, Message Home and Get Connected) in 2003 was the development of more effective links between the national helplines and local runaways services (Franks et al, 2003). This research resulted in the creation of the dedicated Runaway Helpline - the national, free, confidential service, provided by the charity Missing People - for anyone who has run away from home or care, or been forced to leave home.

Some of these links now exist with, for example, some projects having arrangements to divert night-time calls to national helplines. Missing People provided information for this study relating to 'out-of-hours' calls diverted from seven regional projects working with young runaways⁵. During the six month period from April to September 2009, 599 diverted calls were received by the Runaway Helpline.

The success of this arrangement to provide a safety net depends on the availability of suitable accommodation in any given area but further it depends upon young people knowing how to access such provision:

You can have as many or as few (refuges) as you like but if young people don't know how to access them then that compromises their effectiveness

National stakeholder interview

Childline Scotland also provided some data which indicated the level of calls received relating to young runaways. In a recent 12 month period 461 calls were received where running away as a main issue and a further 410 where running away was an additional issue. These figures included young people who had run away and also those who were thinking of doing so.

Professionals and young people participating in the project were asked about their experience of contact with national helplines. Amongst professionals the general picture which emerged was that links with helplines had been explored and established and that this had generated some referrals to local services but not at the levels that might initially have been expected. There was however a recognition that young people may be making self-referrals following advice from national helplines.

As would be expected, given the demands on helplines, some young people recounted positive experiences whilst others recalled instances of calling helplines but not being able to get through, or being put 'on hold'. But the crucial role that helplines can play in linking young people with local services is illustrated by the following quote:

Actually the school informed me about refuges, they gave me the list and if anything should happen I should go to Connexions or a refuge or go down to the police station. When I felt it was getting too much I phoned the number but when I phoned the number they gave me, it wasn't working from my phone, so I called the Childline and they gave me the refuge number, the one that I saved

Interview with young person

Helplines have recently developed a range of means of young people making contact including text and e-mail as well as telephone. These alternative routes can be really valuable for young people whose home environments mean that it would be difficult for them to make telephone calls.

In summary, national helplines, including dedicated helplines for runaways, have a potentially crucial role to play in a comprehensive network of services for young runaways, and can be particularly effective where there are regional and local services that they can refer to when required to provide localised face-to-face support.

⁵ The hours for calls to be diverted varied according to each projects' own opening hours.

3.4 Concluding comments

Summary

In this chapter we have looked at the provision of immediate support to young runaways in order to respond to the needs identified in Chapter 2. In summary:

- We have presented a possible network of services to tackle the issue of running away, including universal prevention, targeted prevention and early intervention, crisis response, follow-up work and assessment, and access to longer-term support. This model builds on previous literature in this field.
- Within this continuum we have focused specifically on the idea of crisis response. In this model the emphasis would be on accessible services which can work with young runaways away from home and in need of support to resolve their situation. Emergency accommodation would be one option available within this approach.
- We have highlighted some fundamental issues regarding the initial contact with young people and the ways in which the different options available to young people are weighed up. We have suggested that this is a particularly critical area for work with young runaways.
- Finally, we have discussed some of the characteristics of an accessible crisis response service, including 24-hour accessibility, staff skills and capacities, and young people's perceptions and awareness of services; and have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of different options for provision of such services.

To summarise things differently, from a young person's perspective the response to running away should be as simple and straightforward as possible. We have broken down a possible response strategy into three phases - relating to before, during and after a running away incident. However we would note that for young people who run away repeatedly there will also be the need for a case-based rather than incident-based approach in order to effectively tackle the issues.

Before running away

- Young people have knowledge and awareness of services that exist – both preventative and reactive
- Young people have access to targeted preventative services which can substantially reduce the likelihood of running away.

During running away incident

- Immediate crisis response services are available for those young people who need this. Pre-conditions: awareness amongst young people and/or people who might be supporting them (e.g. friends and relatives); perceived as trustworthy and helpful by young person; accessible 24 hours a day, particularly outside office hours.
- These services to provide support to consider options and find the right solution - e.g. return home, stay with friends or relatives (depending on safeguarding issues), emergency accommodation.

- Emergency accommodation to be available as one option to consider based on clear thresholds and criteria. Such provision to incorporate skilled listening support and time-sensitive mediation / advocacy to resolve issues and facilitate a return home. Ideally there should be more than one type of emergency accommodation provision available to cater for the needs of the diverse group of young people who run away.
- Responsive support to also be available to young people who do not wish to use emergency accommodation.

After running away incident

- Short-term follow-up support offered to all known young runaways or missing young people (to include all referrals to crisis response services whether provided with emergency accommodation or not, and all known cases of young people reported missing to the police).
- This work to include some form of needs assessment process and referral on to relevant agencies as appropriate.
- Information for future reference to be provided to all young people who choose not to make use of this offer of support.

In relation to the last set of points it should be noted that some young people may not return home, but may find alternative accommodation including, in some cases, local authority care.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, we would recommend a shift in focus and terminology away from the provision of emergency accommodation and towards a concept of immediate crisis response being available to young runaways who are away from home and without somewhere safe to stay, or otherwise at potential risk. This approach would emphasis a balanced exploration of immediate options for young people which might include returning home, staying informally with relatives or friends on a temporary basis, or being provided with emergency accommodation. In the case of the first two options, this would need to be accompanied by appropriate professional support and attention to safeguarding/child protection issues. This approach reflects the practice already in operation in existing refuge projects in the UK.

Recommendation 3:
Emergency accommodation provision should be embedded within crisis response services for young runaways rather than being seen as a stand-alone option. This will enable an initial exploration of options for young people referred to such services, and will ensure that accommodation is provided when this is assessed as being the best option.

Taking into account the issues of safeguarding and young people's experiences discussed in this chapter, it would appear that the initial contact between a professional and a young runaway is absolutely critical. It is essential that this initial 'crisis response' conversation with young people is handled carefully as it can have longer-term implications for young people's confidence in helping agencies. There are also safeguarding / child protection implications to consider both in terms of facilitating a return home or in finding young people somewhere to stay within informal support networks. Information gathered through this project suggests that this is an area where there is a lack of consistency at the moment. In order to support effective practice, we would recommend the production of a brief good practice guide for practitioners.

Recommendation 4:

A good practice guide should be produced for professionals who are providing crisis response to young runaways, which draws together existing examples of practice, and a consideration of child protection / safeguarding duties, issues and procedures. This guide should receive official endorsement as a means of promoting consistent high quality assessment practice.

We have attempted to present a picture of the ways in which crisis response and emergency accommodation might fit into a continuum of services aimed at tackling running away and the problems that may underpin it, which incorporates support through existing mainstream services for young people.

Recommendation 5:

Crisis response services should be strongly integrated into a network of local services which also includes targeted preventative and follow-up work.

A key component of this integrated response would be to ensure an assessment of young people's need:

Recommendation 6:

All young people who are known to have run away or who have been reported as missing should receive a follow-up assessment of their needs.

Finally, this project has once again highlighted a key issue regarding the accessibility of services to young runaways.

Recommendation 7:

It is vital that there are accessible means of young people self-referring to runaways services that they perceive as credible and that they are able to trust; such services should be well-publicised and include referral routes that are available 24 hours a day.

4 Models of emergency accommodation provision

In this chapter we consider a range of options for meeting the emergency accommodation needs of young runaways. Throughout the project we have deliberately taken a broad view of this issue - for example, emphasising during the consultation events that we were not focusing on a specific form of accommodation such as refuge and were interested in exploring ideas for alternative models.

Note that many professionals felt that it was often possible to accommodate young people temporarily through informal support networks such as relatives or friends. We have already considered this possibility in Chapter 3. The focus of this chapter is on the provision of emergency accommodation by agencies, when a risk assessment suggests that this is the best option. First we consider the potential for meeting the needs of young runaways through existing local authority emergency accommodation provision. We then go on to consider some of the alternative models which have been developed in the UK (see also Chapter 1 for a brief historical overview of emergency accommodation provision).

Before considering the different options in detail, it must be noted that the issue of diversity, which has been a recurring theme in the literature on young runaways, was raised throughout the consultation with professionals and young people for this project. There are two aspects to this.

First, the substantial diversity of backgrounds of young runaways suggests that no single model of emergency accommodation can meet the full range of needs which young runaways might have.

Second, the issue of diversity of local context was discussed in consultation events in relation to models of emergency accommodation. It was generally agreed that the most appropriate model of emergency accommodation would vary according to the local and regional context. Refuges were not perceived as a viable option for areas with highly dispersed populations, and this is one of the factors which seems to have led to the exploration of alternative models of emergency accommodation which might work in rural areas.

For these reasons it is not possible for this, or any other, project to conclude with a single recommendation about the 'best' model of emergency accommodation provision. Nevertheless, a key aim of this project was to generate recommendations rather than simply research findings. Through this chapter we therefore attempt to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different models, taking into account the above issues of diversity, and then conclude the chapter with a set of recommendations regarding potential ways forward with this issue.

Finally, by means of introduction, we do not consider the issue of costs of different models in this chapter. This is because it not feasible to separate consideration of costs of emergency accommodation itself from the provision of a broader range of services. So we defer this discussion until Chapter 5.

4.1 Existing local authority provision

One option for the provision of a safety net for young runaways which does not involve any additional or dedicated accommodation provision is utilising existent local authority emergency bed spaces in foster care and children's homes. This was an option which professionals in some areas felt was workable and could meet most or all of the known need for emergency accommodation amongst young runaways, although there was recognition

that there may be a larger hidden need. However it would seem that this is also a solution which may work better in some contexts than others. It was acknowledged during several consultation events that there was a huge range of levels of availability of local authority emergency accommodation provision in different areas.

Previous and current provision

As a number of professionals pointed out during the consultation events, all local authorities have a duty to provide accommodation for children in need within their area in particular circumstances. Emergency accommodation provision for young runaways can be seen as being part of this broader duty. Indeed a number of local authorities responded to the consultation questions along these lines:

Accommodation would be provided through our emergency 28 day foster placement contract with two independent providers...these provide emergency and out of hours placements. Prior to accommodating young people on this basis all other options will be explored - e.g. temporary accommodation with suitable family and friends. [Young people would access this provision] via social work teams or the Emergency Duty team if out of hours.

Local authority response to e-mail consultation.

Similar responses were received to the survey of local authorities during the *Stepping Up* consultation in 2006.

There are a number of current and recent examples of ways in which particular local authorities have been able to provide safety net provision for young runaways in the UK. Three of the five projects funded through the community-based refuge pilot programme by the Department of Health and the (then) DfES in 2004-5 were extensions or modifications of existing local authority services. These projects were based in Liverpool, Durham and Bradford.

In Durham, the initial idea has continued to be developed. The current model involves an integrated approach between the Emergency Duty Service and a team of residential and community workers to provide out-of-hours support to young people and their families where this is a risk of family breakdown. This definition includes young people who have run away. The services include the possibility of emergency accommodation in a children's home dedicated for this purpose (see Practice Example 1 for further details).

This is an interesting approach and the people involved in the service felt it was effective at meeting the known need in the area. There was a recognition that an unknown proportion of runaways would not be reported missing to the police and may also not be known to emergency duty services.

Practice Example 1 - Durham

Durham Safeguarding and Specialist Services developed the Runaways Service to provide 24 / 7 support to young people who are thinking of or who have run away. Included in this provision is an out of hours emergency children's home called '1 Orchard Lane'. The home is for young people aged between 3 and 17 years and can accommodate 3 young people at any one time (or up to 5 siblings). The home is staffed by Residential / Community Workers who are part of the Emergency Duty Team (EDT).

Orchard Lane is not specifically for young runaways but was developed for any children or young people who need accommodation out of hours and who are at risk of significant harm either by running away or due to child protection concerns, and have nowhere safe to go. There is also a pool of emergency foster carers that can be called upon out-of-hours. The Emergency Duty Team comprises of out-of-hours generic social workers, along with Residential / Community Workers. To provide 24 / 7 support there are close links with a team of daytime Community Support workers who can provide follow on daytime support to young people and families. Strong links between the teams allow a fast track immediate response to young people in crisis and follow up support if required.

The Runaways Service exists to prevent family breakdown and young people and parents can receive support for several months if required. The Runaways Service operates a 24/7 Runaways Freephone helpline and, if required, workers will go out to meet young people face-to-face in order to provide support to them directly. Awareness raising and promoting the service is undertaken by Community Support Workers who go into schools / colleges / youth clubs etc. to talk directly with young people.

A second practice example within a local authority is the Bradford Crisis Care model which also received funding through the above community-based refuge programme. The project provided access for young runaways to an existing emergency foster carer scheme operated by the local authority.

Practice Example 2 - Bradford

Bradford Crisis Care, which was established in January 2004, provides overnight (weekdays) or weekend emergency care for children and young people in crisis age 11-16. The young people referred may be missing from home, "thrown out" by parents, experiencing severe parent adolescent conflict, behavioural problems or any other related crises. Referrals come through Social Care, the Emergency Duty team and the Police Missing Person's Protocol.

The aim is to give the families and young people a cooling off period and give the social worker the opportunity to facilitate a return home as soon as possible, if this is appropriate or if not appropriate to look for an alternative. The brief time frame of placements (usually 2 overnights or a weekend) is intended to minimise separation trauma and allow workers to focus on resolving immediate crises and give space to discuss ongoing needs. The work carried out is goal orientated.

The crisis care provision is an extension of the support care philosophy (short break foster care) and part of a wider emergency provision provided by Bradford Metropolitan District Council which also includes; an Adolescent Crisis Response Service (28 day intensive programme offering some planned respite in a small residential based unit with out reach work to the young person and their family); Placement Support (out reach work to children and families) and emergency beds at a residential Unit aimed at returning young people home within a planned time frame. The Placement Co-ordination team are the first point of contact in office hours and have an overview of placement requests. They liaise with the various services to provide the most appropriate placement for each young person referred. The crisis care foster placements aim to be friendly, family based and non-threatening, providing a safe place for the night (or weekend). It is made clear to the young person and family/carer that the provision is extremely short term and not full time care. However, for their stay in crisis care young people are accommodated under Section 20 of Children Act 1989. Work is carried out by area social workers to try and affect a quick return home for the young person and make recommendations about what resources the family may need to maintain the young person at home.

Crisis Care also works in partnership with Childminding Network to provide day care provision (if a young person is not in school). A risk assessment is completed and if appropriate, day care is provided by Emergency Child Minders (quality assured child minders who have had training in issues relating to young people in crisis). There are currently 4 crisis care households in Bradford, with 3 more in the approval stages. The foster carers are trained and paid in line with mainstream fostering and provide 365 days rota cover for all of the Bradford District. Two crisis care social workers administer the scheme. They complete risk assessments for young people referred, negotiate placements as well as recruit, assess, supervise and review all carers.

The third example is a service in Moray in Scotland run by Action for Children. The charity is commissioned to deliver residential provision for the local authority and this includes a separate bed space available for up to 72 hours which has on occasions been used to accommodate young runaways.

Practice Example 3 - Moray

In the area of Moray in the north east of Scotland, emergency accommodation is provided through one 72-hour emergency bed contracted to and managed by the charity Action for Children and which is funded through Children's Services. This self-contained bed-sit which has been in existence since 2006, is attached (though separate from) a two-bedded transitional unit. Action for Children are also contracted to provide two long-term units in Moray. Referrals to the emergency bed come through the out-of-hours emergency duty team. Action for Children can accommodate young people under section 38 when a place of refuge is needed. Action for Children has a pool of staff that can work across all four units on flexible contracts.

This provision is not solely dedicated to young runaways, but to any children and young people 'in need' of a bed in an emergency. The 72-hour provision offers the young people (and parents/carers) an opportunity for a 'brief respite' and a quick assessment of their needs. It allows an opportunity to look at how to support the young person either in terms of returning to the family home or occasionally supporting into alternative care if this is more appropriate. The local authority and local services try to build bridges back into the family where at all possible.

Staff employ a child centred model of working with children and young people, looking at the issues from the young person's perspective and focussing on their needs. They can extend placements if this is deemed necessary and can move young people across the different units if this is required. A service manger group - a multi agency group of managers with a responsibility to look at the care needs of children and young people- in the area focuses on the longer-term needs of the young people and families placed in all of the local children's units, including the emergency 72-hour bed facility. There is a commitment by local services to endeavour to accommodate young people in the locality in order to prevent family breakdown.

These examples demonstrate that there is potential to modify or supplement existing emergency accommodation provision for young people so that it can meet the support needs of some or all young runaways within a locality.

We now go on to consider the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, from the perspectives of professionals and young people.

Professional perspectives

As identified in the previous chapter, one of the themes running through the feedback from local authority professionals both in the individual interviews and the consultation events was a view that existing local authority provision was adequate to meet the needs of young runaways in local areas.

There are certainly strengths to this approach - in particular it ensures that the responsibility for meeting the accommodation needs of young runaways is seen as an intrinsic part of the local authority's role towards young people at risk of harm in their area. It also makes good use of existing resources where these are available.

However the project has also highlighted some potentially significant limitations of this approach.

First, there was evidence from professionals that existing provision is extremely stretched in many areas and is often full. In one consultation event, an example was given of a 15-year-old who had been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation due to the lack of other options. There is also the evidence discussed elsewhere in this report of young runaways being accommodated in police stations overnight. It would therefore seem unlikely, if additional need (currently hidden as discussed in Chapter 2) became apparent through more

effective referral routes, that this need could be met through existing provision. Echoing a finding from the recent survey of police forces for the *Stepping Up* report, there were a number of comments in interviews and consultation events about young people staying in police stations overnight because of the lack of emergency local authority bed spaces.

Second, some questions have been raised in previous research studies about the extent to which young runaways will be seen as meeting the criteria for local authority emergency provision.

Some informants to the research expressed concern that some vulnerable young people can become invisible because they do not meet the threshold criteria for children's services. This is particularly the case for young people who are refusing to go home. We heard that in circumstances where a parent is refusing to have a young person back they may be offered accommodation but that this was not the case for young people refusing to return, because in theory they have somewhere to return to. These young people are equally vulnerable and 'at risk' given the paucity of emergency accommodation available for young people under 16 in the community. Compelling young people to return home without support in these circumstances is likely to be counter-productive and result in repeat episodes of running.

Harris, 2006: 36

In support of the above point, Harris provided a case example from a voluntary sector practitioner as follows:

A recent example would be a 14 year old girl, who repeatedly runs away, refusing to go home. She hasn't been reported to the police and refuses to go home. She is staying in inappropriate accommodation. Children's services are refusing to accommodate because Mum isn't refusing to have her back. In this situation the Refuge can provide a safe space for cooling off for all parties.

Harris, 2006: 36

Young people in these types of situations are still 'in need' of a safety net.

Third, a number of professionals commented on the drawbacks of placing young people into local authority care and the potential value of an intermediate option:

Anecdotally, there has been an increase in the number of young adolescent girls running away from home and placing themselves at risk of exploitation in recent years. This group in particular would benefit from having a safe house to go to. However, any child or young person at risk .. would be offered a short term foster placement if it was deemed not safe for them to go home. The challenge for us is ensuring that this group of vulnerable young girls stay in their placements and don't run away from there. There is no emergency accommodation for runaways or missing children in [Area] which is not Local Authority foster care. [Area] has no residential units or children's homes of their own.

At present there is no facility to provide a safe place for any children or young people who run away from home and place themselves at risk. Of particular concern are the number of young girls who runaway and place themselves at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. In [Area] we have recently implemented [a protocol] which deters unsuitable adults from harbouring young runaways against their parents' or the local authority's wishes. This is working well, but it is not always appropriate to return these children immediately back home, or necessarily into foster care if they won't remain in the placement. Offering a "non stigmatising" alternative for a short period of time might help to address this challenge.

Local authority response to e-mail consultation

As we will see later, young people may also have issues in this respect - particularly in areas where the only emergency accommodation response available is with foster carers.

Finally, linked to the previous point, it seems clear enough from young people's comments that local authority provision, even when it was available, may not be perceived as meeting their needs - in terms of trust. Professionals echoed this point, noting that there may be drawbacks in terms of young people's and parents' perceptions of statutory services. However, as one contributor pointed out, this drawback can potentially be overcome in the longer term through a shift in perceptions.

Evidently there are additional issues here for 'looked after' young people in the sense that they have run away from local authority provision.

Young people's perspectives

The young people consulted for this project had mixed feelings about the potential for young runaways to be temporarily accommodated within the 'looked after' system.

Even though some young people had had negative experiences of residential or foster care, there were indications that they would be positive about the idea, for example, of an emergency bed in a children's home for one or two nights as an emergency response.

If I had that option I would have taken it without a doubt

Focus group with young people

On the other hand, some young people felt more negative about the possibility:

Emergency accommodation is for like all different ages but Children's Home... I'd rather go in a hostel than a Children's Home ... Children's Home you get treated like a kid but at the hostel you had rules that you still had to stick by but they are more lenient.

Emergency accommodation: the rules should not be as strict as a Children's Home - e.g. supervised spends, can't stay out over night etc. The word children's homes puts a bad name to it (emergency accommodation).

Interview with young person

Care homes aren't right for people under ten

Focus group with young people

As discussed earlier in the report there was also evidence of a reluctance amongst some young people to engage with 'social services' either on the basis of stigmatisation or previous experiences. This issue was also echoed in interviews with professionals and it is evident that this could be a major obstacle to the universality of the approach of providing emergency accommodation within existing statutory provision.

Summary

In summary, it may be possible and appropriate to meet the emergency accommodation needs of a proportion of young runaways through existing provision. There appears to be substantial local variation in the levels of emergency accommodation provision available to local authorities, and so this option may be much more possible in some areas than other. There are also several other questions to be addressed regarding whether this is a feasible and suitable response in all cases.

We now turn to the consideration of the provision of emergency accommodation specifically for young runaways.

4.2 Fixed or flexible refuge

In this section we consider the provision of refuge to young runaways in fixed or flexible refuges under the relevant legislation as outlined in the introductory chapter. We exclude from this section specific discussion of the one example of refuge provision through foster carers which is discussed in the next section. However many of the more general points about refuge discussed here apply equally to residential and foster care provision.

The issue of refuges was perhaps one of the most contentious covered during the engagement with professionals for this project. It appears to be a topic about which people have very strong opinions. It was also apparent that people were not always fully aware of the precise nature of refuge provision, the history of this provision or the relevant legislation.

Previous and current provision

In total there have been seven registered refuges specifically working with young runaways in the UK:

- The initial Central London Teenage Project (1985 to 1994)
- The subsequent London Refuge (1995 to present)
- Southside Refuge in Bournemouth (1989 to pre-1999)
- Leeds Safe House (1991 to 2000)
- The Porth Project in Newport, South Wales (1993 to 1999)
- The ROC Refuge in Glasgow (2004 to present)
- The Safe@Last refuge in South Yorkshire (2007 to present⁶)

The first four of these projects were/are fixed refuges in the sense of being always staffed and open irrespective of the level of demand - although in practice it was relatively rare for any of these projects to be completely unused for significant periods of time. As an example of this provision, further details of the model in operation in the current London Refuge are provided below

⁶ This project initially worked with young people with parental permission to accommodate, prior to becoming a registered refuge.

Practice Example 4 - London

The London Refuge for Runaway Children is a partnership project run and managed by St Christopher's Fellowship and the NSPCC and has been in existence in this form since 1995 (it had been previously managed by NSPCC and Centrepoint) as a fixed refuge dedicated to young people under the age of 16 who run away from home or care. It is a safe house located in a confidential address in North London. The Refuge provides temporary residential care for up to six⁷ young people of both sexes between the ages of 11 and 16. Young people can stay up to a maximum of 14 nights if required, although the majority of young runaways stay for shorter periods. Referrals come through professionals, and also directly through young people themselves. Referrals are also received from ChildLine, the Runaway Helpline and Get Connected. To gain access to the refuge provision, young people must be in London and have run away from home or care.

This registered children's refuge provides a safe and structured environment to young people who run away from parents, carers, local authority children's homes and foster carers. It provides outreach and has a family support worker who assists families with the aim of reducing repeat running away incidents. Support on site includes for example, educational support, and help to address why the young person has run away and to identify further support requirements. The provision of accommodation is one aspect of the support provided. The London Refuge is inspected as a children's home.

The Porth Project is the only example of registered refuge using a foster care model, and further details of this are provided in the next section of this chapter.

The final two projects which are more recent in origin operate a flexible refuge provision which is staffed subject to demand and need. Details of both these projects are provided below.

Practice Example 5 - Glasgow

The ROC (Running Other Choices) Refuge in Glasgow has been in operation as a refuge for young people who run away since 2004 and provides a safe, confidential base for young runaways in need of emergency accommodation. The refuge employs a flexible staffing model: staff are 'on call' and respond when they are needed, rather than it being staffed 24 hours continuously even when young people are not in refuge. The ROC Refuge can support up to 3 young people at any one time, for up to 7 days, although this can be extended up to 14 days in exceptional circumstances.

For admission to refuge young people must be 16 and under and have run away or be at immediate risk of running away and, with no safe and agreeable alternatives available, they would be vulnerable and at risk of harm. Young people must be needing refuge, rather than local authority residential care and an initial risk assessment is conducted around the risks the young person would present, prior to admission. If the young person is within 1 hours drive from Glasgow City and they meet the criteria they can access refuge (irrespective of where the young person originates from or which Local Authority has responsibility for them). A 24-hour helpline and 'on call' system ensures young people can access the support whenever it may be required. Agency workers do not place young people in refuge. All referrals to refuge have to involve consent of the young person. Young people can choose to leave at any time, although staff endeavour to ensure that this is to a safe place and is carried out in a planned way whenever possible.

One-to-one direct support and personal care is provided in refuge. Work can be intensive and will involve exploring issues which caused the young person to run away as well as planning for post refuge. This can involve communication and mediation with parents / carers. Post refuge outreach support is also provided for up to 3 months to young people if required, in order to try to prevent cyclical usage.

⁷ The refuge is currently operating a reduced service due to budgetary issues, with four bed spaces being available, and at the time of writing future funding of the project is uncertain.

Practice Example 6 - South Yorkshire

The South Yorkshire refuge which opened in 2007 is another example of a static refuge which employs a flexible staffing model. It was established by the Safe @ Last charity in South Yorkshire. This refuge provides emergency accommodation for young people in four local authorities in South Yorkshire. The refuge was initially registered as a children's home, then certified as a refuge (under section 51 of the Children's Act). Young people can stay up to a maximum of 14 nights if required, but the majority stay for just one night. The provision consists of a two-bedroom house, and up to two young people can stay in the refuge at any one time. The Refuge is staffed on an 'on call' rather than a 24 hour basis. Staff put themselves down for shifts and when a young person enters refuge, they will be called into work.

The project provides a free-phone helpline which is open 24 hours a day, and for 365 days a year. Young people can ring the helpline number to access refuge. Young people refer themselves to refuge, and the project does not generally accept referrals from other agencies. In terms of the criteria for admission into the refuge, young people have to be at risk in the place they are running from, and at risk in the place they are running to. Admission criteria are high and if a young person does not meet the conditions they cannot access refuge and alternative arrangements are found. The National Runaways Helpline cover the helpline from 9pm to 9:30am. The project staff are on call until midnight, and after midnight the Runaways helpline either respond to any emergencies immediately, or they will pass information on to the project the following day if this is appropriate.

A young person centred approach is taken with the young people, and a focus on meeting their needs. The refuge stay provides a space for young people to discuss issues surrounding their running away. If and when a young person needs ongoing support after leaving refuge, this is provided by the general pool of Safe@ Last project workers. Costs are kept low by only paying staff when a young person is in refuge.

The early work of some of these refuge projects is described in Stein et al (1994) and some of the key learning is summarised in Rees (2001). There have also been specific publications on the London refuge (Barter, 1996; Macaskill, 2006), and the Glasgow refuge (Malloch, 2006). Further evaluation work is currently under way in relation to the Glasgow and South Yorkshire flexible refuges.

In broad terms some of the key potential strengths of refuges identified in the above literature are:

- Refuge provides immediate and accessible safety and respite for young runaways.
- The confidentiality of the refuge location can be a fundamental positive feature for young people in some high risk situations (although experience suggests that for most young runaways the provision of non-confidential refuge with parental consent would be possible).
- The direct access nature of refuge means that young people can refer themselves rather than being assessed through other agencies.
- There are indications that the provision of refuge has benefits in terms of enabling young people to talk in detail about the issues affecting them, as outlined in Chapter 3, and of undertaking effective work to resolve their situations.

Some of the key potential weaknesses are:

- There have been concerns about the impact of young people on one another within residential refuge provision (although there may also be benefits from mutual support in such settings). This point would also apply to emergency accommodation within children's homes.

- It seems unlikely that demand and need for refuge would be sufficient to warrant this form of provision in sparsely populated areas.
- There have also been concerns about the impact on longer-term family relationships if a young person is accommodated for lengthy periods without parental permission. As discussed earlier this risk can be mitigated by working practices which seek to engage parents and carers at an early stage in the process.

It was also suggested in one of the earlier studies (Rees, 2001) that the availability of refuge may slow down the responses of other agencies, but some more recent practice experience suggests that this is not necessarily the case. For example, the evaluation of the ROC refuge in Glasgow found that:

Refuge staff were able to support young people to access other services, or to help them get a better service once their needs had been identified and could therefore be appropriately addressed.

Malloch 2006: 23

Previous studies (Newman, 1989; Barter, 1996; Malloch, 2006) have gathered views and experiences from young people who have used refuge projects which have demonstrated the potential value of these services. We also know from previous consultation work (Smeaton & Rees, 2004) that refuges are viewed relatively positively by young people in comparison with other models of emergency accommodation, although some young people (particularly those from minority groups) do have concerns about bullying and victimisation in residential group settings.

Professional perspectives

Three areas or regions covered by the interviews and consultation events currently had some form of refuge in operation - Glasgow, South Yorkshire and London. Feedback from local authorities and police within these areas about the projects was generally positive. The refuges in these areas had clearly succeeded in establishing positive and collaborative relationships with other local agencies and were seen as being a valuable component of the overall network of provision for young people.

Yet in other areas, including metropolitan areas where refuge may well be a viable option, opinions seemed much more negative:

- As noted earlier some people cited the assumed high cost of refuge as being an obstacle. We discuss this issue further in the next chapter.
- Professionals were also concerned about the potential interactions between young people within a shared accommodation setting. There were fears that some young people would be drawn into risky activities by other young people.
- There was also some discussion about inspection requirements for refuges and the complexities this might introduce. This issue is also discussed further in Chapter 5.

It was noticeable in some of the consultation events that professionals were not necessarily aware of the history of refuges in the UK nor of the legal provisions for refuge described in Chapter 1 of this report. There also appeared often to be a preconception of what a refuge might be, which did not match the newer flexible models which have been developed in Glasgow and South Yorkshire.

Young people's perspectives

The interviews and focus groups with young people gathered information on experiences of using refuge and also on views about this particular option. These views from a relatively small purposively selected sample of young runaways cannot be seen as representative, but they do have strong similarities with some of the key issues highlighted by previous learning and from consultation with professionals as above.

Experiences

Dealing first with experiences, on the positive side, young people highlighted their experiences of receiving support when in refuge and the longer-term benefits of this:

They talked to me, when I first arrived they talked to me about what happened, why did I leave and then they gave me advice on what I should do and when my dad was phoning, they said I shouldn't be scared, I should talk to him but cause there was a time I was meant to go back home and talk to him and they said it would be best if I went to go and talk to him at my Auntie's instead of going to my house just in case it gets out of hand or he does anything else. The advice they actually gave me I'm still using today.

Interview with young person

*I was nervous but when I got there I felt better cos it's just like a house ... The first time I was in it for a week and then they took me home ... We did one to one work every night ...looking at relationships and how to talk to people etc ... It gave me a break cos it was the last week of the summer holidays and you had someone to talk to about everything and they were all really nice ... It's better talking to someone you don't really know cos like if you're talking to someone in your family. . .I don't know. The refuge also were in contact with my Mum [mediation]
... It's a break ... Try to do their best. In the children's unit you can't just pull someone in to talk to whereas you can in the refuge ... I'd stay there now if I could.*

Interview with young person

Young people also seemed pleasantly surprised by the quality of the provision and the atmosphere:

The staff were good and the food good and the rooms massive - individual rooms. It was quiet you could sleep at night. There were other people there at the time. Everyone was calm when I was there.

Interview with young person

On the negative side some young people had found the rules within refuge to be quite limiting:

Like I say I wanted to go out to my friend's house or mother's house or a party or a school trip they have to ask mum. It's just you have to get consent (as) mum (is) legally responsible for me - they would have to do that - part of the law.

Interview with young person

Another young person reported feeling that staying in the refuge 'was boring and like being in prison'.

Views

We also gathered views from young people who had experience of running away but had not used a refuge.

One of the benefits perceived by these young people was the safety:

Gets people off the streets don't it - it's horrible to be kicked from pillar to post - it should be a big house - seen as long term [Although] some people might get too settled [if it was long-term]

Interview with young person

The potential for support and the opportunity to talk, highlighted by professionals, was echoed by one young person:

*It's not just like the surroundings kind of thing where you've got a bed and a TV - it's not that kind of thing. It's like you go in and the people there aren't just gonna sit there and go 'we don't think you should run away we don't think you should do this bla di bladi bla'. People that will actually sit there and go 'if you are running away - what's the problem? Why are you doing that?' You know trying to help you without making you feel worse than you are already feeling...you know?
... and they ask you at the right time (what the problem is) and not like once you've first got there. Someone who is just like an 'adult friend' kind of thing.
... as long as it's got a roof and a comfortable bed at night and you can get something to eat and drink there and obviously you can go have a bath or shower or whatever, it'd be alright. But it's really the support that the kids are needing it's not necessarily material things. Sometimes it is material things, sometimes young people are in need of clothes or food whatever, but it mainly is the support ...and in being there, if someone's upset it's just being there (for them). It's like you don't even need to say anything to a young person when they are upset - just being there can comfort them.*

Interview with young person

Although one young person felt that providing refuge 'is not really encouraging them to say what they're feeling'.

Confidentiality was a key issue for some young people, confirming previous research (e.g. Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999). Their main concern was that the police would be informed of their whereabouts and as a result, their parents, foster carers or the children's home would know where they were.

with these options the people [at the emergency accommodation] would phone up the police and they'd know where we're at.

Focus group with young people

The young people in this focus group were particularly concerned about whether they would be able to trust the staff and other young people within the accommodation

*You couldn't trust them (referring to people staffing the emergency accommodation). If I didn't want to be home that much and I wanted to run away I'm not going to go somewhere we can get nicked...
[However] If I knew it was safe and the police weren't going to get involved I would use them*

Focus group with young people

The 24 hour accessibility of refuge was seen as a key positive aspect by the above focus group because they thought that they, and other young people, would usually run away on the spur of the moment rather than in a premeditated way.

Finally, young people also echoed professional concerns about unintended impacts of refuge provision in group settings:

you definitely need some kind of emergency accommodation for young people but it's like you need accommodation for...obviously you are gonna be getting young people as young as 10 maybe younger running away and at the same time getting teenagers running away – so you don't really want those two kinds of groups mixing together cos like the teenagers could like end up encouraging the younger ones to get into worse stuff. So you need a couple of different kinds of projects for the ages, but you definitely need some emergency accommodation

Interview with young person

Summary

The issue of refuge provision divided professional views during the consultation events. As this section has hopefully highlighted this is not surprising as the learning from the provision of such accommodation in the UK has highlighted some significant positive and negative aspects. Clearly, refuge is not the most appropriate form of emergency accommodation for young runaways in all circumstances. However the positive aspects of refuge, as highlighted in the quotes from young people in this and previous studies, suggest that, where it is practical and affordable to offer such provision, it can play an important role as part of a comprehensive safety net for young people.

4.3 Foster care

Previous and current provision

There have been several pilot projects offering foster care as an emergency accommodation option specifically to young runaways.

The first model of this kind in the UK was the Porth Project, established in Newport, South Wales by The Children's Society during the 1990s. This is the only foster care based project to be registered as a refuge. The following extract from Rees (2001) describes the model and some of the key learning points.

Practice Example 7 - Porth Project (Newport)

The Porth Project, which offered refuge in Newport, South Wales from 1993 to 1999, had many features in common with Leeds Safe House [a fixed refuge in operation at that time - see earlier], including its referral process and its methods and approaches to working with young people.

The distinctive aspect of the Porth Project, compared with the other four refuges that have so far operated in the UK, is that it provided accommodation for young people through a pool of foster carers rather than through a central residential unit. Refuge carers were recruited specifically to provide this service, and were subject both to approval as foster carers by The Children's Society and to certification as a refuge under Section 51 by the Welsh Office. Young people stayed at the refuge carers' homes except for during office hours on weekdays, when they were brought to a project base where project staff would work with them on the issues that had caused them to run away...

Unfortunately, it seems that the resources required to operate this model were initially under-estimated and the project experienced considerable difficulties in maintaining an adequate pool of refuge carers. The model was shown to be particularly effective at times, but ultimately the lack of resources led to a sporadic service and eventually the project was closed.

From Rees, 2001: 19

In addition to this refuge model, foster care was provided as part of three of the community-based refuge pilots as discussed in the first section of this chapter, although these models provided accommodation through local authority foster carers.

It is interesting to note that, to date, none of these four examples experienced a high or consistent level of usage, although there are a number of different factors to consider here including resource issues in relation to the Porth Project as described above, and the referral processes and criteria used in different projects.

Nevertheless, there has been strong support for the potential of the foster care model in the past and we therefore expected a relatively positive response to this within the current project. However there were in fact very mixed responses to the idea of foster care emergency accommodation options, both from professionals and from young people.

Professional perspectives

There was some limited support for the foster care option in consultation events. It was particularly seen as an option worth considering in sparsely populated areas where other fixed or flexible refuges may not be viable. The model was also seen to have an advantage compared to residential models in terms of avoiding the potential problems relating to interaction between young people within refuge as discussed earlier.

However, there were also a number of arguments against this option. From professionals' perspectives there were two key drawbacks to this model.

First, there is a general lack of availability of foster care in many areas. It was apparent that in some metropolitan areas (partly linked to property prices and other economic factors) there was already a shortage of available foster carers. It was therefore felt unlikely that this option was viable in these areas.

Second, some professionals were concerned about whether emergency foster care could provide the kinds of specialist support that would meet the needs of young people running away from home. It was suggested that this could be addressed through additional training.

Nevertheless there was still a view amongst some professionals that the foster care model should be tested further. One suggestion in this respect was that an umbrella organisation could be established nationally to provide specific training and support to foster carers who provided accommodation for young runaways.

Young people's perspectives

From young people's perspectives it is evident both from the interviews carried out for this project and also previous consultation work with young people (Smeaton & Rees, 2004) that the idea of staying within a family home on a short-term basis is not something that all young people feel positive about,

I don't know about other people but I wouldn't be comfortable staying in someone else's house that I didn't know and I didn't meet before and if I didn't really know what it was like or have any information on them... If I had met them before hand...

Interview with young person

although it was perceived as being potentially a good option in certain contexts as we discuss below.

The interview sample included a number of young people who had negative experiences of living in foster care in the past and some of these young people felt that they would be reluctant to use this as an emergency accommodation option.

I wouldn't use the foster carers because I don't like them.

Interview with young person

There were also particular issues for some young people which probably related to their experiences of family life:

Going into foster wouldn't be suitable (because of) the past and that - the need to get over it ... I think it would just break down and not work

Interview with young person

On the other hand some young people felt that it was very much dependent on context:

It all depends on the young person (which model of refuge would be preferable) it's like take me for example - it's like putting me in a family type situation (dispersed foster care model) is not a good idea but yet a building would be more appropriate to my needs. But like some young people like it's like they need that kind of family setting but some people don't.

For kids in care - a family setting can quite upset them and it can basically knock em back a few more steps...so it all depends on the young person.

Interview with young person

There was a perception amongst young people that foster care was a suitable option for younger children because:

(they) can get guided in the right direction - in a care home you get a lot of freedom.

Focus group with young people

Previous studies have also highlighted that the individualised nature of foster care may be seen as a preferable option by young people in some minority groups, who would fear being bullied in group residential settings (Smeaton & Rees, 2004).

Summary

In summary, this project has highlighted a number of potential issues relating to the use of foster carers to provide emergency accommodation for young runaways - based on previous practice experience in the UK, and the views of professionals and young people. Up until now, in the UK, there is relatively little evidence that a foster care model can provide an effective response to the emergency accommodation needs of most young runaways. At present, therefore this option could not be recommended as the primary means of providing a safety net for young runaways. However, there are likely to be contexts (e.g. with younger children) where the foster care option can be a useful component of such a safety net. In addition it may also be that this model could be further tested and developed - for example through the provision of specialist training and support as discussed above.

4.4 Other models

To summarise the argument so far in this chapter, there appears to be a place both for access to existing local authority accommodation and additional refuge provision (either fixed or flexible and potentially shared amongst a cluster of areas - see next chapter) to provide an effective and comprehensive safety net of emergency accommodation provision for young runaways in any particular area (This model is already in operation, for example, in the South Yorkshire cluster of local authorities). There may also be some place for foster care provision, but probably only as a supplementary provision to the above.

However, there are difficulties with the viability of provision of residential refuge, even on a flexible basis, in some sparsely populated areas of the UK. In some instances these difficulties could be resolved by clustering of provision. For example in the case of a large Shire authority in England which encircles a Unitary authority, it is possible that a shared provision between the two authorities may be a practical solution. However in other sparsely populated areas this is not an option.

We therefore also sought to identify potential alternative models, particularly those which may be applicable in rural areas. In this section we briefly review a few additional suggestions and ideas generated by this project.

A 'Night Stop' model

A number of professionals in the consultation events referred to the Night Stop model which provides emergency accommodation to homeless young people aged 16 to 25 in many areas of the UK. There are currently up to 40 to 50 schemes in operation in all nine government regions of England and also in Wales and Scotland. Accommodation is provided, usually for one to three nights, in the homes of approved volunteers in the community. All volunteers are CRB checked and receive training and support. The potential applicability of this model to young people under the age of 16 is evident.

A professional working with young runaways in a rural area felt that a positive side of the Nightstop model was that the referring agency takes the responsibility rather than the local authority, and felt that the legal issues regarding using this model for under-16-year-olds should be explored further:

If we look at the Nightstop model which works very effectively in all the areas it operates we have a system whereby the agency that makes the referral agrees to take the responsibility. The difference is that if I was to call the local authority and say, 'Look, I've got a young person I want to do some family work with, is there any chance you could accommodate them for two weeks or three days', they wouldn't be able to do that unless they took that child into care - they can't accommodate them and let me

retain responsibility. If they accommodate them overnight they then come into the remit of this child has come into the care of the local authority and we have this regulation that says we've got to do this within 24 hours and this within 48 hours along with that comes that huge financial commitment. For me the way forward would be enabling local authorities to be flexible in the way they interpret it and I don't know if that requires a legislative change.

Interview with professional

However there may be issues with the level of checks and approvals that might be required for volunteers working with this younger age group. It would also seem unlikely that it would be practical to receive certification for such provision under the relevant refuge legislation in England and Wales (the slightly different legal provision in Scotland may be less problematic) although this would not necessarily be a barrier to provision of emergency accommodation with parental consent. As discussed earlier this may be practically possible for the large majority of young runaways. We learned, during this project, of one Nightstop scheme which had tried on some occasions to offer accommodation to under-16-year-olds through gaining approval from the local Children's Services department. Unfortunately, this had ultimately not proved possible due to time delays in reaching a decision, but illustrates that there may be some potential here.

Another potential drawback is that this model of providing accommodation in individual's homes may be perceived by many young people in a similar way to the foster care model as discussed earlier.

Supported lodgings

Some professionals in rural areas were of the view that informal support networks in these areas were much stronger than in urban areas. For this reason a number of professionals saw the potential to utilise existing local support networks in a structured way. One rural authority was considering the development of a form of supported lodgings for young people away from home. This would be quite different from the way supported lodgings operated in many locations. It would effectively work through recruiting local people who may be willing to accommodate young people occasionally but would not be attracted to the extra commitment of becoming a foster carer. Checks of the person's suitability would be conducted, comparable to those in place for foster carers. In a sense this would be similar to a Night Stop scheme for under-16-year-olds

One of the perceived advantages of this approach for rural areas was that it may be possible to accommodate young people within their local area. This was felt to be important in areas where young people identified strongly with their locality.

However, as with the Nightstop idea, many young runaways may be reluctant to stay in private family homes. There are also potential drawbacks to this kind of approach in terms of possible stigmatisation, as highlighted in a recent journal article on rural runaways (Franks & Goswami, 2008)

Utilisation of existing suitable vacant accommodation

Finally an innovative approach which has been implemented to a small extent in one rural area of Scotland is the utilisation of existing vacant accommodation within the locality to provide emergency accommodation for young people with professional support. This model stemmed from the availability of vacant holiday accommodation in the area for much of the year. The local authority on occasions rents this accommodation as a temporary measure and accommodates a young person in it with the support of staff in the location. Whilst this particular option may not be generalisable, there may be other similarly creative ways to

utilise suitable vacant accommodation on a temporary basis to provide a form of flexible accommodation. Again this is likely only to be a possibility with parental consent.

4.5 Diversity and service provision

Previous research on running away has highlighted a number of important issues about the diversity of young runaways and, as a result, the likely diversity of their needs in terms of service responses. The *Still Running* surveys found some differences in rates of running away amongst different ethnic groups - with white young people and young people of mixed ethnic origin being most likely to have run away, followed by young people of Black - African/Caribbean origin. Young people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin were significantly less likely to have run away. *Still Running 2* also reported significantly higher than average rates of running away amongst a number of other sub-groups of young people - disabled young people, young people who had difficulties with learning, and young people identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

In relation to emergency accommodation this diversity highlights the importance of services being culturally sensitive and able to respond to a range of needs. It also raises questions about whether particular models of emergency accommodation might be more or less appropriate for particular sub-groups of young runaways.

In terms of the first issue, a number of diversity issues arose in emergency accommodation for the minority ethnic participants in this study including:

- Lack of knowledge of the skin and hair care needs of black young people
- A sense of workers making too much effort and thereby emphasising issues of difference - being 'overly nice'
- Emergency accommodation being located in a 'white' area

Previous studies have also identified other issues. For instance, Eid is an important Muslim religious festival and family celebration, a time when young Muslim people away from home can feel extra isolated (Franks 2004).

All the above issues highlight the importance of taking into account issues of diversity in service development and in staff training.

Previous research has also highlighted the importance of bearing in mind cultural differences within the context that young people are running away from. Although young people from various cultures might run away for similar reasons, where family honour is an issue high on the cultural agenda there may be a heightened need for confidentiality and trust building because of safety issues - especially, for example, in a situation where a young person is running from forced marriage or to a relationship which has not been sanctioned by parents. In a previous study on helplines it was made evident to us by young Muslim participants and the Muslim Youth Helpline that accessibility to resources through text and email was important in households where young women may rarely be alone in extended and joint family situations. South Asian young women and men in a focus group stated that they preferred to use text as a means of approaching a helpline as 'people would think you were texting your mate' (Franks and Medforth 2005). This confirms the value of offering alternative means of contact as discussed earlier. It was suggested also in previous research, by a project worker who worked specifically with young South Asian women who had run away that in some cases of heightened familial surveillance there may be a need for young people to be able to prepare and rehearse their getaway (Franks 2004). Learning from this work that was carried out in Manchester includes the need for recognition of the probability of longer-

term work with this particular group of young people whose running away has different ramifications to that of the majority of other groups in that any break with family is likely to be final and they may become isolated from their families and communities (Franks, 2004). Further there may be the threat of being sought out and in cases such as these the level of security of the emergency accommodation is paramount and a foster care placement could not be recommended in such a case.

There is still a significant research gap in relation to diversity issues in relation to other sub-groups of young runaways including disabled young people and gay, lesbian and bisexual young people. However, a consultation with diverse groups of young people regarding emergency accommodation options for runaways conducted in South Yorkshire, highlighted common concerns from young people in minority groups about potential discrimination and victimisation in residential group settings (Smeaton & Rees, 2004). These findings suggested that emergency foster care provision would be an important component of an overall network of emergency accommodation for young runaways.

4.6 Concluding comments

Summary

This chapter has explored options for the provision of emergency accommodation to young runaways by agencies

- We have discussed the competing strengths and weaknesses of provision through existing local authority emergency accommodation and through dedicated accommodation for young runaways.
- We have reviewed the learning from models which have been tested in the UK - including fixed refuge, flexible refuge and foster care - and have summarised professionals' and young people's views on the different options.
- The chapter has also discussed the diverse needs of young runaways in terms of background and characteristics. This consideration, together with the diversity of geographical contexts within the UK, makes recommendation of a single 'best' model inappropriate.

The central conclusion of this chapter is that it is not possible to recommend a single most appropriate model of emergency accommodation for young runaways and that more than one form of provision will be needed within any given area. We conclude this chapter with some concrete recommendations which, taken together, may point the way forward to an effective comprehensive network of emergency accommodation for young runaways.

Recommendations

Where practical, bearing in mind geographical issues, the most viable option on the basis of current evidence and knowledge appears to be a combination of utilisation of existing local authority emergency accommodation provision together with the availability of fixed or flexible refuge which may be shared across local authority areas. In areas which do not currently have refuge provision, the flexible models of provision which have been developed in Glasgow and South Yorkshire offer a valuable means of initiating refuge provision at a local or regional level without the major commitment of funding which is required to set up a fixed refuge.

Recommendation 8:

It is recommended for areas (or clusters of areas) of sufficient population density that, specialist refuge provision for young runaways (either using a flexible or fixed refuge model) should be available to complement existing local authority emergency accommodation provision.

In terms of foster care the evidence presented in this chapter does not provide a great deal of support for this model of emergency accommodation provision as a primary or separate solution. There has been only one example, so far in the UK, of a project which provided dedicated foster care to young runaways under the legislation for refuges. The learning from this project highlights some significant operational difficulties with this model. However foster care is still a useful option for young people in particular contexts, including younger children and sub-groups of young people who may be concerned about safety issues in shared residential provision. Given the limited nature of this need it would seem most appropriate that such young people gain access to specialist emergency foster care through statutory provision.

Recommendation 9:

Foster care should be available as an emergency accommodation option for some younger runaways and some young runaways in minority groups as an alternative to residential provision.

Finally the mixed model including fixed or flexible refuge proposed above may not be viable in sparsely populated areas. This report has highlighted two generic emergency accommodation services in Durham and Moray which have included the provision of accommodation for young runaways. These may be models which would be suitable for replication in other rural areas. Piloting of dedicated provision for runaways in these types of areas has been rare and as a result we still have little firm evidence of what models might work in this context. Thus we would recommend that support is given to the development and testing of alternative models in rural areas to supplement local authority emergency provision.

Recommendation 10:

There is still a need for the testing of alternative models of provision for sparsely populated areas where residential refuge may not be a viable option. This is a significant gap in current knowledge and would warrant pilot funding.

5 Strategic issues

The last three chapters of the report have looked in some detail at the evidence on the emergency accommodation needs of young people and the ways in which agencies might be able to respond to these needs, including the nature of potential service models. A further key topic area for the project is to gain a greater understanding of the organisational factors which are relevant to developing effective responses to the emergency accommodation needs of young runaways. In this chapter we move on to consider these broader issues. In some cases, the issues we have identified have already been extensively discussed in previous literature. In these cases we have only provided a very brief summary of key points with references to previous work.

5.1 Leadership

Previous research (e.g. Evans et al, 2007) has emphasised the important role which strong leadership at a local level can play in developing effective responses to the needs of young runaways.

One of the recommendations of the guidance produced by the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) was:

Every area to have a named manager in charge of runaways issues. Local authorities to identify a named person with responsibility for young people missing from care, and there should also be someone responsible for young people missing from home. These individuals to lead on planning services for runaways, working with and being a contact for other services, particularly as part of local partnerships.

Social Exclusion Unit, 2002: 75

Since that time there have been some positive developments in this direction. The *Stepping Up* survey of local authorities in England in 2007 (Evans et al, 2007) found that 53 out of 69 responding local authorities had a designated lead officer for runaways.

The Young Runaways Action Plan published in England again emphasised the importance of having a clear framework of accountabilities and responsibilities for this policy area at a local level and also discussed the role which Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) in England could play in developing a strategic local response.

The interviews and consultation with professionals undertaken for the current project confirmed the importance of this issue. The presence of 'local champions' was identified as a key factor which can act as a catalyst for the development of effective local responses. Most of the areas which have developed dedicated runaway services have had champions in the senior management of the local authority and/or police who have helped to drive forward change.

A related enabling factor has been the presence of local voluntary agencies that have promoted awareness of running away as an issue and that have been able to work collaboratively and effectively with statutory services. The issue of effective inter-agency working was identified as critical to success in this area and, in a number of areas in England, Local Safeguarding Children Boards had identified sub-groups to facilitate these strategic developments.

One of the key recommendations of this project is therefore to ensure that there are individuals with clear responsibilities for young runaways in the local authority, the Police and other key agencies and that there is a mechanism through which services can be developed and co-ordinated.

As we discussed in Chapter 2, one of the key barriers to the above appears to be lack of awareness and knowledge about the issue of young runaways in some local areas. With respect to the current study, for example, it was noted that in one area the presence of a new senior council 'champion' (with a good understanding of running away issues) brought about a positive change in the development and co-ordination of local runaway services and an improvement in the relationships between statutory and voluntary agencies in that area.

5.2 Independence / working together

A second key issue which has been regularly discussed in the previous literature on runaways projects in the UK, regards who should 'run' runaways services.

Thinking specifically about accommodation provision, most of the successful models of emergency accommodation provision for young runaways in the UK have been operated by the voluntary sector, although often with national or local statutory funding.

In general there was a fair degree of support amongst professionals contributing to this project regarding the role which the voluntary sector can play in meeting the needs of this particular group of young people, and it was apparent that in many areas a substantial level of trust had been established between particular voluntary sector agencies and the local authority. As noted earlier it is essential that the voluntary sector agencies are able to work effectively and collaboratively with the statutory sector. The early history of running away projects in the UK highlights some examples of the potential difficulties, both for the agencies involved and for young people, when this is not the case (Rees, 2001: 74-76)

There are, however, also examples within the runaways field of statutory sector organisations which have been highly effective, including some of the DfES-pilot projects funded during 2003 and 2004 (Rees et al: 2005).

At the heart of the matter, the discussions with young people would suggest that issues of perception, credibility and trust are extremely important, rather than the specific agencies involved. Voluntary sector organisations have to find a fine balance between establishing this credibility but also maintaining effective working links with statutory agencies, both for the long-term good of the project, but also more importantly to ensure that young people can gain access to other services when needed.

Some professionals suggested the possibility of multi-agency or multi-disciplinary teams - for example with representation from Social Care, the Police and the voluntary sector to maintain this balance. These would have the dual advantage of maintaining some operational independence from any particular agency but at the same time would have the benefits of a 'buy-in' from a range of key agencies that would ensure that the project was well integrated into the overall local network of services. This would seem to be a potentially fruitful area for future development, one that might also help to spread service costs.

Another aspect of inter-agency working was the potential role of schools in providing a comprehensive response to the needs of young runaways. This issue was raised at some of the consultation events. Previous research has shown strong links between running away and school-related problems (Rees & Lee, 2005). Professionals at the consultation events felt that there was the potential for teachers and other schools staff to be aware of potential running away issues for young people who were absent from school and to facilitate young runaways gaining access to services.

5.3 Costs of different models

We now turn to a discussion of the potential costs of different options for providing a safety net for young runaways. These costs are a key issue - the pressures on resources of local authorities, and the large number of competing priorities for these resources, were recurring topics during the consultation events.

In terms of emergency accommodation for young runaways, there seems to be some fairly widespread assumptions about the costs of emergency accommodation. The fixed refuge model, in particular, was perceived as being very expensive. However, there is currently very little readily available information about the costs of such services. So in this section we attempt to disentangle some of the issues and to consider different options for the provision of emergency support services, including accommodation where needed, for young runaways.

We focus here on emergency support, rather than only on emergency accommodation, because it is apparent that some of the assumptions about the relative costs of different models stem from a tendency not to compare like with like. For example a fixed refuge model including 24 hour telephone contact, immediate meetings with young people, provision of accommodation, initial crisis resolution work and follow-up work will inevitably be much more expensive than the per person per night cost of emergency foster care because the refuge is providing a range of relevant services 'wrapped around' the provision of accommodation. To provide a good comparison of an equivalent service through a foster care model, a number of different additional components would also need to be costed. This example illustrates that it is not meaningful to compare the costs of emergency accommodation for young runaways in isolation from a consideration of the full range of services that are necessary to provide such a service to young people - e.g. whichever type of accommodation is provided there are costs involved in providing an accessible referral route and conducting an initial assessment of need.

So in order to undertake appropriate comparisons, we have considered the possible costs of various models on the basis of some characteristics of what we would consider to be an 'ideal' model based on the discussion earlier in this report. These are as follows:

1. There is an accessible local or regional referral route, independent of statutory services, which is available 24 hours a day and which accepts referrals directly from young people as well as from other agencies.
2. All referrals receive an initial assessment of need either over the telephone or where necessary face-to-face which focuses on risk assessment and the young person's views and wishes, and does not have a predetermined notion of the most preferable solution. It is implicit in this assumption that decisions are not made on the basis of relative cost as - at least at a surface level - it is clear that a return home or informal solution will have lower immediate costs than the provision of formal emergency accommodation.
3. In addition to the possible provision of accommodation an effective crisis response model will also include some ongoing short-term work to try to resolve the immediate issues, to undertake a full assessment of young people's needs and enable young people to gain access to longer-term services where necessary.

In summary, then, we will consider in some detail the cost implications of providing the following services⁸:

1. 24 hour referral service
2. Initial crisis response where needed
3. Provision of accommodation where needed
4. Short-term crisis resolution work
5. Assessment and ongoing referral as appropriate

The calculations needed to arrive at cost estimates for services require a very large number of assumptions about likely levels of need, about methods of service delivery, and about likely staffing and other costs. However we are aware that there has been no previous attempt to estimate the costs of models, and that this is a key issue for considering service development in this area. We therefore took the decision to present some very approximate costing estimates as part of this report, and hope that this is seen as a useful although tentative first step in trying to address this issue.

Details of assumptions and calculations are presented in the Appendix to this report. In this section we focus on the key conclusions from this analysis. Whilst the material in the Appendix illustrates a wide range of estimates of need and costs, two broad messages from this analysis emerge as follows.

First, even taking into account the cost of the additional 'wrap around' services listed above, flexible forms of refuge (as described in Chapter 4) are likely to demonstrate significant cost savings compared to fixed refuge in many geographical areas. For areas which have not previously had any specialist emergency accommodation for young runaways, these flexible approaches also provide an opportunity to gradually build capacity in response to need. Learning from refuge provision suggests that it can take some years for awareness of projects amongst professionals and young people to become established. Flexible approaches can match the likely gradual increase in referrals to services. However, the analysis in the Appendix also suggests that for large conurbations, due to the higher levels of demand, the overall costs of fixed and flexible models of emergency provision are relatively similar. In these areas there is likely to be a need for emergency accommodation on most nights of the year and this, together with similarities in overall costs, does not suggest cost advantages of having flexible refuges for these types of areas. It may be that it is operationally more straightforward, in these areas, to operate a fixed refuge providing a full range of integrated services rather than a flexible refuge linked to other services for referrals, crisis response, and follow-up work.

Second, for flexible models, the provision of accessible 24 hour referral routes and initial response services represents a significant fixed cost, irrespective of the level of demand for crisis response and emergency accommodation. Thus, it is suggested that, where practical, these services are shared amongst geographical clusters of areas to spread the costs.

⁸ Note that we do not consider the option of not providing a service at all. We have already made the case in Chapter 2 that some form of crisis response service is needed for a substantial proportion of young runaways. The referral and initial assessment processes involve identifying those young people who are in need of such a service.

Potential cost savings of effective crisis response services

If emergency accommodation services for young runaways are able to provide safety and to prevent further incidents of running away and other issues, then they could lead to substantial benefits for young people, families, services and society. It is beyond the scope of this project to assess the potential cost savings of the provision of crisis response services for young runaways. However we would note the following potential tangible benefits of the provision of an independent crisis response service for young runaways including emergency accommodation where needed - in the short term and in the longer term.

First, in the short term:

1. We know that around 8% to 9% of young people are hurt or harmed whilst away from home. Provision of safe emergency accommodation for young people would reduce the costs of this harm to the individual and to society
2. Additionally, some runaway incidents may lead to health issues which would place additional costs on health services, some young people resort to begging which will have a social cost, and there are the emotional costs of a running away incident both for the young person and their parents or carers.
3. If crisis response services can reach a protocol with police then this can substantially reduce the cost to police of dealing with missing person reports. The *Still Running* research suggests that between 19% and 32% of young runaways are reported missing to the Police. It has been estimated that the average missing person report costs the Police service in the region of £1,000 to £2,000⁹.
4. An effective crisis response will reduce the incidence of young people committing offences whilst away from home in order to survive. Research suggests that 9% of young runaways steal whilst away from home in order to survive. As an example of the potential cost saving here, the average cost to society of a non-vehicle theft is £844¹⁰.
5. On the basis that many young runaways away from home will not in the short-term attend school then each effective response could prevent school absence and therefore have cost benefits in terms of reduction in missed days of schooling

Beyond the immediate savings there are also a range of longer-term potential savings, including:

- Prevention of repeat running away incidents including reduced burden on Police
- Reduction in ongoing demand for other services - for example an early intervention with a first-time runaway may prevent the need to take this young person into care at a later point - leading to substantial human and financial benefits.
- Possible longer-term benefits in terms of links between running away and other issues such as offending, substance use, school attendance and youth homelessness.

⁹ Estimates from Lancashire and Leicestershire police

¹⁰ Source: Dubourg et al (2005). Note that there is a much higher estimated cost of £3,268 if the offence is a burglary.

Summary

In summary, estimating the cost of emergency accommodation provision is extremely complex. A fixed refuge model appears at first sight to be an expensive way of providing emergency accommodation to young runaways. However, such a model also offers a range of other services, including 24 hour telephone contact and substantial one-to-one work with young people, over and above the mere provision of accommodation. Other more flexible accommodation models will still need to provide these services. The choice between these two approaches depends very much on the population size of the geographical area to be covered and the exact level of need. For smaller areas and/or lower levels of need, the flexible refuge has clear financial advantages. For highly populated areas and/or higher levels of need, there may still be a case for a fixed form of provision.

The estimated costs presented in the Appendix also highlight the economies of scale involved in providing crisis response services, particularly in terms of telephone contact and initial meetings, which point to the potential value of shared approaches to provision across more than one geographical area.

Whilst it has not been possible, within the scope of this project, to calculate the potential cost savings of provision of emergency accommodation it is evident that there are a number of potential cost savings for services and for society which may well be sufficiently substantial to offset the costs of emergency provision.

5.4 Setting up services

The interviews and consultation events with professionals highlighted some important issues relating to commissioning, funding and setting up services. These issues have already been well covered in the previous literature and so we only provide a brief summary of the main points here.

Funding time scales

There were a number of comments about the difficulties of short-term funding streams for setting up and running this type of project. This is of course a challenge for any kind of service, but there are some specific issues relating to work with young runaways which have already been highlighted by previous work (e.g. Rees et al, 2005; Smeaton, 2006).

First, any high quality accommodation provision for young people requires a substantial amount of set-up time and in addition the certification requirements for refuges mean that development phases of one to two years have been fairly typical in the past.

Second, it takes time for accommodation projects for runaways to become embedded in the local context and for awareness of the service to develop amongst professionals and young people. Previous work, e.g. from Leeds Safe House which was the longest running refuge project outside London, has highlighted that local awareness amongst young people can grow substantially over time and this supports a direct referral approach which has been an important aspect of the successful refuge models.

In addition to these two points, short-term funding cycles have made it very difficult to evaluate the impact of runaways projects, and there is still a relative shortage of robust evaluation studies in this area, considering the substantial amount of practice activity which has taken place over the past decade.

These issues clearly point to the need for longer-term funding arrangements and it is suggested that a four to five year period would be a realistic initial time scale in order to set up an emergency accommodation project, establish a reasonable level of awareness and usage, and undertake an evaluation to assess its effectiveness.

Inspection requirements

There was some discussion in the interviews and consultation events about the certification and inspection requirements of accommodation provision. This issue has also been noted in previous literature - and certainly these requirements have been a significant issue in terms of the lengths of time involved in developing and initially setting up services.

For example, in England, refuges are required to meet the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes. Some professionals pointed out that it is potentially impossible in some contexts for refuges to fully meet all the requirements, given that these were drawn up with different kinds of services in mind. For example, one of the issues raised in this study related to the requirement for placement planning. Previous literature has highlighted other issues such as policies relating to outdoor activities (Smeaton, 2008). There was a genuine concern that refuges might be judged not to have met inspection requirements which are in reality unattainable in this context. In addition, there may be appropriate additional minimum standards for refuge - for example policies focused on maintaining the confidentiality of the location - which it would be helpful to be included in inspection of these services.

It was therefore suggested that it may be appropriate to publish and apply a slightly different set of requirements for this particular form of emergency accommodation provision in England, Wales and Scotland.

5.5 Inter-area working

The final strategic issue which we cover in this chapter is the potential to develop joint responses to the needs of young runaways across a cluster of local authorities.

The Young Runaways Action Plan alluded to this potential in relation to the brief for this particular project:

We will support the development of local, regional and sub-regional commissioning and provision of emergency accommodation following consultation with local authorities on the successful provision of emergency accommodation for young runaways

DCSF, 2008: 23

There are already some examples (London and South Yorkshire) of joint approaches to emergency accommodation provision across a number of local authority areas. This has obvious potential advantages in terms of spreading fixed costs (see discussion earlier in this chapter), and so we were interested in exploring professionals' views about the viability of this option in other regions.

Other examples of joint working emerged through the consultation events. For example, participants in the events mentioned the development of joint missing persons protocols across clusters of areas (with the local police force covering these areas). One cluster of areas was operating a joint emergency duty service.

Generally there was a fair degree of support for this approach more widely - particularly in clusters of metropolitan areas and, tentatively in unitary authorities attached to shire authorities. It is clear that the potential for this approach is linked to the geography of regions and sub-regions, and the relative size of local authorities in terms of population base.

Overall the findings from the consultation would suggest that further non-prescriptive support for the development of shared cluster approaches would be welcomed.

There were clear indications from the consultations and individual interviews that cluster approaches would be much less likely to be applicable in rural areas due to the large size of these individual areas, and the importance of relatively localised responses.

For us our experiences are that our runaways stay local they don't even go to the next town or village. They are scared kids and don't want to move out of their comfort zone

Interview with professional in rural area

There was also discussion of joint regional commissioning, even when the actual provision might be dispersed. There were perceived strengths in this in terms of getting value for money, although there were also reservations, with one professional describing this as potentially 'a bureaucratic nightmare'

Linked to these issues of inter-area working, a number of professionals raised the issue of young people running away from one area to stay in another. There were two different aspects to this issue. First, there were instances of young people moving between local authority areas within a particular region or sub-region. This is particularly likely to be an issue, for example, in some metropolitan areas where the boundaries are primarily administrative and also in areas which are made up of a unitary authority in the centre of a primarily rural area, where young people may move towards the population centre. There were particular concerns here about the establishment of emergency accommodation in one area creating additional movement of young people:

I am sure you are aware of the negative incentive principle. If there is emergency accommodation in an area there is the risk for the local authority of becoming a net importer of very vulnerable young people which will put pressure on services in the area. There has to be a strategic overview for this work at a regional/national level which acknowledges the impact and responds to it.

Local authority response to e-mail consultation

It would seem that this issue could probably be effectively tackled by the shared cluster provision discussed above with clear agreements between areas regarding responsibility for young people.

A slightly separate issue was the movement of young people over larger geographical distances. This issue has been acknowledged in the past in relation to London, and also to some seaside towns. Research would suggest that a relatively small proportion of young runaways will travel outside their local area whilst away from home. However, the consultation events suggest that there is some inward movement of young runaways to coastal towns. In Scotland, there were also concerns amongst professionals in rural areas about the possibility of young runaways moving out of the area to one of the larger cities - particularly Glasgow. It was felt that once this has happened it may be difficult to enable the young person to return to the area and their home:

Historically young people who go out of area stay out of area. We would want to minimise that where possible

Interview with professional

This issue was also raised in national stakeholder interviews:

The challenge of receiving young people from different local authorities needs to be recognised.

National stakeholder interview

A further issue raised by several professionals related to young people who were placed in residential and foster care 'out of area' by local authorities. One predominantly rural area drew attention to the large number of residential establishments within the region which provided accommodation for 'looked after' young people from neighbouring metropolitan areas. Incidents of going missing from these residential establishments constituted a substantial proportion of incidents of young people reported missing within the local police force area.

An unresolved issue is the way in which such a national network might be funded. One option which has been proposed in the past is central government funding for such a network. We sought views on this in national stakeholder interviews and a concern was expressed that 'ring fenced' funding of this kind would inevitably mean cuts in other areas.

A second option is for the local authority responsible for a young person to be charged on a nightly basis. This is an approach which some refuges have been able to negotiate with local authorities within restricted geographical areas - with the current refuge in South Yorkshire providing a good current example. However it has generally been found to be more difficult to gain agreement for this type of approach across a larger number of neighbouring local authorities.

This is an issue which requires further exploration, given the geographical mobility of some young runaways as highlighted by this and previous research, if joint funding of refuges is to become a viable option. It may be worth exploring an approach which includes nationally agreed thresholds and processes for access to refuge together with guidance on appropriate charging arrangements for local authorities with responsibilities for the young person concerned. The only way that this could be satisfactorily resolved would be for there be a legal requirement on the responsible local authority to meet the initial costs of providing refuge for children who have either left their area or are placed out of area. This would need to be included in guidance in a similar manner to that for leaving care services in England and Wales (Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000).

5.6 Concluding comments

Summary and recommendations

This chapter has considered five key strategic topics in relation to the provision of crisis response and emergency accommodation services for young runaways. Many of the topics discussed have already been identified in previous literature, but their inclusion here reflects the fact that they are still to some extent unresolved.

First, we considered the issue of strategic leadership on the running away issue within local areas. It is, once again, apparent from this project that the presence of 'local champions', within Children's Services, the Police and voluntary sector organisations are a key enabling factor for the establishment and maintenance of effective strategies and services to tackle this issue. We would therefore reinforce the conclusions of previous research, and the recommendations within Government guidance on this matter.

Recommendation 11:
The identification of designated lead professionals within Children's Services and Police should continue to be promoted as an important prerequisite to the provision of effective responses to the needs of young runaways.

Second, we looked at issues of independence and working together in relation to runaways services. This has been a long-standing debate in the literature on this topic. There have traditionally been perceived benefits stemming from the independence of many projects for young runaways, most of which historically have been run by voluntary sector organisations. This project has again highlighted the importance of the perceived independence of these projects in engaging with young people. However, learning from previous practice has also highlighted some of the drawbacks of the independent approach including tensions in working relationships within statutory sector agencies which may also hinder optimum solutions for individual young people. A number of professionals contributing to this consultation suggested the potential for multi-agency teams to provide services to young runaways and this should be considered in future development of such services.

Recommendation 12:
Runaways services need to pay particular attention to the balance between perceived independence and integration into local and regional networks of provision for young people. It is recommended that the potential for developing multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approaches is seriously considered in future service developments.

The chapter moves on to consider the issue of costs of runaways services. We argue that it is not possible to estimate the relative costs of different models of emergency accommodation provision without considering the wider range of services that are needed in order that young people can gain access to such provision, and to enable their needs to be addressed and appropriate solutions to their situation to be found. There are no specific recommendations from this discussion but there is a need for the issues raised to be borne in mind in relation to some of the other recommendations in this report - particularly Recommendation 2 (effective communication with key stakeholders) and Recommendation 16 (shared cluster models).

The fourth key area to be considered in this chapter relates to the setting up of services for young runaways. Two particular issues raised during this project related to time scales and inspection requirements.

In terms of time scales, as with previous work in this area, the project has drawn attention to the need for realistic time scales for the establishment of effective emergency accommodation projects for young runaways.

Recommendation 13:
It is recommended that future projects set up to provide emergency accommodation for young runaways have a sufficient initial funding period to enable the project to be developed in line with accepted standards, to establish awareness amongst professionals and young people, and to begin to evaluate its effectiveness.

In terms of inspection requirements, it appears that there are some unresolved issues in relation to the extent to which refuges in particular can be expected to fully meet existing minimum standards. There may also be additional minimum standards that should be applied to refuge provision - for example taking into account the issue of confidentiality of location. We would therefore suggest that a review is undertaken of these issues.

Recommendation 14:

The inspection requirements for refuges should be reviewed. This review should include consideration of possible exceptions to the existing minimum standards for residential provision in this context, and also the formulation of any additional minimum standards that may support high quality practice in relation to the provision of refuge.

Finally, the project has sought to gather views and assess the merits of the development of services across local authority boundaries. There was considerable support amongst professionals for the development of shared cluster approaches to the provision of services, and the case for this is strengthened by some of the estimates of costs of services presented in this chapter. However, it is clear that the geography of some areas would mean that this is not universally practical.

Recommendation 15:

The possibility for shared cluster approaches across a group of local areas to meet young runaways' emergency accommodation needs should be explored where practical. This approach has potential to reduce costs and increase accessibility and service co-ordination in many regions.

The project has also highlighted issues about the movement of young people between local authority areas both within and between regions. Current refuge provision is extremely sparsely spread and there remains a case for the development of a national network of services which can enable young runaways to remain in their local area or return there as appropriate.

Recommendation 16:

This project has again highlighted the need for, and potential value of, a national network of emergency accommodation for young runaways which can provide an effective safety net for young people in all geographical areas.

6 16- and 17-year-olds

The issue of 16- and 17-year-olds away from home has been discussed in a number of research reports on young runaways. There has been an ongoing debate in the literature about the distinction between running away and youth homelessness. This stems from some of the practical and legal differences in relation to young people aged 16 and over who are away from home. In some contexts young people aged 16 and 17 have additional options available to them whilst away from home compared to under-16-year-olds. For example, in some areas there is a limited amount of emergency accommodation provision available for young people in this age group. It is also generally accepted in practice (although perhaps not in law) that young people of this age can leave home, and it is unlikely in most circumstances that the Police would return a young person in this age group who was reported missing. One of the key exceptions to this is that 'looked after' young people would usually be returned to their placement.

On the other hand, the above additional accommodation options may not in reality be available to many or most young people aged 16 and 17 who are away from home. There are also some legal age-related differences between England, Wales and Scotland to consider here. Young people away from home at this age are still in a highly disadvantaged position and at substantial risk due to their age and the limited options available to them to live independently.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the primary focus of this project was on young runaways under the age of 16¹¹. However this principle, which was explained at the start of each stakeholder consultation event, was the subject of considerable discussion. It became clear that the situation of young people away from home aged 16 and 17 was a matter of some concern to many professionals. As a result we undertook to dedicate some time at the end of each event to this issue, and to summarise the key points as part of this report.

In brief, four areas of concern were identified by professionals.

First, concern was expressed about professional perceptions towards 16- and 17-year-olds - whether this group were seen as 'vulnerable' or 'in need' of services.

Second, linked to the above point it was felt that this age group fell into a 'grey area' in terms of service provision - often falling through the gaps between children's services, child and adolescent mental health services, housing services and adult services. Examples were cited of young people leaving home being referred to local authority housing services for help, but then being turned down on the basis of 'intentional homelessness'.¹²

Third, a number of contributors felt that current agency involvement with this age group was highly complex. It was felt that there was a need to rationalise existing services for this age group so that they received a more effective and coherent response.

Fourth, in many areas it would appear that there is a lack of direct access emergency accommodation provision for this age group, or long delays in gaining access. Concerns were expressed in a number of regional events about the use of B&B accommodation for young people and the risks that this posed.

¹¹ For exceptions to this general principle in relation to 'looked after' young people and also to take into account the different context in Scotland, see Chapter 1

¹² Note: A recent legal ruling in England, *G, R (on the application of) v London Borough of Southwark*, has clarified the responsibility of local authorities under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 in situations where young people age 16 and 17 are in need of accommodation.

In summary, there are a number of unresolved issues in relation to provision of emergency accommodation and other forms of crisis support for young people away from home in this age group. Some of these issues are not distinct from the issues discussed in earlier chapters of this report in relation to young people under the age of 16. In general, the recommendations and services presented in other chapters could equally be applied to this older age group.

However, there do appear to be a set of additional issues related to this particular group of young people which are of a more far-reaching nature than the provision of emergency accommodation. These relate to an apparent lack of clarity about the service status of these young people as either children or adults. These issues are beyond the scope of this particular project to consider in detail, and would warrant further specific exploration.

Recommendation 17:

It is recommended that the legal and practice issues in relation to young people aged 16 and 17 who are away from home and in need of accommodation are explored further. The information gathered for this project suggests the need for clarification of the relative responsibilities of different services for this age group to ensure that there is a coherent network of support to meet their needs.

7 Conclusions

7.1 Discussion

Earlier in this report we provided an executive summary, and also at the end of each chapter, ongoing summaries of material for that chapter. It would therefore be superfluous to attempt once again to provide a comprehensive summary of the contents of the report here. Instead this section focuses on some key issues which this project has identified in relation to the provision of emergency accommodation and other services for young runaways in the UK.

First of all we return to three key areas of disagreement amongst professionals which we identified in the introduction to this report. Then we turn to some other key issues highlighted by this project.

Are there significant numbers of young runaways in need of emergency support?

The survey-based evidence highlighted in Chapter 2 suggests that the answer to this question is 'Yes'. There is consistent statistical evidence of a substantial number of young runaways each year in the UK - somewhere in the region of 100,000. Information from young people indicates that more than a fifth of young runaways will either have nowhere to stay or will be hurt at some point whilst away from home.

Clearly a larger proportion of young runaways can be considered 'at risk'. It seems however that this level of need is not always apparent to local agencies - particularly statutory services - and that there is generally a lack of firm statistical evidence of local need. One of the main reasons for this is that young people are not only reluctant to approach agencies for help whilst away from home but will often actively avoid contact with agencies.

If so, can the emergency needs of these young runaways be met without the need for emergency accommodation?

We considered this question at some length in Chapter 3. Some professionals contributing to the project felt that in most or all cases, the immediate situation of young runaways can be resolved without the provision of formal emergency accommodation - either through negotiating a return home or through finding temporary informal options such as staying with relatives or friends. There was broad agreement that these options were possible and appropriate in some contexts. However, the material in Chapter 3 raises important questions about safeguarding duties. It also highlights the implications for establishing an engagement with young people. We conclude that it is important that agencies maintain an open mind about the most appropriate option for each individual young person rather than seeing an immediate return home as the preferred option. The answer to the above question is therefore 'Yes' in some cases and 'No' in other cases. In brief there is a need for a safety net of emergency accommodation provision and this is consistent both with the statutory duties of local authorities towards children in need, and the provisions of refuge legislation which focus on children and young people 'at risk of harm'.

If so, can these accommodation needs be met by existing statutory provision?

This final question which we considered in the first part of Chapter 4 also receives a qualified response. Clearly there are instances where young runaways meet all the relevant criteria for immediate provision of local authority accommodation.

The project has however raised a number of questions regarding the extent to which local authorities are able to meet the emergency accommodation needs of all young runaways who may legitimately need it.

First, there are questions about the capacity of current local authority services in many areas to meet this need - particularly if some of the current hidden need amongst young runaways highlighted in Chapter 2 becomes more apparent. Resource issues were a common point of discussion in the regional consultation events and the recent evidence on young runaways being accommodated overnight in police stations also reinforces this issue.

Second, and related to the above, there are questions about whether all young runaways who may need emergency accommodation would meet the current thresholds in operation for access to local authority emergency accommodation.

Third, there are questions about whether accommodation within the 'looked after' system is an appropriate option for some young runaways, either from a professional or young person's perspective.

Finally, there are significant doubts about whether all young runaways in need of a safety net would be willing to be accommodated in statutory emergency accommodation provision.

These qualifications therefore point to the need for an alternative emergency accommodation provision for young runaways, to be provided alongside existing local authority provision. This conclusion is supported by the experience in the three areas of the UK which currently have refuge. In all these areas, there was a broad level of agreement amongst professionals in the statutory and voluntary sectors that refuge provision was a valuable component of the local network of services available to young people. The answer to the above question is again therefore 'Yes' in some cases and 'No' in others

Models of emergency accommodation provision

Chapter 4 reviews the history of emergency accommodation provision for young runaways in the UK, providing practice examples and summaries of previous learning. It also presents the views of young people and professionals gathered for this project on the strengths and weaknesses of different models. Given the current state of knowledge, the chapter concludes that the strongest case is for the provision of fixed or flexible refuge, potentially across clusters of areas, alongside the provision of emergency accommodation by local authorities where appropriate. Chapter 5 includes some rough estimates of the costs of models of provisions which highlight the benefits of flexible models for smaller geographical areas. These estimates also suggest that fixed refuge can still be a cost effective model in larger conurbations.

At present, the case for other models of emergency accommodation provision - for example dedicated foster care - is not so strong. However there are contexts in which these models may form an important part of a comprehensive service for particular young people. There is also still a lack of successful examples of accommodation models for sparsely populated areas. This project has highlighted a few possibilities for further exploration in this context, and this is an area where pilot funding may still be required.

Other issues

In addition the report considers a number of broader issues including:

- The importance of strategic leadership in order to develop effective responses to the needs of young runaways.

- The importance of multi-agency working balancing independence and interdependence, and the potential for the development of multi-disciplinary services in this area of practice.
- The need for appropriate funding time scales to enable services to be developed, established and evaluated.
- Some unresolved issues relating to the minimum standards and inspection requirements for refuge provision.
- The potential to develop regional and sub-regional approaches to the provision of crisis response and emergency accommodation for young runaways.

7.2 Recommendations

In this section we provide an accessible and complete listing of the recommendations presented within each chapter of the report. We do not reproduce the rationale for each recommendation here, which are available in the summarising sections of the relevant chapter.

Chapter 2: Levels of need

1. There is a lack of reliable evidence of need at local level and it is recommended that questions about running away should be integrated into self-report surveys of young people as a means of filling this gap.
2. There is a need to more effectively communicate with key local stakeholders and decision makers regarding the learning from the last two decades of research and practice with young runaways.

Chapter 3: Responding to need

3. Emergency accommodation provision should be embedded within crisis response services for young runaways rather than being seen as a stand-alone option. This will enable an initial exploration of options for young people referred to such services, and will ensure that accommodation is provided when this is assessed as being the best option.
4. A good practice guide should be produced for professionals who are providing crisis response to young runaways, which draws together existing examples of practice, and a consideration of child protection / safeguarding duties, issues and procedures. This guide should receive official endorsement as a means of promoting consistent high quality assessment practice.
5. Crisis response services should be strongly integrated into a network of local services which also includes targeted preventative and follow-up work.
6. All young people who are known to have run away or who have been reported as missing should receive a follow-up assessment of their needs.
7. It is vital that there are accessible means of young people self-referring to runaways services that they perceive as credible and that they are able to trust; such services should be well-publicised and include referral routes that are available 24 hours a day.

Chapter 4: Models of emergency accommodation provision

8. It is recommended for areas (or clusters of areas) of sufficient population density that, specialist refuge provision for young runaways (either using a flexible or fixed refuge model) should be available to complement existing local authority emergency accommodation provision.
9. Foster care should be available as an emergency accommodation option for some younger runaways and some young runaways in minority groups as an alternative to residential provision.
10. There is still a need for the testing of alternative models of provision for sparsely populated areas where residential refuge may not be a viable option. This is a significant gap in current knowledge and would warrant pilot funding.

Chapter 5: Strategic issues

11. The identification of designated lead professionals within Children's Services and Police should continue to be promoted as an important prerequisite to the provision of effective responses to the needs of young runaways.
12. Runaways services need to pay particular attention to the balance between perceived independence and integration into local and regional networks of provision for young people. It is recommended that the potential for developing multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approaches is seriously considered in future service developments.
13. It is recommended that future projects set up to provide emergency accommodation for young runaways have a sufficient initial funding period to enable the project to be developed in line with accepted standards, to establish awareness amongst professionals and young people, and to begin to evaluate its effectiveness.
14. The inspection requirements for refuges should be reviewed. This review should include consideration of possible exceptions to the existing minimum standards for residential provision in this context, and also the formulation of any additional minimum standards that may support high quality practice in relation to the provision of refuge.
15. The possibility for shared cluster approaches across a group of local areas to meet young runaways' emergency accommodation needs should be explored where practical. This approach has potential to reduce costs and increase accessibility and service co-ordination in many regions.
16. This project has again highlighted the need for, and potential value of, a national network of emergency accommodation for young runaways which can provide an effective safety net for young people in all geographical areas.

Chapter 6: 16- and 17-year-olds

17. It is recommended that the legal and practice issues in relation to young people aged 16 and 17 who are away from home and in need of accommodation are explored further. The information gathered for this project suggests the need for clarification of the relative responsibilities of different services for this age group to ensure that there is a coherent network of support to meet their needs.

By way of conclusion, we would note that whilst some of the above recommendations are new, others echo long-standing themes from previous research and guidance. It is clear that there is still considerable local diversity in levels of practice and policy in relation to the issue of running away. There is now a substantial body of research and practice learning on this topic in the UK, including the new material generated through this project. The need to effectively communicate this to key stakeholders as highlighted in Recommendation 2 above would seem to be crucial to the development of a more coherent and effective national safety net for young runaways in England, Wales and Scotland.

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Appendix - Cost estimates

In this appendix we attempt to disentangle some of the issues regarding the costs of runaways services. We discuss a number of different models of service provision, including different crisis response and emergency accommodation options. As outlined in the main report, we consider the costs of various models on the basis of some characteristics of what we would consider to be an 'ideal' model based on the discussion in this report. These are as follows:

1. There is an accessible local or regional referral route, independent of statutory services, which is available 24 hours a day and which accepts referrals directly from young people as well as from other agencies.
2. All referrals receive an initial assessment of need either over the telephone or where necessary face-to-face which focuses on risk assessment and the young person's views and wishes, and does not have a predetermined notion of the most preferable solution. It is implicit in this assumption that decisions are not made on the basis of relative cost as - at least at a surface level - it is clear that a return home or informal solution will have lower immediate costs than the provision of formal emergency accommodation.
3. In addition to the possible provision of accommodation an effective crisis response model will also include some ongoing short-term work to try to resolve the immediate issues, to undertake a full assessment of young people's needs and enable young people to gain access to longer-term services where necessary.

So we will consider in some detail the cost implications of providing the following services:

1. 24 hour referral service
2. Initial crisis response where needed
3. Provision of accommodation where needed
4. Short-term crisis resolution work
5. Assessment and ongoing referral as appropriate

Estimating the costs of such services is a complex process and involves numerous assumptions which we have attempted to clarify below. Therefore the estimates presented in this Appendix should be viewed as having a wide margin of error.

Estimates of the likely need for services

The first set of assumptions relates to the likely need for a service within an area with a population of a given size. The table below lists the key required assumptions, the estimates we have used and the rationale for these estimates:

Table 2 - Assumptions of level of need

	Estimated range	Explanatory notes
Number of overnight running away incidents per year per 100,000 child population aged 0 to 15	1100	This is based on an estimated 129,000 running away incidents per year and a total UK child population of 11.5 million. Note that the <i>Still Running</i> surveys also found no systematic variation in running away rates according to type of area, so we have assumed a uniform rate of running away across all areas.
Proportion of young runaways seeking help from agencies	5% to 20%	Surveys suggest that only 5% of young runaways seek help from agencies, but that in total 20% do so from formal and informal sources.
Proportion of young runaways seeking help who are in need of an initial meeting	60% to 80%	For example, the proportion of referrals to a pilot project in Leicestershire which led to an initial meeting (rather than just telephone support) was 73%
Proportion of young runaways seeking help who are in need of emergency accommodation	30% to 50%	Based on the proportion of referrals leading to refuge provision in the Glasgow and South Yorkshire refuges
Average number of emergency accommodation nights required	2 to 6 nights	Based on information on the range usage of the three current refuges

On the basis of the above it is possible to use the lower, mid-point and upper estimates for each statistic to calculate a range of likely need within an area of a given population size. Using this principle, some sample estimates of referrals and emergency accommodation need are as follows:

Table 3 - Estimates of referrals and emergency accommodation need per 100,000 child population aged 0 to 15

	Range	Lower estimate	Average estimate ¹³	Upper estimate
No. of runaway incidents	n/a	1,100	1,100	1,100
No. seeking help	5%–20%	55	138	220
No. needing an initial meeting	60%–80% of those seeking help	33	96	176
No. needing emergency accommodation	30%–50% of those seeking help	16	55	110
Average person nights	2–6 nights per stay	32	220	660

It can be seen from this table that there is huge variation in the potential need for services, including emergency accommodation, depending on the precise assumptions made at various levels. In the remainder of this appendix we will use the average estimates in the fourth column in the table above as the basis for discussion, but clearly these are to some extent arbitrary estimates.

It is also possible to see that likely occupancy levels of refuge will vary substantially depending on the population size of the area covered. Due to the likely overlap of stays of different young people, a total demand of 220 nights per year, as in the fourth column in the above table, is unlikely to mean a constant demand for emergency accommodation throughout the year. However in an area with five times the population with a potential demand for over 1,000 nights of emergency accommodation per year, it would be much more likely that there would be a fairly constant usage of the provision on the large majority of nights in the year - although there would still be peaks and troughs in demand. So it can be seen that in smaller population areas a fixed refuge model would not be justified, but that it may make sense to have such a provision to cover a large conurbation.

¹³ Averages are based on the average of the maximum and minimum percentages in column 2 rather than the mid-point between the lower and higher estimates in columns 3 and 5.

Service cost assumptions

The next set of assumptions relates to salaries and other factors related to budgeting of services.

Salary costs

The following average annual salary costs (inclusive of National Insurance and Pensions) have been used:

Project worker	£30,000
Senior Project Worker	£38,000
Project Manager	£48,000
Administrator	£22,000

In addition, a support cost of £4,000 per annum per full-time post has been used to allow for premises, office and other running costs. In reality there may be economies of scale in this estimate for larger projects, but we have not taken this into account.

Practice time available

For each full-time Project Worker post of 260 working days a year, the following deductions have been made:

- 40 days for annual leave, bank holidays and an allowance for sickness and other forms of leave
- 30 days for training, administration, supervision, team meetings, and so on.

This leaves 190 days per year per full-time post. Given a working day of 7.4 hours (37 hours per week) this amounts to 1,406 available practice hours per full-time per year.

Management and administration

It has been assumed that one full-time management post and one full-time administrative post are required for each 5 full-time practitioner posts. It has been assumed that management posts are not routinely involved in shifts but may provide cover when necessary.

Staff cover

It has been assumed that a minimum of two practice staff should be on duty at any time when services are open.

In addition, for residential provision, it has been assumed that handover meetings are needed for shift work to ensure continuity of practice. Three handover meetings of one hour per day have been included in calculations. This effectively means that to cover 24 hours, 27 hours of person time are needed due to overlap in working patterns.

Estimates of likely cost of service

We now turn to a consideration of the likely costs of providing a full range of services to respond to these young people's needs as listed earlier, using different models of emergency accommodation provision.

Fixed refuge

The estimated costs of fixed refuge can be calculated directly from the service cost assumptions above. For example, if we assume double cover, 24 hours per day, every day of the year, then the approximate cost, based on these assumptions is in the region of £680,000 - see Example 1 below. Clearly the cost would be much higher if more than double cover was required, and could be slightly lower depending on arrangements for paying staff on night cover (e.g. sleeping-in allowances).

As indicated in the main report this type of project incorporates capacity for the full range of crisis response services from referral through to follow-up work. It is not possible to arrive at separate costings for the different parts of the service, but it is possible to compare the overall costs of this model with the sum of the costs of different components of a flexible model.

Flexible refuge

In contrast to the fixed model, the costs of the flexible model need to be considered in relation to different components.

First of all we consider the cost of providing an initial response to referrals. This needs to involve the staffing of the telephone line to receive referrals, and going out to meet young people when required.

A comprehensive level of such cover would require access from 5pm to 9am Monday to Friday and all day Saturday and Sunday. This totals 128 hours cover per week or 6,656 hours per year. For two staff to be on duty for this whole period (plus management and admin support) would cost in the region of £470,000 per year - see Example 2 below. Reducing this to one member of staff on cover would approximately halve the cost but then there would need to be additional 'on call' support for the purposes of going out to meet young people.

It is already evident from this calculation that the costs of providing out-of-hours cover can be very high. Moreover this level of staffing does not provide adequate day-time cover to work with young people. It would seem that this option would only be viable if the service covered a large population area.

A more cost-effective option might be for two staff to be available from 5pm to midnight each day, with referrals redirected to a national helpline outside those hours. This type of model has been used by a number of local runaways projects. A rough estimated cost of service provision of this model is in the region of £180,000. This does however leave the question of how to provide a service to young runaways who make a referral after midnight. Note also that in the most expensive option with two staff on duty all night, as above, the staff could also provide some of the required cover for the provision of emergency accommodation

The second component of the model is the actual provision of accommodation. Unit costs are difficult to calculate because this is dependent on the levels of occupancy. For example, the estimated average weekly cost for a child to be placed in a children's home is £2,428¹⁴. So an approximate cost in the region of £400 per night might seem a reasonable estimate. However, this is highly dependent on occupancy rates as, in the case of single occupancy, it would clearly not cover the cost of two staff to be on duty from 5pm until 9 am, plus all the associated management, administration and running costs. As can be seen from the earlier calculations, in smaller population areas the levels of demand for accommodation would mean that, on occasions when refuge was required, single occupancy would be likely to be the norm rather than the exception and this raises questions about the costs of such a model.

The third component of the model would be the provision of daytime work with the young person and parents / carers to resolve the situation and either arrange for a return home or to alternative accommodation. Based on the recommendations earlier this would include an assessment of young people's needs and the referral on to other agencies as appropriate. Again, it is difficult to make precise estimates in this area, but if we assume that each case would take 8 hours of a worker's time then the costs¹⁵ of this aspect of the intervention would be in the region of £300 per case.

Finally, it is important to make some allowance for a follow-up visit and assessment for young people who were referred and not accommodated. We have estimated this at 4 hours work per case which might cost in the region of £150 per case.

Costs for different example areas

Based on the above discussion, it is possible to calculate some very rough costs for the provision of a flexible model, based on estimated costings for each component as follows:

1. Referral and initial response - £180,000 for a service from 5pm to midnight plus an allowance for 'call out' costs between midnight and 9am for 10% of calls
2. Refuge charged at £400 per person per night
3. Crisis resolution charged at £300 per case
4. Follow-up work charged at £150 per case

Note that these estimates only include crisis resolution work and follow-up work for young people accommodated. There would also be a need for additional work for young people who were not in need of emergency accommodation.

¹⁴ NHS Information Centre, *Personal Social Services Expenditure and Unit Costs England 2007-8*, February 2009 cited in House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee, *Looked After Children. Third Report of Session 2008-9, Volume 1*. London: The Stationery Office Limited.

¹⁵ Inclusive of an allowance for management, administration and support costs

Table 4 - Estimates of costs of service

Population aged 0 to 15	100,000	200,000	400,000
No. seeking help	137	274	548
No. needing an initial meeting	105	210	420
No. needing emergency accommodation	63	127	252
No. of refuge nights	252	508	1008
Cost of crisis response	181,575	183,150	186,300
Cost of emergency accommodation	100,800	201,600	403,200
Cost of crisis resolution	18,900	38,100	75,600
Cost of follow-up	9,450	19,050	37,800
Total estimated cost	310,275	441,900	702,900

Two things are evident from this table.

First, the cost of provision per person helped for small areas is relatively high and probably not viable. This is primarily due to the fixed costs of providing an out-of-hours referral route. This once again indicates the potential merits of a shared service across clusters of local areas.

Second, the costs of flexible provision for a large area are roughly equivalent to the cost of fixed refuge provision estimated earlier. As a consequence, for an area of this size, there may be a case for provision of fixed refuge.

Example 1

Fixed refuge - double cover, 24 hours per day, 365 days per year

Practice hours per day (2 staff @ 27 hours)	54 hours
Practice hours per year (365 days)	19,710 hours
Practice posts required (1,406 hours per post)	14.0 posts
Management posts required (one post per 5 practice staff)	2.8 posts
Administrative posts required (one post per 5 practice staff)	2.8 posts

	Number	Cost
Project workers	14	£420,000
Senior Project Workers	1.8	£68,400
Project Manager	1	£48,000
Administrative staff	2.8	£61,600
Support costs (@£4,000 per post)	19.6	£78,400
Total cost		£676,400

Example 2

Emergency support service (not including accommodation), double cover, 16 hours per day on weekdays and 24 hours per day at weekends, 365 days per year

Practice hours per week (2 staff @ 128 hours)	256 hours
Practice hours per year (365 days)	13,348 hours
Practice posts required (1,406 hours per post)	9.5 posts
Management posts required (one post per 5 practice staff)	2 posts
Administrative posts required (one post per 5 practice staff)	2 posts

	Number	Cost
Project workers	9.5	£285,000
Senior Project Workers	1	£38,000
Project Manager	1	£48,000
Administrative staff	2	£44,000
Support costs (@£4,000 per post)	13.5	£54,000
Total cost		£469,000

Example 3

Emergency support service (not including accommodation), double cover, 7 hours per day (5pm to midnight), 365 days per year

Practice hours per day (2 staff @ 7 hours)	14 hours
Practice hours per year (365 days)	5,110 hours
Practice posts required (1,406 hours per post)	3.6 posts
Management posts required (one post per 5 practice staff)	0.8 posts
Administrative posts required (one post per 5 practice staff)	0.8 posts

	Number	Cost
Project workers	3.6	£108,000
Senior Project Workers	0	0
Project Manager	0.8	£38,400
Administrative staff	0.8	£17,600
Support costs (@£4,000 per post)	5.2	£20,800
Total cost		£184,800

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