

Guest blog: Susannah Drury from Missing People

The festive period can be a difficult time of year for anyone with a missing relative. It is also a hard time for people who are missing or thinking of going missing.

In a guest blog, Susannah Drury of Missing People, outlines the vital support that is available and highlights the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on mental health.

Susannah is Missing People's Director of Policy and Development and joined the organisation in 2013. She leads the Policy and Research Team who help missing people and their families get the support they need from UK governments, the police and other agencies.



Susannah Drury, Director of Policy and Development, Missing People

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In April, Helen*, aged 16 called Missing People's Runaway Helpline. Helen had left home after a huge argument with her mum and did not want to go back. She was alone and scared in the city, unable to stay with friends because of the COVID-19 lockdown and not sure what to do or where to go. Helen found out about Runaway Helpline after receiving a TextSafe® message. TextSafe® is a supportive text message, requested by Police Scotland and sent from the charity Missing People to a missing child or adult offering the charity's confidential helpline support.

Our helpline team were able to support Helen to feel calmer and then to talk through her options. The team found Helen a safe place to stay that night, and agreed with Helen that they would contact her parents and the police to let them know she was safe. Her parents were hugely relieved to hear from us – having been worried sick about what would happen to their daughter, away from home in the middle of a pandemic.

Helen's story highlights the vital work Missing People delivers in Scotland – working in partnership with Police Scotland and other agencies to safeguard and support hundreds of children and adults who are missing and their families every year. 2020 has been an incredibly busy and challenging year for the charity. Thanks to funders including the Scottish Government we have been able to keep our vital support services open at a time when they have never been more needed.

COVID-19 has made life tougher for everyone – but particularly for people in our society who were already vulnerable. A national survey we conducted recently found that two-thirds of people who had been missing before were experiencing worsening mental health as a result of the pandemic, half had experienced problems accessing support and more than four in ten were facing financial challenges. Many of these people are at risk of going missing again, finding themselves at greater risk of harm, not least as COVID-19 is on the rise again.

In 2017, the Scottish Government and partners published the groundbreaking National Missing Persons Framework, which put Scotland firmly ahead of the curve in its response to missing children and adults. Thanks to funding from the Scottish Government, Missing People now works with local multi-agency partnerships to assess their response to missing children and adults against the good practice outlined in the Framework, and then to develop tailored local plans to ensure missing children and adults always get the right help, from the right professional, at the right time.

In 2020/21, we have worked directly with multi-agency partnerships in three local areas to review and identify ways of improving their response to missing people. We held the first ever good practice sharing conference on missing persons with more than 100 participants from across Scotland. We have started work on a good practice toolkit, to highlight the many examples of brilliant work we have seen across Scotland in the two years of delivering this work.

Helen's story highlights the importance of agencies working together to safeguard vulnerable missing people. Stories like Helen's together with the great local work we have seen across Scotland have inspired us to adapt to the challenges of COVID and stay focused on building partnerships with the aim that every missing person in Scotland is found safe.

**Name changed to protect anonymity*

Missing People provides 24/7 advice and support for children and adults who are missing, or are thinking about going missing, and for the families left behind.

Support is free to access by phone or text on 116 000, and online via www.missingpeople.org.uk

The post [Guest blog: Susannah Drury from Missing People](#) appeared first on [Justice and Safety](#).