BEING ABSENT FROM OUT-OF-HOME CARE:
THE VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND CARERS

JOSEPH J. MCDOWALL

Executive Director (Research)
CREATE Foundation

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Executive Summary

Being Absent from Out-of-Home Care: The Views of Young People and Carers aims to increase understanding of the experiences of young people in out-of-home care who go missing or are absent from their official placement. It aims to complement the *"When a Child is Missing"* report by the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC, 2016) which was prompted by the disappearance and murder of 12 year old Tiahleigh Palmer. The 2016 report reviewed the response by government agencies to Tiahleigh's disappearance and highlighted procedural and practice inconsistencies, in addition to significant gaps in understanding as to why a young person in out-of-home care may go missing from their placement.

To address these gaps, CREATE Foundation in partnership with QFCC, Bravehearts and Foster Care Queensland, spoke to 33 young people across regional and metropolitan Queensland about their experiences in going absent from placement. The key areas for consideration included:
- Why were young people absent from placement?
- What happened whilst they were absent from placement?
- What motivated them to return?
- How young people were supported when they returned and
- What could have prevented young people from leaving their placement?

The Queensland Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women assisted by identifying children and young people who had gone missing or been absent from placement and were eligible to participate in the study. Young people who participated in the study had been recorded in the department database as 'missing' and on occasion reported missing to the police. Missing refers to a situation wherein a young person's location is unknown, and there are fears for their safety and concern for their welfare. However, most of the young people in this study were absent from placement, meaning their location was known or could be quickly established.

Key Findings

Why young people were absent from placement
A diversity of experiences emerged in the structured interviews, with 27 of the 33 participants reporting they had run away from placement more than five times, and one-third reporting they had been missing for more than one month at a time. Despite these differences, similar themes emerged when describing why they had left their placement, the most common of which was to escape conflict within their placement, often involving their carers. Over one-third of young people reported leaving a placement to spend time with friends, family or partners, while others wanted to exert greater independence over their lives.

Prior to leaving their placement, a significant proportion of young people reported their intention to leave and their concerns about the issues motivating their behaviour to caseworkers, carers and biological parents. Approximately 40% had spoken to caseworkers and over one-third had discussed their intentions with carers. However, the majority of young people felt that these individuals were unsupportive and did not take their concerns seriously.

What happened to young people whilst they were absent from placement
When describing their experiences whilst absent from placement, over half reported they had stayed with friends although 14% ran to a destination (e.g., the park, city or beach). Over half did not attempt to contact anyone while absent. However, only six reported that nobody had attempted to

contact them during their period of absence. Young people most often reported that their caseworker had attempted to contact them, followed by their carer.

One quarter of young people reported they did not feel safe whilst absent from placement, particularly due to fears of violence. However, many said that whilst safety was a concern, they had had felt more unsafe in their assigned placement and this influenced their decision to leave.

What motivated young people to return and how young people were supported upon returning
Upon return to their placement, a collaborative discussion (a return interview assessment) about triggers that prompted running away and how services and interventions could be deployed to better meet their needs may serve to reduce the young person's need to run away. However, the most common reported outcome upon return to placement was the receiving of a "lecture" about how their behaviour was inappropriate, rather than a discussion about ways to improve the situation to avoid this occurring again.

Most young people (42%) reported they told key persons (caseworkers, carers, police, biological family, etc.) nothing about their experience being absent from placement, and overall felt that these persons were not concerned with why they had left their placement. This was in contrast to what young people wanted when they returned, that is, some form of support and demonstration of care for their well-being, such as receiving a home cooked meal and listening to the young person's concerns.

What could have prevented young people from leaving their placement
A major reason young people left their placement was due to conflict or because they were being hurt, so not surprisingly, a number of young people said that if they felt safer and more secure in their placement they may not have left. Being listened to and respected was the most commonly reported suggestion that young people felt would have made them less likely to run away. In addition, the flexibility to visit friends and have visitors was also reported, particularly as many young people left placement to connect with these people.

Perspectives of foster carers

Fifteen carers were also interviewed to gain their perspectives of how to respond when a young person in their care goes missing or absent from placement. When asked to nominate how they would respond, most foster carers reported they would contact the young person's caseworker and police, followed by contacting the young person's friends. When asked what could prevent young people from being absent or missing from placement, carers felt that greater communication and information sharing by the Department was needed, such as informing the carer if the young person has a history of leaving their placement. The need to develop a stable and supportive relationship with the young person, where the young person feels safe sharing concerns was also an important observation from carers.

Only seven of the carers surveyed had direct experience with young people going missing whilst in their care. Generally foster carers did not feel supported by the young person's caseworker and felt they were not provided with practical assistance. However, most carers were satisfied with assistance provided by police, particularly if they searched for the missing young person.

Upon the young person's return, none of the carers reported engaging in disciplinary action, but instead reported developing strategies to reduce the likelihood of the young person leaving

placement again or minimising the associated risks. These included ensuring the young person had capacity to contact the carer if needed, and connecting the young person to therapy.

It is important to consider that the children and young people consulted as part of this report provide insights into the small number of young people who go absent from placement each year. Whilst of course, these young people do express issues that must be considered and addressed within the system, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of children and young people in out-of-home care do not choose to go absent from placement and the results presented here must be considered in that context.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study represents an attempt to gain a better understanding of the factors influencing children and young people who, for various reasons, at some point in time are absent from their official placement in the out-of-home care system in Australia. The work is a complement to the recent report released by the Queensland Family and Child Commission [QFCC] (2016) that was precipitated by the issues surrounding the case of a 12-year-old girl who went missing from her out of home-care placement and later was found murdered. Such tragic events attract much media attention (e.g., Dalton, 2016), and elicit actions from authorities to try to explain what happened and why. Often, this response takes the form of some type of inquiry; in this case, the Premier wanted "to ensure that the child safety, education, health, and police service system worked effectively when concerns were first raised" about this disappearance and requested QFCC to conduct the review (QFCC, 2016, p. 134). A further approach is to conduct research into the issues; this report presents the findings of an empirical study into absent children commissioned by QFCC.

The *"When a Child is Missing"* report (QFCC, 2016) highlighted procedural and practice inconsistencies and misalignment of responses across multiple agencies. It also depicted gaps in knowledge as to why a child or young person may intentionally or unintentionally be absent or go missing in Queensland. A key challenge remains to identify the circumstances or the reasons children and young people from out-of-home care are absent or missing, what happens when they are absent, why they return (if they do), and the potential consequences on returning. It is imperative to examine what is known of the issues nationally and internationally, and to compare the practices affecting Australia's children and young people in out-of-home care with those in other jurisdictions.

Across Australia, state and territory governments are responsible for statutory child protection. Children are placed in care as an intervention of last resort (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2018). Out-of-home care is a complex area; more awareness of the factors that contribute to increased risk and vulnerabilities is necessary to inform policies and practices, and to sustain a desired whole-of-community/whole-of-government approach to safeguard young people (QFCC, 2016).

It must be emphasised that this study concerns children and young people who at some point chose to be absent from their placement. The possible reasons leading to such action will be examined in this report. However, while these young people personally have issues that must be addressed within the system, it must be remembered that the great majority of children and young people in out-of-home care (over 90%) report feeling safe and secure in their placement (AIHW, 2016b; McDowall, 2013).

1.1 The Concepts of "Absent" or "Missing"

As Taylor et al. (2014, p. 399) have observed, "Going missing is a key indicator that something is not right in a child's life." The basic understanding of "missing child" is provided by the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (2018) as "any person under the age of 18 whose whereabouts are unknown." ICMEC identifies several categories of "missing" varying in the seriousness of behaviours and outcomes. This group discusses (a) abandoned or unaccompanied minors (not being supported by a legally responsible adult); (b) lost or injured children (not enough information available to know why they have disappeared); (c) endangered runaways (who have chosen to be away from home without permission); (d) family abduction (retention or concealment of a child by a parent or family member derogating the rights of other family members); and (e) non-family abduction (coerced, unauthorised taking of the child by non-family member).

This range mirrors the model developed in an exploratory study by Biehal, Mitchell, and Wade (2003) in which "missing" was conceptualised along a scale of intent, from an intentional break in contact with family and friends to an unintentional separation not of the person's choosing (see Figure 1). The authors indicated that individual reasons might not sit neatly along the continuum due to the complexity of factors (Biehal et al., 2003), and there were likely to be grey areas between the extremes where the absence did not result from clear decisions being made (e.g., "drifted"). This model provided a useful framework for mapping the identified factors and perspectives related to going missing that emerged from the current analysis of the national and international literature. The present study will be concerned mainly with *Intentional* absences, both in the review of literature, and in the empirical data collected and discussed. This restriction largely is because of the breadth of the subject, and is not intended to detract from the seriousness of *unintended* absences (Finkelhor, Henly, Turner, & Hamby, 2017).
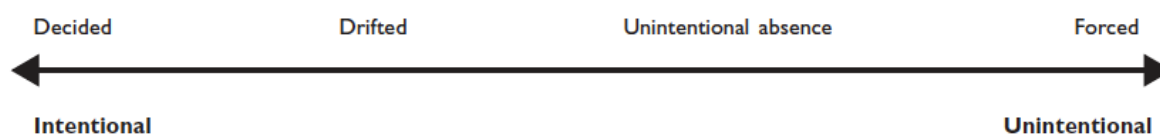
Figure 1. The "missing" continuum. (Source: Biehal, Mitchell, and Wade, 2003).

Various terms have been used to refer to children who, at a point in time, are not where they are expected to be by those caring for them. As well as "missing", labels such as "absconding", "couch-surfing", "running away", "self-placing", and even "eloping" (Morewitz, 2016, Chapter 1), have become accepted when referring to children absent from their placement. However, groups such as the Queensland Law Society (2012) have made the point that some terms can have negative connotations for children and are best avoided. In its recent review, QFCC (2016) recommended that the preferred terms in future would be "missing" and "absent from placement" (p. 37) and definitions to help differentiate these descriptions have been added to the *Reporting Missing Children Guidelines* (Department of Child Safety, Youth, and Women {DCSYW}, 2018). "Absent" should be used when the child is "absent for a short period without permission, and where the child's location is known or can be quickly established", while "missing" is reserved for "any child whose location is unknown <u>and</u> there are fears for the safety or concern for the welfare of that child" (p. 1).

While "absent from placement" is now the preferred expression, certainly in Queensland, used to describe a situation without any emotional connotations or inferences of blame, the literature to be reviewed mostly refers to "missing children" and "runaways"; these terms will be employed where relevant when referring to specific studies in which they have been used.

1.2 Structure of this Report

This report comprises two major sections. Part A explores current international literature concerning children and young people being absent and missing from care, and compares this with what is known in the Australian context. The literature review (Chapter 2) is presented using a scoping technique to summarise trends in the data, identify the knowledge gaps, and inform the key considerations for further research. The discussion of the literature focuses on four key components: (a) the *Reasons* children and young people become absent or go missing; (b) the *Risks* they face while absent; (c) the *Responses* (theirs and others') to the absence; and (d) the *Resolution* of issues

that triggered the absence on their return. Part A also incorporates a review of published policies from Australian jurisdictions and overseas regarding how absences from care are to be handled, looking at similarities and differences (Chapter 3 and Appendix A). The second major section (Part B) reports empirical findings from two studies designed to give voice to two of the parties involved in absences; the young people themselves, and the carers. Chapter 4 presents data from interviews with a number of young people who have been absent from care in Queensland to learn about why they decided to be absent and what happened as a result of their taking that action. Chapter 5 discusses the experience of dealing with absent or missing children from the viewpoint of carers.

Part A

Children and Young People Absent from Placement: Literature and Policy Review

Chapter 2: Literature Review[1]

2.1 Method of Literature Selection

Scoping reviews represent an emerging method of evidence synthesis that considers papers (primary studies, textual papers, and reviews) both published and unpublished (The Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015). Given the dearth of research related to this topic in Australia, the scoping review firstly attempted to clarify the problem, and then identified the key concepts and the types of evidence available in Australia to address and inform policy, research, and practice in the field (Peters et al., 2015).

An initial search highlighted little Australian research that could be sourced through online databases. Following this, a comprehensive search of the extent, range, and nature of information related to the issues and factors was done using Google web-based search tools. The terms used to undertake a broad search included "foster care and kinship care", "Australia", "missing", "Indigenous children", "foster and kinship care", "predictors of runaway/missing", "out-of-home care", "CALD and foster care", "violence in out-of-home care", "absconding", "missing out-of-home care Australia", "child sexual exploitation". The search was not limited to type or quality of information. A range of documents identifying multidisciplinary interests were found including inquiries, reviews of policy and practices, position statements, and discussion papers. No time frame was used in the exploratory search of Australian information to give the greatest possible catchment period. This resulted in the inclusion of a research report from 1983 that was relevant to the issues being considered.

The second stage of the review involved tracking literature published internationally. A protocol was developed (Table 1) to undertake a search of databases for evidence on the topic (Informa, Healthcare Medline, PubMed, SocINDEX, PsycARTICLES, Science Direct, Elsevier, and Wiley), using Google Scholar. The protocol was based on parameters identified in the Australian information. Searches were restricted to documents published in English, with keywords drawn from the Australian review. Additionally, the reference list of previous reviews of literature examining young people at high risk of sexual exploitation, absconding, and other significant harms (e.g., Bowden & Lambie, 2015; Crosland & Dunlap, 2015; Jackson, 2014), provided a useful means to source international research. Articles were recorded in a reference library and a data charting table was developed to record study details (author, year, location, samples), project aims, methodology including key concepts and outcome measures, and important results (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Colquhoun et al., 2014). The validity, methodological approach, and representativeness of available International primary sources were considered against the protocol. The search strategy and two-stage screening process of all the information and literature was an iterative process coinciding with analysis. Sixty-three research articles met the final inclusion criteria and the aim of the review.

These studies were coded and compared against the limited sources found in the search of the Australian records (see Table 2). This approach usefully enabled a comparison of different aspects of the phenomena to be identified and conceptualised across all the data (Smith & Firth, 2011). Evidence relating to four major facets of the absent or missing experience was extracted from the literature, viz. *Reasons* for leaving; the *Risks* experienced while absent; *Responses* of individuals and the community to the absence; and finally, how the absence was *Resolved* when the young people were returned, and what happened as a consequence.

---

[1] Acknowledgement must go to Dr Karleen Gwinner who contributed significantly to the literature search, and provided drafts of sections of the review.

Table 1: *Selection Protocol and Search Terms for Literature*

Selection Protocol	Search Terms/Concepts
INCLUSION *Context* International research; English language; Year 2000 onwards; Social service settings. *Sources* Qualitative and quantitative studies; Allied health, youth services, social work; Child protection inquiries; Child protection reports. *Participants* Meets definition of out-of-home care; Related to foster care and kinship care; Children and young people in out-of-home care under 18 years; Runaways from home/care.	Runaway; foster care; Predictors of missing/runaway out-of-home care; Children missing from care; Child prostitution in out-of-home care; Lost, stranded, or injured; suicide out-of-home care; Violence in out-of-home care; Absconding missing out-of-home care, Australia; Timely response when a child is missing from out-of-home care; Children and young people; CALD; foster care; Runaway/thrownaway; Foster care and kinship care; Absent from care, sexual exploitation, absconding, abduction; Looked after children/youth; Placement; Boy/girlfriend; pregnancy.
EXCLUSION Literature Reviews; Abstracts; Newspaper articles; Non-English Language; Pre-2000; Editorials/opinion pieces.	

Table 2: *Summary of Literature Included in Scoping Review, Organised by Factors Influencing Intentional Absences from Placement*

Factors	Description	Literature†
1. Reasons for absence • Systemic factors ▪ Placement instability ▪ Placement type ▪ Culture	Studies here discuss the various reasons that lead young people to run away or be absent from their home or care placement. These are the factors that are external to the child or young person, and can include the nature of the placement, the support received in placement, the number of placement changes and placement trajectory, and geographic (location) separation and neighborhood qualities. Of particular concern are possible cultural issues underpinning runaway behaviour, although little research addresses these.	Biehal and Wade (2000) Carmody (2013) (A)* Courtney and Zinn (2009); Courtney, Skyles, Miranda, Zinn, Howard, and Goerge (2005); Kim, Chenot, and Lee (2015) King, Abrego, Narendorf, Ha, and Santa Maria (2017) QFCC (2016) (A) Wilson (1983) (A) Benoit-Bryan (2011) Nesmith (2006) Penzerro (2003) Pergamit and Ernst (2011) Rees (2011) AbSec (2014) (A) Attar-Schwartz (2013) Robertson and Demosthenous (2004/2011) (A)
• Relationship issues	This research addresses the "pull" factors that motivate young people to run away; the desire to reconnect with family (particularly siblings, parents) and with friends; the need to maintain peer relationships.	Finkelstein, Wamsley, Currie, and Miranda (2004) Kerr and Finlay (2006) Taylor, Bradbury-Jones, Hunter, Sanford, Rahilly, and Ibrahim (2014)
• Escape (conflict / abuse)	These studies deal with the "push" factors that lead young people to get away from a violent, abusive domestic environment; conflict with carers and peers in the family; being bullied; and perceptions that nobody cares about them.	Karam and Robert (2013) Kim, Tajima, Herrenkohl, and Huang (2009) Smeaton (2009) Smeaton (2013) Tyler, Johnson, and Brownridge (2008)
• Individual factors	These works refer to characteristics that the young people themselves bring to the placement, including their history of running away, age, and sex, that may help predict future absences.	Crosland and Dunlap (2015) Lin (2012)
• Seeking agency	Several studies show that young people who feel constrained in a placement may leave to find a sense of freedom, regain some control in their lives, and to find what they consider to be "normalcy".	Crosland, Joseph, Slattery, Hodges, and Dunlap (2018) Hébert, Lanctôt, and Turcotte (2016) Munford and Saunders (2015)
2. Risks	When young people are absent from placement, they are vulnerable and exposed to many risks, particularly the three categories identified: Child sexual exploitation, entry to Juvenile Justice, and mental health concerns. This literature deals with several of these risk factors.	Edinburg, Harpin, Garcia, and Saewyc (2013) Jago, Arocha, Brodie, Melrose, Pearce, and Warrington (2011) Plass (2007) Skyles, Smithgall, and Howard (2007) Stott (2012) Thompson (2014) Thompson, Bender, Lewis, and Watkins (2008)

• Child sexual exploitation		Cecka (2015) Middleton, Gattis, Frey, and Roe-Sepowitz (2018)
• Juvenile Justice		Kempf-Leonard and Johansson (2007) Sarri, Stoffregen, and Ryan (2016) Sturrock and Holmes (2015)
• Mental health issues		Johnson, Whitbeck, and Hoyt (2005) Pearson, Thrane, and Wilkinson (2017) Sowerby and Thomas (2017) Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, Tyler, and Johnson (2004) Wright, Attell, and Ruel (2017)
3. Response/Reaction while absent	These articles are concerned with issues young people are likely to encounter while absent, including access to support and services (e.g., for homelessness), and the responses of key caregivers, and the police, in their attempts to re-connect with or locate the young people.	Day and Riebschleger (2007) Franks, Hunwicks, and Goswami (2015) Gwadz, Cleland, Leonard, Bolas, Ritchie, Tabac, … Powlovich (2017) Hayden (2017) Hayden and Shalev-Greene (2018) Slesnick (2004) Yu and Au Liu (2013)
4. Resolution on return	An important stage of the "runaway" process is the return, particularly if future absences are to be avoided. How are the young people treated when located? This literature explores some of the approaches that can be used to support young people when they return.	All-Party Parliamentary Group (2016) Clark, Crosland, Geller, Cripe, Kenney, Neff, and Dunlap (2008) Hill, Taylor, Richards, and Reddington (2016) Holmes (2014) Holmes (2017) Malloch and Burgess (2011) Mitchell, Malloch, and Burgess (2014) Morewitz (2016) Pona (2016) Slesnick, Guo, Brakenhoff, and Feng (2013)

2.2 Missing Persons' Statistics

While a substantial literature exists regarding runaway behaviour in general, less information is available concerning those young people who are absent from a care placement. Throughout this discussion, reference will be made to common events and outcomes experienced by all runaway children and young people, with emphasis on the special cases of those absent from care placements where literature is available.

A key study by Courtney et al. (2005) contributed much to our understanding of the missing phenomenon in the out-of-home care context. For the 14,282 young-people who ran away from out-of-home care in Illinois during the ten years between 1993 and 2003, a number of observations were made that have since been confirmed in many studies: 90% were aged between 12 and 18 years; girls were more likely to run away than boys; youth experiencing substance abuse were at heightened risk; and those placed with a sibling were less likely to run away than those not living with brothers and/or sisters. A follow-up study based on the same data (Courtney & Zinn, 2009) showed that most run-away periods were of relatively short duration, with about one half being less

than one week, although one-quarter of absences were longer than five weeks. The older children were when they first ran away, the longer they were likely to stay away. However, as Thompson (2014) warned, risky situations can develop extremely quickly.

A review of recent Australian news media, describing various sensational case studies, highlight a range of factors that relate to young people in care who are absent or go missing. These include abduction, kidnapping, and sexual exploitation (Fox Koob & Loussikian, 2016), trafficking and grooming (Oakes & Clark, 2016), critical injury and death/suicide (Barret, 2012; Knowles & Branely, 2014), homelessness and criminalisation (McFarlane, 2016), and emotional and physical health issues (Moodie, 2016). However, the serious cases referred to in these articles represent the tip of the "missing" iceberg. Around 20,000 young people under the age of 18 years are reported missing each year in Australia (National Missing Persons Coordination Centre, 2016). Bricknell and Renshaw (2016) documented that half of the young people reported as missing were in the 13–17-year age group, and girls made up approximately 60% of all missing persons in this cohort. Over two thirds of those who go missing do so more than once. Little detail is known about the different populations of missing persons including those in out-of-home care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children and young people, or young women. All these young people are vulnerable, and better records are needed so that their well-being can be protected.

It must be emphasised that, as has been mentioned previously, the vast majority of children and young people in out-of-home care in Australia report being happy in their current placement and feel safe and secure (AIHW, 2016b, McDowall, 2013). The cohort who go missing from placement is a small sub-section of the care population with a range of special needs. Even though the numbers are relatively small, individual issues are real and need to be addressed within the care system. Some of the reasons that have been documented in the literature as explaining absences will now be explored.

2.3   Reasons for Being Absent or Going Missing

The national and international literature discusses various factors that can contribute to young people being absent or going missing. However, to date, even though there is a requirement in Australia for the care system to be measured, monitored and reported on in a transparent and efficient manner over time (FaHCSIA, 2011, p. 6), and AIHW (2018) attempts to do this, no consistent approach has been adopted to record data or discern patterns associated with young people absent from care. This lack of monitoring has serious implications in the development of policies and practices, provision of guidance, and allocation of resources. Overseas, Cecka (2015) observed, as have others (Pergamit & Ernst, 2011; Rees, 2011; Sarri, Stoffregen, & Ryan, 2016), that there are numerous challenges in obtaining accurate data concerning young people being absent or missing from care. Inaccuracies result from limited monitoring and recording of specific details, poor tracking systems, and time restrictions on caseworkers when documenting incidents. As mentioned, the definitions applied to young people "missing" in child care systems can be different across local authorities, states, and countries which can make comparisons difficult, and can lead to variations in data reported (Cecka, 2015; Kim, Chenot, & Lee, 2015; Malloch & Burgess, 2011). Cecka (2015) stated that, in the USA, "there are no provisions in the federal legislation governing foster care that specifically address the prevention, response to, or resolution of missing episodes" (p. 1230). A similar situation is also apparent in Australia (FaHCSIA, 2011).

Given the limitations of data on children absent or missing from care, certain overarching features have been detected in the various data sources. For example, Biehal and Wade (2000) observed that reasons for going missing were complex, and often involved histories of rejection, neglect, abuse, or

past instabilities at home or in statutory care. Kim et al. (2015), from their multi-level analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, found that, as well as county variations in runaway behaviour, many individual and systemic factors contributed to young people being absent from their placement (e.g., "children's ages, gender, diagnosed clinical conditions, family structures, number of removals, number of placements, removal manner, and case plan goals" [p. 109]). As King, Abrego, Narendorf, Ha, and Santa Maria (2017, p. 138) concluded, "the act of running away is, therefore, framed as a threshold event representing a multifaceted phenomenon combining perceptions of self-identity, conflict, and power in the home."

An early Australian study of "runaway" behaviour and its consequences, conducted by Wilson (1983), introduced a typology based on the motives underpinning young people's running away. He saw some young people as becoming bored and leaving home to find stimulation and excitement ("Adventure-Seekers"); others running away to avoid unacceptable living conditions ("Refugees"); and those who go missing as a solution to an immediate personal crisis ("Problem-Solvers"). Although Wilson retained the label "Escapees" for those who specifically had a history of running away from institutional or "foster homes", his other categories also could be related to the home-care environment.

Several researchers have suggested that the factors leading to children and young people being absent from placements could be divided into two broad categories: the "pull" and "push" conditions (Biehal & Wade, 2000; Kerr & Finlay, 2006). These refer to those motivations that lead young people to run "to" something positive, and "away" from something aversive (Crosland, Joseph, Slattery, Hodges, & Dunlap, 2018). For the purposes of the present discussion, motivations for going missing will be considered in more specific detail. "Pull" and "push" reasons addressed in the literature have been grouped into five categories: (a) Systemic or contextual factors; (b) Relationship issues; (c) Escape from restrictions, conflict, or abuse; (d) Individual factors; and (e) Seeking agency, excitement, and asserting independence. While these aspects will be discussed separately for emphasis, it must be realised that, as Bowden and Lambie (2016) stress, "none of these factors should be considered in isolation, as each factor continually exerts influence on each young person" (p. 266).

2.3.1 Systemic or contextual factors

2.3.1.1 Placement instability. Family instability has been shown to be a strong predictor of runaway behaviour (Tyler, Hagewen, & Melander, 2011). Young people in out-of-home placements are likely to experience complex and cumulative instabilities. These instabilities are evident not only in moves into, within, and out of out-of-home care, but also in the consequential disruptions to residential, educational, relational, and family networks and can lead to an increase in the prevalence of risky behaviours (Lin, 2012; Stott, 2012). Various national[2] and state-based inquiries[3] have examined broad and significant issues confronting statutory care in Australia, and while not a key feature of such reviews, concerns have been raised about young people being absent from care. For example, in a Queensland-based inquiry into the child protection system, Carmody (2013) wrote, that if "a child regularly absconds from care, he or she has less chance of dealing with any underlying trauma or attachment problems" (p. 269). He also referred to challenging behaviours that lead to absconding and the likelihood that such unconnected young people will drift back to birth parents or

---

[2] The Royal Commission to investigate Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017) public hearing to examine child sexual abuse in out-of-home care (2015); the Senate Inquiry into Out-of-Home Care (2014).

[3] For example, Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (2017); The Child Protection Systems Royal Commission SA (2016); Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (2013); Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry (2012); Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory (2010); Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW (2008).

"self-place" with friends or acquaintances. Penzerro (2003) saw running away as a means, used by young boys she spoke with, of coping with instabilities in placements and as a way to avoid getting attached, which contributed to identification with an itinerant lifestyle.

2.3.1.2 Placement type and location. In their analysis of the predictors of running away from out-of-home care, Courtney and Zinn (2009) noted several system-level factors that influenced the likelihood of young people being absent from their placements. These included placement type, number of prior placements, prior runaway history, and differences in the geographic regions studied (which might serve as "a proxy for social ecological conditions that are related to the risk of runaway" or that practices in relation to missing children differ across regions [Courtney & Zinn, 2009, p. 1304]). Kim et al. (2015) also reported county-level variation in the US regarding absences from out-of-home care, while Rees (2011) found comparable differences across the countries in the UK.

Furthermore, Courtney et al. (2005) had noted that those in residential placements were more likely to be absent than those in foster care. However, when comparing care and non-care populations, Benoit-Bryan (2011) showed that, in her sample of over 15,000 young people followed in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, those who had been in foster care were more likely to be absent than those with no foster-care history (30% of the former group compared with 8.1% of the latter). There also is a suggestion that running away is more likely from placements where there is a lack of warmth, and caseworker involvement is low (Nesmith, 2006; Pergamit & Ernst, 2011).

2.3.1.3 Culture. It has been suggested that young people coming into care from different racial and cultural backgrounds experience identity confusion and self-esteem issues causing them to react differently when confronted with problems in their placement. This has been observed internationally as well as in Australia. For example, Attar-Schwartz (2013) reported that young Jewish girls were more likely to run away from residential facilities in Israel than were their Arab peers; these differences were not observed in their male counterparts. In Australia, vulnerable groups include Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (Kaur, 2014), as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (Moss, 2009). As the Aboriginal Child, Family, and Community Care State Secretariat, NSW (AbSec) reported to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs - Out-of-home Care (2014, p. 23), "an Aboriginal child's rights, wellbeing and social and emotional stability are tied in with those of their families and not divisible from that of their family, belonging is critical foundation for them to be able to 'grow up strong'." Removal from the family context to be placed in care is likely to generate motivation for leaving the imposed placement to return home. Notions of "missing" might have entirely different meanings and significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in care.

Unfortunately, little is known about the prevalence of runaway behaviour by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care in Australia, in spite of their being seriously overrepresented (AIHW, 2018). Limited records for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander missing persons in general are kept in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and Northern Territory. However, as Bricknell and Renshaw (2016) note, these data are unreliable and should be treated with caution. Based on their data, in NT for example, it is known that 59% (n = 1,239) of missing persons are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and around half the missing persons are between 13 and 17 years of age, but it is not known how many of these young people are in care. This omission indicates that accurate records must be retained so that the impact of cultural factors as predictors of missing behaviour can be better understood.

From analyses of police data that did not focus on the out-of-home care population specifically, Robertson and Demosthenous (2004/2011) provided an insight into the complex mix of factors likely to contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls (12–15 years) being absent from family in Australia. They identified that separation "may result from difficulty in coping with home and school life, a desire to own one's body and protect siblings, and an understanding that one is able to care for oneself in the broader, general community" (p. 5). However, they also revealed that friends and communities may be more likely to see the girls as runaways, but not really missing, and that there could be many reasons for girls' absences not to be reported to police.

2.3.2 Relationship issues

Many of the contextual issues discussed above also involve specific relationships with family and friends. However, these particular connections can create their own unique set of issues. Courtney et al. (2005), in exploring the categories of young people who had run away from home, emphasised the importance of the biological family in "exerting a distinct emotional pull" (p. 4) on the young people placed in care. This situation is different from other runaways who often are reported to be running away from family. Explanations given for running to family do not focus on finding a better care experience. Courtney et al. indicated that the young people who run away from care do not necessarily see their biological family environment as healthy or safe; rather, they believed that being with the biological family was "normal" and a "real home".

Other youth in this study ran to friends as well as family as a way of maintaining contacts within their personal care network. Indeed, as Finkelstein, Wamsley, Currie, and Miranda (2004) observed from their study of runaways in New York, very few of those who ran away spent time on the streets; mostly they stayed with friends. Many of the absent young people in their study left placements because they were "going to see boyfriends and girlfriends" (p. 14). Festive periods also were associated with increased incidents of young people absconding to be with family who often were located great distances from the young person's placement (Taylor et al., 2014).

2.3.3 Escape from restrictions, conflict, or abuse

As well as being an attempt to re-connect with family and friends, runaway behaviour also is recognised as a coping strategy used by young people to regain control over their lives, or to re-engage with past experiences from which they have been disconnected. It can be a mechanism for dealing with uncomfortable or extreme psychological tension or crisis situations (Finkelstein et al., 2004; Karam & Robert, 2013; Smeaton, 2009). It is well documented that young people from troubled backgrounds, who have experienced physical and psychological abuse, and have a history of maltreatment, are likely to run away to escape negative situations (Kim, Tajima, Herrenkohl, & Huang, 2009; Tyler, Johnson, & Brownridge, 2008).

Paradoxically, while young people run away to avoid what can be perceived as restrictive care environments that lack trust and respect (Pergamit & Ernst, 2011), they also express a need to have more structure in their lives. Taylor et al. (2014) suggested that it was vital to get the balance right between setting boundaries and applying discipline, and allowing the young people freedom to have a say in making their own decisions. The use of punitive measures that could be regarded as "inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (p. 397) do not function as effective ways to prevent children and young people running away. Rather, they need firm boundaries reinforced by "empathy, understanding, support, respect, and a listening ear" (p.398).

2.3.4 Individual factors

As previously discussed, individual-level factors such as age and sex, are consistently observed as predictors of absence from placement. Young people, as they become older, are more likely to run away; also, based on research centred in the US, females are more likely to be missing from placements than males (Bowden & Lambie, 2015; Courtney & Zinn, 2009). Nesmith (2006) added that sexual identity was another largely "invisible" factor that needed to be considered, particularly in middle to late adolescence.

Another individual attribute known to have great value in predicting absences from placements is the young person's "history of absconding" (Bowden & Lambie, 2015; Courtney & Zinn, 2009). Nesmith (2006) claimed that young people with such a history were 92% more likely to run away than were their peers who hadn't run away. It has been suggested that there are "significant differences between youths who run away once and those with repeated episodes" (Thompson & Pollio, 2006, p. 245). The former group is likely to be responding to a particular incident in the placement, while the "recidivists" are those who "experience prolonged and lingering problems that often originate from poor family relationships" (Thompson & Pollio, p. 245). As Crosland and Dunlap (2015, p. 1703) concluded, "youth in foster care who chronically run away present a substantial problem within child welfare." Because these young people may be involved in more widespread patterns of difficult behaviour, "screening and prevention programs need to address the cycle of adolescent defiant behaviour associated with running away" (Holliday, Edelen, & Tucker, 2017, p. 247). Other strategies, such as providing foster carers with special behaviour management training, have been shown to mitigate the negative effect of runaway history (Price et al., 2008).

The connection between absence from placement and other personal characteristics such as mental health and disability is more equivocal, and clear patterns have not been revealed in the literature. For example, Lin (2012) claimed that, when comparing two groups of foster children and young people (ones who had run away versus ones who had not), those who were older, female, African American, and who had behaviour problems or who had been diagnosed with a disability were more likely to have left a placement without notice. However, other studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2015) have reported that young people with diagnosed emotional problems and other clinical conditions were less likely to leave their placement. These differences possibly are a result of the ways disability and mental health issues are defined and, as Kim et al. advise, future researchers need to differentiate these conditions more clearly when relating them to runaway behaviour.

2.3.5 Seeking agency, excitement, and asserting independence

Various studies have shown that vulnerable young people, including those in out-of-home care, place significant emphasis on being able to exercise autonomy and agency (Karam & Robert, 2013; Taylor et al., 2014), specifically to equip them for "making sense of the world, having a voice and acting on the world" (Munford & Saunders, 2015, p. 616). Running away can be a means of expressing this need. Related to this is the desire of young people to address boredom by intentionally leaving care in search of more interesting experiences and excitement (Finkelstein et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2014). Courtney et al. (2005) described an attempt to "assert their adulthood" (p. 4) as central to many young people's stories of running from placements. Hébert, Lanctôt, and Turcotte (2016) linked placement instability and the search for agency. While in some instances instability was imposed, through decisions made within the system, on the young women interviewed, in other cases the young people chose self-induced instability when seeking empowerment and more control over their lives.

Furthermore, Smeaton (2013) explained that running away can be a response to feeling unwanted, a need expressed through seeking care and attention. Many of the young people in her study perceived their maturity to be greater than their peers of the same age. This was linked to circumstances prior to, or as part of young people's care experience in which they had been forced into a position of taking on adult responsibilities, as well as a consequence of survival/coping strategies connected to placement instability or while absent from care. When these young people perceive themselves as operating at an adult level, it can be difficult for them to accept the control of authority. Crosland et al. (2018, p. 39) summarised this motivator well when they observed that "youth run away to access situations that give them autonomy, and allow them to engage in normal peer relationships and extracurricular activities."

2.4   Risks

While some young people run away from placements because they feel unsafe, it is more likely that they will be exposed to greater risk when absent from care. Thompson (2014, p. 6), based on her experience with Railway Children in the UK, summarised the risks: "A young person who runs away from home or care and has no safe place to go is at risk of ending up on the streets or in other equally unsafe places where they are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, or involvement in crime." These possible outcomes match those Wilson (1983) observed in his early Australian study where young runaways engaged in prostitution to survive, and were susceptible to drug overdoses, and homelessness.

It is clear that many of the precursors leading to a young person's entry to care, such forced removal from their family homes on court orders, involvement in a negative peer culture, conflict due to the configuration and dynamics of a caregiver's family, structural poverty, and reductions in public assistance, have been connected to the likelihood of a young person intentionally leaving a placement as well as contributing to increased risk and vulnerabilities while absent (Jago et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2015). Plass (2007) discussed the possibility of runaway children and young people experiencing "secondary victimisation" while absent which often took the form of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and/or robbery. She found that secondary victimisation occurred in 9.5% of runaway events she studied, the most common form of harm in this group, experienced by around 6% of the runaways she sampled, was some form of physical assault. Edinburgh, Harpin, Garcia, and Saewyc (2013) provided a more comprehensive list of likely risks to which young runaways might be exposed. They confirmed the possibility of sexual abuse, and problem substance use behaviour. However, they also pointed to higher levels of emotional distress, more sexual partners, greater likelihood of have a sexually transmitted infection, and lower levels on average of social support associated with resilience (e.g., connections to school, family, and other supporting adults). Higher levels of teen pregnancy also have been observed in young girls who spend time away from home (Thompson, Bender, Lewis, & Watkins, 2008). As well as possibly confronting these extreme risks, young runaways are quite likely to miss many educational opportunities (Skyles, Smithgall, & Howard, 2007). The following discussion examines key risk areas that have been studied in some detail.

2.4.1 Child sexual exploitation

Smeaton (2013) made it clear that one of the ways young people running away from care placements can gain the attention they seek, usually inadvertently, is through Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Jackson's (2014) literature review discussed the high risk associated with this phenomenon, particularly when a commercial element (where money, drugs, or other favours are traded for sex) is involved including prostitution, pornography, internet activity, and sexual assault. Jackson differentiated *active* (where the young person performs a behaviour) and *passive*

expressions (imposed on the young person by others). She strongly indicated that an "active" involvement does not imply that this is the young person's fault, "they may have developed certain behaviours to adapt in a context of survival and constrained choices" emphasising that "[t]his confusion between what is choice and what is control often confounds policy makers and practitioners alike" (p. 10).

Other workers (e.g., Edinburgh et al., 2013) have indicated that repeated missing episodes may also suggest that a child or young person is being groomed and therefore at very high risk of sexual exploitation, including sex trafficking (Middleton, Gattis, Frey, & Roe-Sepowitz, 2018). In one of its key Consultation Papers addressing child sexual abuse in care settings, the recent Australian Royal Commission described incidents characterized by young people "missing from placement" as a red flag indicator of sexual exploitation (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2016, p. 34). However, as Coy, Sharp-Jeffs, and Kelly (2017) indicated, the detection of an indicator should begin a process: "Information sharing between agencies is a first step; the next has to be sensitive but inquisitive conversations with young people" (p. 3) to help identify victims.

Jago et al. (2011) and Pearce (2013) reported on an evaluation of how Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) responded to the problem child sexual exploitation in the UK. The Jago review noted the connection between going missing and sexual exploitation. Overall, this report showed that much more work needs to be done in many areas including the coordination of a local response to CSE, identifying CSE, protecting and supporting young people and families, disrupting and prosecuting abusers, and collecting and managing data. Pearce provided a practical solution for jurisdictions to follow when she suggested that "safeguarding children was best facilitated through co-located multi-agency teams where child protection and law enforcement practitioners worked together" (P. 159).

2.4.2 Juvenile justice

As Sarri, Stoffregen, and Ryan (2016) explained, several research studies, including their own, now show a clear link between running away from foster care and subsequent involvement with the juvenile justice system. These researchers used two propensity-scored matched samples from administrative records in Wayne County of the US, one group of young people who had been "absent without leave" (AWOL) from care and one with no AWOL members, to investigate the connection between running away and juvenile justice experience. Predictors of involvement with the justice system included sex, age at first child welfare placement, years in the welfare system, number of placements, total time in residential care, as well as running away from placements, which had the largest effect.

A study in the UK based on surveys and focus groups with professionals and young people also looked at the connection between missing young people and juvenile justice, particularly concerning gang membership, with a view to addressing the challenges of providing better support to runaways (Sturrock & Holmes, 2015). Many services across the country had been in contact with young people who had gone missing and who were involved with gangs. They knew of young people who were often victims of coercion and violence, were likely to be using illegal drugs, and for girls particularly, involved in sexual exploitation. One overarching concern was that many families were reluctant to report a young person as missing if he or she were connected to a gang, due to a general distrust of authorities, or feelings of "guilt, fear and shame surrounding gang involvement" (p. 37). Sturrock and Holmes also spoke out against the "clear tendency to criminalise children and young people, and regard repeated absences as evidence of lower risk rather than a need for safeguarding" (p. 6).

Kempf-Leonard and Johansson (2007) drew attention to the differential treatment of girls and boys in the juvenile justice system. They considered all arrest referrals between 1997 and 2003 in one city in one county in Texas, USA, where running away is treated as an offence. For runaways, the sex difference is most pronounced. Of the 6,473 young people who had a referral for leaving their homes without approval, 65.3% were female. A key point noted in this analysis is that "more runaway girls have been victims of child abuse, including sexual abuse, than other girls who have been involved in juvenile justice" (p. 323). The authors suggested that one explanation for this difference is that more girls are arrested because of concern with the girls' sexuality and their obedience to parental authority. The most common juvenile justice intervention with runaways was a warning against repeating that action. More research is needed to explore if such differences are observed in the cohort of young people who are absent from care placements. However, Kempf-Leonard and Johansson's conclusion that the main problem for authorities, "quite likely in most juvenile justice systems", is a "lack of alternatives and understanding about how best to respond to runaways" (p. 324). This issue will be discussed further in Section 2.6.

2.4.3 Mental health issues

Mental health has been shown to be a significant issue for missing persons in general (Sowerby & Thomas, 2017). In her review, Radu (2017) pointed out that young runaways are likely to present with high rates of emotional problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, self-harming, oppositional defiant disorder, attention deficit disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder.) Research conducted by various workers (e.g., Pearson, Thrane, & Wilkinson, 2017; Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, Tyler, and Johnson, 2004) had shown that the impact of these conditions was compounded for the LGB sub group of runaways. A key issue is whether the mental condition was a precursor to, or a consequence of running away. Radu believed that family instability and stress were contributing factors to the mental health problems, a view supported by other workers (Rees, 2011; Swisher & Warner, 2013). However, as discussed previously, while absent from home these young people can be exposed to violence and exploitation that would be likely to exacerbate any pre-existing mental condition. Other studies have highlighted concerns related to suicide attempts, pregnancy, and health issues such as HIV (Smeaton, 2013; Thompson et al., 2008).

Mental health problems for runaways could be ameliorated by interventions that generate more supportive social network ties. Wright, Attell, and Ruel (2017) showed that having more supportive social ties reduced the risk of youth experiencing significant symptoms of severe mental illness. However, one issue is that older youth and those absent for more than six months tend to have fewer personal support networks and hence would be more susceptible to mental health problems. While social networks of those who have gone missing for longer periods are considerably heterogeneous, comprising members from both the home and street related to the individual's characteristics and experiences (e.g., sexual identity, abuse history, and street experience), supports that focus on home components may be critical. "Innovative interventions that involve creating supportive networks of more conventional peers and facilitating access to them may act to maintain ties to conventional norms and even serve as motivation to get off the streets" (Johnson, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2005, p. 246).

2.5   Response / Reaction

This section considers what happens while the young people are absent; what do we know about what they do, where they go, what supports they might need or access, and what barriers or facilitators they encounter to this access. I also will discuss what the authorities' actions might be; who searches for the runaways and what supports are provided.

2.5.1. Young Person Support

While as discussed, there are many possible risks confronting young people when missing (well summarised by Crosland & Dunlap, 2015), a clear picture is not available of what happens to most of the runaways, particularly those who are absent for relatively short periods (in Australia, 80–90% of "missing" persons are located within a week; Bricknell & Renshaw, 2016). It is understood that young people, while absent from placement, will have similar needs to their peers in a home base: they will require food, shelter, to remain safe and healthy, and to engage in some socialising to minimise feelings of loneliness (Slesnick, 2004; Yu & Au Liu, 2013). Little research is available to give insights into how these survival ends are achieved.

2.5.1.1 Services. Limited or non-existent options for young people to access legitimate support, emergency accommodation, economic assistance, and health services while absent have been linked to increased risks and vulnerabilities of exploitation, harm, and criminalisation (Malloch & Burgess, 2011; Rees, 2011; Sarri et al., 2016). Smeaton (2013) observed that many areas in England have no specialised services for young people when absent from their home environment. Young people generally are ill informed about available resources and their rights of access. This was raised in Day and Riebschleger's (2007) study; they reported that the strongest recommendations of their focus-group youth were (a) for someone to care about them, (b) for them to have more input into their case planning, (c) to be made more aware of resources they can access when preparing for the future, and (d) to be kept with their siblings where possible. To improve the knowledge of young people in care who choose to be absent, it is imperative that the needs of young people, as expressed by them, are heard. Indeed, meeting the need to be cared for in policies, resourcing, and practices should be of primary importance. Unfortunately, the literature and data suggest young people's contribution to important decisions about their needs and care is all too frequently overlooked.

Young people often render themselves invisible to services through fear of being returned. Rees (2011) found that although one quarter of the young people in his study claimed they had sought help while absent, they approached mainly friends or other relatives. Only 5% of those absent overnight asked professionals (social services or school staff) for help. Researchers have looked at possible barriers and/or facilitators that either hinder or help young people to access services such as emergency accommodation (Franks, Hunwicks, & Goswami, 2015) and mental health care (Brown, Rice, Rickwood, & Parker, 2016). Brown et al. revealed that common barriers for "at risk" youth accessing and engaging services included stigma and shame around seeking help, poor motivation for treatment, negative attitudes to seeking help, concern that needs would not be met, lack of peer support for treatment, concerns about confidentiality, trust, and anonymity. Facilitators were how serious the problem was, motivation to seek help, having information about services, and confidence in the treatment provider's competency. Franks et al. also found that lack of availability of the service (suitable accommodation), and lack of visibility and/or inaccessibility of service, together with a lack of trust in the providers exacerbated the already low motivation of detached young people. These researchers recommended the introduction of a "transitional person" who adopts a non-judgmental framework and acts as a bridge between service providers and the young runaways to help them access the support they need. People from the natural networks of the runaways could be recruited to fill such roles.

A critical support required by those absent from placement is finding suitable accommodation. Various organisations can provide this type of service, but evaluations of what is offered is rare. One study, conducted by Gwadz et al. (2017) in New York State, compared the quality of the organisation, and outcomes achieved by 29 randomly selected specialist settings established to

provide support for young runaways and homeless people. These included drop-in centres, transitional living programs, and multi-program settings. The Youth Program Quality Assessment model (see Figure 4) was used to produce ratings of the effectiveness of 53 programs; this analysis was combined with interview data from 30 administrators, and assessments from 463 young people (16–23 years). Overall, the organisations rated satisfactory-to-high on the setting quality score. Of the three behavioural outcome measures used, engagement with school/job training was high (81%); substance use was moderate; and 37% were involved in the street economy (drug dealing, robbery). Young people in Transitional Living Programs performed better than their peers in Drop-In Centres. The authors summarised their findings in this way (p. 398):

> while the present study suggests all settings benefit RHY [runaway and homeless youth], better quality settings may be able to move beyond meeting RHY's basic requirements and address higher order relational, psychosocial, and motivational needs. Importantly, fostering a sense of resilience…

This unique study points to how future supports can be provided for young people when absent from placement, and also how such programs can be evaluated to determine if needs are being met.
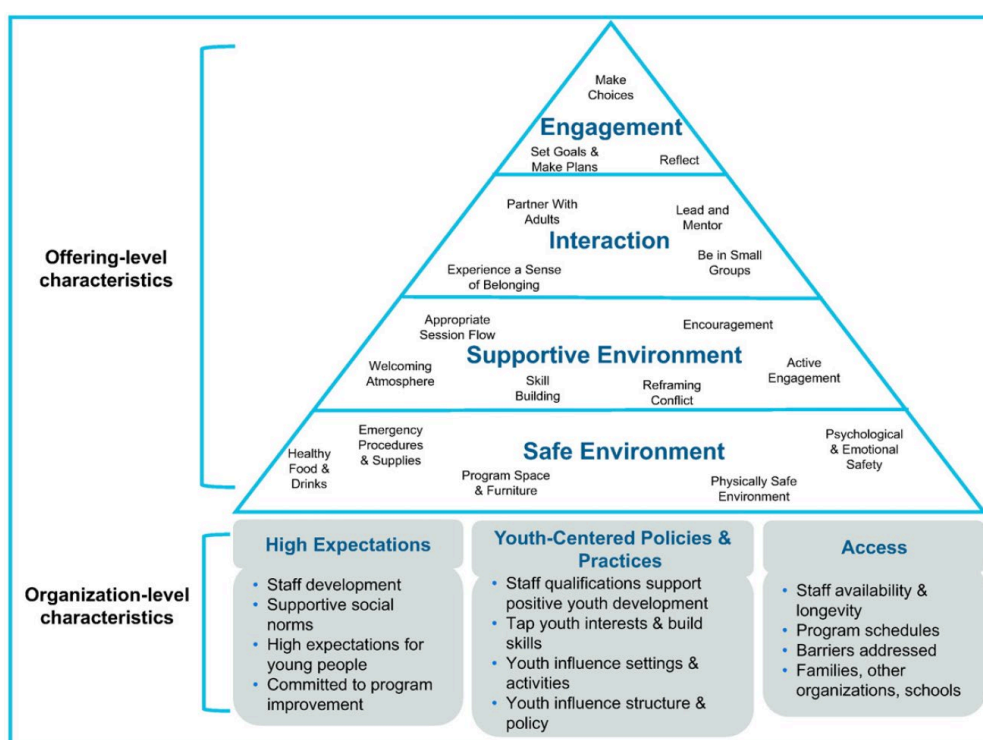
Figure 2. Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) model as used by Gwadz et al. (2017) to rate services provided in New York State for young people who have run away.

2.6 Resolution

Much attention in the literature has been directed to attempting to understand the reasons young people have for running away, what dangers they may face while absent from the protection of their caregivers, and what support services could be provided to maximise their safety during the runaway period. However, equally important is what happens when the young people are located and return to placement. How the caregivers respond, how much the young persons' views are considered, how much effort is directed at addressing the issues that led the young person to be absent initially will have a significant determining effect on future actions.

Malloch and Burgess (2011) emphasised that professionals' attitudes and responsibilities towards young people who are absent from care may inhibit resolution of these incidents. If some young people are seen as the problem, i.e., not having genuine concerns, just being thoughtless and impulsive, then a deserving/undeserving dichotomy in runaways can be created. They argued that if some young people are perceived as needing protection while others were likely to be "blamed" for their actions, this difference could be reflected in the responses of child protection staff as well as in the allocation of resources. "This 'way of seeing' limits the effectiveness of statutory responses" and may not result in the needs of all young runways being given sufficient attention.

Unfortunately, the perception of authorities (police, child safety officers) is influenced by the fact that it is a common occurrence for young people to be absent from placements multiple times. For example, in the UK, the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults (2016) reported that the 6,110 children who went missing in 2014–15 did so 28,570 times (an average of 4.7). Clearly, insufficient appropriate action has been taken following the early returns to prevent the substantial "recidivism."

What responses, following return from an absence, would be likely to lower the motivation of a young person to run away again? These would include the Secondary Interventions referred to by Morewitz (2016, Chapter 20).[4] For any approaches to be successful, the literature consistently emphasises the importance of a supportive relationship between caregivers and the young people. Finkelstein et al. (2004) observed that when young people return from being "absent without leave", they appreciate more "displays of emotion and concern, rather than anger and irritation" (pp. 31–32). Youths explained that it would be harder for them to leave people who they believed were being nice to them. Openness regarding case planning and management, and increased flexibility in administering policy (rules) could be the most effective preventative options.

Karam and Robert (2013) agreed that the relationship climate between foster care workers and the youth is a determining factor for runaway behaviour. Running away may be seen as a coping mechanism, but not just in response to firmness and control. As they explained: "supervision and discipline alone in certain environments would not be a risk factor for runaway behaviour; it is more a combination of these characteristics with a cold, distant, and authoritative relationship between the foster care workers and the youth that can be a risk factor" (p. 76). Findings presented by Slesnick, Guo, Brakenhoff, and Feng (2013), from their studies of a group of substance-abusing adolescents recruited from shelters, suggest that reducing substance abuse, but also strengthening care and connection within "family" relationships, should be targets of interventions when trying to prevent future runaway episodes in at-risk groups. Holmes (2014; 2017) also emphasised the importance of re-connecting with support networks.

One obvious first step in expressing care and concern for those who have just returned after being absent is for responsible adults to talk with them to hear their story, and to look for some suitable resolution to the issues that led to the young people needing to leave their placement. Such conversations in the UK have been formalised in what are generally termed "return interviews" (The Children's Society, *n.d.).* The requirements have been documented in the UK Department for Education's (2014) *Statutory Guidance* that stipulate the conducting of "Safe and Well" checks by the police as soon as possible after a runaway is located, as well as an Independent Return Interview within 72 hours of return.

---

[4] Morewitz's Primary interventions could be seen as pre-emptive, introduced as strategies to try to prevent the young person actually running away initially.

Different districts in the UK conduct the return interviews slightly differently. For example, Mitchell, Malloch, and Burgess (2014) undertook a review of the *Grampian Return Home Welfare Interviews* in Scotland. Their findings largely were positive, showing that "*RHWIs* function as an effective screening mechanism and can be facilitative in creating multiple pathways for referral to appropriate services" (p. 55). They varied the process by showing that the police, who are at the front line when locating missing children, also could conduct the interviews, rather than possibly delaying the process by introducing another independent agency. A concern was that the young people may feel inhibited talking with police and not reveal valuable information that could lead to their receiving necessary support. However, it appeared that, irrespective of who conducted the interviews, the critical factor was an interviewer's ability to relate to young people. The Interviews "have the potential to improve outcomes by helping young people appreciate the value of talking about their problems rather than running away" (p. 64).

Another evaluation, conducted by Hill, Taylor, Richards, and Reddington (2016), investigated the *Return Interview Assessment* provided through the Missing Children's Service of the UK National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Again, their results were largely positive; they summarised their findings in these terms: "This indicates the importance of the Return Interview Assessment as a starting point to identify unmet needs and risks with the child and family to then develop a programme of work with the child and family or facilitate access to appropriate services" (p. 202). Unfortunately, their data were equivocal regarding the effectiveness of the interviews in preventing future absences.

The Children's Society in the UK has investigated the implementation of the Return Interview requirement through FOI requests to local authorities for 2011–12 data (The Children's Society, 2013; Pona, 2016). From the 134 local authorities that responded (out of 152 possible), comparisons could be made not only on the implementation of interviews, but also on the different treatment young people who were absent from home and care received. Key findings included:

- Children who go missing from home were more likely to miss out on a return Interview (29%) compared with those missing from care (49%). However, this indicates that, even though the care group have been prioritised as especially vulnerable, still over half did not receive an interview on return;
- In 2011-12, a total of 2870 return interviews were conducted; this represents only 7% of the number of missing episodes recorded;
- return interviews were conducted mostly by social service staff, not independent providers; and
- assessment of the young person's needs was not always part of the return interview.

Pona (2016) detected that as well as the home/care difference in incidence of return interviews, those young people who had been classified officially as "absent" (compared with "missing") also were less likely to have a chance to talk about why they left, what happened while missing, and what would help when they returned.

Return interviews are a mechanism for identifying the supports that young people could benefit from when located after being absent. Researchers have explored a range of possible services that might lead to reducing the likelihood of future absences. Jackson (2015) advocated for the development of special trauma-specific therapeutic responses to assist young people to cope. Such services are characterised by ensuring young people are treated with respect, helping all involved put words to feelings, while attempting to understand the reasons for behaviour and which needs remain unmet. Jackson referred to results from an evaluation of a therapeutic residential care program in Victoria (Australia) that found reduced absconding as one its outcomes.

Other interventions, such as the functional behaviour analytic approach documented by Clark et al. (2008), produced individually tailored interventions based on an assessment process that seeks to: (a) understand the motivations for the adolescent's running (e.g., what the youth was seeking to obtain by running, and/or what the youth was attempting to avoid by leaving the foster care placement); as well as (b) determine the specific circumstances or situations that might have triggered the running episode. "This information would then be used to devise an individualized, multicomponent intervention plan focused on reducing the youth's motivations for running away and increasing the youth's motivations for staying in a safe setting" (Clark et al., p. 431).

2.7 Conclusion

The reasons for young people in out-of-home care "going missing" can be many and varied. This scoping review has identified four broad areas emergent in the literature pertaining to the vulnerabilities and risks children and young people are exposed to as a result of being absent or going missing from their out-of-home carer placement. These include (a) the reasons young people choose to leave the care environment; (b) the risks they face while being absent or missing; the responses/reactions of caregivers and authorities to their absence; and (c) actions taken on their return to attempt to resolve their issues. While considerable research has been conducted overseas, this review highlights the lack of systematic studies dealing with the issue of young people absent from out-of-home care in Australia. In particular, research is lacking to help us understand the significance of being absent from care as it applies to special groups including "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from CALD backgrounds, children who have an intellectual disability, and children for whom sexual orientation may be a risk factor for going missing" (QFCC, 2016, p. 119). Numerous challenges exist in developing effective prevention, intervention, and reintegration programmes that can effectively uphold young people's rights to be looked after in statutory care across Australia. It is essential that the young people are actively engaged in all decisions affecting their lives (Bessell, 2011; McDowall, 2016). Further research is necessary to enable stakeholders to learn from the experiences of children and young people, as well from the views of their foster and kinship carers, to gain a greater understanding of the problems, and hopefully devise appropriate solutions to safeguard young people in out-of-home care and minimise the likelihood that "something is not right in their lives" that might result in their feeling their only option is to "go missing."

Chapter 3: Policy Development Concerning Absent or Missing Young People

3.1   International and national framework

This chapter explores the legal and policy framework underpinning the treatment of missing children within the out-of-home care sector. Brief reference will be made to the international context, but most attention will be focused on the similarities and differences among the Australian states and territories, particularly regarding policies concerning children and young people absent or missing from care.

In both the US and UK, the federal or national government is active in monitoring the situation regarding missing children. For example, as Fernandes-Alcantara (2016) documented, since 1974 when the US Congress passed the Runaway Youth Act, the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (RHYP) has been developed and expanded as a major support for these vulnerable youth (although other federal government programs also exist). The RHYP supports three front-line programs: The Basic Center Program that serves between 31,000 and 36,000 young people each year; the Transitional Living Program which supports 3,000 to 3,500 16 to 21 year olds; and the Street Outreach Program which makes hundreds of thousands of contacts with street youth each year. This program "provides education, treatment, counselling, and referrals for runaway, homeless, and street youth who have been subjected to or are at risk of being subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation" (p. i). Related services conducted under the auspices of RHYA include a National Communication System to link service providers, runaway youth, and caregivers; training and support for groups funded under the programs; and the encouragement of new research and evaluations of programs. All funding is provided on a formula basis and is competitively allocated. The individual states institute these and their own programs to support the vulnerable children and young people (Morewitz, 2016, Chapter 21).

Although the UK had a national government, most of the practical child protection is achieved by the local councils. However, having national oversight means that the general principles can be established with broad agreement, with only minor variations introduced during the implementation of programs. For example, the government in 2015 issued inter-agency guidelines for all local authorities to follow when working together to safeguard children (HM Government, 2015). More specifically, regarding runaway or missing children, a *Statutory Guidance* (Department for Education, 2014) was produced by the Department for Education that applies to local authorities and their partners when exercising their social services functions. The monitoring of adherence to the guidelines is done by various groups including the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) in their Inquiry for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults (2016) and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2013). By adopting this framework, the UK government is able to stipulate that certain actions must occur not only when looking for, but also after runaway children and young people have been located and returned. The "safe and well" checks by the police, and formal "return interviews" are two important requirements. The issue as always is how well the policies and guidelines are actually implemented. As Pona (2016) determined, there is likely to be variation in response across localities; but the principle is articulated, and should be adhered to.

The Australian context is somewhat different in that the states and territories are responsible for the administration and operation of child protection services (see Scott, Holzer, Lamont, & El-Murr, 2018

for the full list of relevant Acts). The Commonwealth has some responsibility when establishing regulations for protecting Australian children in international contexts. It also was involved in setting up the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (Council of Australian Governments, 2009) and funds the Tran*sition to Independent Living Allowance* available for young people 15–25 years of age leaving the care system. However, it has no direct responsibility for young people running away or missing from care; its representation would come through the Australian Federal Police and the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre. This deals with reports of all missing persons, including children. There are no dedicated Australian government regulations relating to children absent or missing from care, and there is no requirement for missing children statistics to be collected or reported in the national summary of the status of child protection published annually (AIHW, 2018).

3.2 Australian state and territory legislation and policy

Because the states and territories have primary responsibility for child protection, and hence all that occurs under that umbrella, Australian legislation is complex and varies across jurisdictions. The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC, 2016) included in its report, as Attachment 4, an extremely comprehensive coverage of relevant Queensland legislation including sections of the *Child Protection Act 1999*, the *Foster and Kinship Carer Handbook* (revised edition 2016), the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*, the Commonwealth *Privacy Act 1988*, Queensland's *Information Privacy Act 2009*, and *Right to Information Act 2009*, the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and the Queensland *Charter of Rights for a Child in Care (Schedule 1).* It also included a cross-jurisdictional comparison of all the Australian child protection legislative frameworks.

As a complement to that review of legislation, this chapter presents a summary of the policy and guideline framework that has developed within the states and territories from this legislative underpinning. Appendix A records the definitions of key terms, and the main actions to be undertaken by relevant personnel when a young person is first detected as absent or missing, while the search proceeds, and once the young person is returned. Most states make this information available through a variety of media, including published (online) *Child Safety Practice Manuals* (Queensland, Victoria); *Guidelines* (Queensland, Australian Federal Police, Tasmania, Western Australia); *Protocols* (Queensland); and dedicated *Policies* (Queensland, Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory). Unfortunately, New South Wales does not publish this material in an integrated, accessible form and was unable to supply copies on request. The procedures documented for this state are based on information gleaned from multiple documents on various online sites. New South Wales appears to have adopted a procedure of having all reports from any concerned party directed through the *Child Protection Helpline*. South Australia did provide *Guidelines* for residential care facilities dealing with missing young people. As well as presenting a range of procedures for staff to follow, these *Guidelines* (Families SA, 2014) included an admonition that would seem relevant in all jurisdictions:

> If you fail to respond when a child or young person runs away or goes missing you are not only breaching your duty of care, you are showing the child or young person that you do not care enough to respond or that they aren't important enough for you to make an effort. (p. 19)

3.3 General observations on Policies and Guidelines

The most obvious features resulting from a comparison of the approaches stipulated by the states and territories when dealing with absent or missing children is the accessibility of the information, and its apparent variability, in terms of both the roles identified as being involved, and the detail provided in describing the actions required of these stakeholders. One positive development, as far

as can be determined, is that child safety departments in most jurisdictions are now differentiating between "absent" and "missing" episodes, and proposing specific strategies to deal with these different situations. Unfortunately, police services still tend to use the somewhat pejorative term "absconding", even when referring to children in care, particularly from residential facilities.

It is interesting that some child safety jurisdictions (e.g., QLD, VIC, WA) have no problem making public selected sections of their *Practice Manuals* and detailed *Guidelines* relating to young people absent or missing from care (which presumably would be of continuing value to carers), while others (e.g., NSW, SA, and to a lesser extent NT) present the information in a dispersed form that is difficult to locate, or make it accessible only to caseworkers.

Given that "missing" can be a cross-jurisdictional experience (e.g., a young person can leave New South Wales and move to Queensland), it would seem sensible for there to be some standardisation in the terminology and processes to be followed when looking for young people who are classified as missing. The fact that there is different emphasis on (a) what actions should be done first, (b) when it is necessary to report concerns to police and Child Safety, (c) which agencies need to be involved when invoking a multi-agency approach etc. indicates that there are many possibilities for a step to be overlooked. Because it is desirable that as many groups as necessary be involved in searching for missing young people to maximise the likelihood of a satisfactory outcome, it would seem appropriate for all jurisdictions to have a Child Safety Missing Coordinator (as in Victoria) to ensure that the actions of all agencies are complementary, and to handle any variations in process that may occur.

Other important differences emerge once the young person is located. Some jurisdictions require more formal interviews with the young person (usually conducted by police). Others mention "debriefing" the young person, while Victoria expects a "conversation" with a professional the young person trusts. There also appears to be differences in how young people who have gone missing are treated, compared with those who have been absent. The reasons for conducting more formal interviews are first, to be sure that the young people have an opportunity to talk about why they ran away and what happened during their absence (and that this is documented), and second, that a plan is developed to address the issues that led to the absence or missing episode and help minimise the likelihood of a repeat occurrence. For example, in Queensland, the joint care team and police develop a *Safety and Support Plan* to address the young person's issues.

All jurisdictions propose some response to an absent or missing event; more detail and consistency would improve the policy framework. However, what is not known in Australian jurisdictions is how relevant and appropriate the responses of the authorities are for the individual young people involved. Are the proposed procedures actually executed; do any plans produced address the young person's needs; and are plans meaningfully implemented? Evidence reviewed in the literature from overseas indicated that the best intentions of the policy makers in attempting to introduce preventative measures to reduce repeated running away can be thwarted by the expected supports not being implemented. Is the situation different in Australia? The next chapter presents the answers given to these questions by some young people in Queensland with a history of running away.

Part B

The Voices of Young People and Carers concerning Absences from Care

Chapter 4: Interviews with Young People Who Have Been Absent from Care

4.1 Introduction

The review of the literature has provided insights into the prevalence of the phenomenon of children being absent or going missing from care placements, some of the reasons for this behaviour, and responses of authorities and the community to their actions. However, what was clear from this summary was that little work has been done in Australia on this important subject.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission [QFCC] (2016) produced a watershed document in its Report following Tiahleigh Palmer's disappearance. This report drew together much information on missing children in general, and provided useful insights into what was known about those being absent or missing from out-of-home care. While the QFCC report documented statistics from the Queensland Police Service, it had to rely on data from overseas (e.g., Courtney et al., 2005) for an understanding of what the missing experience meant to the young people themselves. No Australian data were available.

This section of the current project presents some empirical findings derived directly from interviews conducted with young people who were, or had recently been in out-of-home care in Queensland. This provides an opportunity for the young people to tell their story, and to allow us to explore what absence from care means in the Australian context compared with the understanding we have developed from data collected on runaway children overseas.

4.2 Method

4.2.1 Participants

4.2.1.1 Recruitment of interviewees. Support was provided by the Queensland Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (formerly Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services) to locate young people who had been living in a placement in out-of-home care for an extended period, and who had been absent or missing from that placement on at least one occasion. Ethics approval for the project was obtained through Belberry Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number 2006-11-852-A-1). An important component of that application concerned CREATE's documentation of procedures to be followed if any disclosures of harm were made by the young people, either to themselves or others in care (see Appendix B for copies of the Disclosure Protocol documents). The Director General of the Department and Regional Directors from Child and Family Services districts throughout Queensland were consulted and provided with information about the proposed study. They subsequently authorised team leaders and caseworkers to provide the contact details of any young people in their region who would be eligible to participate and may have been interested in giving their consent. In recommending the involvement of young people, caseworkers indicated they knew the history of the potential participant and were satisfied that all past placement issues that might be raised in interview had been appropriately resolved.

An initial list of 67 young people was produced. The context from which this sample was drawn can be appreciated by reference to data reported by QFCC (2016, Appendix 1, Table 3) where it is revealed that, in 2014–15, a total of 369 children and young people were reported missing from out-of-home care, representing 4.19% of the total number of children living away from home in Queensland at that time.

Table 3 shows the initial number of prospective interviewees in each region together with the 13 additional young people who were recommended as possibly suitable for inclusion. Of these 80, young people, 33 finally were able to be interviewed. This table also indicates the total number of calls that had to be made to secure these interviews, of which 24 were done by telephone and nine face-to-face. Because of the transient nature of this group, the immediacy of the phone resulted in more successful outcomes than did attempts to arrange face-to-face meetings in the future. Over half of the identified cohort were either not interested in participating (including those whose emotional state at the time was judged by caseworkers to render them unsuitable for interview), or could not be contacted either directly or through their child safety officer.

Of the 33 included in the sample, 19 (57.6%) were female, and 16 (54.6%) identified as Aboriginal. This compares with the 41.6% of the QLD care population in 2015 who were members of this cultural group (AIHW, 2016a). As noted in QFCC (2016, Appendix 1, Table 4), 48% of those children and young people reported missing in 2014–15 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Ages ranged from 12 – 17 years, with 10 (30.4%) under 15 years. Their living arrangements at the time of interview are presented in Figure 3. Almost half were living in supported accommodation. Most (22; 66.7%) was experiencing their first entry into the care system, while four (12.1%) had entered again after one attempt at reunification, and seven (21.2%) had re-entered three or more times.

Table 3: *Results of Interviewee Recruitment*

Region	Initial Sample	Extras	Total Attempts to Contact	Not Interested / Unsuitable	No Contact	Face-to-Face	Phone	Total Responded
Far North QLD	10	0	33	2	5	0	3	**3**
North QLD	5	1	19	3	0	0	3	**3**
Central QLD	6	11	57	3	7	0	7	**7**
North Coast	2	0	9	0	1	0	1	**1**
South East QLD	23	1	76	2	11	5	6	**11**
South West QLD	21	0	61	2	11	4	4	**8**
TOTAL	**67**	**13**	**255**	**12**	**34**	**9**	**24**	**33**
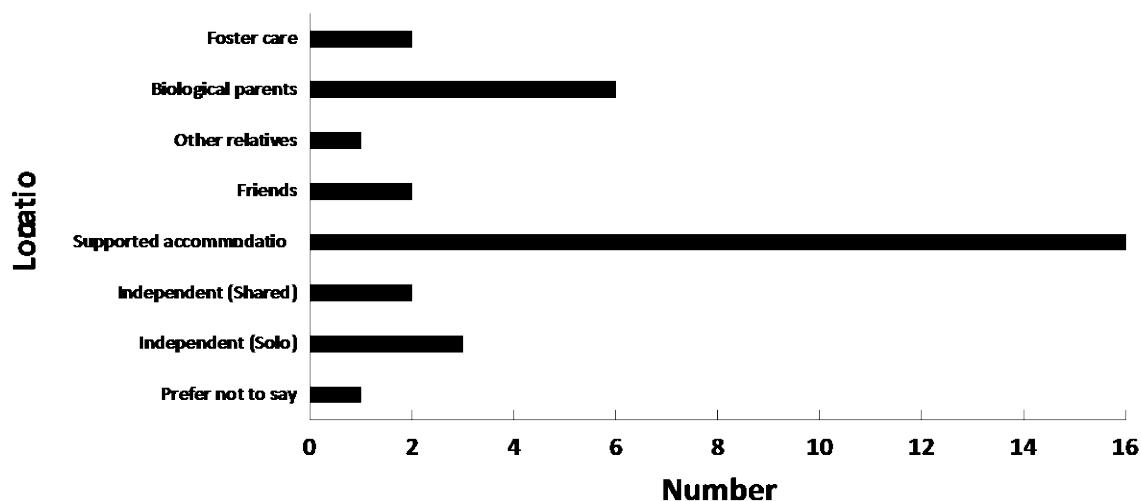
Figure 3. Living arrangements of young people at time of interview.

4.2.2   Structured Interview

Because of the sensitive subject matter dealt with in this study, an initial decision was to collect the experiences of the young people by personal contact rather than through an anonymous questionnaire. However, to ensure that the same questions were asked of all respondents, a structured interview was developed. This allowed sufficient flexibility in delivery to accommodate the differing levels of engagement of the young people being consulted, enabling the interviewer to "provide extra motivation and assistance to respondents when needed" (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014).

The interview comprised a maximum of 66 questions; the total depended on responses provided to questions providing conditional branching (e.g., "Do you have any brothers and/or sisters?"). Of these items, 33 collected demographic information and overall descriptors of the young person's pathway through care. The remaining 33 questions dealt with the experience of being "missing" from a placement. What led to the decision to leave? What happened while absent? What were the reactions of caregivers, family, and friends when the young people were located?

A variety of question types were used constituting a mixed-method approach. Some were quantitative requiring choices to be made from lists; other questions asked respondents to select a position on a continuum between two poles (e.g., "Not at all Comfortable" to "Very Comfortable"), scored using a slider rating scale. In addition, open questions gave interviewees the opportunity to express their views in their own words. These were subjected to a thematic analysis to identify key issues. A copy of the questions asked is provided in Appendix C.

4.2.3   Procedure

As indicated, lists of possible interviewees were provided by the relevant child safety Department for the various regions around Queensland. Initially, attempts were made to arrange face-to-face interviews with young people in various geographic areas.[5] However, after several trips were made to remote areas only to find that plans had changed (young people were no longer available), it was decided to conduct interviews by telephone as well as face-to-face.

Before a young person was interviewed, the caseworker responsible for that young person was contacted to check that progressing with the interview would still be appropriate. In a small number of cases, the young person had become unavailable either because of personal trauma in his or her life, or in two instances, they had been placed in detention. Contact then was made with the young person, the nature and purpose of the study explained, and their consent to participate obtained. Responses from the young people were typed directly into the interview pro forma accessed through the Survey Monkey platform. The average time taken for the interviews was 30 min 17 sec.

Data collected during the interviews were both quantitative and qualitative, being a mixture of Yes/No options, rating scales, and open text responses. Quantitative analyses were undertaken using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (V 25 for the Macintosh). Mostly frequency analyses were conducted, given the relatively small number of interviewees. Text responses were subjected to thematic analyses to identify key issues that affected groups of respondents.

4.3   Results

4.3.1   In-Care experience

Several questions focused on aspects of the care experience of the young people. They were asked about their relationship with caseworkers, the extent of their family contact, connection with siblings, and any special support they were receiving for particular issues.

4.3.1.1   Placement history. The length of time spent in care ranged from 6–12 months (n = 1) to more than 10 years (n = 9) with an average duration of around 6 years (see Figure 4). During that time, the interviewees had lived in an average of 10 placements (Figure 5). There was no relationship between the time spent in care and the number of placements.[6] Figure 5 indicates that the number conforming to the ideal expressed in the National Standards (FaHCSIA, 2011) of 1 – 2 placements while in care is low (6.1%). There was a reasonably even split regarding Department (15; 45.5%) and Agency (16; 48.5%) management of the various placements.

---

[5] It is with extreme gratitude I acknowledge the incredible dedication and persistence shown by Mr Peter Melrose, Policy Officer, CREATE Foundation, in engaging with the young people, organising the interviews after numerous attempts, and bringing his considerable skill to bear in conducting the interviews, extracting from the young people for whom this process was not a high priority, the valuable insights contained in this report.

[6] A correlation between Time in Care and Number of Placements was low and not significant (Spearman's *Rho* = .15, *p* > .05).
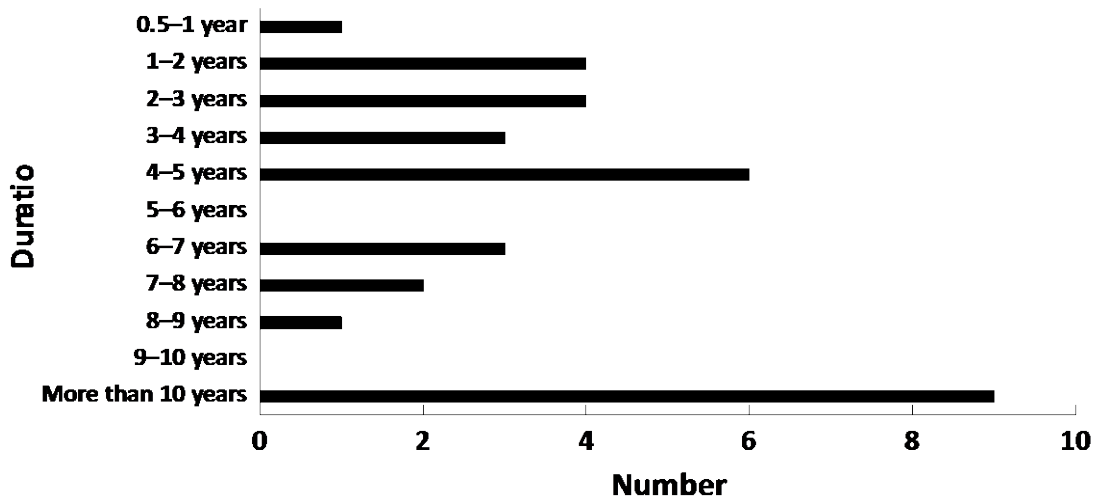
Figure 4. Number of young people who spent the designated time in care.
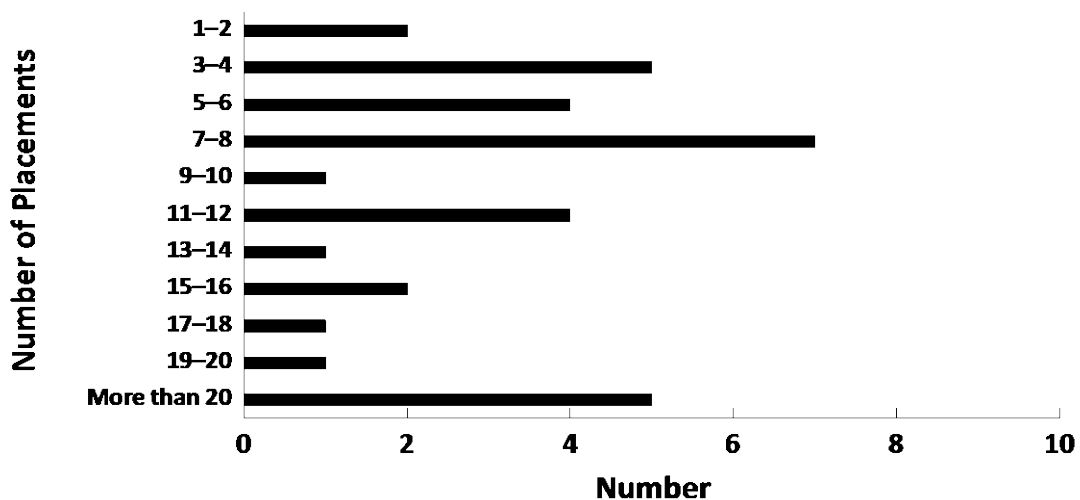
Figure 5. Number of young people who experienced the designated number of placements while in care.

4.3.1.2 Connection with caseworkers. Young people indicated having had a variable number of caseworkers while they were in care. Only two (6.1%) reported having one or two caseworkers; 13 (39.4%) claimed to have interacted with three or four caseworkers, nine (27.3%) dealt with five or six, while the remaining nine (27.3%) reported seven or more workers. Again, there was no direct connection between time spent in care and number of caseworkers indicating that young people who had been in care for several years were no more likely to have a larger number of caseworkers than were those who had been in care for a shorter time.[7]

---

[7] A correlation between Time in Care and Number of Caseworkers was low and not significant (Spearman's *Rho* = -.11, *p* > .05).

A majority of the young people (51.6%) saw their caseworkers at least fortnightly; a further 36.4% met them monthly. Only three (9.1%) had not seen a caseworker at all. Overall, 48.5% of respondents felt at least 75% comfortable discussing personal issues with their caseworker; 63.6% reported being at least 50% comfortable.

Young people also were asked about their knowledge of having a case or care plan, and what special supports may have been provided for them. Just under half (48.5%) were aware of having a case plan, although some of these commented that they hadn't been involved in its development.

> *"I have a care plan, but was not present for it at all. I have a psychiatrist and doctor for my mental health. I have PTSD, anxiety, and major depression."* (Female, 17 years)

One third of interviewees reported that they were not receiving any extra support for special issues. However, eight others were assisted with their education, while eight were receiving health related treatment, six for mental health problems.

4.3.1.3 Education and the future. Young people were questioned on their current involvement with education. A large number (n = 14; 42.4%) indicated they already had left school. The remainder were distributed between grades 7 and 12 (Gr 7: 2; Gr 8: 1; Gr 9: 6; Gr 10: 2; Gr 11: 5; and Gr 12: 2) with one attending TAFE. Two young persons had attended Flexi School.[8]

Two thirds of the interviewees indicated that they had missed at least 70% of school days in the previous year; 24.2% had attended at least half the classes in that year. Of the two, young people at Flexischool, one had missed 1–5 days, while the other reported being absent for 1–3 months. A variety of reasons were given to explain the absences. The most common explanation, mentioned by six respondents, was having been expelled or suspended, often for expressing anger and fighting. Five young people stopped going to school because they didn't like how they were treated, and another four did not attend because of issues with their mental health. Other reasons cited included bullying, moving placement, youth justice involvement, having a disability, and being pregnant. Only one young person reported non-attendance at school because of being absent. The following views expressed by the young people indicate experiences with a complex set of factors that need considered attention:

> *"I haven't been in school since year 9. I don't feel comfortable attending school locally as I have high level anxiety."* (Female, 16 years)
>
> *"I left school in year 10 because of bullying and stuff. I don't know why I was bullied, I had red hair and not academic so that was probably why as well. And being in care made it hard as well - just feeling different to everyone else. I had to get all this permission to go on anything, while everyone else just got to do stuff."* (Female, 17 years)
>
> *"I just stopped going. When I went into care and I got expelled, and got lazy and stopped going to school. I didn't really like school anyway."* (Male, 17 years)
>
> *"I was in hospital a lot, with mental illness."* (Female, 17 years)
>
> *"Dropped out in grade 8. It was not working for me and I was bashing people. I got picked on because of my weight. I refused to go back to school. I have bad anger issues. It means I can't be around people much and I just go off and bash people."* (Female, 17 years)

---

[8] See Wilson, Stemp, and McGinty (2011) for a discussion of the Flexi School concept.

"I moved around heaps and just dropped out. I got suspended and moved away and never went back to school. I got suspended because I was going through a lot of family sxxx and I swore at teachers." (Female, 16 years)

"Moved placements and I get picked on at school. I used to get bashed and bullied and have my stuff stolen. No one did anything to help me. I went to xxxxx High School. None of the staff helped me and only when my dad went to the school, the school called the police on my dad, and I got suspended for the whole year." (Male, 13 years)

"I was enrolled but the school kept changing my start date. Plus, being in care caused all this confusion about who was paying for my school stuff. It never got paid so I was not allowed to start." (Male, 17 years)

"I left school in grade 7 because I ran away. I went back for a little while but didn't like it. And I got pregnant and have not been there since the start of last year." (Female, 15 years)

"I have been in detention too often to go to school regularly." (Male, 16 years)

Some of the young people still have aspirations to complete their formal education:

"The last full year I did was 2012. I have problems with people. I would go to school stoned so I could deal with people. I am going to TAFE next year to finish year 11 and 12." (Male, 17 years)

Most were hoping to find a job in the near future, six were seeking apprenticeships, while seven were planning to undertake study at TAFE or university. In their current living arrangements, 14 (42.4%) received an allowance from their carers, while 14 (42.4%) relied on Centrelink and disability payments (one of this group also was working part-time). Others depended on family and friends for support. When asked how they spent their free time, young people identified 49 activities. Most popular was hanging out with friends (28.6%), followed by playing sports, including swimming, rugby, fishing etc. (16.3%), watching movies (8.2%), and spending time with partners (8.2%).

4.3.1.4   *Rights and care experience.* The young people questioned were not well informed about their rights as expressed through the UN Rights of the Child Convention (Know nothing: 87.9%) or the Queensland Charter of Rights for Children in Care (Know nothing: 81.8%). However, over two thirds (69.7%) were confident that they would be able to take appropriate action if they encountered a problem in care. Two thirds of the 30 responses provided indicated that the Department's CSO would be contacted, as well as the police (10%) and agency caseworkers (6.7%).

When asked to nominate things that they found were good about being in care, young people produced 47 comments, eight (17.0%) of them referring to how much the young people valued the relationship with their caseworkers and people who care, and six (12.8%) appreciating the general support obtained through the system. Others referred to specific assistance with school and satisfying basic necessities (having somewhere to live and food to eat). Unfortunately, nine (19.1%) could not find anything good about the care system. Some examples of the positive comments were:

"I got a better life than what I could have had. My parents were not very good." (Female, 17 years)

"I guess that when I need help they help me as much as they can." (Female, 15 years)

"Having people that care about you." (Female, 17 years)

"You get fed and go to school." (Male, 12 years)

"Get a support system and education." (Female, 16 years)

"I love my CSO, she really helped me find my dad." (Female, 16 years)

"I like my house and people in it." (Male, 14 years)

More comments were made (*n* = 65) when outlining things that were not all that good about being in care. The most common reaction was concern over loss of contact with biological family (18.5%) followed closely by complaints about the treatment given by particular carers (16.9%). A further 13.8% of responses focused on restrictive rules and general lack of freedom. Comments about what was not good with the system included:

"Everything, like being taken away from my parents." (Male, 15 years)

"You don't see your mum and dad and family often." (Female, 14 years)

"I feel owned, when I have to sign in to things and get approved to see my mates." (Female, 16 years)

"There's not too much that's really bad, it's just not positive for kids to be removed and not live with your family." (Male, 16 years)

"It's hard and stressful living with other people." (Female, 16 years)

"Some of the carers don't treat the kids well. We don't deserve to be treated that badly." (Female, 17 years)

"You get different workers and carers and its hard dealing with someone different and getting to know someone." (Female, 15 years)

"When you want loving carers; they don't love you like their own kids." (Male, 14 years)

"The houses are dreadful, bad co-tenants. Carers don't engage." (Male, 17 years)

"Most of the foster carers I have been with did not treat me very well. After I had my daughter, they told everyone she was their daughter. My daughter is in a different placement, and I am happy with that." (Female, 15 years)

Young people were asked to indicate how safe they felt being in care on a continuous scale from "Not at all safe" to "Very safe". Seven young people (21.2%) reported feeling very safe; 39.4% at least 80% safe; and 66.6% at least 50% safe. Of some concern is that these figures indicate that, for at least one third of these young people, perceived or actual safety in their placement was an issue. Fortunately, all but two of the cohort could nominate another person they could go to for help through a difficult time. Most (*n* = 14; 42.4%) would approach a professional (caseworker, therapist, or counsellor) rather than carers (*n* = 2; 6.1%) or family (*n* = 10; 30.3%) and friends (*n* = 5; 15.2%).

4.3.1.5   Sibling and family contact. Of the 33 interviewees, 31 (93.9%) reported that they had siblings. However, only five of these (16.1%) were living with their brothers or sisters. Eleven (35.5%) knew of brothers and sisters living elsewhere in care, while 15 (48.4%) knew of siblings who were not in the care system. For most of the young people, the separation occurred when they were brought into care.

Figure 6 shows the frequency of contact, either face-to-face or by telephone, that interviewees had with various family members including siblings with whom they were not living. The most obvious finding is how limited the networks of these young people are; large numbers did not have any

knowledge of their father (14), grandparents (20), or any other relative (31). "Mother" was the family member most frequently contacted (weekly or fortnightly) by most young people (51.5%), with siblings a close second (42.4%). Only 15.2% contacted their fathers this often. Young people were mostly happy with the amount of contact they had with their Mother (OK: 60.6%) and Father (OK: 33.3%), but 57.6% wanted more contact with their siblings as shown in Figure 7.
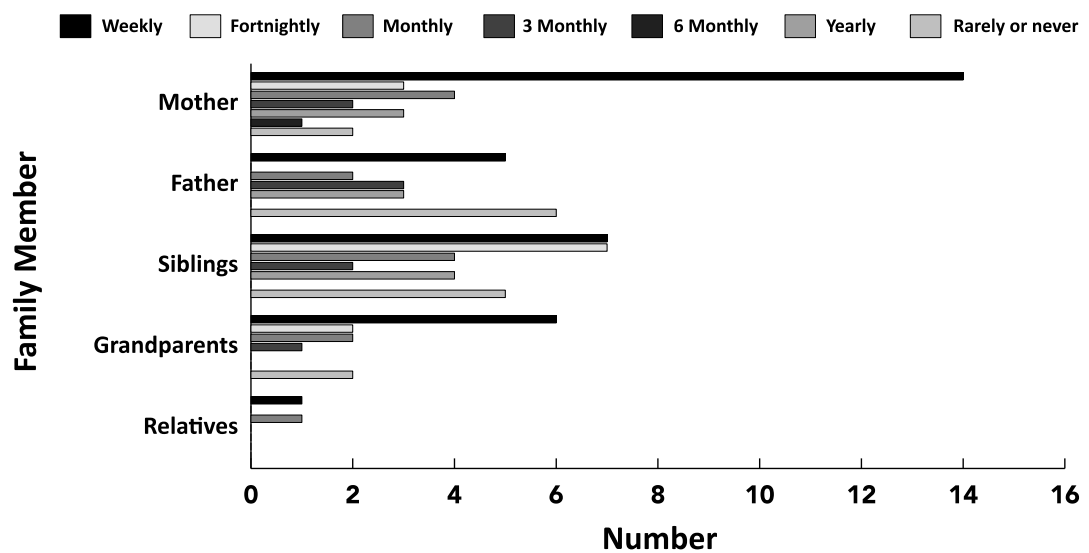
Figure 6. Number of interviewees indicating the various frequencies of contact with family members.
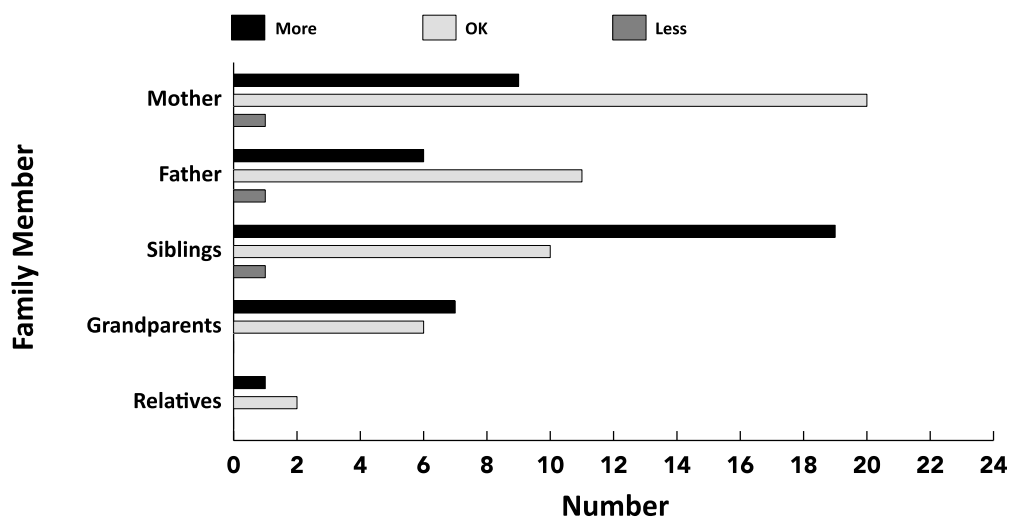
Figure 7. Number of interviewees who would like more, less, or are happy with the frequency of contact with the designated family member.

4.3.2   Being absent

The previous findings give a picture of the young people available for interview in this project. They were selected initially because they had, at least on one occasion, been absent from their placement without the permission or knowledge of their carer. The following sections will explore why the young people left their placement, what happened while they were absent, and what responses greeted their return.

4.3.2.1   "Missing" experience. To gain an understanding of the term "going missing" from the young person's perspective, the interviewees were asked to explain what the phrase meant to them. Most were aware of the two main factors defining "missing": they had to have run away from their placement (n = 25; 75.8%), and nobody knew where they had gone (n = 22; 66.7%).

> *"It's like running away and not letting the workers or anyone know where you are."* (Female, 15 years)

> *"Absconding. When you just leave, and don't tell anyone. Usually because I can't get approval to see a mate or something."* (Female, 16 years)

> *"When you runaway and no one knows where you are."* (Male, 16 years)

Others concentrated on either being absent, or the fact that their location was unknown. One respondent also acknowledged a difference between absconding and missing:

> *"I have absconded and they put out a missing person's report because I did not have approval, but they knew where I was. It should be that if they have a name and address you should be able to visit people and go where you like. This creates the problem for kids who are trying to have a normal life. Missing is when someone has not been heard from at all. Absconding is where they do have information but they are not in the placement."* (Female, 16 years)

The remaining eight young people commented on aspects of the experience of being absent rather than the meaning of the term. Some examples of their views include:

> *"Most of the time, when kids take off it's because they don't get much freedom so they just want that freedom."* (Male, 16 years)

> *"When they call the police but you might not be missing, I know where I am so I'm not missing. I understand where they are coming from but it's really annoying."* (Male, 17 years)

> *"Avoiding the carers, who judge me. They say what I do wrong and that I am a threat to society."* (Female, 15 years)

> *"Getting myself some space to breathe and let me be me, instead of faking a smile all the time, otherwise they ask me what's wrong and they annoy me."* (Female, 17 years)

Of the young people interviewed, all had been absent on multiple occasions. Overall, 81.8% had run away more than five times (*n* = 27; 15 females; 12 males). The number of absences varied considerably between individuals:

> *"More than 20 times. I spend time with people who aren't in care, like mum, family."* (Male, 14 years)

> *"50 times maybe. I took off all the time.*" (Male, 17 years)

"I would be missing half the time I have been in care in total." (Male, 17 years)

"Every day if I could; not sure but all the time." (Female, 14 years)

"The police told me I have gone missing over 123 times in the last 2 years." (Female, 15 years)

One third of respondents claimed they had run away for, at most, about one week. However, another third went missing for more than one month, with the maximum reported being 10 months. Most young people (*n* = 14, 42.4%) had lived in their placement only a few days before running away; seven (21.2%) a few weeks; and five (15.2%) a few months. Only five (15.2%) had left placements where they had been living for several years.

4.3.2.2 ***Reasons for running away.*** Young people were asked to discuss the reasons they had for running away from care. The explanations provided were categorised using the framework outlined in Section 2.3 (Systemic factors; Relationship Issues; Escape from conflict / abuse; Agency). The fifth category identified in the literature review (viz. Individual Factors) was already incorporated in the selection of the participants (e.g., sex, most susceptible age group, and all with a history of running away).

One suggested Systemic factor (viz. Placement Instability) did not appear to be an influence with this group of respondents; no relationship was found between the number of placements the young people experienced and the frequency of their absences.[9] The factor that had the strongest connection with running away was the total length of time the young person spent in out-of-home care; clearly, a longer time gives greater opportunity.[10]

While there was no association between absences and the number of caseworkers the young person interacted with, or how often they saw their caseworkers, there was a significant correlation between times absent and how comfortable the young people felt discussing issues with their caseworker. The more comfortable they reported feeling, the less likely they were to run away.[11]

Multiple reasons for being absent were given by several respondents (44 examples were recorded). Mental Health issues were clearly of concern for two respondents. Their comments are included in detail to try to articulate the range of experiences of young people that require a more sensitive response from the system than was provided if running away in these situations is to be avoided.

> *"I run away with friends all the time. Just to get away from people. I'm a self-harmer and I hate them calling the police. They respond by freaking out. One worker showed a neighbour how to stop me cutting myself. They call the police and ambulance and the police protect the ambulance. I just want them to leave me alone. I tried jumping off XXXXX bridge in XXXXX [city], I've had multiple suicide attempts, and spent three days in XXXXX [city]. I feel less stressed when I am away from my placement."* (Female, 17 years)

> *"I used to go to counselling and there was not enough time to talk to her. I was upset and not emotional, and my carer had a go at me. She told me that it was my fault we argued. Then they kicked me out. There was a whole melt down at church, I ran away and they were planning my funeral, and my carer was really angry and she went off at me at church and stood over me when I came back. So, I went to my boyfriend's house. I did not feel safe at my*

---

[9] The correlation between Times Absent and Number of Placements was not significant: Spearman *Rho* = .17, *p* > .05).

[10] The correlation between Times Absent and Duration in Care was significant: Spearman *Rho* = .34, *p* < .05; between Times Missing and Number of Caseworkers was not significant: Spearman *Rho* = .27, *p* >.05; and between Times Missing and Frequency of Caseworker Contact was not significant: Spearman *Rho* = .23, *p* >.05.

[11] The correlation between Times Absent and Comfort with Caseworker was significant: Spearman *Rho* = .32, *p* < .05.

foster cares house and the carer used to hit my sister. That made me feel unsafe and she lied about what happened to everyone." (Female, 15 years)

Of the other four categories of reasons for being absent or going missing, "**Escape from conflict or abuse**" was the most commonly described (38.6% of all comments). Females (*n* = 17) were more likely to give this reason than males (*n* = 5). In this group, two young people were concerned about the strictness of the placement's rules and procedures, particularly in group or residential facilities:

"I wanted to leave XXXXX [city]. I wanted to go to live with my boyfriend and I was over all the drama and expectations of me as a kid in care. Like the carers wanted us up by 8:00, shower and breakfast and if we were not at school, they would ignore us and we had to do lots of chores and we had unreasonable bedtimes (10pm) for a 15-year-old and they took the TV cable. Also, they would not pick us up after 7pm and they would refuse to pick us up, and then they [residential care workers] would report us missing but they refused to pick us up."
(Female, 16 years)

"The carers, the way they speak to you and always calling the cops. Once I threw my phone on the floor and it hit the workers shoe and he charged me with assault, but it got thrown out of court. Other kids would wind me up so would go off, and then the workers would call the cops so I would be removed. In one house, the kids threw food at the wall, and the staff would not buy any more food. They spent $150.00 per week on food and groceries for four kids."
(Female, 17 years)

One female reported issues with abuse from her brother, and another experienced assault from other girls in the placement. However, by far the greatest reported source of conflict and/or mistreatment and abuse was the behaviour of carers.[12]

"Because they were mistreating me. They abused me, locked me outside the house because I was cutting myself. They locked me outside the whole night and that was when I went missing. I went to my friend's house for the night. This was about 9:30pm." (Female, 12 years)

"I had a phone so I could talk to my mum, but they took the phone off me and said I could not talk to her. I was not allowed to do other things as well after they said I could do things. I got sick of being treated badly by my CSO and carers so I ran away." (Female, 15 years)

"I was getting abused in the placement. I didn't tell anyone, so I just left. I felt safer not being there." (Female, 17 years)

"To get away from the carers. They say negative things about me and don't help. This is the first whole week I have been here in four months." (Female, 15 years

"I got sick of the placement. They treated the boys like sxxx." (Male, 16 years)

The "pull" factor of "**Relationship Issues**" was the next most cited reason for leaving a placement (34.1% of comments, seven from females and eight from males). Most of the absent episodes were short-term so the young person could spend time with friends. While some interviewees ran away to be with partners or specific family members, many of the young persons' statements suggest that a more flexible system and supportive carers could significantly reduce the incidence of this form of absence.

---

[12] It should be noted that the situations described here happened in previous placements the young people had experienced. All issues have been considered by authorities and addressed to the satisfaction of the young people, often resulting in the young people changing placement. It is not known what action was taken regarding the carers.

"Because I did not want to be in care. I wanted to be in XXXXX [city] with my partner. I just did not want to be in care. They were trying to make me move to my dad's but I don't want to live with him, he used to do drugs and it sort of wrecked my life. I ran away to my partner's house for 8 months. I was self-placed there." (Female, 15 years)

"I wanted to see dad for his birthday, who was in jail. I was upset and wanted to see dad. For that time, I was at friends, cousins, and then I went to mum's house. The carers pushed me and hit me and once they chased me in their car. I was very scared of them." (Male, 13 years)

"I was just being stupid and wanted to be with my mates. The carers were saying I could not see my mates because I was not approved for independent time to hang with my mates. I just wanted to hang out with them for a day, I was going to come back but they would not let me go, so I took off." (Female, 15 years)

"Mainly to be with friends. Sometimes I got sick of the carers telling me what to do and that. You can't just go out when you want, not at night or anything, just with friends like a normal kid." (Male, 16 years)

"To hang out with my mates. I would never get lifts from the carers, so I would walk. I rang them but they would still report me as missing." (Male, 17 years)

A further nine reasons (20.5% of 44) could be classified as describing "***Seeking agency / asserting independence***"

"I felt like everyone was being rude to me. I don't feel safe in care, you get placed with strangers. I felt like running away, so I would not have people on my case 24/7 and have some freedom. Other kids have more freedom than kids in care. They can more easily live their life because they just ask their mum or dad for stuff." (Female, 17 years)

"Because I did not want to be there. I've done what I wanted since I was 13. I'm not going to listen to anyone now. No one wanted to help when I was younger. I just want to go out and be left alone. I know what I am doing and don't need to be told what to do. Mainly I leave because of the workers. We just want to do what we want to do. Kids blame the workers, but we just want to go out and have fun, and sometimes I just wanted to get on drugs." (Female, 17 years)

"I just got over being with carers. Being told what to do and not being at home." (Male, 17 years)

"General systemic issues" did not appear in many cases to be factors directly impacting on a young person's decision to leave a placement without approval. Even though the cohort comprised several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, only one referred to culture as a motivator for his leaving a placement that did not appear to meet the requirements under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

"I wanted to know who I was. I had no opportunity to focus on my family, not my father, grandfather, brothers, and sisters. There were no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander carers. None of my carers were Indigenous and I did not have an opportunity to learn about my culture. This put me at a disadvantage. My school friends told me how they went hunting and I had no language." (Male, 14 years)

It was of interest to see if all young people in the respondent group were dissatisfied with their treatment in their placement which may have contributed to their choosing to run away. They were asked to indicate, on a continuous scale (0: *Not at all well* to 100: *Extremely well*), how they felt they were treated before their absence. While 28 (84.8%) thought the standard of their treatment was at

50% or below, five (15.1%) scored it above 70%. All these young people were included in the ***Seeking agency*** category. In their view, they simply wanted the freedom to be out of the system.

4.3.2.3 Disclosure of intentions. Did young people confide in anyone that they were thinking about running away? If they had revealed their intentions, actions might have been possible to dissuade them from following this risky course. Interestingly, 13 (39.4%) did discuss their thoughts with caseworkers, and 12 (36.4%) with carers. The next most likely confidants were biological parents (n = 7; 21.2%). However, even following such revelations, many young people still didn't get the support they felt necessary to preclude them from leaving placement. As two of the group explained:

> *"I told my CSO and counsellor and the carers. No one did anything. I used to get punched by other kids and they did nothing even when I said I needed help. This is why I left."* (Female, 16 years)

> *"I would tell people but they would not listen anyway. Also, I heard my mum and dad were together again and my siblings were seeing them. Child Safety said that they were too dangerous and I wanted to experience that for myself."* (Female, 17 years)

Alternatively, these data reveal that 13 (39.4%) of the young people told no one about their problems. They had to try to deal with the issues on their own.

> *"I told no one I was being hurt in the placement. No one knew, I didn't tell my CSO because I did not like that CSO."* (Female, 14 years)

> *"I was cutting because I felt unsupported by my carers. I did not know how to ask for support. I still cut myself but not as much."* (Female, 12 years)

Questions were asked regarding the reaction of the individuals who the 20 young-people told that they were unhappy and contemplating running away. Responses were coded as indicating a positive and supportive outcome, indifference (no obvious outcome), or a negative result. Of the 27 responses obtained, only seven reactions could be classified as having positive elements; but these often were combined with negative repercussions from others as well.

> *"Mum and dad came to get me. I tried to call my carers but they said it was too far to come and get me. I was at XXXXX [place] and I said I would meet them half way to XXXXX [city] but they said that they can't facilitate that."* (Female, 14 years)

> *"MY CSO believed me but the other workers and carers lied."* (Male, 16 years)

> *"They listened but did nothing about it. Most people were supportive and made me do counselling. I just wanted them to be more caring toward me and nicer to the kids they looked after. They were nice and said they understood but this did not come out in their actions. I was seen but not heard really."* (Female, 17 years)

> *"They would be sort of worried and not know that I was safe. They told me to answer my phone but I wouldn't."* (Female, 17 years)

The response "They didn't listen to me" was given 10 times by young people, two fewer than the negative reactions experienced by interviewees, which often involved calling the police but also resulted in various inappropriate behaviours:

> *"They would still call the police even if I told them I was going out."* (Female, 17 years)

> *"They just called the cops."* (Male, 17 years)

"They said I could not go and I was not approved for independent time." (Female, 15 years)

"Carer was angry and she pushed me away from her family. I ate dinner separately from them, and was told I was not part of the family." (Female, 15 years)

"Got into trouble off the workers and the workers sent me to the police station. No one asked why I left." (Male, 13 years)

Young people indicated to what extent they thought the people they told actually "heard" what they were saying on a continuous scale (0: *Not at all* to 100: *Totally*). While 15 (45.3%) claimed to be at least 20% heard, and six (18.1%) believed to be at least 50% heard, only two (6.0%) thought they were at least 80% heard. This result indicates that more than half the group did not feel that the issues they were raising were being considered seriously; seven (21.2%) thought "Not at all".

4.3.3   Behaviour while absent

Young people were asked where they had gone while absent. Several interviewees mentioned a variety of locations (42 in total). Of these responses, 22 (52.4%) reported young people staying with friends, more than with parents (*n* = 8; 19.0%) or other relatives (*n* = 6; 14.3%). Another 6 (14.3%) did not run away to particular people, but rather to destinations (e.g., cities, towns, the park, beach) to find their own space.

For 17 young people in this cohort (51.5%), their absence was not well planned, with seven (21.2%) actually leaving with nothing. At the other extreme, another seven (21.2%) were well prepared (with clothes, money, medications etc.) for the action they took. There was no significant association between age and degree of preparedness.[13]

4.3.3.1 Actions to prevent absences. One important question directed to the young people was to gain their insights into what changes in their placement might have made it less likely for them to feel that they had to run away. Four young people did not have any suggestions, and four claimed that nothing would change their intention to leave:

"Nothing, I would have left anyway. Even in the shit placements … I would have headed off. I don't really know, I just like freedom." (Male, 14 years)

"If they were nicer I would have stayed a bit, but still would have run away because I wanted to be with mum." (Male, 13 years)

A thematic analysis of the remaining 26 answers gave clear guidelines for improved practice. The most common requests raised were for more respectful treatment (n = 7; 26.9%), and for the caregivers to listen to what the young people were trying to say (n = 6; 23.1%):

"I would take a week worth of clothes and shoes and my toothbrush. If people listened and show more respect in general then that would make it better." (Female, 14 years)

"Treat me nicer, with respect. I know I am hard to get on with and a shit of kid, but that is their job and they should be nicer and more understanding." (Female, 17 years)

"I just left with my phone. If I got the pocket money they owed me. We did chores and they never gave me my pocket money. If they were nicer." (Male, 13 years)

"If they could just support me instead of being judgmental." (Female, 17 years)

---

[13] The correlation between Age and Preparedness was not significant: Spearman *Rho* = -.11, *p > .05*.

"The carers never listened to me. We were living in a resi house at the time. I only lived in two foster placements my whole life. The first one when I went into care was good; I did not like the second one. I left with my phone and charger and my brothers." (Female, 14 years)

"When you have a whole bunch of people who don't listen, just one person who does listen can make you feel good." (Male, 17 years)

"Maybe if the youth workers were working with the kids and working on why young people want to leave." (Male, 16 years)

The next most important issues mentioned, the resolution of which could make absconding less likely, were feeling safe and secure in their placement (*n* = 4; 15.4%), and having the flexibility to visit friends and have friends visit them (*n* = 4; 15.4%).

"If I was not getting abused in the house. The carers would lock themselves away and leave me alone when the other kids were going off. I had to fend for myself in the house." (Female, 17 years)

"If I wasn't fighting the kids maybe." (Male, 12 years)

"Not really. I'd rather spend time with people I know. There were always people coming and going from the care houses and this is crap. People would steal your stuff. I'd take my stuff to my mum's and go to a mate's house where your stuff does not get stolen." (Male, 17 years)

"If I could have friends at the house it would have been better. It's a rule, no friends at the house." (Female, 16 years)

"If I was allowed to see my mates and stuff, like normal kids." (Female, 16 years)

Additional points were made by individual young people that weren't echoed in the group but could have implications for others in care. One respondent was particularly concerned about communication on cultural issues, and another about the lack of involvement she had in deciding where her placement was located.

"If they communicated with me regularly, and learnt about my culture. I was lost in Child Safety, I did not know what to do. I wanted to know my family and culture." (Male, 14 years)

"Maybe if I was transferred to a foster family in XXXXX [major city]. I did not want to be in XXXXX [country town], I wanted to be in XXXXX [city] where I could go to school. I told them this many times." (Female, 16 years)

4.3.3.2 Contacts while absent from placement. Young people were asked about who they contacted while absent from their placement, if anyone, and who contacted them. As indicated in Table 4, 18 of the young people (54.5%) did not attempt to contact anyone. If they did reach out, it was most likely to be toward biological parents. However, effort was made by some to contact carers, friends, and caseworkers; six of these young people made contact with multiple supports. Perhaps not surprisingly, the greatest number of contacts received by the young people while absent were from caseworkers and carers when trying to locate them and check on their well-being; 19 of the group reported hearing from multiple concerned caregivers. Only six claimed that nobody contacted them during the period of absence.

Most contact, initiated and received, was achieved by the telephone (*n* = 25; 69.4%). Three young people reported that a caseworker, and the police did make personal visits to known locations to try to find them.

"Telephone. I would call every 48 hours so they couldn't call the cops." (Male, 17 years)

"My mum rang me all the time to make sure I was okay." (Female, 14 years)

"Telephone; and police would come to the house where I was staying." (Male, 16 years)

"I had no phone. I rang the carers heaps and left messages. I was trying to see if I could get picked up. But they would not come and get me. (Female, 17 years)

Four of the interviewees did not have phones while absent; three left without them, but one claimed she had no communication because of an intervention on the part of her carer:

"People did try to contact me but my carer deactivated my phone. But people tried to contact me but they could not." (Female, 15 years)

Table 4: *Contacts with Other Individuals Initiated By, and Received By, Young People while Absent from Placement*

Person	Initiated		Received	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
No one	18	54.5	6	18.2
Carer	6	19.4	17	33.3
Caseworker	4	12.9	19	37.3
Biological Parents	9	29.0	9	17.6
Grandparents	1	3.2	1	2.0
Siblings	3	9.7	2	3.9
Other relatives	0	0.0	0	0.0
Teachers	0	0.0	0	0.0
Friends	5	16.1	0	0.0
Strangers	1	3.2	0	0.0
Community Visitor	0	0.0	0	0.0
Police	2	6.5	3	5.9
Total	31	100.0	51	100.0
	Six were multiple contacts		**19 were multiple contacts**	

4.3.3.3   *Experiences while absent*. It was important to discover how well the young people looked after themselves while absent, what services they accessed, and whether they maintained their daily routine (e.g., attending school). When asked how easy it was for them to find food, somewhere to sleep, health care, and money while absent, respondents presented a reasonably positive picture. Overall 28 (84.9%) had little difficulty finding food and 30 (90.9%) few problems locating somewhere suitable to sleep. Furthermore, 30 (90.9%) did not require access to health care while absent, and 28 (84.8%) did not require spending money. The few who did require these supports reported having no problems in meeting their needs. None accessed any support services, and none attended school during the period they were absent.

When asked how safe they felt while away from their placement, 14 (42.4%) indicated they thought they were quite safe (at least 80% on a continuous scale of 0: Not at all safe; 100: Very safe). However, almost a quarter ($n = 8$; 24.2%) reported thinking they were not all that safe (20% or "less safe" on the scale).

Being absent can be a risky experience, as has been demonstrated though the current literature review. To determine what the young people were feeling while absent, they were asked what the greatest concerns were that they had when running away. This question attracted 34 responses. A common reply, by nine young people (26.5%), was that they had no concerns; most had run away to familiar territory.

> *"I didn't really sleep much. I was not really worried, just hanging out with friends."* (Female, 16 years)

> *"Nothing, it was better because I knew where I was."* (Male, 17 years)

> *"I was not worried about anything. It was better than being with carers. Your mum should be able to tell you what to do but not carers, they are not my family."* (Male, 17 years)

A number ($n = 7$; 20.6%) did identify a fear of potential violence, either on the streets, or where they were "self-placing":

> *"I could beg for food and money. I was worried about someone trying to start a fight with me. The adults were scary as well."* (Male, 14 years)

> *"I was scared of my parents fighting, because I was at their house. I ran away to see if it was safe at my parents, and it wasn't."* (Female, 17 years)

Another 10 respondents (29.4%) directly referred to safety issues. However, many claimed that, although safety could be a concern while being absent, they felt safer in their chosen locations than in their assigned placements.

> *"What is safe? You can't always say that you are safe, you never know if you're safe. So, no, not always. But any time I am gone is better than being here."* (Female, 15 years)

> *"I felt safe in the park, much safer than in the house."* (Female, 17 years)

> *"I felt safer than with youth workers and being in care. I know a lot of people on the street."* (Male, 17 years)

> *"Nothing really. I knew I was okay and it was better than being with carers."* (Male, 13 years)

> *"I did not feel safe but I felt safer than being at home."* (Female, 14 years)

Other individual young people talked about a fear of losing their placement because they had run away, or having their possessions stolen in their absence. Two respondents were mostly concerned about being found and returned. In the minds of these young people, the risks seemed to be worth taking:

> *"It's scary being on the streets. I nearly got raped once. But I kept running away to feel like a normal kid and have the same rights as everyone else. They should treat you with more respect."* (Female, 16 years)

In summarising the discussion of her experiences while absent from her placement, one young person identified a perception that child protection services must address:

> *"It's the worst. When you are missing it's scary and cold. It's better to be somewhere safe, but not with carers. It's safe with my mum."* (Female, 14 years)

4.3.4   Outcomes on return

The final section of the interview concentrated on what happened after the young people were located and/or returned to care. In response to the question of why they returned to care, the two most common answers were "I decided to return by myself" (n = 14; 42.4%) and "I was found by the police" (n = 17; 51.5%). Only two did not return to their placements, one because she was admitted to hospital, and then not returned to the residential facility; the other stayed with family. Young people were asked to indicate how concerned they were that others might have been worried about them while they were absent. On a continuous scale (0: Not at all concerned; 100: Very concerned), all young people were no more than 50% concerned, with 26 (78.8%) experiencing little concern (10% or less).

4.3.4.1   Treatment on return. It might be expected that, following an episode where a young person is absent from placement, opportunities would be provided for discussions with concerned adults regarding the problems leading to the behaviour of being absent and what might help resolve the issues. Respondents were asked to what extent they had talked with a variety of support people about what had happened while they were absent. Answers were scored on a six-point scale (1: Not at all; 6: A great deal). The per cent of interviewees who indicated they didn't speak at all with a range of support persons after returning from being absent is shown in Figure 8.
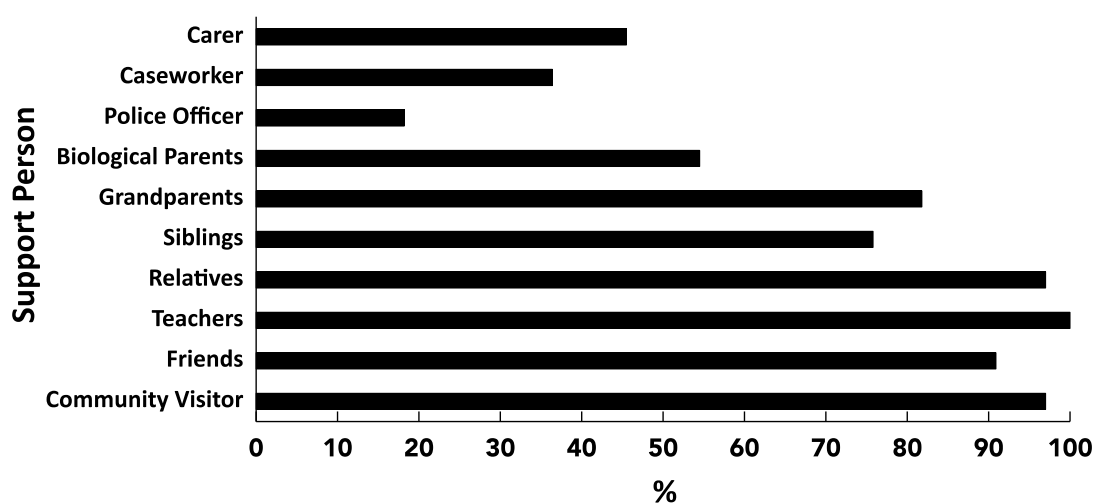
Figure 8. Per cent of interviewees who reported not talking at all to the designated support persons on their return from being absent.

It can be seen from these figures that the young people had little discussion with most support persons after their absence. Most involved were the police officers who located the young person. It is not surprising, therefore, that when asked what things they shared with key people on their return, 14 (42.4%) said nothing, and two "not much". Another nine (27.3%) at least told people where they had been. By contrast, five talked about "everything", with another three specifically referring to the reasons they left. Some of the comments from the young people reflect negative attitudes that could benefit from identifying, talking through, and hopefully resolving.

> *"I told them about why I left, that there was no food, and that I wanted to know more about my culture and family and my language."* (Male, 14 years)

"I told everyone what happened. I wish they had been more understanding." (Female, 17 years)

"I told my CSO what was happening, and why I ran away from school and did not want to go home." (Female, 14 years)

"Pretty much everything. One time I got bashed and had my nose broken and some of the workers were really good and supportive, but others were going off at me." (Female, 17 years)

"Nothing, I told them all they need to worry about is what happens when I am in their house and to mind their own business." (Male, 17 years)

"Nothing, I did not tell them where I was because I did not want them going to my mate's house." (Female, 15 years)

"I've told no one about my experiences while missing. I thought they don't have the right to know why I went missing. Nothing bad happened while I was missing anyway." (Female, 14 years)

"Nothing much. I didn't tell my CSO the carers hit me because she would not believe me, and the carers said that they would not believe me." (Male, 13 years)

Eight of the 15 young people (53.3%) who admitted to not sharing certain information on their return made this choice to protect the secrecy of the location to which they ran. Another two had been involved in drugs, while one confided she was nearly raped. The remainder were still of the view that it was nobody's business but their own.

Respondents were asked how concerned they believed their support persons were in finding out why they had left their placement. Answers were scored on a six-point scale (1: Not at all; 6: Very concerned). Figure 9 shows the per cent of the various support who persons respondents believed were not concerned at all with why they had been absent from placement. Caseworkers, Police, and Biological Parents were perceived as being most concerned, even though the level was low. Friends probably received such a low rating because, in many cases, the young people had run away to friends, so these people already would know what was going on.
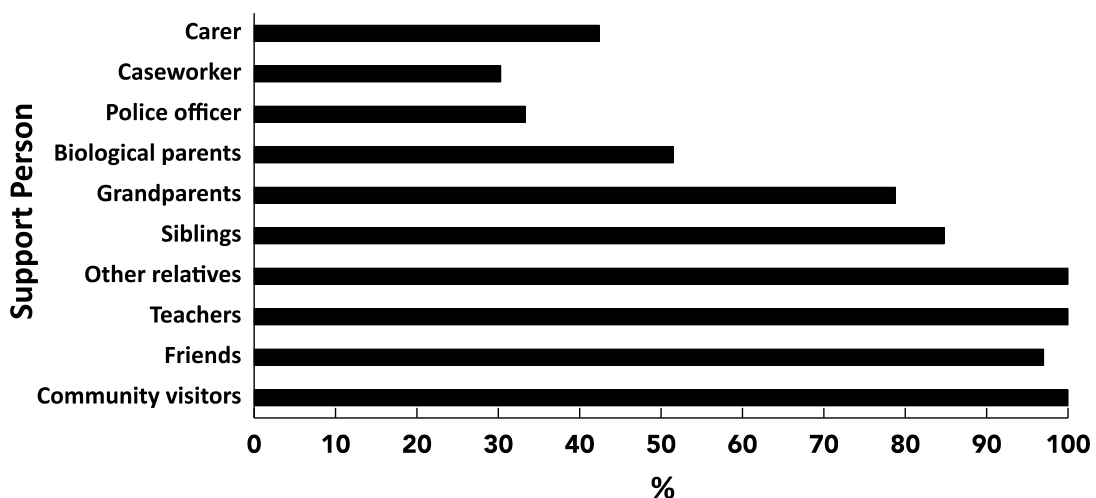

Figure 9. Per cent of interviewees who believed the designated support persons were not concerned at all with why they were absent.

Perhaps a reason for the overall low level of perceived concern was provided by one young person when she said:

"I don't think they were concerned as much as they were doing their job." (Female, 16 years)

4.3.4.2   Expectations on return. Young people compared how they were treated when they were located with what they would like to have happened. The most common reaction experienced by 11 interviewees (33.3%) was to receive "a lecture" about their inappropriate behaviour.

"The police brought me back and the carers lectured me for like 2 hours." (Female, 14 years)

"The police would talk to me. The worker would talk to me. Pretty much nagging from the adults. Only a couple of workers were nice when I got back." (Female, 17 years)

Apart from just receiving an adult lecture, five others reported getting into more serious trouble and being punished:

"I got into a bit of trouble and had things taken off me like my laptop, Bluetooth speakers. I got it back after three weeks. I don't think it was fair." (Female, 15 years)

"Nothing, just a lecture. I lost my pocket money for a week." (Male, 16 years)

"Got into trouble off the carers, they hit me, and locked the doors." (Male, 13 years)

While eight young people (24.2%) reported that nothing much happened or resulted in differences from before, another four experienced significant changes, leading to their being moved to other living arrangements for their safety.

"I had to go to the police station to make a complaint about the sexual abuse. I was then taken back to the same placement. They were still there but I locked myself in my room. The next day I was moved to a residential placement." (Female, 12 years)

"No one cared until I told them what happened. The police were called and then they started a big investigation. I wonder why I moved and he [brother] didn't. Also, my sister is still there and this is why I run." (Female, 14 years)

Only two respondents were able to recount positive, supportive actions from others that they appreciated:

"Nothing really. They ask if I had food. They are pretty nice." (Male, 14 years)

"Workers that I got along with were good. Some that I did not get along with were not as supportive." (Female, 17 years)

However, when asked what they would like to have happened when they were found, six of the 30 comments received (20.0%) indicated that these young people thought that everything was fine and nothing needed changing.

"Exactly what happened. The supportive workers were really good." (Female, 17 years)

"I'm happy with how it worked out." (Male, 14 years)

Apart from four respondents not wanting to return to their placement, a variety of other suggestions were provided potentially to improve outcomes. Ten comments (30.0%) expressed the need for young people to have more support, to be looked after, and for someone to have concern for their well-being.

"Cook me some food. Not question me. I wanted to be looked after. I would come back because I wanted to be able to have a break from drugs and I just wanted to be looked after a bit, but that would not happen." (Male, 17 years)

"I wish they were nicer. Maybe talk to me about how they behave around me, but no one did that." (Female, 17 years)

"I would have liked the carer to be more supportive with schooling and other things." (Female, 15 years)

"Someone to sit down and talk to me about what I wanted." (Female, 15 years)

"I would like them to have changed my placement. When they said if I came back they would find me a placement. I would have preferred they did not lie to me." (Female, 16 years)

As well as agreement on a number of actions, there also were some differences. For example, three wanted other people to listen to their concerns more, while another three sought to be left alone.

"I don't know. Something. Maybe just listen to kids more than bossing kids around." (Male, 16 years)

"I just want to be left alone, and live with mum. But I can't." (Female, 15 years)

4.3.4.3 ***Resolution of issues.*** Young people were asked to indicate, on a continuous scale (0: *Not at all*; 100: *Completely*) to what extent they thought the issues that had led to their running away had been resolved on their return. Six (18.2%) claimed that the problems had been totally resolved, another seven (21.2%) felt that issues were at least 80% resolved, while 15 (45.5%) claimed at most a 50% resolution. Of these, six (18.2%) felt that little had been resolved at all (less that 10% resolution).

When asked what changes could be made to help their current situation, the 27 young-people for whom resolution was not 100% gave a variety of answers. The most common outcome, chosen by nine respondents (33.3%), that alleviated their problems was leaving care and moving out of the placement and gaining more autonomy. Another five (18.5%) had achieved, or believed they could achieve the same satisfaction by moving to live with parents or family.

"Moving out of care will help with the issues. I won't have to run away. Money will be tight, but it will be great, and I won't be a ward of the state." (Female, 17 years)

"I moved placements so it's not an issue. I get independent time now." (Female, 15 years)

"I live independently now so have no issues." (Female, 17 years)

"I get to see people, I feel like I have a bit more control." (Male, 14 years)

"If I could just see my mates and my mum." (Male, 17 years)

"Running away is resolved because I live with my mum and dad now." (Male, 13 years)

"Me self-placing makes things easier. I just got kicked out, but it's still easier than being with [department]." (Female, 16 years)

Other interviewees commented that being listened to would help, as would having more considerate caseworkers:

"Sit down and have a meeting about it. Everyone listen to how I am feeling about it all." (Female, 17 years)

"Having all the youth workers be fair and treat people the same. Just to be understanding, and treat people the same." (Male, 16 years)

4.3.5 Conclusion

The interview concluded with the young people having an opportunity to comment on how they felt about the care system and the overall experience of being in care. As expected, there were mixed responses, some extremely negative, others acknowledging the value of the system when it works as intended.

"I just want to say thank you to Child Safety. Because, even though we do not appreciate the support, we do when we are about to leave care. I feel there is support there when I leave care, but it won't be as easy as it has been." (Female, 17 years)

"It's okay, but it can be hard not knowing your culture. You need to feel cared for. The CSO does what she can but money does not grow in trees and it's hard when you need things for school and stuff like that. I will just do most things by myself." (Male, 14 years)

"Well, they really need to listen to children more and give them more freedom. After 16 years of age they should have later bedtimes and not as much restriction. They should not send the police after us when we go out at night. Half the reason there is so much suicide from kids in care is the pressure put on them by child safety and the carers. They should trust us more. They should recognize that I am independent and treat me like a young adult." (Female, 16 years)

"I feel kids need support when they need it. Kids get placed for their own safety, but people need to listen to kids more about their feelings." (Female, 17 years)

"I think that there are a lot of things that could be improved. Some kids never meet their CSOs. Kids should be given a phone or access to a phone so they can call for help." Female, 17 years)

"It's just awful. I would not wish it upon anyone. I feel sorry for the kids who are neglected, but being in care is sometimes worse than being at home." (Female, 17 years)

4.4   Discussion

4.4.1   Recruitment issues

Based on the data included in Appendix 1 of the QFCC (2016) report, which presents the most recent information available regarding the numbers of young people absent or missing from out-of-home care in Queensland, the 33 respondents interviewed in this study represent almost 10% of the annual number of those reported as missing (e.g., the total in 2015 was 369 young people, a small proportion of the 8448 in the 2015 care population in QLD; AIHW, 2016a). To obtain these respondents, 80 young people were approached on 255 occasions. Clearly, this is a select group from the total cohort of children and young people who have been absent from care in Queensland. They represent the potential interviewees deemed suitable by their caseworkers, who were contactable, and who consented to participate. While it cannot be claimed that these respondents form a representative sample of all young people who are absent or missing, they were experienced with the care system and were practiced at absenting themselves from their placements. As such, they were able to provide valuable insights into likely experiences in these contexts.

4.4.2   Experiences in placement

4.4.2.1   Placement instability. One factor known to provide an impetus for running away is placement instability (see Section 2.3.1.1). This group, having lived in an average of 10 placements while in care, certainly qualified as having experienced placement disruption. However, those who had run away the most were not necessarily those who had been moved around most in their

placements, or vice versa. Other factors were more important for this group; for example, those who had been in care longer had more chance to run away.

These respondents also reported having many caseworkers, with over half interacting with five or more while in care. However, it appears that the number of caseworkers a young person has might not be another disruptive influence for the young people. Rather, regarding the impact of caseworkers, the most important factor seems to be establishing a comfortable relationship between the young person and worker, a context in which issues can be discussed freely. Young people who receive this assistance are less likely to want to be absent from their placement. Supportive caseworkers also are more likely to be the ones who ensure that young people have a case plan and who help them meet particular needs in education and health.

4.4.2.2 *Education.* Two major issues were identified when considering the educational experience of this group. Even though all respondents were of school age (12 – 17 years), 42% had already ceased their educational involvement. These presumably are part of the two thirds who claim to have missed at least 70% of classes in the last year. Two respondents had attended Flexi School, but one reported substantial absences even from negotiated attendance. The fact that only one young person mentioned going missing as the reason for school absence shows that other factors took precedence. More attention from caregivers must be directed to encouraging and supporting participation in educational activities. For example, alternate methods of discipline need to be trialled to reduce reliance on suspension as a first course of action (Coleman, 2015; Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). Mechanisms need to be introduced or enhanced to support young people with a care experience who feel they are being treated inappropriately or bullied at school (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Child protection must ensure that placement changes are minimised, and any likely consequent disruption to educational programs mitigated.

4.4.2.3 The care experience. Exploring how young people felt about being in care could give insights into their satisfaction with the system and their sense of agency within it (Mason, 2008). If they felt they had some input, they might be able to make changes; if not, a course of action is to escape the control. While the group interviewed here knew little about their rights as expressed in various official Charters, most knew which authorities to contact if they had problems. Young people clearly appreciated it when they were able to form meaningful relationships with their caseworkers and carers, and received the support they needed with sustenance, shelter, and their education, a consistent finding reported in the literature (Ferguson, 2016; van Bijleveld, Dedding, & Bunders-Aelen, 2015). Ahmed, Windsor, & Scott (2015) found that young people reviewed foster care positively when they experienced "a clear disciplinary style, setting firm boundaries, nurturing care, enjoyable time together and mentoring further development" (p. 21). Unfortunately, about one fifth of this small group was not having these needs met and could find nothing positive to say about their experiences in out-of-home care at all.

Not surprisingly, negative comments about the care system focused on the loss of contact with biological family. Young people have a longing for family contact, particularly if this is prohibited, and they have no involvement in decisions about its occurrence. It is important for caseworkers to evaluate the relationship between the young people, their parents, and carers when determining how to best implement contact. Studies have shown that "good quality contact with family members in conjunction with other positive professional interventions, will likely promote positive outcomes for children regarding successful family reunification and/or placement stability (Sen & Broadhurst, 2011, p. 298), and may help reduce the desire in some young people to run away. "Good quality" outcomes are likely to be achieved when there is a collaborative approach between birth family members and carers (Boyle, 2017; Kiraly & Humphreys, 2016). However, forced or over-frequent contact, particularly with maltreating parents, can lead to more mental health problems for

the young people (Fawley-King, Trask, Zhang, & Aarons, 2017). They must be involved in any decisions to respect and value the outcomes.

Another set of negative comments concerned the treatment given by some carers, usually involving discipline and restrictive rules. The views expressed by respondents in the present study (e.g., in Section 3.3.1.3) mirror the findings of Rauktis, Fusco, Cahalane, Bennett, and Reinhart (2011) from their focus groups involving 40 young people in Pennsylvania. They reported that:

> typical feelings about the rules were anger, resentment, feeling labelled, isolated and stigmatized. Relationships influenced perceptions: within a positive relationship, youth understood and tolerated the rules that limited independence. The perception of what were normal restrictions for other youth not in out-of-home care was another influencing factor. (p. 1224)

Again, a positive relationship with caregivers is of critical importance. Without this connection, the situation can exist, as evidenced here by one third of respondents, that many young people may not feel safe and secure in their placement.

The answers to specific questions asked of respondents about family contact revealed findings that raise concerns about the extent of their support networks. The number living with their brothers and sisters (in "together" placements; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2011) was lower than the value reported by McDowall (2015, Figure 1, p.33) for sibling placement in care in Queensland, viz., 16% vs. 28%. Analysis of the extent of contact with other family members not living in the same placement showed that the range of family members able to be contacted by many of the respondents was limited, mostly mothers and siblings. Research shows that family and social networks can provide important supports for successful independent living by young people with a care experience (Jones, 2014). When the removal from family disrupts these relationships, and the system does not establish mechanisms for repairing and maintaining these links, a motivating factor has been created likely to empower young people to leave a placement to re-establish the connections.

4.4.3 Being absent from placement

Young people were reasonably well informed about what "missing" meant, and how the term could be differentiated from "absent". There was considerable variability in the number of occasions respondents had run away and the length of time they were absent or missing, with over 80% reporting five or more episodes. As has been well documented, one of the strongest predictors of running away behaviour is a history of going missing (Holliday, Edelen, & Tucker, 2017). The group interviewed here were well placed to provide valuable insights regarding the variety of that experience.

4.4.3.1 Reasons for running away. The respondents interviewed here provided illustrations of each of the five categories of reasons for running away from a placement that were articulated in the literature review, viz., systemic factors, relationship issues, avoidance of conflict or abuse, and seeking agency (the sample was selected based on the fifth category of individual factors). Most commonly discussed were the "push" and "pull" factors (Crosland et al., 2018; Kerr & Finlay, 2006) of avoiding conflict and abuse and relationship issues involving family members and friends, including partners. It is concerning that "push" factors operate in the care system, established to protect young people from harm and abuse. For some young people, as reflected in the comments provided by the group interviewed in this study, this outcome is not being achieved.

The inappropriate behaviour of some carers and residential staff described by the young people interviewed is consistent with observations made by Kiraly and Humphreys (2017) that led them to argue that "there are significant risks for children's safety and well-being in failing to assess carers thoroughly and to provide equitable case management and support (both financial and non-

financial) to children in kinship care as in foster care" (p. 230). Similar requirements apply to residential facilities. As Tregeagle (2017) stressed, the minimum standard for residential care must provide children and young people with "a safe environment, a nurturing and healing environment, continuity of care, and the capacity to meet young people's developmental and permanency needs" (p. 240). More attention needs to be directed to the recruitment and training of carers and caring staff, following evidence provided in recent evaluations of appropriate practice (Downey, Jago, & Poppi, 2015; Greeno et al., 2016; Harder, Knorth, & Kalverboer, 2013; Kinsey & Schlösser, 2013).

Relationship issues constituted the "pull" factor leading young people to leave their placement. Most of this group absconded when they were forbidden to contact their friends. These absences were of short duration, and would seem avoidable through negotiation and more flexible arrangements. Ungar and Ikeda (2017) reviewed the behaviour of workers who successfully engaged with adolescents for whom they were responsible, and classified them as "informal supporters" (emphasised empathy and enforcing few rules); "administrators" (enforced relevant rules unemotionally); and "caregivers" who "hold reasonable expectations and impose structures but are flexible in their negotiations with youth when rules were broken" (p. 259). The young people they spoke with liked the "informal supporters", but they also responded well when rules established for their protection were applied fairly, flexibly, and were sensitive to cultural norms. Ungar and Ikeda suggested that "all three approaches to youth engagement may help workers create better therapeutic relationships with youth" (p. 259). This strategy may also reduce the incidence of unauthorised absences from placements.

Those absent due to the *Seeking Agency* reason raise interesting questions for the care system. This group in the present study were not necessarily victims of attempts to control or abuse, nor were they running to a specific "target" (friend or family). These young people felt they were being treated quite well in their placement, but still they ran away. Their desire was to leave a system that they considered oppressive. In these situations, attempting excessive control is not likely to change the young persons' behaviour (Taylor et al., 2014). As Crosland et al. (2018) suggest, it may be more effective to concentrate on reducing the motivation to run away by building relationships between the young people and caregivers, particularly in family or group homes. This could be achieved by negotiation, pairing desired behaviours (e.g., seeing friends) with certain responsibilities (e.g., returning at a designated time). In addition, it is important to ensure that young people receive training to prepare them to overcome barriers to help seeking so they can access the supports they may require when pursuing independence (Pryce, Napolitano, & Samuels, 2017). It is essential, as Taylor et al. observe, that young people's disclosures are heard and responded to, that they have "someone to talk to, who can empathise and listen. They need space to explain their concerns and to sense that they have some control over what can appear to them to be a helpless, disempowering situation" (p. 399).

4.4.4 Behaviour while absent

4.4.4.1 Actions to prevent absence. Throughout the interview, the respondents made comments about what changes in their placement might have made it less likely that they would decide to run away. The main point made, as has been discussed previously, is for them to feel that the carers listened to what they were saying and treated them with respect. Even though the majority of the group identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, only one consistently made reference to a desire for more connection with culture. It would be valuable in future research to look more closely at not just where the young people go when absent, using the broad categories employed in this work (e.g., parents, relatives, friends), but to look at the network connections these people have and the communities with which they are involved (Barman-Adhikari, Bowen, Bender, Brown, & Rice, 2016).

4.4.4.2 Contacts while absent from placement. Apart from the people at the location to which they went while absent, respondents were asked about any one they contacted while absent, perhaps to notify of their whereabouts or to ask for help. They also were asked who contacted, or tried to contact them during that period. The imbalance revealed in Table 6 (with over half the young people not initiating contact, but over 80% knowing that others were trying to contact them) may be an indicator of the mental state of the young person at that point in time. They want freedom to be alone and not risk being found (Franks et al., 2015); the adults looking for them need to exercise their responsibility for monitoring and protection. The group studied here was special in that their periods of absence were frequent and relatively short-term; type and frequency of contact may be different with more protracted absences.

4.4.4.3. Experiences while absent. The special nature of this cohort of respondents was noted again when they were asked about supporting themselves while absent. They didn't need to access special services, and they had little difficulty finding food and shelter. Whether this situation could be maintained over longer periods is not known. Two issues did emerge from the comments they made. First, they did not attend school while absent. It is interesting that none reported that any teachers tried to contact them while they were not attending. It would seem that carers and caseworkers took most responsibility for reaching out to the young people, but a more coordinated effort involving all relevant parties might be more effective in identifying and addressing the young people's concerns.

Second, the respondents largely did not express serious concerns about being away from their placement. This group seemed well practiced at running away, and knew where to go and how to survive. Some were worried about possibly being involved in violent episodes, but most claimed that they felt safer when "self-placing" than they did in their official placement. Such comments indicate that more consistency is required within the system for ensuring that placements are, and are perceived to be safe environments in which the young people can live and thrive. A study by Beckett, Warrington, Ackerley, and Allnock (2015), when reporting on the role of police in safeguarding young people (including a group who were absent from their placements), produced a set of principles that could serve as general guidelines for maximising a sense of safety and well-being for young people, particularly those in care. These principles are worth listing and should receive serious consideration, not just by police but by all caregivers:

- Demonstrating empathy and compassion;
- Respectful and non-judgmental practice;
- Effectively eliciting and responding to children and young people's accounts;
- Conveying information to children and young people in a timely and appropriate manner;
- Due consideration to confidentiality and discretion;
- Maximising continuity of engagement;
- Considering children and young people's support needs; and
- Facilitating choice and control. (p. 25)

4.4.5   Outcomes on return

4.4.5.1 Treatment on return. For all but two of the respondents, their absences ended with return to their placement, at least in the short term. Just over half were found by the police; the remainder returned by themselves. Young people were not overly concerned that others would be worried about them. The police play an important role in locating and returning those who have run away from placement. These young people are more likely to talk to the police about their experiences while absent, even though only a small number here gave much information. Globally, the police are

concerned that much of their time is spent looking for missing people, many of whom run away again after being returned. Similar issues have been identified in the UK by Hayden and Shalev-Greene (2018) in their description of the police involvement as the "blue light social services." Morewitz (2016) also gave a detailed overview of the difficulties police experience in undertaking the process of locating and returning those who are absent from their placements.

It would seem important, if future absences are to be avoided, that concerned adults do talk to the young people to try to determine why they felt the need to run away and how they could be more involved in their care so that this was less likely to happen again. Only five of the current interviewees described talking about the issues that led them to be absent initially. Such discussions need to be a more formal part of the return process, and could be structured around forms of "safe and well" checks or "return interview assessments", administered by either police or caseworkers, or preferably a multi-agency approach, involving key support personnel, to improve interventions (Harris & Shalev-Greene, 2016; Hill et al., 2016). However, as Mitchell, Malloch, and Burgess (2014, p. 64) pointed out when evaluating the use of Return Home Welfare Interviews in Scotland, "irrespective of who undertakes RHWIs, their success in ultimately meeting the needs of young runaways will always be dependent upon a follow through by appropriate services and sufficient resources to actually follow up identified needs."

4.4.5.2   Expectations on return. For 24 out of the 33 respondents, either nothing much changed on their return, they were given a lecture about not running away, or they were more seriously punished.

However, what the young people were looking for was support; for the adults in their lives to show that they had real concern for the well-being of the young. The literature is clear that imposing penalties to try to stop running away does not work. For example, the 28 young-people from the UK in Taylor et al.'s (2014) study reported similar outcomes to what had been experienced by the interviewees here; they were "grounded" or had their shoes removed to try to stop them from leaving in the future. However, what the young people want and need is "someone to talk to, who can empathise and listen. They need space to explain their concerns and to sense that they have some control over what can appear to them to be a helpless, disempowering situation" (Taylor et al., p. 399).

4.4.5.3   Resolution of issues. Authorities justifiably feel a successful resolution to an absence has been achieved when the young person is located and returned safe and well to the carer. While this outcome is of primary importance, ideally, after a young person returns to placement following the experience of being absent, it would be hoped that attempts are made by all parties to resolve the issues that led to the young person taking such extreme action. Various researchers have described Interventions, applied in different contexts, designed to address many of the problems faced by youth who are absent from placement. Morewitz (2016) provided a comprehensive summary and evaluation of several of these programs, emphasising that the interventions should build on the strengths of the young people rather than their deficiencies and should be individualised based on need. Holmes (2014) titled her report "When the search is over" to emphasise how important the aftercare is once the missing people return and the process of reconnection begins. She provided a more extensive discussion of the issues likely to be encountered (Holmes, 2017) and made useful suggestions of what the reconnection process might entail, including conducting return interviews, identifying and accessing relevant support services, and considering how any future absences could be handled, based on the needs expressed by the missing person. As she concluded (p. 241):

Whilst, understandably, great efforts have been focused on understanding how, why and where people go missing, it is important that the topic of incident resolution is given due consideration. If incident resolution is successful, this may have a strong influence on the

likelihood of the missing person disappearing again, and on the long-term wellbeing of everyone affected.

Chapter 5: Foster Carers' Perspective

5.1 Introduction

The previous section presented the views of young people who had been absent from placements in the care system, exploring the motivations they had for running away, the experience they had while absent, and how they were treated on return. Another group intimately involved in this process, whose lives are directly affected when young people run away from their homes (i.e., the placement) are the foster carers. In the design of this project, it was considered essential to obtain their insights into any absences they may have experienced of children and young people in their care, so that a more complete understanding could be gained of the conditions leading to a young person's absence, and the impact this had on the carer in the short-term (during the absence) and in the future when responding to possible absences.

Few studies have been conducted that focus on exploring carers' experiences with absent or missing children, in spite of claims by Hayden (2017), from her small-scale 2010 survey, that 78% of carers had experienced a young person running away at some stage. A common problem is that authorities tend not to keep central records of carer involvement; data would have to be extracted from caseworkers' records. In one project, when Octoman, McLean, and Sleep (2014) asked carers to nominate behaviours of young people they find challenging, they found that carers included "running away from foster home" in the second most difficult category (accounting for 11% of the variance) relating to family belonging and identity. Wade (2015) proposed a new approach that she employed to encourage key stakeholders (including carers and police) to "play nicely and act maturely" to improve the outcomes for children reported missing in Wales (p. 206). Her method involved listening to the young people, and feeding their views back to carers and workers, with a view to addressing the "personal interpretations and different value bases" underpinning their actions and look for more negotiated outcomes that might obviate the need for police involvement. Wade gave a useful example of how carers can proactively respond to avoid an absence occurring at all:

> For example, Daniel' s foster carer heard him saying that he would continue to run back to his previous foster placement area, where he had established links with peers. The foster carer negotiated with him, offering to take him back there and collect him, so that he did not have to "run away" to see his old friends, but go with his permission. (p. 214)

Hayden (2017) did present the views of carers (based on information collected for a previous study; Hayden & Goodship, 2015), giving a range of reasons from their experience that they believed young people ran away:

- they run from school because they don't like school;
- they've run because they don't know the placement and they want to get home;
- they run to their pimp;
- they run to their best mates because that's where they've stayed for the last two weeks and they liked it there;
- they run to the previous foster carer;
- they get high on running, you'd be surprised how addictive running away becomes.
- the well-documented lack of choice of care placements;
- sometimes placements were too far away from family and friends (as is more often the case with residential cases);

- sometimes the placement was too nearby, as in the following case: "I mean, placing a child with a foster carer who lives around the corner from mum, even if you are the only bed, is just a complete waste of time, you know they're going to run";
- they liked the attention from the police, who could be very kind and understanding, sometimes even speaking up for the child when a carer was angry;
- children were also said to enjoy a ride in a police car. (see Hayden, 2016, p. 13)

It is self-evident that carers play a critical role in supporting young people in out-of-home care. They have unique insights into the needs of the children and young people for whom they are responsible, and have the potential to ensure that young people placed in their care are given every opportunity to achieve their goals in life. Therefore, it is critical that these key stakeholders also are given a chance to share their insights regarding how they perceive absences.

5.2. Method

A survey was conducted under the auspices of Foster Care Queensland (FCQ) to collect information from carers' regarding their knowledge of procedures to be followed if a young person in their care was absent or missing, and where relevant, to explore their reactions to the experience.[14]

5.2.1   Carer survey

The carers' survey included 42 questions gathering responses about carer demographics, their knowledge of procedures to follow in the event of a child or young person going missing from their care, what they did if they had experienced a missing episode, what happened when the child/young person was located, and any suggestions or advice they had that might help improve the system regarding preventing running away or responding to missing young people. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix D.

5.2.2   Survey distribution and carer recruitment

Information about the FCQ survey and requests for expression of interest (EOI) in participating were communicated widely through FCQ networks. It was decided that, rather than expect all carers to respond even if they had no actual experience with absent children, it would be better to seek responses from those who had been through the process. Project information and requests for EOI were included in the bi-monthly editions of FCQ *Reporter* magazine circulated to over 600 members. Information also was sent to every child safety agency in the state and included in the bi-monthly editions of the Foster carer Advocacy and Support Team's (FAST) newsletters. In addition, posts were included on FCQ's Facebook site that connects with over 1000 members.

From all this activity that extended over approximately six months, with multiple reminders, only 20 EOIs were received. These carers were sent a copy of the survey that could be answered online through the SurveyMonkey platform. Unfortunately, only 15 of those who provided an EOI submitted a completed survey; of these respondents, only seven reported that they had direct experience with a child being absent from their care. Given this response rate, it must be emphasised that the following discussion cannot be considered as representative of the knowledge and/or opinions of the carer population in Queensland. However, the analysis is presented, with comments included, to share the views of some concerned carers that could raise issues for further more detailed, targeted research in the future.

---

[14] The support provided by Danny Hemsley, Case Officer, Foster Care Queensland, in promoting and distributing the carer survey is greatly appreciated.

5.2.3   Respondent carer demographics

The 15 respondents in this study had a mean age of 43 years 8 months; the group that had experience with absent young people was older (*M* = 50 years 11 months) than the other carers (*M* = 37 years 5 months). They were associated with four major agencies in Queensland (Uniting Care: 7; Churches of Christ: 3; Mercy Community Services: 3; Anglicare: 1; one chose not to answer). All 15 were foster carers (one was designated also as a kinship carer); 14 identified as Anglo-Australian and one as Anglo-Chinese. Eight were married, and two each were single, de-facto, or divorced, and one was currently separated. Highest education level attained varied from pre-Year 10: 1; Year 12: 4; Vocational qualification: 4; Undergraduate degree: 3; to Postgraduate degree: 3.

5.3 Results

5.3.1   Knowledge of carer responsibilities

Carers were asked initially how familiar they were with what they needed to if a child was absent from their placement, in terms of who should be informed (a continuous scale was used: 0: *Not at all familiar*; 10: *Very familiar*). Median familiarity score was 8.0; eight respondents were at least 80% familiar with what needed to be done, however four were less than 60% familiar. When carers nominated three actions they would take if a child/young person in their care went missing, the most common responses were to call the police and the Department CSO. However, five out of the 15 did not mention notifying any authorities (police, agency worker, or department CSO); and five only called the authorities, rather than conducting an investigation themselves. The collection of proposed actions is listed in Table 10, together with the number of times the behaviours were mentioned by carers.[15]

Table 5: *Proposed Actions and Number of Times Cited by Carers in Response to a Child/Young Person Going Missing*

Action	*N*	%
Search house	2	4.1
Search locations	6	12.2
Police	9	18.4
Agency worker	7	14.3
Department CSO	9	18.4
Phone child	3	6.1
School	1	2.0
Family	4	8.2
Friends	8	16.3
	49	100.0

As a measure of their confidence in responding to absent-from-placement children, carers rated on a 5-point scale (1: *Not at all prepared*; 5: *Very well prepared*) how they felt about handling a missing

---

[15] Overall, 49 comments were recorded. Some respondents listed multiple contacts in one example (e.g., "contact relevant authorities" received a score for Police, Worker, and CSO).

episode. The median preparedness was 3.0. Five carers reported being at least "Quite prepared", while six thought at best they were "Little prepared".

The Department of Child Safety, Youth, and Women (DCSYW) has produced two publications: *Reporting missing children: Guidelines for approved carers and care services* and a *Missing Child Checklist* to assist caregivers when responding to a young person who was absent or missing (see Appendix E). Carers' knowledge of these publication was explored with two questions measuring their familiarity with the *Guidelines,* and ability to locate the *Checklist*. Median "Familiarity with Guidelines" score was 3.0 on a 5-point scale (1: *Not at all*; 5: *Very*). Four respondents felt at least "Quite familiar", but seven reported "Little familiarity" with the *Guidelines.* Overall, nine carers (60%) did not know where to find the *Missing Child Checklist.*

5.3.2 Preventing absent or missing episodes

Carers were asked an open question to try to obtain their special insights into what actions on the part of any stakeholders might be helpful in reducing the incidence of young people being absent. Only two respondents did not share any thoughts. The main point made by several carers was about communication and information sharing with the Department. Comments by the carers are particularly insightful:[16]

> *"If child has history of running away or going missing, actually advise caregivers so early preparations can be undertaken to help child and caregivers can take preventive actions. Department and agency are often aware of history, but do not pass on relevant information. Department and agency work with care givers to prepare surroundings when child is triggered, i.e., if CSO comes to deliver bad news. Not say after delivering bad news and child has ran away, "Oh yeah, he has a history of running away", then do nothing whilst caregivers take actions to find child."* (Carer A)

> *"Better placement information for carers looking after at risk children."* (Carer L)

> *"Communication."* (Carer H)

> *"Information about child and family where possible."* (Carer E)

> *"An immediate contact within child safety."* (Carer N)

> *"Correct placement information; support for at risk children."* (Carer M)

> *"When caregivers provide incident report of child running away and then returning after family contact issues, Department and agency should not say "No we don't need that info it is not important". Data is extremely important to create profile of family contacts and child profiles to enable interventions."* (Carer A)

A second critical theme concerned establishing strong, stable, supportive relationships between carers and young people, focused on attending to the needs of the young people:

> *"Relationship - the most effective prevention. Good home security! Being aware and sensitive to child/young person's situation and sensitivities, keep communication fluid and open, giving them opportunities to see/talk to/be with people who are important to them. Ensure child safety, family, child/young person are on the same page. Give them plenty of activity, sport, beach, swimming, outdoor fun, safe risk taking activities. Bring their friends to your home so that you also know them/have relationship with them/their family. Safe social media use."* (Carer K)

---

[16] These quotations are presented verbatim, with only minor spelling and punctuation changes added to enhance readability.

"Build a solid rapport/caring relationship with the child/young person so they can come to you with their concerns." (Carer F)

"Child-focused representation from the Department of Child Safety." (Carer I)

"Knowing they have somewhere safe to go, where there will be no judgement. For us, it's a friend's house close by." (Carer G)

"Stability in their placements." (Carer O)

"Listen to their requests, i.e., wanting to live with their family." (Carer D)

5.3.3 While young people were absent

Results in this section of the report refer to responses from the seven carers who indicated they had the experience of dealing with a missing young person, although from the variety of comments provided, it would seem that, following the "official" terminology, the cases described were more correctly categorised as "absences" (see Section 1.1).

5.3.3.1 Carers' experience. Young people were absent between about an hour and overnight (18 hours), but their whereabouts were known to the carer, who generally responded quickly (within two hours of the disappearance). Only in the overnight absence, where the young person broke curfew, was the delay longer. Most absences occurred in the afternoon, and two extended into the evening.

The explanations given by carers for the missing episode describe the complexities of dealing with young people:

"Triggered by bad news from CSO; child had no coping mechanisms other than running." (Carer A)

"Young person left from school and did not return home within timeframe. I drove to the school, spoke to them to identify when he was last seen, spoke to his friends. Gave him time to return, but acted before close of business. Rang Department (no one available to talk to me/reported him missing), rang my agency, rang the police. Rang everyone including previous placement. Waited." (Carer K)

"He came home late. He said he missed the bus. He was not answering his phone. I didn't realise it was because he had run out of credit. His friend was also not answering their phone." (Carer C)

"I have only ever taken teenagers as foster children. Child 1 ran away to live with her family; Child 2 left high school to go back to her mother; and Child 3 self-placed with a school friend." (Carer D)

"Teenager who took off with friends and did not want to be found." (Carer B)

"Issues during contact with family." (Carer A)

Carers reported that the greatest impact the absences had, occurring when they did in the afternoon/evening, was that they felt they were unable to devote sufficient time to looking for the young person because they had other children to care for who couldn't be ignored. One carer was not too concerned because the young person was with friends; another was grateful that the episode occurred within business hours when all services were available. Carers expressed concern for the safety of the young person when absent, particularly when a carer was aware that their young person was known to self-harm, and another had shown a vulnerability to sexual predation. One did confess to initially thinking "the Department will automatically blame me."

5.3.3.2 General comments about support. Four carers responded to an opportunity to make some general comments about how they perceived the absence and the resources available to assist them at that difficult time. They highlighted weaknesses in the system that would need to be evaluated and consequential improvements introduced to make it easier for carers and young people alike to cope effectively with the system:

> *"House is often "booby trapped" with bells and noisy items to alert caregivers, should child try to run away at night. Child gaining strategies every day, but initial reaction is to flee if feeling anxious (i.e., bullying at school, school work, family etc.)."* (Carer A)

> *"Guidelines need to be tailored to circumstances and not be overly onerous for the carer. For instance, I was asked to leave home to report at a local police station. What happens if the child turns up while I am away at the police station?"* (Carer B)

> *"Child Safety was no support at all. My agency was very supportive of me, but it was the police who were looking for him."* (Carer K)

> *"I have only taken teenagers as foster children. So, this always comes with the very similar problems. When a teen has been taken from their parents at a young age, I have found in my experience that they always want to live with their parents again by the age of 14. They don't understand why they [were] taken away. Perhaps they should be allowed to read the original reports so that they understand why they are in care. They will run away to live with their parents. And also in my experience, it doesn't work out living with the parents, then run away again. By time they have reached 14 years old, they have very strong ideas of where they want their life to be and look like. I have found if they aren't listened to and helped in some way they will run away."* (Carer D)

Carers were presented with a checklist of 19 items that have been shown, in the literature and from experience, to be possible reasons for young people being absent or missing. Given the small number of respondents, it was not possible to determine with any clarity which items were most common. Of interest was the observation that all but three of the reasons ("wanting to visit previous care/home location"; "injured or stranded and unable to contact carer"; "disability or impairment") were selected by at least one carer. Four carers did choose "inappropriate relationships"; and three each "gaining access to preferred wants/activities", "seeking independence", and "emotional or trauma-related problems". Of the six carers who responded to this question, one nominated eight items from the list, one selected seven, one six, and two five items. One carer nominated one item (the specific reason of miscommunication about curfews).

5.3.3.3 Use of resources. The carers who were experienced with absent children were asked how useful they found the resources produced to assist with locating those missing (the *Missing Children's Guidelines* and the *Missing Child Checklist*). Four carers responded; one did not know about the *Guidelines,* one found the document "Quite", one "Reasonably", and one "a little" useful. Only one carer had used the *Checklist.* While three of these carers indicated that they found no barrier to getting the support they needed when looking for their absent young person, another three were not as positive. Two complained about a lack of urgency from authorities, reporting that the caregivers were seen as over-reacting; the third noted that police resources seemed limited.

Possibly because of the limited time the young people referred to here were absent, the carers did not have the opportunity to use technology (social media, email), prepare posters or flyers, or enter details on a Missing Persons' register to help locate the young persons. Two did begin to organise search parties. Only two of the carers with absent young people called a Child Safety Service Centre as their first reaction; no one notified the police as an initial response.

5.3.4   When young people were located

Four of the young people who ran away returned by themselves, one after attending school the following day. Of the remaining two, one was found by another carer, the other by the police. Five returned to the original placement. As indicted previously, the duration of absences ranged from around one hour to 18 hours (overnight).

5.3.4.1   Return interviews. An important issue is whether or not young people and carers are given the opportunity to discuss what led to, and the consequences of the absence. Unfortunately, only two young people and carers participated in any formal interview to attempt to resolve the issues leading to the absence. All the carers claimed that they didn't take any disciplinary action toward the young people following their return. However, from the explanations given by the young people, it appeared that more discussion of their concerns was needed. Three declined to explain their behaviour, one stated that he just "missed the bus", while another claimed "I can do what I want". The remaining young person reflectively explained that she did not know how to react in the difficult situation, and just wanted to escape the conflict.

Even with limited formal meetings and discussions, some carers were able to put in place strategies that they hoped would mitigate future absences. The few examples available reflect sincere attempts to minimise future problems:

> *"Safety plan and behaviour management plan developed with agency."* (Carer K)

> *"Safe zones, strategies [in place]; do not rely on Department/Agency.*" (Carer A)

> *"Make sure his phone has credit. Told him to call or text me if he's late. Told him to answer his phone if I ring."* (Carer C)

> *"Leaving phone on."* (Carer B)

Therapeutic interventions also were implemented for four of the young people, with two carers (A and K) being totally involved in the development of the safety and support plans. Even when one young person reacted negatively initially, the carer persisted:

> *"Refused to participate in therapeutic support, but relationship development was done with a therapeutic framework. Started to see a psychologist 18 months later."* (Carer K)

5.3.4.2   Evaluation of support. Finally, concerning the return of young people, carers were asked how satisfied they felt with the actions of (a) child safety services, and (b) the police services in helping to locate the absent young people. In addition, they were requested to evaluate the extent to which the services worked together to achieve a satisfactory outcome. All ratings were performed using a 5-point scale (1: *Very dissatisfied*; 5: *Very satisfied*). The median satisfaction scores revealed that the carers were dissatisfied with the performance of child safety (*Median* = 2.0), but more positively disposed to the actions of the police (*Median* = 4.0). The combined effort of the two services also left a lot to be desired in the opinion of the carers (*Median* = 2.0). The few comments available give a clue to the basis of these perceptions.

Child Safety:
> *"Limited in what could be done."* (Carer B)
> *"They don't do anything to actually help."* (Carer J)

Police:
> *"They always found the girls."* (Carer D)
> *"They at least went looking."* (Carer J)

Combined performance:
> *Child safety didn't really do anything.* (Carer K)
> *Child safety relied on us to inform them what the police were doing.* (Carer J)

5.3.5   Concluding comments

The final questions on the survey gave carers the opportunity to make individual statements regarding (a) the risks and impacts they perceived for children/young people of being absent or going missing; (b) any suggestions they wanted to make to Child Safety to improve response during absences; and (c) any practical advice they would have to help meet the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care. Although only five responses were obtained, they do identify key issues that need addressing. Carers' comments on each question are reported verbatim. The reflections provided in "Practical advice / thoughts" seem particularly insightful, and worthy of serious consideration.

Risks and impacts:

> *"Having a safety plan in place and working on the relationship with the child - so that when and if they do go missing, there is fast action and a reason for them to return home."* (Carer K)

> *"Better funding for Department to mitigate risks and provide support to families."* (Carer L)

> *"How long do they have to be unlocatable before they are considered missing?"* (Carer C)

> *"I also think the Department of Child Safety in other states need to cooperate with each other. In my experience, when a teen wants to self-place with their family in another state, this is even more of a problem getting the states to talk to each other."* (Carer D)

> *"The effect on the other kids is not routinely addressed."* (Carer J)

Suggestions for Child Safety:

> *"Caregivers will most likely have done nothing wrong, but feel as though it is their fault. To maintain the child placement, caregivers need reassurance and supported with practical help and advice, as in the heat of the moment will be extremely anxious and may not be able to carry out needed actions. Nor is it the child's fault, and they need to be supported, not given consequences."* (Carer A)

> *"Get out and help practically, not from behind the phone."* (Carer J)

> *"Better communication with other government Departments and NGOs."* (Carer L)

> *"Child Safety may deal with a lot of absconding children/young people, but they should not be de-sensitised to the situation. I was shocked by their lack of care. After-hours is more like a counselling hotline, as they are unable to provide practical support."* (Carer K)

Practical advice / thoughts:

> *"Listen to teenagers. They will run away if they are not listened to and helped in some way. I know this easier said than done."* (Carer D)

> *"Each child needs their own safe place. Or person they can call or go to when things are tough. Many young people, even though in their own homes, have had times of wanting run away and it's their support network that keeps them safe."* (Carer G)

> *"Keep consistent workers, and support long-term placements with resources and time."* (Carer J)

"Many more than would fit in this box. More government funding. More support [for] carers to help address kids issues instead of carers taking all the burden of care. Better community support." (Carer L)

"Stability!! They move all the time and so don't feel they belong anywhere. Parents are given so many chances to try again that the child is never put at the heart of that decision. If the child has a stable option for a placement, why shake that?" (Carer O)

"It is important to grab these children early after being taken into care to respond to their mourning for their previous lives. They often have no fear of going missing because of the experiences they have incurred, neglect, and roaming the streets etc. They need counselling and 'no punches pulled' responses to their questions. Vague answers as to why they are in care do not suffice. I prefer to be up front and I tell them everything I know. However, as the primary front line carer, we are not given the information we need to respond, as it relates to the 'privacy' of their parents. I have often gone years before knowing children have siblings; this might be useful information. I don't think carers are given enough information when the placement process occurs, often because the agencies don't have it at the time." (Carer N)

5.4 Discussion

5.4.1 Limitations of carer survey

It must be emphasised again that, because of the low response rate to this survey, finding presented have to be viewed as the opinions of individual carers, and cannot be interpreted as representative of the carer population as a whole. While it is unknown what proportion of carers in Queensland report absences or missing episodes, the number is more likely to be around 5% of the carer population,[17] rather than the 78% Hayden (2017) reported. Of the 1000 plus carers who were made aware of the survey, the 15 responses documented here were from the ones concerned enough to take the time to share their insights in the interests of the young people in care. Because of this, their perceptions need to be acknowledged.

Why more carers did not respond, in spite of extensive and varied communication between Foster Care Queensland and its members encouraging involvement, is a question that needs addressing. Was it the subject matter that many carers found difficult to discuss? Perhaps some insights into this aspect could be obtained by comparing the response rate to this survey with those of other surveys conducted by FCQ dealing with issues in the care system. If this survey's result is particularly low, this would be an indication that more attention needs to be given to this area in carer support and training. If carer response rates are generally low, this could indicate that the survey approach is not the most appropriate form in which to engage busy carers; perhaps more personal interviews (face-to-face or telephone) would result in higher response rate, if carers felt that their views were receiving more direct attention (Dodge & Chapman, 2018).

5.4.2 Carer responsibilities regarding absent or missing children

Most carers were reasonably confident that they knew what to do when a young person was absent from their placement. The most common responses were to notify police and CSOs. The *Guidelines* provided by DCSYW suggest that the carer "initiates action that a reasonable parent would take, to quickly establish the child's location and their safe return. This could include:

  • searching the house and the premises including the garage, grounds and surrounding area;

---

[17] In Queensland, 369 children/young people ran away or went missing from care in 2014–15 (QFCC, 2016), and most placements have one child (AIHW, 2018), it could be estimated that about 200 out of the 4177 carer households experienced a missing episode (i.e., approximately 5%).

- asking friends or neighbours if they have seen the child;
- contacting the child's school to determine if they have information about the child's whereabouts;
- checking places where the child frequently attends, such as shops, park, friend's homes or other 'special places' they may go to;
- alerting the child's friends and networks that you are looking for the child and seeking their assistance to find the child, where this is appropriate to do so;
- engaging with other members of the child's care team. (p. 1)

Most of the respondents in this survey indicated they would include some of these actions when trying to locate the absent or missing young person. The need to conduct an immediate search (as indicated in the *Guidelines*) must be emphasised in carer training to avoid the situation of carers relying on authorities to take full responsibility. Making the *Guidelines* and *Missing Child Checklist* more visible and accessible for carers would seem necessary, given the low familiarity with each. The fact that two of the carers here either did not know about, or did not value the *Guidelines*, and only one used the *Checklist*, indicates that carers need to be made more aware of these resources and their value than appears to be the case at present.

Carers in general felt that many issues with absent or missing young people could be addressed through better communication and information sharing with the Department. Several indicated that they believed they would be better equipped to handle challenging situations, such as having a young person threaten to, or actually run away, if they knew the full background of the issues the young people were facing because of their traumatic past. Their perceptions also strongly concurred with findings emerging from the literature, and from what the young people themselves reported, that caring and supportive relationships between caregivers and young people, where problems can be discussed and resolutions negotiated, are the key to minimising absences from care.

5.4.3 Dealing with absent or missing young people

Unfortunately, information about how carers actually handled missing episodes was obtained from relatively few respondents. Given the situations described in terms of length of time away from placement, and the carer's knowledge of young person's location, these occurrences were more correctly categorised as absences rather than actual missing events. However, even these incidents highlighted issues that need to be reviewed to make the search process less stressful for the carers (e.g., having to monitor and care for other children while searching; having to report in person to a police station to make a report).

5.4.4 Return of absent young people

The Department's *Guidelines* deal explicitly with what should happen when a missing child/young person is returned. They stipulate meetings that should occur, who should be involved, the timeframe, and expected planning outcomes. However, no reference is made to what would be expected following a return from being absent. While a missing event is likely to be more serious, absent occurrences are far more frequent, and if not handled sensitively, can be the precursors to more extended missing episodes in the future. Clearly, since only two carers and young people in this study participated in a formal return interview, the process of resolving absences needs clearer structure to ensure that the young person's concerns are addressed.

5.4.5 Satisfaction with support

One important finding from the carers' survey was the difference in level of satisfaction respondents expressed with the support provided by Child Safety and the Police services when helping to locate young people absent from placement. Police were seen as far more likely to provide tangible

assistance than were Child Safety workers. The carers also could not find many examples of when the two services worked well together. The complementary roles of Child Safety and police need to be clarified, along with interactions involving carers, to clarify responsibilities and maximise successful outcomes when searching for absent and missing young people. As has been well documented, positive outcomes are more likely with multi-agency responses where all stakeholders work together (Ofsted, 2013).

Although limited in number, many of the comments provided in this study by concerned carers reinforce both observations reported in the literature and the views of the young people who actually have been absent from their placements. As well as being responsible in a statutory sense, Child Safety and care-team members must also demonstrate their concern and caring by respecting the views of young people, involving them in their life decisions, and ensuring they and their carers are fully informed so that their current relationships can create a positive context to help mitigate the effects of past trauma.

References

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW) [AbSec]. (2014). *AbSec submission - Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs - Out of home care.* Sydney: Author.

Ahmed, K., Windsor, L., & Scott, S. (2015). In their own words: Abused children's perceptions of care provided by their birth parents and foster carers. *Adoption and Fostering, 39*(1), 21–37.

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults [APPG]. (2016). *Inquiry into the safeguarding of "absent" children: "It is good when someone cares."* Retrieved from http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/appg-absent-inquiry-final-report-may-2016.pdf

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1), 19–32.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2016a). *Child protection Australia 2014–15.* Child welfare series no. 63. Cat. no. CWS 57. Canberra: AIHW.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2016b). *The views of children and young people in out-of-home care: Overview of indicator results from a pilot national survey 2015. Bulletin 132. Cat no. AUS 197.* Canberra. Retrieved from http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129554764

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2018). *Child protection Australia 2016–17*. Child Welfare series no. 68. Cat. no. CWS 63. Canberra: AIHW.

Barman-Adhikari, A., Bowen, E., Bender, K., Brown, S., & Rice, E. (2016). A social capital approach to identifying correlates of perceived social support among homeless youth. *Child Youth Care Forum, 45,* 691–708.

Barret, R. (2012, 28 May). Killed runaway failed by state. *The Australian*. Retrieved from http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/killed-runaway-failed-by-state/story-e6frgczx-1226368710507

Beckett, H., Warrington, C., Ackerley, E., & Allnock, D. (2015). Children and young people's perspectives on the police's role in safeguarding: A report for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies. *Children's Voices Research Report.* Luton: University of Bedfordshire. Retrieved from https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwim0Pv8q5_aAhWFv7wKHX9pAxcQFggyMAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk%2Fhmicfrs%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2Fchildrens-voices-research-report.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3Dh09sBTAxc4kZCvSUpszD

Benoit-Bryan, J. (2011). *The runaway youth longitudinal study*. Chicago: University of Illinois. Retrieved from https://www.1800runaway.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/NRS-Longitudinal-study-full-report.pdf

Bessell, S. (2011). Participation in decision-making in out-of-home care in Australia: What do young people say? *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(4), 496–501.

Biehal, N., Mitchell, F., & Wade, J. (2003). *Lost from view: Missing persons in the UK*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Biehal, N., & Wade, J. (2000). Going missing from residential and foster care: Linking biographies and contexts. *British Journal of Social Work, 30*(2), 211–225.

Bowden, F., & Lambie, I. (2015). What makes youth run or stay? A review of the literature on absconding. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 25,* 266–279. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2015.09.005

Boyle, C. (2017). "What is the impact of birth family contact on children in adoption and long-term foster care?" A systematic review. *Child and Family Social Work, 22,* 22–33.

Bricknell, S., & Renshaw, L. (2016). *Missing persons in Australia, 2008–2015*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. Retrieved from http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/sb/sb001.html

Brown, A., Rice, S. M., Rickwood, D. J., & Parker, A. G. (2016). Systematic review of barriers and facilitators to accessing and engaging with mental health care among at-risk young people. *Asia-Pacific Psychiatry, 8*(1), 3–22.

Carmody, T. F. (2013). *Taking responsibility: A roadmap for Queensland child protection*. Brisbane: Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry.

Cecka, D. M. (2015). The civil rights of sexually exploited youth in foster care. *117 W. Va. L. Rev.* 1225.

Clark, H. B., Crosland, K. A., Geller, D., Cripe, M., Kenney, T., Neff, B., & Dunlap, G. (2008). A functional approach to reducing runaway behavior and stabilizing placements for adolescents in foster care. *Research on social work practice*, *18*(5), 429–441.

Coleman, N. (2015). Promoting resilience through adversity: increasing positive outcomes for expelled students. *Educational Studies, 41*(1–2), 171–187.

Colquhoun, H. L., Levac, D., O'Brien, K. K., Straus, S., Tricco, A. C., Perrier, L., ... & Moher, D. (2014). Scoping reviews: Time for clarity in definition, methods, and reporting. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, *67*(12), 1291–1294.

Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *Protecting children is everyone's business: National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009–2020*. Retrieved from https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf

Courtney, M. E., Skyles, A., Miranda, G., Zinn, A., Howard, E., & Goerge, R. M. (2005). *Youth who run away from out-of-home care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Courtney, M. E., & Zinn, A. (2009). Predictors of running away from out-of-home care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31*(12), 1298–1306.

Coy, M., Sharp-Jeffs, N., & Kelly, L. (2017). *Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Social workers.* London: Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.

Crosland, K., & Dunlap, G. (2015). Running away from foster care: What do we know and what do we do? *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 24*(6), 1697–1706.

Crosland, K., Joseph, R., Slattery, L., Hodges, S., & Dunlap, G. (2018). Why youth run: Assessing run function to stabilize foster care placement. *Children and Youth Services Review, 85,* 35–42.

Dalton, T. (2016, 27–28 February). "If she was a rich kid, it would be different". *Weekend Australian Magazine*. pp. 14–18.

Day, A., & Riebschleger, J. (2007). Circumstances and suggestions of youth who run from out-of-home care. *The Michigan Child Welfare Law Journal, Fall,* 20-30.

Department of Child Safety, Youth, and Women (DCSYW). (2018). *Reporting missing children: Guidelines for approved carers and care services.* Retrieved from https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/childsafety/foster-care/reporting-missing-childrens-guidelines.pdf

Department for Education, UK. (2014). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. London: Department of Education. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf.

Department of Family, Housing, Child Safety and Indigenous Affairs [FaHCSIA]. (2011). *An outline of national standards for out-of-home care*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Dodge, N., & Chapman, R. (2018). Investigating recruitment and completion mode biases in online and door to door electronic surveys. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 21*(2), 149–163.

Downey, L., Jago, J., & Poppi, S. (2015). The spiral to recovery: An Australian model for therapeutic residential care. *Children Australia, 40*(4), 351–360.

Edinburgh, L., Harpin, S. B., Garcia, C. M., & Saewyc, E. M. (2013). Differences in abuse and related risk and protective factors by runaway status for adolescents seen at a US child advocacy centre. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience, 1*(1), 4–16.

Families SA. (2014). *Working with children and young people who run away or go missing: A residential care practice guide*. Adelaide, SA: Author.

Fawley-King, K., Trask, E. V., Zhang, J., & Aarons, G. A. (2017). The impact of changing neighborhoods, switching schools, and experiencing relationship disruption on children's adjustment to a new placement in foster care. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 63,* 141–150.

Ferguson, H. (2016). What social workers do in performing child protection work: Evidence from research into face-to-face practice. *Child and Family Social Work, 21*(3), 283–294.

Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2016). Runaway and homeless youth: Demographics and programs. *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress.* Retrieved from https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL33785.pdf

Finkelhor, D., Henly, M., Turner, H., & Hamby, S. (2017). Family abduction in a national sample of US children. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *67,* 403–407. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.11.008

Finkelstein, M., Wamsley, M., Currie, D., & Miranda, D. (2004). *Youth who chronically AWOL from foster care: Why they run, where they go, and what can be done*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

Fox Koob, S., & Loussikian, K. (2016, 5 November). Girl in state care was "kidnapped, raped". *The Australian*. Retrieved from http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/girl-in-state-care-was-kidnapped-raped/news-story/b1a47ad624faa4814a950cc2af5ec309

Franks, M., Hunwicks, R., & Goswami, H. (2015). Barriers to the uptake of emergency accommodation by young runaways and thrown-out children and the role of the 'transitional person'. *Children & Society, 29*(2), 146–156.

Greeno, E. J., Uretsky, M. C., Lee, B. R., Moore, J. E., Barth, R. P., & Shaw, T. V. (2016). Replication of the KEEP foster and kinship parent training program for youth with externalizing behaviors. *Children and Youth Services Review, 61*, 75–82. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.12.003

Gwadz, M. V*.*, Cleland, C. M., Leonard, N. R., Bolas, J., Ritchie, A. S., Tabac, L., . . . Powlovich, J. Understanding organizations for runaway and homeless youth: A multi-setting quantitative study of their characteristics and effects. *Children and Youth Service Review, 73,* 398–410.

Harder, A. T., Knorth, E. J., & Kalverboer, M. E. (2013). A secure base? The adolescent–staff relationship in secure residential youth care. *Child and Family Social Work, 18,* 305–317.

Harris, M., & Shalev-Greene, K. (2016). Police attitudes in England to return interviews, in repeat missing person cases. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling, 13*(3), 253–266.

Hayden, C. (2017). Children missing from care. In K. Shalev-Greene & L. Alys (Eds.), *Missing persons: A handbook of research.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Hayden, C., & Goodship, J. (2015). Children reported "missing" to the police: Is it possible to "risk assess" every incident? *British Journal of Social Work, 45,* 440–456.

Hayden, C., & Shalev-Greene, K. (2018). The blue light social services? Responding to repeat reports to the police of people missing from institutional locations. *Policing and Society, 28*(1), 45–61.

Hébert, S. T., Lanctôt, N., & Turcotte, M. (2016). "I didn't want to be moved there": Young women remembering their perceived sense of Agency in the Context of placement instability. *Children and Youth Services Review, 70*, 229–237.

Hegar, R. L., & Rosenthal, J. A. (2011). Foster children placed with or separated from siblings: Outcomes based on a national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33,* 1245–1253.

Hill, L., Taylor, J., Richards, F., & Reddington, S. (2016). "No-one runs away for no reason": Understanding safeguarding issues when children and young people go missing from home. *Child Abuse Review, 25*(3), 192–204. doi:10.1002/car.2322

HM Government, UK. (2015). *Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592101/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children_20170213.pdf

HM Government, UK. (2018). *Changes to statutory guidance: Working together to safeguard children; and new regulations: Government consultation response*. Retrieved from

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683115/Changes_to_statutory_guidance-_Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children.pdf

Holliday, S. B., Edelen, M. O., & Tucker, J. S. (2017). Family functioning and predictors of runaway behavior among at-risk youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 34,* 247–258.

Holmes, L. (2014). When the search is over: Reconnecting missing children and adults. London: Missing People. Retrieved from https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiy7crqr5_aAhULTrwKHVvEAT4QFggpMAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.missingpeople.org.uk%2Fdownloads.raw%3Ftask%3Dcallelement%26item_id%3D6986%26element%3Ddfbb2d4b-e3af-40bc-a511-b0d819792af1%26method%3Ddownload&usg=AOvVaw2pmaHoOtlFOGNzdHe6eoVR

Holmes, L. (2017). Resolution of missing incidents. In K. Shalev-Greene & L. Alys (Eds.), *Missing persons: A handbook of research.* Abingdon Oxon: Routledge.

International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. (2018). *The definition of "missing": A missing child is a vulnerable child.* Retrieved from https://www.lcmec.org/global-missing-childrens-center/the-definitions-of-missing/

Jackson, A. (2014). Literature review: Young people at high risk of sexual exploitation, absconding, and other significant harms. Melbourne: Berry Street Childhood Institute.

Jackson, A. (2015). From where to where – Running away from care. *Children Australia, 40*(1), 16–19.

Jago, S., Arocha, L., Brodie, I., Melrose, M., Pearce, J. J., & Warrington, C. (2011). *What's going on to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation? How local partnerships respond to*

child sexual exploitation. Luton: University of Bedfordshire.

Johnson, K. D., Whitbeck, L. B., & Hoyt, D. R. (2005). Predictors of social network composition among homeless and runaway adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 28*(2), 231–248.

Jones, L. P. (2014). The role of social support in the transition from foster care to emerging adulthood. *Journal of Family and Social Work, 17,* 81–96.

Juvonen, J., & Graham, S. (2014). Bullying in schools: The power of bullies and the plight of victims. *Annual Review of Psychology, 65,* 159–185.

Kaur, J. (2014) Culturally sensitive practice in out-of-home care: A good practice guide to supporting children and youth from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Queensland, Australia. Retrieved from http://www.jkdiversityconsultants.com.au/PracticeGuide/practiceguide2014.html

Karam, R., & Robert, M. (2013). Understanding runaway behaviour In group homes: What are runaways trying to tell us? *Journal of Community Positive Practices, 13*(2), 69–79.

Kempf-Leonard, K., & Johansson, P. (2007). Gender and runaways. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 5*(3), 308–327. doi:10.1177/1541204007301293

Kerr, J., & Finlay, J. (2006). *Youth running from residential care: "The Push" and "The Pull".* Toronto, ON: Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy. Retrieved from http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/16000/271285.pdf

Kim, H., Chenot, D., & Lee, S. (2015). Running away from out-of-home care: A multilevel analysis. *Children and Society, 29*(2), 109–121.

Kim, M. J., Tajima, E. A., Herrenkohl, T. I., & Huang, B. (2009). Early child maltreatment, runaway youths, and risk of delinquency and victimization in adolescence: A mediational model. *Social Work Research, 33*(1), 19–28.

King, B., Abrego, D., Narendorf, S., Ha, Y., & Santa Maria, D. (2017). Representations of homelessness, home environments, and authority in the context of runaway behaviors reported by foster care youth residing in an emergency shelter. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless, 26*(2), 138–147.

Kinsey, D., & Schlösser, A. (2013). Interventions in foster and kinship care: A systematic review. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 18*(3), 429–463.

Kiraly, M., & Humphreys, C. (2016). "It's about the whole family": Family contact for children in kinship care. *Child and Family Social Work, 21,* 228–239.

Kiraly, M., & Humphreys, C. (2017). The changing face of out-of-home care in Australia – Developing policy and practice for the 21st century. *Children Australia, 42*(4), 230–232.

Knowles, L., & Branely, A. (2014, 3 December). Family demands answers after finding out about Karmah Jayne Hall's suicide in foster care on Facebook. *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-26/mother-learns-of-daughter's-foster-care-suicide-on-facebook/5920118

Lin, C-H. (2012). Children who run away from foster care: Who are the children and what are the risk factors? *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(4), 807–813.

Malloch, M. S., & Burgess, C. (2011). Responding to young runaways: Problems of risk and responsibility. *Youth Justice, 11*(1), 61–76. doi:10.1177/1473225410394281

Mason, J. (2008). A children's standpoint: Needs in out-of-home care. *Children and Society, 22*, 358–369. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2007.00115

McDowall, J. J. (2015). *Sibling placement and contact in out-of-home care.* Sydney: CREATE Foundation. Retrieved from https://create.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Sibling-Report_LR.pdf

McDowall, J. J. (2016). Are we listening? The need to facilitate participation in decision-making by children and young people in out-of-home care. *Developing Practice, 44,* 77–93.

McFarlane, K. (2016, 16 December). NSW bail laws mean well but are landing homeless kids in prison. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/nsw-bail-laws-mean-well-but-are-landing-homeless-kids-in-prison-68490

Middleton, J. S., Gattis, M. N., Frey, L. M., & Roe-Sepowitz, D. (2018). Youth Experiences Survey (YES): Exploring the scope and complexity of sex trafficking in a sample of youth experiencing homelessness. *Journal of Social Service Research.* Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/01488376.2018.1428924

Mitchell, F., Malloch, M., & Burgess, C. (2014). The role of Return Home Welfare Interviews in responding to the needs of young runaways. *Children and Society, 28,* 55–65.

Moodie, C. (2016, 27 March). Two young children roam streets after absconding from state facility. *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-27/safety-fears-for-state-wards-absconing-newman-out-of-home-care/7278284?pfmredir=sm

Morewitz, S. J. (2016). *Runaway and homeless youth: New research and clinical practice.* (pp. 1–16). E-book: Springer.

Moss, M. (2009). Broken circles to a different identity: An exploration of identity for children in out-of-home care in Queensland, Australia. *Child and Family Social Work*, *14*, 311–321.

Munford, R., & Saunders, J. (2015). Young people's search for agency: Making sense of their experiences and taking control. *Qualitative Social Work, 14*(5), 616–633.

National Missing Persons Coordination Centre. (2016). Fact sheet: Myths and facts. Retrieved from https://www.missingpersons.gov.au/sites/default/files/PDF%20-%20Publications/NMPCC/Factsheets/NMPCCFS_Myths_English.pdf

Nesmith, A. (2006). Predictors of running away from family foster care. *Child Welfare, 85*(3), 585–609.

Oakes, D., & Clark, S. (2016, 30 June). Sex crimes police seek trust of children in Victorian state care to target paedophiles. *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-30/police-seek-trust-of-at-risk-children-to-target-paedophiles/7558518

Octoman, O., McLean, S., & Sleep, J. (2014). Children in foster care: What behaviours do carers find challenging? *Clinical Psychologist, 18,* 10–20.

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [Ofsted]. (2013). *Missing Children*. Retrieved from http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120364

Pearce, J. J. (2014). "What's Going On" to safeguard children and young people from child sexual exploitation: A review of local safeguarding children boards' work to protect children from sexual exploitation. *Child Abuse Review, 23,* 159–170.

Pearson, J., Thrane, L., & Wilkinson, L. (2017). Consequences of runaway and thrownaway experiences for sexual minority health during the transition to adulthood. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 14*(2), 145–171.

Penzerro, R. M. (2003). Drift as adaptation: Foster care and homeless careers. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 32*(4), 229.

Pergamit, M. R., & Ernst, M. (2011). *Running away from foster care: Youths' knowledge and access of services*. Retrieved from

https://books.google.com.au/books?id=YRZIco9eMVwC&pg=PA53&lpg=PA53&dq=pergamit+%26+ernst&source=bl&ots=VG4Nuw1tAN&sig=v_wIP-kSg5C8g2rCy0ozPEWfhNg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi904-605vaAhVD6bwKHRrrBLAQ6AEIMDAB

Peters, M. D., Godfrey, C. M., Khalil, H., McInerney, P., Parker, D., & Soares, C. B. (2015). Guidance for conducting systematic scoping reviews. *International Journal of Evidence-Based Healthcare*, *13*(3), 141–146.

Plass, P. S. (2007). Secondary victimizations in missing child events. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 32*(1), 30–44. doi:10.1007/s12103-007-9008-9

Pona, I. (2016). *Safeguarding children and young people who go missing in London*. London: The Children's Society. Retrieved from https://www.basw.co.uk/resource/?id=5164

Price, J. M., Chamberlain, P., Landsverk, J., Reid, J. B., Leve, L. D., & Laurent, H. (2008). Effects of a foster parent training intervention on placement changes of children in foster care. *Child Maltreatment, 13*(1), 64–75. doi:10.1177/1077559507310612

Pryce, J., Napolitano, L., & Samuels, G. M. (2017). Transition to adulthood of former foster youth: Multilevel challenges to the help-seeking process. *Emerging Adulthood, 5*(5), 311–321.

Queensland Family and Child Commission. (2016). When a child is missing: Remembering Tiahleigh - A report into Queensland's children missing from out-of-home care. Brisbane: Author.

Queensland Law Society. (2012). *Public naming of child offenders and use of the terms 'abscond' and 'self-place' in commission documents*. Letter to Children's Commissioner. Retrieved from http://www.qls.com.au/files/622df2c0-86d7-4ebc-bbbb-a0c900ffa512/2624_Public_Naming_of_Child_Offenders_and_Use_of_the_Terms_Abscond_and_Self_Place_in_Commission_Documents.pdf

Radu, M. B. (2017). Who runs away from home and why? How families, schools, and bullying influence youth runaways. *Sociology Compass. A*dvance online publication*.* doi: 10.1111/soc4.12537

Rauktis, M. E., Fusco, R. A., Cahalane, H., Bennett, I. K., & Reinhart, S. M. (2011). "Try to make it seem like we're regular kids": Youth perceptions of restrictiveness in out-of-home care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33,* 1224–1233.

Rees G. (2011). *Still Running 3*. London: The Children's Society.

Robertson, B., & Demosthenous, C. M. (2004/2011). *Young Aboriginal females reported missing to police: "Which way for prevention & service".* Sydney: NSW Attorney-General's Department.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. (2016). *Consultation Paper*. Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/0ffa1ec1-db19-4c3e-b3b8-d7a8f32d4f55/Out-of-home-care-consultation-paper.

Sarri, R. C., Stoffregen, E., & Ryan, J. P. (2016). Running away from child welfare placements: Justice system entry risk. *Children and Youth Services Review, 67*, 191–197.

Scott, D., Holzer, P., Lamont, A., & El-Murr, A. (2018). *Australian child protection legislation*. Child Family Community Australia Resource Sheet. Retrieved from https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/australian-child-protection-legislation

Sen, R., & Broadhurst, K. (2011). Contact between children in out-of-home placements and their family and friends networks: A research review. *Child and Family Social Work, 16*(3), 298–309.

Skyles, A., Smithgall, C., & Howard, E. (2007). *School engagement and youth who run away from care: The need for cross-system collaboration*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University

of Chicago.

Slesnick, N. (2004). *Our runaway and homeless youth: A guide to understanding*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Slesnick, N., Guo, X., Brakenhoff, B., & Feng, X. (2013). Two-year predictors of runaway and homeless episodes following shelter services among substance abusing adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 36,* 787–795.

Smeaton, E. (2009). Off the radar and at risk: children on the streets in the UK. *Housing, Care and Support, 12*(3), 22–27.

Smeaton, E. (2013). *Running from hate to what you think is love: The relationship between running away and child sexual exploitation*. London: Barnardo's. Retrieved from https://www.barnardos.org.uk/15505_cse_running_from_hate_2l_web.pdf

Smith, J., & Firth, J. (2011). Qualitative data analysis: The framework approach. *Nurse Researcher, 18*(2), 52–62.

Sowerby, A., & Thomas, S. D. M. (2017). A mixed methods study of the mental health and criminal justice histories of missing persons. *Police Practice and Research, 18*(1), 87–98.

Steinberg, M. P., & Lacoe, J. (2017). What do we know about school discipline reform? *Education Next; Cambridge, 17*(1).

Stott, T. (2012). Placement instability and risky behaviors of youth aging out of foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 29*(1), 61–83.

Sturrock, R., & Holmes, L. (2015). *Running the risks: The links between gang involvement and young people going missing*. Retrieved from https://www.catch-22.org.uk/publications/catch22-dawes-unit-running-the-risks/

Swearer, S., & Hymel, S. (2015). Bullying and discrimination in schools: Exploring variations across student subgroups. *School Psychology Review, 44*(4), 504–509.

Swisher, R. R., & Warner, T. D. (2013). If they grow up: Exploring the neighborhood context of adolescent and young adult survival expectations. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 23*(4), 678–694.

Taylor, J., Bradbury-Jones, C., Hunter, H., Sanford, K., Rahilly, T., & Ibrahim, N. (2014). Young people's experiences of going missing from care: A qualitative investigation using peer researchers. *Child Abuse Review, 23*(6), 387–401. doi:10.1002/car.2297

The Children's Society. (2013). Here to listen?: Return interviews provision for young runaways. London: Author. Retrieved from https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/here_to_listen_report.pdf

The Children's Society. (*n. d.)* Conducting good return interviews for young people who run away. London: Author. Retrieved from https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/runaway_return_interviews.pdf

The Joanna Briggs Institute. (2015). *Joanna Briggs Institute Reviewers' Manual 2015*: *Methodology for JBI Scoping Reviews*. Adelaide, SA: Author.

Thompson, J. (2014). *Reaching safe places: Exploring the journeys of young people who run away from home or care*. Retrieved from https://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/media/37811/14rach001-br-summary-digital-high.pdf

Thompson, S. J., Bender, K. A., Lewis, C. M., & Watkins, R. (2008). Runaway and pregnant: Risk factors associated with pregnancy in a national sample of runaway/homeless female adolescents. *Journal*

of Adolescent Health, 43(2), 125–132.

Thompson, S. J., & Pollio, D. E. (2006). Adolescent runaway episodes: Application of an estrangement model of recidivism. *Social Work Research, 30*(4), 245–251.

Tregeagle, S. (2017). Weighing up the evidence and local experience of residential care. *Children Australia, 42*(4), 240–247.

Tyler, K. A., Hagewen, K. J., & Melander, L. A. (2011). Risk factors for running away among a general population sample of males and females. *Youth & Society, 43*(2), 583–608.

Tyler, K. A., Johnson, K. A., & Brownridge, D. A. (2008). A longitudinal study of the effects of child maltreatment on later outcomes among high-risk adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 37,* 506–521.

Ungar, M., & Ikeda, J. (2017). Rules or No Rules? Three strategies for engagement with young people in mandated services. *Child and Adolescent Social Work, 34,* 259–267.

van Bijleveld, G. G., Dedding, C. W. M., & Bunders-Aelen, J. F. G. (2015). Children's and young people's participation within child welfare and child protection services: A state-of-the-art review. *Child and Family Social Work, 20,* 129–138.

Wade, K. (2015). Breaking the cycle: Collaborating and behaving differently to improve the outcomes and experiences of missing children. *Journal of Integrated Care, 23*(4), 206–218.

Whitbeck, L. B., Chen, X., Hoyt, D. R., Tyler, K., & Johnson, K. D. (2004). Mental disorder, subsistence strategies, and victimization among gay, lesbian, and bisexual homeless and runaway adolescents. *Journal of Sex Research, 41*(4), 329–342

Wilson, P. R. (1983). *Runaway behaviour and its consequences*. Brisbane: Queensland Criminology Council. Retrieved from https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiAqN7jn8_QAhXLPY8KHYd9Cp8QFggcMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcrg.aic.gov.au%2Freports%2F8-81.pdf&usg=AFQjCNEZESGc1YHCD1iAkQUoPlj2yfX5BA&sig2=jbYbP-xxGtZ2N9tXLIiidQ&bvm=bv.139782543,d.c2I

Wilson, K., Stemp, K., & McGinty, S. (2011). Re-engaging young people with education and training. *Youth Studies Australia, 30*(4), 32–39.

Wright, E. R., Attell, B. K., & Ruel, E. (2017). Social support networks and the mental health of runaway and homeless youth. *Social Sciences, 6,* 117.

Yu, Y., & Au Liu, S. C. E. (2013). Experiences while on the run: A qualitative study of runaway adolescents in Hong Kong. *Proceedings 5th International Conference of Humanities and Social Sciences.* Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University. Retrieved from http://tar.thailis.or.th/handle/123456789/756

Appendix A

Comparison of the Policies and Guidelines Employed by the Various Australian Jurisdictions in Relation to Absent and Missing Children[18]

---

[18] I am indebted to Ms Kate Tillack, Policy Officer, CREATE Foundation, for her work collecting and assembling these data for comparison. Kate not only conducted extensive web-based searches, but also spent much time trying to contact key policy personnel in the various jurisdictions to "fill in the gaps" in this summary.

State	Role	Definitions	Responsibilities: Initial	Responsibilities: During	Responsibilities: After	Source
QLD	Approved Carers/Care Services	A **missing** child is any child whose location is unknown and there are fears for the safety or concern for the welfare of that child. An **absent** child is a child who is absent for a short period without permission, and where the child's location is known or can be quickly established.	• If child is abducted, call 000 then Child Safety Service Centre. • If absent, direct carer should make reasonable attempts to locate young person then make a judgement about seriousness of situation and respond like **any reasonable parent**. • Call CSSC or foster care agency for advice. • As soon as possible after all reasonable attempts (**respond like a reasonable parent**) to find the child have failed, the child must be reported as missing to the police. • Attend local police station in person. "Carer is usually the best person to make the missing person report." • Completed *Missing Child Checklist*.	• After making the report, record the date and time report was made, the name of the police officer, the QPRIME number. • Provide these to CSSC or After Hours service. • Provide a clear photo if requested by police. • Unless written approval provided, do not identify young person as in care when sharing photo. • Continue to exchange information with care team e.g., places where young person may frequent.	• Immediately advise police when young person is found • Attend meeting with CSO to discuss why young person went missing and consider actions to improve safety and wellbeing	*Reporting Missing Children: Guidelines for Approved Carers and Care Services*
	Child Safety Officer	As above	• If abducted, call 000 immediately. • Contact child's family to enquire if young person is there.	• Liaise with police and contribute additional info carer may not know. • Written authorisation from Chief Executive can authorise missing child to be identified as being	• Discuss with young person why they went missing, whether they experienced harm, and jointly develop strategies to reduce likelihood of going missing again **within 48**	*Reporting Missing Children: Guidelines for Approved Carers and Care Services* *Child Safety Practice Manual*

				in care. • Work with police to develop a media strategy. • Communicate with carer about who does following actions: Contact child's network (as long as will not threaten child's wellbeing), attempt to contact young person (e.g., social media), contact biological parents, contact school. • Identify factors that increase vulnerability. • Create "missing child" alert in ICMS. • Complete Critical Incident Report. • Provide verbal advice to Manager. • Inform SCAN and complete *Request for Multiagency Meeting* form.	**hours.** • Arrange a care team meeting to discuss above.	*Chapter 5 s14* *Queensland Government Protocol for Joint Agency Response When a Child in Care is Missing*
	CSSC Manager		• Inform Regional Director (RD) immediately if young person is abducted.	• Liaise with RD about level of info suitable for publication.		*Child Safety Practice Manual Chapter 5 s14*
	Regional Director			• Exercise statutory delegation to authorise publication of info that young person is in care. • Lead media strategy with police and carer.		*Child Safety Practice Manual Chapter 5 s14*
	SCAN		• Following notification that child is missing, SCAN coordinator notifies all SCAN core members.	• Record relevant information on *Additional Information Form.* • If no meeting requested within 2 days of young person going missing, SCAN coordinator will determine if emergency meeting required.	• At each SCAN team meeting, the SCAN team will review all children who have been missing, or missing and found, in the period between the previous SCAN team meeting. The purpose of the discussion will be to determine opportunities to	*Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Team System Response Protocol – Children Missing from Out-of-Home Care (OOHC)*

					address the reasons that the child may be frequently missing, and recommend what further action (if any) needs to be taken. This includes a decision to close the case or keep it open.	
	QPS	**Missing person** means a person, whether an adult or child, reported to police whose whereabouts are unknown and where there are fears for the safety or concerns for the welfare of that person. **Known vulnerability** includes a person: (i) affected by: (a) dementia and related illnesses; (b) a known medical condition or a physical or intellectual disability; (ii) believed to intending self-harm; or (iii) who is a child.	• Officer who received report must consider if there is known vulnerability and if there is a justifiable reason to report. • Complete QPRIME occurrence in database and keep it updated. • Complete Risk Assessment. • Receive *Missing Person Checklist* • Notify CSSC and After Hours. • Assign "be on lookout" tasks to stations where young person may be near. • Obtain photograph. • DCCSD have responsibility to contact biological parents. • Missing Person Unit is responsible for state wide overview, coordination, and analysis of info relating to missing persons. They assist with investigation, refer suspicious cases to Homicide Unit.	• When issuing media notify Child Safety. • Gain authorisation to publicise care status if deemed necessary. • Responsibility of investigation is the region where there was the last confirmed siting of missing person. • Make necessary inquiries to locate child and update QPRIME. • Obtain formal statements from witnesses within 60 days. • Obtain DNA if person not located within 60 days. • Supervising superintendent of Regional Crime Coordinator determines if Amber Alert is necessary (seeking permission from guardian is not a requirement but good practice). • Media and Public Affairs group implement Amber Alert. • Amber alert and media release utilised if young person abducted or high risk (i.e., any child under 18 years who is missing in concerning or	• Interview missing person to ascertain circumstances (e.g., where they have been and who with). • Consider child harm indicators. • Immediately notify CSSC upon finding young person. • *Safety and Support Plan* developed by a joint agency care team to address issues. • Can keep whereabouts of missing person confidential if person is under 18 and disclosure of the whereabouts may endanger the safety of that person. If such danger exists, and satisfactory arrangements cannot be made with the inquirer/parent, cause the matter to be referred to the nearest Child Protection and Investigation Unit.	*Operation Policy* *Queensland Government Protocol for Joint Agency Response When a Child in Care is Missing*

				suspicious circumstances and the child may be at imminent risk of death or serious harm).		
ACT	Staff under the ACT Together Consortium including carers, residential staff and case managers	A critical incident includes a child or young person "absconding" (preferred term now "unplanned absence") or missing from placement.	• Carers report to After-Hours Worker that CYP has left placement. • After-Hours Worker reports to CYPS (Child and Youth Protection) that a child is missing or absent. • After-Hours Worker and carer discuss methods of contacting the child and supporting their return to placement (e.g., think about where young person has gone). • If an older child is missing for **more than 2 hours** the incident is reported to police. • If child is younger or considered vulnerable, then the police should be notified immediately. • After-Hours staff may contact a Caseworker afterhours for critical information that has not been uploaded to young person's casefile. • Caseworker on-call can provide back up to After-Hours worker when needed.	• After-Hours Manager is expected to use discretion as to whether Regional Manager needs to be advised of an allegation of abuse in care or significant critical incident. • After-Hours Manager needs to consider the use of media attention. • After-Hours worker and carer cooperate with police and provide police with any information they require. • After-Hours Manager notified if serious concerns are held for CYP wellbeing.	• When child found, all parties notified and *Critical Incident Report* outlining what happened completed and sent to CYPS. • When situation is under control, initial debriefing will be made available to staff, volunteers and clients. • *Critical Incident Report* completed with 12 hours of incident occurring and is then forwarded to Team Leader or Manager where applicable, and to the Office of the Executive Manager within 12 hours. • If the incident involved the young person being abused, neglected, or at risk of abuse and neglect, then a *Child Concern Report* is completed and sent to CYPS. • Incident recorded on the client file. • Staff must ensure that young person impacted by incident are provided with opportunity to debrief. • Following debriefing, guidelines will be updated and training arranged for staff, volunteers and	*ACT Together Responding to Critical Incidents Policy; ACT Together After Hours Policy; Personal Correspondence with Carolyn Campbell, Regional Manager-Adolescents, Youth and Leaving Care*

					carers.	
	AFP	**Absconder** means a person whose whereabouts are unknown and for whom there are **no** concerns for their safety or welfare, including: a resident, under a judicial order or otherwise, of a recognised youth refuge or care facility; a patient, voluntary or otherwise, of a mental health facility; a person who is reported as missing, runaway etc. on a regular basis and returns within a short time after being reported. **Missing person** means any person, whether an adult or child, reported to police whose whereabouts are unknown and where any of the following conditions apply: fears for their safety; concerns for their welfare; suspicious circumstances surrounding their disappearance (including anyone missing from an institution but excluding escapees); a person deceased or living whose identity is unknown.	• Members must accept missing person reports immediately- no time restriction on when someone is missing 　○ Obtain all relevant info for database, obtain photo showing front teeth, notify parent or next of kin (if different from complainant) • Absconder reports can be taken over the phone, fax, or email. 　○ Officer creates incident in database with circumstances, level of concern, contact person.	• ACT Policing Missing Persons' Team is responsible for the overview, coordination and analysis of information in relation to missing persons in ACT • Members must not release personal particulars of a missing person to the media without written authority of complainant, next of kin, or parents • Without consent case officer consults with team leader, Missing Persons' Team, Coordinator Media and Marketing • Members should consider if involving the media might assist in locating a missing person under circumstances such as when the missing person is a child. • The case officer should then undertake all enquiries deemed relevant, based on the specific circumstances, including attending scene for preliminary investigation. • Maintain contact with complainant - update within 48 hours of initial report than twice weekly for first 2 months. • Within 14 days examine areas likely to produce fingerprints. • Team Leader reviews case within 28 days. • Contact	• Members should confirm location by direct observation. • Notify case officer and Missing Person Team that person has been found. • Advise complainant or next of kin or parents unless there is a custody dispute. If the missing person is a child who is the subject of a custody dispute, members should advise the parent(s)/guardian(s) that they may apply to the Family Law Court for a recovery order for the child's return.	*AFP National Guideline on missing persons (ACT Policing)*

				• complainant or next of kin again. • After 12 months consider requesting an inquiry by coroner.		
NSW	Mandatory / Non-mandatory reporters		• Call Child Protection Helpline			*Child Wellbeing & Child Protection NSW Interagency Guidelines*
	Carers		• Call Child Protection Helpline			*Childstory Website*
NT	Case Manager		• If child is absent from placement, the Case Manager must make reasonable effort to locate the child.	• To manage situation, Case Manager will need to consider circumstances around disappearance, level of risk to child, their age, previous strategies, future care arrangements. • Policy refers to s85 of the *Care and Protection of Children Act* which enables Authorised Officers (including police) to apprehend a child in the care of the CEO and return them to placement- but this should only be used after consultation with Tem Leader and Manager. • Attempts to locate child documented in database.		*Territory Families Children in Care Policy: Child is Absent, Missing or Absconds from Care*
SA	Residential Workers	**Run away** is used to refer to a child and or young person intentionally leaving their residential care placement (or leaving the care or supervision of a staff member/other responsible carer) without	• **"If you fail to respond when a child or young runs away or goes missing you are not only breaching your duty of care, you are showing the child or young person that you do not care enough to respond or that**	• If risk is extreme, high, medium, or low, continue to try and contact the child, find out as much information as possible, and pass on any new information to police and case manager. • If risk is medium or low monitor the situation and	• Welcome the child or young person home and do not immediately confront them about their behaviour. • Try to spend some positive time with the child or young person. • Stay with the	*DCP Guideline Working with Children Who Run Away or Go Missing;* *Procedure Assessing and Reporting Children and Young People as Missing or Absent*

		permission. **Go missing** is used to describe both: 1. A child or young person failing to return to their residential care placement (or the care/supervision of a staff member/other responsible carer). 2. A child or young person being absent from their residential care placement (or the care and supervision of a staff member/other responsible carer) unexpectedly or unintentionally. **• Note that the terms 'abscond' and 'AWOL' are not used in this document because these terms are generally not associated with home-like environments.**	**they aren't important enough for you to make an effort."** • Try contacting (e.g. over phone) and searching for the young person, contact the young person's contacts or other young people in the house for information about the young person's location. • If in contact with young person, tell them about positive things they can do when they return home (don't focus on negative consequence of behaviour). • Conduct baseline risk assessment (assess what potential consequence are and likelihood of consequence in light of the young person's age, developmental ability, mental health, behaviour history, history of running away, connections in the community, level of maturity and understanding of protective behaviours). This should be conducted prior to the incident- if not completed, young person is assessed as 'high'. • Conduct an urgency assessment (considering length of	assess increase in level or urgency	child or young person if you can and do not isolate them or send them straight to their room when they return. • Find out as much as you can about where they have been, even if you think you already know (including information about adults who may be harbouring or concealing the young person). Ensure young person feels safe and comfortable and knows you are asking due to concern for their safety, rather than interrogating them. • Record and report any information that is important or concerning and inform Supervisor, case manager or police if necessary.	

			absence, time of day, weather, specific circumstance of young person e.g. have they expressed suicidal ideation?). • Record the young person as run away or missing in appropriate medium (e.g. information system). • If risk is extreme, call 000 • If risk is high, report young person as missing to police, note Missing Person Report Number, notify the case manager • If risk is medium, report young person as absent to the police. An absentee report will be generated- note this report number, and notify case manager • If risk is low, report young person as 'absent from placement' via information systems, SA Families Call Centre, or case manager. • Notify appropriate people (i.e., friends or family members). • Follow the young person's Individual Safety Plan.			
	Families SA Case Manager Supervisor		• Uses reasonable grounds to assess whether a child is at risk and a Written Directive is required			

			(formal notice that directs someone not to communicate with, harbour or conceal a young person under care or guardianship of the Minister)- does not need to be evidence of harm but evidence of risk assessed by consulting with residential workers and police.			
TAS	Child Protection Worker	Use the Tasmania Police definition: *anyone reported missing to police, whose whereabouts are unknown, and where there are concerns for the safety or welfare of that person*. There is no requirement that a person be absent for 24 hours before they can be regarded as missing.	• Child Protection Worker works with carer to make reasonable attempts to find child through usual networks - immediate report should be considered. ○ Report is dependent on CYP age, disability, risk of lack of shelter, food, supervision, and how long they have been missing. ○ Under 14 - *Missing Persons' Report* is made to police. ○ Over 14 - determine risk of lack of shelter, food, etc. or if **8 hours** has passed, and report to police. • The Child Protection Worker will plan a response based on knowledge of the child, the child's networks and the possible causes of the	• Give consideration to likely locations where the child may be and how these places might be checked. • Alert the child's networks (for example, local youth worker, peers and family) and request their assistance to look for, and to convey messages to the child. • Alert local shelters. • Where considered necessary, make an application for a search warrant. • Alert the Child Protection After-Hours Emergency Service of the "possible contact" and place this After-Hours possible contact on the client's electronic file. • Adhere to the departmental incident reporting requirements, particularly in cases that have the potential to involve the Minister or be subject to high-level public or legal scrutiny.	• Child Protection Worker would have organised a placement intention in their response plan which is provided to the police. • Verify and document evidence of child's location - child protection worker develops appropriate response according to the needs of the child.	*Practice Guide Missing Persons Response - Children in Care* *Missing Persons Response - Children in Care Flow Chart*

			child's disappearance. • As soon as it is determined child is missing for more than 8 hours, Child Protection Worker will ensure a *Missing Persons' Report* is lodged with the police either by themselves or by the carer. • Child Protection Worker alerts Team Leader. • Parents are informed that young person is missing as soon as possible.	• Regular liaison between Child Protection and the police must occur while the child is missing, in order to exchange information and determine appropriate action.		
	Team Leader		• Ensures a decision regarding action is made promptly on being notified that the child is missing. • Ensures that the rationale for the decision is recorded on database (CPIS). • Advises Child Protection Manager. • Ensures that the child's parents have been informed that the child is missing and of the proposed action.			*Practice Guide Missing Persons Response - Children in Care*
	Police				• Police are requested to inform Child Protection when child is located. • Child Protection Worker would have organised a placement intention in their response plan which is provided to the police. • Under a *Missing Persons' Report* the police have	*Practice Guide Missing Persons Response - Children in Care*

					no powers to apprehend, detain, or return the child to a placement without a warrant. The police are responsible for informing the person who made the *Missing Person Report* of the child's whereabouts. On locating a missing child, the police are able to speak to the child and encourage return to placement.	
	Carer		• The carer is best placed to speak to Police about the child's last location, the child's possible intentions and demeanour, their clothing and appearance.			*Missing Persons Response - Children in Care Flow Chart*
SA	Carers	Information available only within *Agency Training Resources.* Not accessible online.		• If the child is absent for more than 14 days, then the placement will be terminated (discretion may be applied on approval of supervisor).		*Families SA Carer Support Payments Carer Handbook*
VIC	Case Practitioner	Is the child **missing**? What is known about the child's whereabouts, are the circumstances out of character, or is there evidence to suggest the child may be the subject of a crime, or at risk of harm to themselves or others. Is the child or young person **absent**? Their whereabouts are	• If the whereabouts of a child are unknown, make a *Missing Persons' Report (MPR)* to police. • Inform supervisor same day you learn young person is missing • Ensure *MPR* is lodged - whether by parent or caregiver. If parent or caregiver does not, the case manager must make it and ensure police	• Complete a *Repeat Missing Profile* for young people who have been missing three times in 28 days or for more than 7 consecutive days. • Complete weekly missing updates for clients. • Make reasonable attempts to locate the child. • Ensure the parents of the missing child know their child is missing and inform them of the actions taken. Advise your supervisor that you	• Notify the police immediately if the child is located and provide written confirmation to the police to withdraw the MPR. • Complete *Sexual Exploitation Information* template if believed or confirmed that child was sexually exploited while missing. • Team Manager ensures relevant professions are	*Child Protection Manual*

		known, but they are not at a place where they are expected to be and where the circumstances and context suggest a lower level of risk.	inform Child Protection when young person is found.
			• Complete *Incident Report.*
				have informed the parents.
				• Consider the need for a Children's Court search warrant and the need for police to search premises or to take a child into emergency care when located. Record the decision and rationale on database (CRIS).
				• Liaise regularly with police.
				• If the child remains missing, consult with your supervisor about whether to issue a *Missing Persons' Media Release*.
				• Efforts to locate the missing child may include one or more of the following:
				  o the likely locations where the child may be and how they might be checked;
				  o alerting the child's networks and requesting their assistance to look for and convey messages to the child;
				  o alerting Street Work Outreach Service (SOS);
				  o lodging a *Missing Persons' Report* with police;
				  o where it is considered necessary, making an application for a Children's Court search warrant;
				  o advising the After-Hours Child Protection Emergency Service (AHCPES);
				  o adhering to the Departmental
					consulted when developing a response to child's episodes of going missing.
					• Case practitioners need to document a response plan for any child who goes missing as part of a crisis management plan. This includes the nominated person who is responsible for the return to care conversation (held within one day of child's return) and how this is reported to the case manager.
					• Return to care conversation by a professional the child trusts: Required when young person missing for more than 24 hours or when missing on three or more occasions - assesses young person's whereabouts, highlight danger of going missing, reinforce that someone cares for them. Consider doing this with police if there was a missing person report or warrant.	

				incident reporting requirements, particularly in cases that have the potential to involve the Minister or be subject of public or legal scrutiny.		
	Child Protection Missing Coordinator			• Compiles a weekly *Missing Area Report* at end of each week to determine children who are missing and if they are subject to warrant of missing person report.		
	Team Manager			• Decide what action is to be taken within eight hours of being notified a child is missing. • If the child is missing, consider whether to issue a *Missing Persons' Media Release*. • To issue a *Missing Persons' Media Release*, seek endorsement from the Director, Child Protection or Assistant Director, Child Protection.		
	Community Service Organisation		• Make a *Missing Persons' Report* to the police if a child residing in an out-of-home care service is missing. If the missing child is residing in out-of-home care, it is the responsibility of the community service organisation to make a *MPR.* • Advise Child Protection that the child is missing and complete an incident report. If the *MPR* is lodged after hours, confirm			

				this with Child Protection the next working day.		
	Child Protection Operations Manager			• If the child is missing and a decision to issue a *Missing Persons' Media Release* has been endorsed by the Director or Assistant Director, Child Protection, provide information about the child and a photograph to police.		
	Director			• If a child is missing consider whether to authorise a *Missing Persons' Media Release*. • Inform the child's parents of the intention to publish information. Parents must be consulted if the child is not subject to a care by Secretary order or a long-term care order. • Consult with the Department's Media Unit. • Apply to the Children's Court, if seeking permission from the President of the Children's Court to publish information identifying a child as subject of proceedings in the Children's Court or subject to a Children's Court order. • Apply to the Secretary to seek permission to publish information identifying a child as subject to a Children's Court order. The Secretary has no power to grant permission for the		

				publication of identifying information about any other party or witness in Children's Court proceedings.		
	Victoria Police				• Under a *MPR*, the police have no powers to apprehend, detain, or return the child to a placement without a warrant. The police are responsible for informing the person who made the *MPR* of the child's whereabouts. On locating a missing child, the police are able to speak to the child and encourage the child to return to his or her placement.	
WA	Caregiver		• Conduct initial search for a child. • If child cannot be located, report child missing to WA police. • Inform Child Protection Worker of child's absence. • Report the young person as missing immediately in circumstances of high risk (suicidal, mental health, substance use, intent to inflict harm or commit a crime, in company of someone concerning)		• Notify police and CPW if child is found	*Child Protection and Family Support Children who are at risk of being abducted or removed or are missing Procedure*
	Child Protection Worker		• Ensure a report has been made to WA Police. • Advise parents if	• Liaise with police.	• Determine whether the child has suffered any injury or harm	*Child Protection and Family Support*

			appropriate. • Update databases - place an alert and change placement type to "Unknown". • Report the young person as missing immediately in circumstances of high risk.		and take any immediate action to address the needs of the child. • Notify the child's parents (if appropriate) or significant others of the child's return. • If no safety concerns exist, debrief the child about his/her absence (this may be on the next working day). • Remove the alert in Assist and update the placement type. • Place all records in the Objective Case File.	*Children who are at risk of being abducted or removed or are missing Procedure*

	Executive Director			• Approves assistance from the public - as a media statement will identify the child as being in the CEO's care.
				• Following approval (or concurrently), the District Director must provide as much information about the child as possible to the Director, Corporate Communications for a media statement to be prepared. This will include information about:
				  o the child's name and age;
				  o when he or she was last seen;
				  o what the child was wearing; and
				  o a physical description and a photograph (if possible).
						Child Protection and Family Support Children who are at risk of being abducted or removed or are missing Procedure

	Residential Facilities		• If a child leaves the home (or an outing), residential care			*Child Protection and Family Support*

			workers must try to accompany the child for as long as practicable to persuade him or her to return, or to determine the child's intended destination. • If a child leaves the home without permission, cannot be located or fails to return to the home by a set time, an absconder report must be completed immediately (if high risk) or **within 30 minutes.**			*Children who are at risk of being abducted or removed or are missing Procedure*

Appendix B

CREATE's Disclosure Protocols

Risk management and response for the research interview process with young people

The researcher will be guided by child aware principles to listen to and keep children and young people safe and well throughout the research process.

- o Promote child –safe engagement (protecting at all times the best interests of the child)
- o Understand and apply knowledge of the child/young person's wishes
- o Recognise and be sensitive to their unique perspective and experiences

- o Understand cultural influences
- o Listen to the child/young person as an active participant
- o Identify and respond to the needs of the child/young person during the interview and afterwards if necessary
- o Assess and respond to health, harm or risk needs of a child when raised

Recruitment

DCSSDS personnel will provide the PICF to YP who meet the criteria for participation (drawn from ICMS reports of missing children) and whose level of understanding and capacity to consent in the research has been assessed as appropriate. The Regional Directors will provide, contact details of young people to the researcher.

Pre interview

Review PICF explain benefits & risks, stress voluntary consent. Reaffirm risk of harm disclosure requirements. Check & assess need for support person. Confirm understanding/consent to continue. Reassess individual risks*.

Assess & screen

Establish YP needs & requirements for interview, place time and support. Provide options for adult/support person if requested & not available. Assess level of understanding & individual risk levels*.

Initial contact (by researcher to YP)

Explain the project criteria, benefits & risk to participation. Gain appreciation of the values underlying YP requirements and choices to participate or not.

Interview

Orientation prior to interviews including familiarisation with region contacts, agencies & service groups; resources available to support equality in communications & for counselling if need; establish localised protocols for responding to concerns; assessment of location of interview to ensure the space is welcoming & appropriate. Print lists for interviews

Check/reaffirm need for adult/support person. Ensure safe, honest and trusting communication acknowledging YP experiences & the way they want to interact, check regularly during the conversation that they feel safe & happy to continue. Use arts-based approach to reduce asymmetry and offer therapeutic method of engagement.

Responding to concerns- if YP's story/experiences raises concerns or reasonable grounds for belief of risk/harm to YP the researcher will stop the interview and discuss the concerns with the YP.

[1] Response to emotional distress will include a) acknowledging awareness of their distress, b) assessment of degree of severity, safety & wellbeing c) consultation & referral to appropriate personnel, counselling, support persons & CSO

[2] Response to disclosure of risk/harm to YP include a) support and acknowledge belief of harm b) reassure the YP of the importance of disclosure & researchers obligation to make a report c) assess degree of severity, safety & wellbeing d) report to appropriate CSO/ Practitioner/Manager e) consider specific cultural or other details that will help to care for the child

Post Interview

Review YP feelings of safety & wellbeing, remind them of the *Getting Help* information of the PICF & that they can ask questions about the research by calling the toll free number to talk with Karleen (Researcher). Advise them that a summary of the research will be available when ready if they email the researcher with their contact details. If concerns are raised to the researcher post the interviews responses will follow the Responding to concerns actions.

Young people can choose not to participate at any stage during the project. They can withdraw from the research up to four weeks after the interview. After four weeks it will not be possible to withdraw the information as the information will have been identified and become part of a report.

*If concerns are raised at any point during the recruitment/research phase including post-interview, responses will follow the *Responding to concerns* actions listed in the interview phase. Any information collected from participants in which there are concerns will be removed/not included in the research if it is within the four week period.

Abbreviations
CSO- Child Safety Officers
DCSSDS- Department of Child Safety Services and Disability Services
ICMS- Information Client Management System
PICF – Participant Information & Consent Form
YP- Yong Person or Child/ren

Relevant CREATE Policy documents
Code of Conduct
Code of Ethics
Privacy Management Policy
Risk Management Policy
Consultation Policy (with children and young people)

Other Relevant documents
Child Protection Act 99
Charter of Rights for kids in care
Response to children and young people sexually abused whilst placed in out-of-home care Policy No: CPD627-2
Strengthening Families Protecting Children Framework for Practice- Practice tools and processes - Harm Statements
The principles of Child Aware Approaches- The Good Practice Guide to Child Aware Approaches, Child Family Community Australia
<www.aifs.gov.au/cfca>

DISTRESS PROTOCOLS

as cited in (Draucker, Claire Burke, Donna S. Martsolf, and Candice Poole. "Developing distress protocols for research on sensitive topics." *Archives of psychiatric nursing* 23.5 (2009): 343-350.)

Hearing Our Voices Research Interview and Distress Protocol

The following protocol outlines the actions of the interviewer if, during the course of the interview, a participant exhibits acute distress or safety concerns- or imminent danger to self or others

Indication of distress during interview	Follow up Questions	Participant behavior/responses	Acute emotional distress/safety concern? Y/N	Imminent Danger? Y/N

Indicate they are experiencing a high level of stress or emotional distress, Or exhibit behaviours suggestive that the interview is too stressful such as uncontrolled crying, incoherent speech, indications of flashbacks etc.	1. Stop the interview
	2. Offer support and allow the participant time to recover/regroup
	3. Assess mental/emotional status
	  a. Tell me what thoughts you are having
	  b. Tell me what you are feeling right now
	  c. Do you feel you are able to go on about your day?
	  d. Do you feel safe?
	4. Determine if the person is experience acute emotional response beyond what would be normally expected in an interview about a sensitive topic			

Indicate they are thinking of hurting themselves	1. Stop the interview
	2. Express concern and conduct a safety assessment.
	  a. Tell me what thoughts you are having
	  b. Do you intend to harm yourself?
	  c. How do you intend to harm yourself?
	  d. When do you intend to harm yourself?
	  e. Do you mean to harm yourself?
	3. Determine if the person is an imminent danger to self.			

Indicate they are thinking of hurting others	1. Stop the interview
	2. Express concern and conduct a safety assessment.
	  a. Tell me what thoughts you are having.
	  b. Do you intend to harm someone else? Who?
	  c. How do you intend to harm them?
	  d. When do you intend to harm them?
	  e. Do you have the means to harm them?
	3. Determine if the person is an imminent danger to others			

Indicate they would be in any danger if anyone else found out about their participation in the study	1. Stop the interview
	2. Assess danger from the other person
	  a. How might you be in danger?
	  b. How might the other person find out you were participating?
	  c. What do you think the other person would do if they found out you were participating in the study?
	3. Determine if the person is experiencing a safety concern			

Actions for the interviewer

1. If a participant's distress reflects an emotional response reflective of what would be expected in an interview about a sensitive topic offer support and extend the opportunity to (a) stop the interview, (b) regroup, (c) continue.

2. If a participant's distress reflects acute emotional distress or a safety concern beyond what would be expected in an interview about a sensitive topic, but not imminent danger, take the following actions

   a. Encourage the participant to contact their mental health provider, Child Safety Officer and/or other local support person (determined prior to the interview) for follow up.

   b. Provide the participant with the contact information for support and encourage the participant to call if they experiences increased distress in the hours/days following the interview.

   c. Indicate that, with the participant's permission, the preferred support person will contact them in the next day to see if they are ok.

   d. Notify the Child Safety Officer or other local support person of the recommendations given to participant

3. If a participant's distress reflects imminent danger, take the following actions,

   a. Contact local authorities unless arrangements can be made for the participant to be transported to the emergency room by a preferred support person.

   b. Indicate that, with the participant's permission, the preferred support person will contact them in the next day to see if they are ok.

   c. Notify the Child Safety Services of the actions taken.

Appendix C

Young Person's Structured Interview

HOV Interview Pro forma

Demographics

1. Do you identify as:

◯ Female ◯ Male ◯ Other

2. How old are you?

[　　　　　⬍]

* 3. What is the post code where you live?

[　　　　　]

4. Where were you born?

◯ Australia

◯ Another country (please specify):

[　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　]

5. Where are you living at present?

[　　　　　　　　⬍]

6. Do you identify with any special cultural group?

◯ No special group

◯ Aboriginal

◯ Torres Strait Islander

◯ Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

◯ Other cultural group (please specify):

[　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　]

7. How many times have you entered the care system?

[　　　　　　⬍]

8. How long have you been living in out-of-home care?

[　　　　　　　⬍]

9. About how many placements (not counting respite) would you have had while in care?

[　　　　⬍]

1

Case Management

10. Is your placement managed by the Department or an agency?

○ Department ○ Agency

If an Agency, what is its name?

[   ]

11. How many main caseworkers (or CSOs) have you had while in care?

[⬍]

12. How often would you talk with a caseworker (CSO)?

[⬍]

13. How comfortable do you feel talking about things that are personal with your caseworker (CSO)?

Very uncomfortable   Very comfortable

○────────────────────────────────────   [   ]

14. Do you have a care or case plan?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

15. Are you receiving special support for your health, education, or anything else?

[   ]

16. Do you have a mobile or smart phone?

○ Yes ○ No

3

Family

17. Do you have any brothers and/or sisters (siblings)?

◯ Yes ◯ No ◯ Don't know

Siblings

18. Do you live with any of your brothers or sisters?

◯ Yes ◯ No

19. Do any of your brothers or sisters live in care but not with you?

◯ Yes ◯ No

20. Are any of your sisters or brothers not living in care?

◯ Yes ◯ No

21. If you are not living with any of your brothers or sisters, at about what age were you separated?

5

Other family

22. On average, how often would you contact (either face-to-face or by telephone) these members of your biological family who don't live with you?

	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Once every three months	Once every six months	Once a year	Rarely or Never	N/A
Mother	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Father	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sisters/Brothers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Grandparents	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other relatives	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

23. How do you feel about the amount of contact you have with these family members?

	Would like more	OK as is	Would like less	N/A
Mother	○	○	○	○
Father	○	○	○	○
Sisters/Brothers	○	○	○	○
Grandparents	○	○	○	○
Other relatives	○	○	○	○

6

School

24. Do you attend a Flexi School?

◯ Yes ◯ No ◯ Unsure

25. What grade are you in at school now?

[▲▼]

26. For those attending Flexi School: About how many of your contracted days did you miss in the last school year?

[▲▼]

27. Out of the 200 school days in a year, estimate how many days you missed in your last full school year.

0   200

◯── [   ]

28. What was the main reason you missed these school days?

[   ]

29. What would you like to do when you finish school?

[▲▼]

[   ]

7

Employment

30. How do you manage in terms of money?

○ Supported by carer

○ Receive an allowance from carer

○ Work casually

○ Work permanent part-time

○ Work full-time

○ Receive Centrelink support

○ Other support (please specify):

31. In your free time, what sort of things do you like to do?

8

General Knowledge

32. How much do you know about the United Nation's Rights of the Child"

○ Nothing

○ A little

○ Some things

○ A reasonable amount

○ Quite a lot

○ Everything

33. How much do you know about the Queensland Charter of Rights for those in care?

○ Nothing

○ A little

○ Some things

○ A reasonable amount

○ Quite a lot

○ Everything

34. Do you know what to do if you think something is not right in care?

○ Yes

○ No

9

Action

35. What would you do?

In Care

36. What things do you think are good in care (list up to three)?

Example 1 [   ]

Example 2 [   ]

Example 3 [   ]

37. What things do you think are not good in care (list up to three)?

Example 1 [   ]

Example 2 [   ]

Example 3 [   ]

38. How safe do you feel in the care system?

Not at all safe	Very safe	

39. Who would you say is the person you could most rely on to help you through a difficult time?

○ Carer

○ Caseworker (CSO)

○ Parent

○ Sibling

○ Grandparent

○ Other relative

○ Teacher

○ Partner

○ Friend

○ Community Visitor

○ Other person (please specify):

[   ]

11

40. What does "going missing from care" mean to you? (NB. Clarify the difference between **Missing** and **Absent**.)

41. How many times have you been missing from a placement while being in care?

○ Never

○ One

○ Two

○ Three

○ Four

○ Five

○ More than five (please say how many):

12

Missing 2

42. Of the times that you have been missing, what was the longest period you were absent?

| ⇕ |

[ ]

43. How long did you live, or have you lived in the placement from which you went missing?

| ⇕ |

44. What reasons led you to leave your placement and go missing?

[   ]

45. How did you feel you were being treated where you were living before going missing?

Not at all well   Extremely well

○──   [   ]

13

46. Did you tell any of these people how you were feeling before you left?

	Yes	No
Carer	☐	☐
Caseworker	☐	☐
Biological Parents	☐	☐
Grandparents	☐	☐
Siblings	☐	☐
Other relatives	☐	☐
Teachers	☐	☐
Friends	☐	☐
Community Visitor	☐	☐

Were there any other people you told?

47. Is there anything else you would like to say about what was happening in your life before you went missing?

48. Where did you go while you were "missing"?

14

Response to disclosure

49. How did those you told respond to what you said?

50. To what extent do you think these people heard what you were saying?

Not at all   Totally

51. How prepared were you for going missing?

I had everything I needed
(clothes, money,
I left without anything   medications)

52. Is there anything you can think of that might have stopped you leaving or made it less likely that you would want to go missing?

15

While missing

53. Did you contact any of these people while you were missing?

☐ Didn't contact anyone

☐ Carer

☐ Caseworker

☐ Biological parents

☐ Grandparents

☐ Siblings

☐ Other relatives

☐ Teachers

☐ Friends

☐ Strangers

☐ Community Visitor

☐ Other person (please specify):

☐

54. Did any of these people contact you while you were missing?

☐ No one contacted me

☐ Carer

☐ Caseworker

☐ Biological parents

☐ Grandparents

☐ Siblings

☐ Other relatives

☐ Teachers

☐ Friends

☐ Strangers

☐ Community Visitor

☐ Other person (please specify):

☐

16

55. How was contact made?

[ ]

56. How did you find getting these things while missing?

	Very difficult	Reasonably difficult	Somewhat difficult	Somewhat easy	Reasonably easy	Very easy	Did not need while missing
Food to eat	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Somewhere to sleep	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Health care	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Money	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

57. Did you attend school while you were missing from care?

◯ Yes ◯ No

58. Did you access welfare support services for help while missing?

◯ Yes ◯ No

59. If "Yes", which services?

[ ]

60. How safe did you feel while missing?

Not at all safe   Very safe

61. What were your greatest concerns while missing?

[ ]

62. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experiences while missing?

18

Return

63. Regarding the longest period you were missing, why did you return to care?

◯ I decided to return by myself

◯ I was found by the police

◯ I was found by caseworkers

◯ I was found by carer

◯ Family convinced me to return

◯ Friends convinced me to return

◯ Other reason (please say):

64. How concerned were you that others might be worried about you?

Not at all concerned		Very concerned	
◯————————————————————————————			

19

65. To what extent did you talk with these people about what had happened while you were missing?

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A reasonable amount	Quite a lot	A great deal
Carer	○	○	○	○	○	○
Caseworker	○	○	○	○	○	○
Police officer	○	○	○	○	○	○
Biological parents	○	○	○	○	○	○
Grandparents	○	○	○	○	○	○
Siblings	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other relatives	○	○	○	○	○	○
Teachers	○	○	○	○	○	○
Friends	○	○	○	○	○	○
Community Visitor	○	○	○	○	○	○

Other people (please say):

66. What things did you share with people about your experiences while missing?

67. Were there things you didn't share with people about your experiences while missing?

○ Yes ○ No

68. What were these things?

20

69. How concerned do you think these people were that you had gone missing?

	Not at all concerned	A little concerned	Somewhat concerned	Reasonably concerned	Quite concerned	Very concerned
Carer	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Caseworker	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Police officer	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Biological parents	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Grandparents	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Siblings	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other relatives	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teachers	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Friends	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Community Visitor	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other person (please say):

70. What happened when you returned to care after being missing?

71. What would you have liked to have happened when you returned from being missing?

72. To what extent do you feel the problems that led to your going missing have been solved?

Not at all   Completely

21

73. What do you think could be done to help the situation, if necessary?

74. Is there anything else you would like to say about going missing?

Thank you page

Thank you for sharing your story with me today.

75. In conclusion, is there anything else you would like to say about your experience living in out-of-home care?

Appendix D

Foster Carer's Survey

About This Survey

Who is this survey for?
We want to hear from foster and kinship carers in Queensland about your views and experiences of the circumstances when children go missing from care.

What is this survey about?
This survey is part of a research project to make sure the views, ideas and stories of children, and foster and kinship carers are heard. We want to understand the risks and impacts of missing person issues for children and young people in out-of-home care to develop preventive strategies and suitable interventions for when children go missing from their care in Queensland.

Taking Part?
Your participation will involve completing this anonymous survey. It will take approximately 20 minutes. This is entirely voluntary and you don't have to complete any question(s) you don't want to answer. We value your views and would encourage you not to leave any question blank. There are no right or wrong answers we are interested in your opinions.

How do I consent?
Submitting the completed questionnaire online is accepted as an indication of your consent to participate in this project.

Where can you get more Information?
If have any questions or require further information, you can call directly and speak to Joseph on 1800 655 105 (free call except from a mobile phone) or send an email to joseph.mcdowall@create.org.au; or Danny on 07-3256 6166 or send an email to danny.hemsley@fcq.com.au.

1. Do you want to read more information about participating?

○ Yes

○ No

Thank you for reading this information.
We really value your time to take part and share your views

Participant Information

Hearing Our Voices - Information for Foster Carers and Kinship Carers

Foster Care Queensland is working with the Queensland Family and Child Commission, Bravehearts and CREATE Foundation to hear the voices of children and young people about their experiences of going missing from their care placement. We are doing this research to make sure the views, ideas and personal narratives of children and foster carers and kinship carers are heard.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission is funding the research because it has a commitment to advocate for a system that truly meets the needs of children, young people and the people that care for them.

The research is being led by Dr Joseph McDowall from the CREATE Foundation.

You have been given this invitation because of your experience as a carer. We want to hear about your experiences of supporting children and young people in out-of-home care who have gone missing from care at some stage.

Why is this research being done?

The research is seeking to better understand the risks and impacts of missing person issues for children and young people in order to develop effective preventive strategies and appropriate interventions for when children go missing from out-of-home care in Queensland. The information will help us to understand how systems might be improved to support children and young people who go missing from out-of-home care and to guide practices to safeguard them.

In addition to the questions about your knowledge of and/or experience with children missing from care, we have provided an opportunity for you to share your experiences and perspective as a carer, and how you can be better supported to care for children and young people in out-of-home. The general questions in the second half of this survey will help us to identify what issues are important for you and the general or specific supports that may be needed.

Are you looking for people like me?

As part of the research we would like to invite you to participate in an online survey. You are invited to participate in this research because you are a foster carer or kinship carer in Queensland. We are seeking Queensland foster and kinship carers' views about the factors

associated with children and young people missing from care. Your participation will involve completing an online survey (approximately 20 minutes). The questions will ask you about your views in relation to your

* experiences of supporting children and young people in out-of-home care
* understanding of the factors that might contribute to the problems of going and being missing from care, and
* what happens when a child is missing or absent from a placement and when they return.

If these topics or questions are likely to upset you, please consider carefully participating further in this survey and discuss with your placement support worker.

What will happen if you participate?
Your participation will involve completing an anonymous questionnaire with likert scale answers (e.g. strongly agree – strongly disagree). Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you participate you do not have to complete any question(s) you are uncomfortable answering. We value your views and would encourage you not to leave any question blank. There are no right or wrong answers we are interested in your opinions. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future care arrangements.

About You

1. What is your age group?

- ◯ 18-25 years
- ◯ 26-30 years
- ◯ 31-35 years
- ◯ 36-40 years

- ◯ 41-45 years
- ◯ 46-50 years
- ◯ 51-55 years
- ◯ 56-60 years

- ◯ 61-65 years
- ◯ 66-70 years
- ◯ 71-75 years
- ◯ 76-80 years

2. Are you attached to a Foster and Kinship Care Agency?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

3. Which Agency are you affiliated with?

4. What is you carer approval type?

- ◯ Foster Carer
- ◯ Kinship Carer

- ◯ Foster and Kinship Carer
- ◯ Provisionally Approved Carer

5. Do you identify as: [Select all that apply]

- ◯ Aboriginal
- ◯ Torres Strait Islander

- ◯ Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- ◯ Anglo Australian

Other (please specify)

6. Which of the following best describes your relationship status? [Select one]

◯ Single   ◯ Married   ◯ Divorced

◯ De-facto   ◯ Widowed   ◯ Separated

Other (please specify)

[   ]

7. What is the highest level of education you have completed? [Select one]

◯ Pre Year 10   ◯ Year 12   ◯ Undergraduate degree

◯ Year 10   ◯ Vocational training   ◯ Postgraduate degree

About If A Child Goes Missing

1. How familiar are you with what you need to do as a Carer to inform people that the child/young person is missing?

0 Not at all familiar	10 Very familiar

2. Can you list three actions you might take to establish the whereabouts of a child/young person in your care if they were missing?

1

2

3

3. How prepared do you feel in managing a child at risk of going missing from care?

Not at all prepared	A little prepared	Reasonably prepared	Quite prepared	Very well prepared
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

4. How familiar are you with the *Reporting missing children: Guidelines for approved carers and care services?*

Not at all	A little	Reasonably	Quite	Very
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

5. In your opinion what would help to prevent a child/young person going missing?

6. Do you know where to get the *Missing Child Checklist* if you needed it?

○ Yes   ○ No

7. Has a child/young person placed in your care ever gone missing?

○ Yes

○ No

About When A Child Goes Missing

1. Can you please explain what happened when the child/young person in your care was missing?

2. How long was the child in your care missing?

3. How long did you wait before alerting others?

4. What time of the day were they missing?

5. How did this impact on your capacity to locate the child/young person?

6. What were your concerns when you realised the child or young person was missing?

7. Any other general comments?

8. In your opinion, which of these may have contributed to the child/young person going missing?

☐ problems with school

☐ peer pressure

☐ disagreement in discipline matters

☐ inappropriate relationships

☐ communication and information around placement and care

☐ gaining access to preferred wants and/or activities (e.g., fast food, hang out at the mall with friends, cigarettes, sex, drugs and alcohol)

☐ desire to reconnect with siblings, parent or other relatives

☐ wanting to visit friends in previous care/home location

☐ seeking independence

☐ conflict with friends

☐ coerced by others

☐ friction with children or young people in your care

☐ injury or stranded and unable to contact you

☐ miscommunication or misunderstanding of curfews/ carer expectations (e.g. stay out past curfew or going somewhere without calling or leaving a note)

☐ emotional or trauma related problems

☐ issues related to court rulings

☐ boredom

☐ disability or impairment

☐ risky behaviours

☐ Are there other reasons not listed here?

9. How useful was the *Reporting missing children: Guidelines for approved carers and care services* for you when the child/young person went missing?

◯ Very useful

◯ Quite useful

◯ Reasonably useful

◯ A little useful

◯ Not at all useful

◯ I do not know about the Guidelines

10. Did you use the *Missing Child Checklist* available from communities.qld.gov.au when the child/young person went missing?

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ I used another checklist (please specify)

11. Did you experience barriers to getting support to find the child/young person?

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Please explain why?

_____

12. Please indicate the people you contacted when you realised the child/young person was missing, and the order that you contacted them in (with 1 being the first).

⣿	⬍	Queensland Police Services
⣿	⬍	Caseworker
⣿	⬍	The child/young person's friends
⣿	⬍	Family
⣿	⬍	Child Safety Service Centre
⣿	⬍	Child Safety After Hours Service Centre
⣿	⬍	Media (including newspapers, television and radio)
⣿	⬍	Foster and kinship care support line
⣿	⬍	Other

13. Did you use any of the following to try to locate the child/young person while they were missing?

☐ E-mail notification

☐ Printed missing person poster

☐ Australian missing person register

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ Organised search party

other method (please describe)

_____

14. What do you think happened to the child/young person while they were missing?

About When The Child/Young Person Was Located

1. How was the child/young person located?

2. How long did it take to safely locate the child/young person?

3. After the child/young person was safely located:

	Yes	No
Did they return to your care?	○	○
Was a return interview conducted with the child/young person?	○	○
Was a return interview conducted with you?	○	○
Did you take any discipline actions with the child/young person as a result of them being missing?	○	○

4. After the child/young person returned:

What explanation did the child/young person give for missing?

What actions or strategies were put in place to ensure their safety?

What therapeutic care did the child/young person receive?

5. How involved were you in the development of a safety and support plan for the child/young person when they were safely located?

Not at all involved	Very involved

6. How satisfied are you with Child Safety Services response to the child/young person being missing?

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

Could you explain

7. How satisfied are you with the police response to the child/young person being missing?

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

Could you explain

8. How satisfied are you that the police and Child Safety Services worked together to respond to the child/young person being missing?

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

Could you explain

About Your Suggestions And Advices

1. Please provide any further comments or insights you have as a foster or kinship carer, about the risks and impacts of missing person issues for children and young people in out-of-home care.

2. Do you have any suggestions or comments you would like to make for Child Safety Services when responding to a child missing from care?

3. Do you have practical advice or ideas to help meet the diverse needs of children/young people in out-of-home care?

Completion of Survey

Many thanks, you have now completed the
Hearing Our Voices survey.

We know your time is important, and we appreciate the time you have taken to complete this survey. The survey is anonymous. All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially. Your responses will be kept secure by FCQ and CREATE. We will write a report and other publications at the end of our project.

If you have any questions or require further information, you can call directly and speak to Joseph on 1800 655 105 (free call except from a mobile phone) or send an email joseph.mcdowall@create.org.au; or Danny on 07-3256 6166 or send an email danny.hemsley@fcq.com.au.

Thank you for helping with this research project.

Appendix E

Reporting Missing Children: Guidelines and Checklist

Reporting missing children:
Guidelines for approved carers and care services

1. Purpose

To support approved foster and kinship carers and staff in care services when responding to situations where a child in out-of-home care is missing from where they live.

The guidelines are also relevant to carers who have been granted long term guardianship of the child under the *Child Protection Act 1999.*

2. Definitions

- A **child** is one who is placed in the custody or guardianship of the Chief Executive or with carers who have been granted long term guardianship of the child under the *Child Protection Act 1999.*

- A **direct carer** is an approved carer, long term guardian or staff member in a care service.

- A **missing child** is any child whose location is unknown **and** there are fears for the safety or concern for the welfare of that child.

- An **absent child** is a child who is absent for a short period without permission, and where the child's location is known or can be quickly established.

- The term **care team** is used to reflect those people engaged in the provision of care and support to the child. This may include direct carer, care services, child safety, police, education, the parents, friends and family of the child.

3. When a child is abducted

If you know or reasonably suspect a child has been abducted, contact police immediately by calling 000. Once police have been advised please contact your care service, the Child Safety Service Centre, or if after hours, the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre.

4. When a child is absent

In some circumstances, children absent themselves from where they should be for a short period and then return. They may be testing the boundaries, or have become side-tracked on their way home. The direct carer should make all reasonable attempts to locate the child and then will have to make a judgement about the seriousness of the situation and respond like any reasonable parent.

In most instances the child's whereabouts are known or can be readily confirmed. It is important the child's direct carer initiates action that a reasonable parent would take, to quickly establish the child's location and their safe return. This could include:

- searching the house and the premises including the garage, grounds and surrounding area
- asking friends or neighbours if they have seen the child
- contacting the child's school to determine if they have information about the child's whereabouts
- checking places where the child frequently attends, such as shops, park, friend's homes or other 'special places' they may go to
- alerting the child's friends and networks that you are looking for the child and seeking their assistance to find the child, where this is appropriate to do so
- engaging with other members of the child's care team.

It may also be appropriate to contact the child's parents or family members and enquire if the child is in contact with them. It may be preferable for this action to be undertaken by the child safety officer.

If there is doubt about how to respond, the direct carer should contact their agency or the Child Safety Service Centre for advice.

An absence may be an early indicator that a child is missing. Therefore the child's absence will need to be carefully monitored and escalated if the child becomes 'missing'.

5. When a child is missing
Regardless of the order or care agreement the child is subject to, if a child in out-of-home care is missing, immediate efforts are required to locate them.

As soon as possible after all reasonable attempts to find the child have failed, the child must be reported as missing to the police.

Responding quickly and appropriately when a child is missing is vital, even for short periods. It is important the child's direct carer initiates action that a reasonable parent would take, to secure the safe and timely return of the child.

6. Making a missing person report to police
The police require a 'missing person report' be completed. This is done by attending the local police station in person. Irrespective of how long you have been the child's direct carer, you are usually the best person to make the missing person report at the local police station.

If there are extenuating circumstances that prevent the direct carer from going to the police station, you must contact Queensland Police Service to discuss an alternative process to facilitate lodging the missing person report.

Police must be provided with as much relevant information as soon as possible to assist them in making a risk assessment and locating the missing child. The attached 'missing child checklist' is to be completed by members of the child's care team to assist police. It does not replace the need to make a missing person report. The checklist can be completed online or manually. Where information is not known, it can be added at a later time so there is no delay making the missing person report to police.

- It can be pre-populated and kept in a safe place, particularly where there have been previous incidents.

After making the missing person report to police, you are required to ask for and record the following details:

- **the date and time the missing person report was made**
- **the name of the police officer who received the missing person report**
- **the QPRIME number, obtained from the police officer taking the information.**

As soon as practical the direct carer must provide these details to the Child Safety Service Centre, if after-hours, to the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre and to their care service.

Child safety will liaise with the police and contribute any other relevant information about the child that the direct carer may not have been aware of at the time of making the missing person report.

147

7. Providing a photograph of the missing child

Police may request a recent photograph of the missing child to assist their efforts to locate the child. The direct carer should where possible, provide a clear recent photograph of the missing child to police.

In the event police need to release additional information with the photograph that **will identify** the missing child as being subject to any intervention under the *Child Protection Act 1999*, they (the police) **must** seek the written authorisation from the Chief Executive, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

Regional Directors (Child Safety) and Regional Executive Directors have the statutory delegations to provide written permission in these circumstances.

8. Publishing a photo to social media

A photo of the missing child can be published on social media by any member of the care team and/or Queensland Police Service, where the child is **not identified** as being subject to intervention under the *Child Protection Act 1999*. For example:

- It **is OK** to publish a photo on Facebook to say "Johnny Smith a member of my son's football team is missing. Here is a photo of him" – as this does not or is not likely to identify him as a child in care, nor does it identify and other person.
- It is **not OK** to post the same photo on Facebook and add the commentary "Here is a photo of Johnny Smith, a foster child that I am caring for who is missing" – as this identifies him as a child in care.

9. Involving mainstream media

Police make the decision to release information to mainstream media (including newspapers, television and radio) to help locate the child.

In these instances the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services will lead the development of a media strategy.

10. While the child continues to be missing

During the time a child is missing it will be important the child's care team continue to work together to regularly exchange information regarding the actions being taken to locate the child.

Actions which Child Safety Services may be undertaking during this time include:

- Supporting the carer and police to identify places where the child frequently attends.
- Contacting the child's family, friends and networks including previous carers to establish if the child has been located and/or identify other possible locations where the child may have gone.
- Taking other actions to locate the child, such as trying to make telephone contact, leaving messages on the child's phone and through other social networking sites used by the child.
- Cooperating with police regarding media coverage, such as 'amber alerts'.
- Developing, as appropriate, a media strategy in consultation with police, the direct carer and where appropriate, the child's parents.

Actions which the Queensland Police Service may be undertaking during this time are contained in chapter 12 of the *Queensland Police Operational Procedures Manual*. A copy of this manual is publicly available at https://www.police.qld.gov.au/corporatedocs/OperationalPolicies/opm.htm

11. When the missing child in located

When a missing child is located or returns to where they live it is important the direct carer or child safety officer **immediately advise the police**. This can be done by contacting **Policelink on 131 444** and proving the Queensland Police reference number (QPRIME number) which was provided when the missing person report was initially made to police. All members of the care team previously aware the child was missing.

The child safety officer will also meet with the child following their return to discuss the reasons why they went missing, explore whether the child experienced harm while missing, and to jointly identify any actions to support the child's ongoing safety and wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of the child going missing in the future. This meeting may be undertaken jointly with police. This should occur within 48 hours of the child being located.

The child safety officer will also arrange a meeting with the child's care team to discuss the reasons why the child went missing, and consider any actions to support the child's ongoing safety and wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of the child going missing in the future.

This may include reviewing the placement agreement, safety and support plan and/or the child's case plan.

12. When a child is frequently missing

If a child is frequently missing, the child's care team will identify strategies to reduce the likelihood of recurrence and the actions required when the child is missing.

The child safety officer will partner with other members of the child's care team and the child to review the placement agreement, safety and support plan and/or child's case plan.

A missing child checklist can also be pre-populated with the required information and copies given to the child's care team.

13. Phone numbers

- The addresses of police stations are listed under 'Police Service' in the White Pages of the telephone book and on the Queensland Police Service web site, under 'station locator'.

- Foster and kinship care support line is available Monday to Friday 5pm to 11:30pm; Saturday and Sunday 7am to 11:30 pm. Phone: 1 300 729 309.

- Child Safety After Hours Service Centre is available for after-hours advice and support relating to the management of children subject to child protection orders or ongoing intervention by Child Safety Services, where an immediate response is required. They can be contacted on 1800 177 135 or 3235 9901.

MISSING CHILD CHECKLIST

This form authorises the Queensland Police Service to initiate appropriate actions.

- The checklist is NOT a substitute for making a missing person report to the police.

- It is designed to provide guidance about the kind of information required to locate the missing child.

- You don't need to be able to answer every field. Where information is not known it can be provided later and should not delay taking immediate action.

- The child's care team members may contribute relevant information where this is not known to you at the time.

- It can be completed online or completed manually.

- A copy is to be given to police.

- It can be pre-populated and kept in a safe place, particularly where there have been previous incidents.

150

1. Details of missing child	
First name: Including aliases:	Surname: Including aliases:
DOB and age:	☐ Male ☐ Female Mobile number:

2. Description of missing child (if possible, provide police with a current photo)	
Height:	Build:
Colour of eyes:	Hair colour/length/style (please specify):
Complexion: ☐ Fair ☐ Light ☐ Olive ☐ Tanned ☐ Dark ☐ Very dark	Distinguishing features: ☐ Tattoos ☐ Birthmark ☐ Piercings ☐ Scars Other:
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (please specify): ☐ Aboriginal ☐ Torres Strait Islander ☐ Both ☐ Neither	Cultural and linguistically diverse background (please specify):

3. Circumstance of disappearance		
Where was the child last seen:	Date:	Time:
Clothing/personal items (worn/taken):		
Name of anyone with the child:		

Information about the last person to see the child	
Name:	Relationship to child:
Address:	Phone numbers

Reasons for disappearance (e.g. Notes/letters left by child, did the child leave willingly or were they taken? Any family or relationship issues or conflict, including domestic violence that may have influenced the disappearance?)

Details of inquiries made/actions taken to locate the child prior to contacting Queensland Police Service	
☐ Search of house and premises ☐ Enquiries with friends or neighbours ☐ Checking child's likely places to visit	☐ Alerting child's friends and networks to be on lookout ☐ Leaving messages on child's mobile, Facebook ☐ Telling CSSC or Child Safety After Hours Care Service
4. Concerns/risks/vulnerability for the child	**If 'yes', provide details**
Age of the child (child is under 13 years old) Please check: ☐ Yes ☐ No	
Medical condition (life threatening illness or requires significant medication which is not in the persons possession) Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Intellectual impairment (functioning at an age level of 10 years old or less) Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Mental health (diagnosed with a psychiatric or psychological disorder such as anxiety, depression) Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Substance misuse (known or suspected to be misusing alcohol, drugs or other substances) Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Criminal involvement (is known or suspected to commit offences) Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Relationship issues (dealing with a current or recent relationship breakdown) Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Significant life event (suicide attempt/ bullying) Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Out of character (recent behaviour that is unusual for child) Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Event (natural disaster/at sea/plane crash)	

Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Environmental factors (significant weather conditions (hot, cold, wet, terrain) Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	
Previous incidents of child missing and location unknown Please check: ☐Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown	

Any special/complex behavioural or emotional needs (e.g. violence, aggression, possession of weapons)

5. Current child protection order (CPO) or authority relating to the child	
Type of authority (Please check) ☐ Assessment order ☐ Care agreement ☐ Interim CPO custody to Chief Executive ☐ CPO custody to Chief Executive ☐ CPO guardianship to Chief Executive	**Child's current placement** (Please check) ☐ Foster care ☐ Kinship care ☐ Residential ☐ Semi-independent living ☐ Safe house Other
Name of CSO:	Contact phone no:
Child safety service centre:	

6. Additional information which may assist in locating the child
Places frequented:
Parents or significant family members:
Friends or associates:
Facebook, email or other social media details:
School or employment:
Child's bank account details (for older children):
Name and contact details of any person who may be likely to assist (relatives, friends etc):

153

7. Actions after child is located — where child is to be returned to?	
Name:	
Address:	Phone number:
Additional information:	

8. Person who reported child missing to QPS	
Name of carer/worker/position:	
Child Safety or agency:	Phone number:
QPS station/unit:	Date and time:
QPRIME number:	