

# **The Children's Society**



## **Birmingham Scrutiny Enquiry - Missing Children**

**21<sup>st</sup> of October 2015**

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1.	<h2>Introduction</h2> <p>The Children's Society (TCS) helps change children's stories, working towards a country where all children are free from disadvantage.</p> <p>We've been trusted for over a century to drive change locally and nationally and provide support where it's needed most. We base this vital work on the experiences of every child we help and the solid evidence we gather.</p> <p>Every year, we work directly with more and more of the most disadvantaged children. We do this through our extensive network of frontline services, supported by an army of volunteers. Together we tackle child poverty and neglect head on. Our services range from helping families trapped in debt, child runaways and young carers, to stopping child sexual exploitation.</p> <p>We focus on helping young people aged 10-18 who are most marginalised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• at risk of, or affected by, sexual exploitation;</li> <li>• missing from care or home;</li> <li>• affected by poor emotional wellbeing or poor mental health;</li> <li>• impacted by involvement with the care system;</li> <li>• substance misusers or who are affected by parental substance misuse.</li> </ul> <p>TCS's commitment to supporting children at risk is more relevant now than ever. We have a vision of a country where children are free from disadvantage. Our mission states that we fight for change and support disadvantaged children to have better lives.</p> <p>We both target the specific issues that lead children and young people to go missing from care and respond to the wider challenges that they face in life. Workers follow best practice in relation to engaging young people – through use of creative, persistent and flexible engagement techniques (Warrington &amp; Shuker, University of Bedfordshire; May 2015).</p>
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2.	<h2>What is Missing from Home or Care</h2> <p><i>ACPO Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons</i> (2013) uses the following definitions (as used by the police):</p> <p><b>Missing:</b>      'Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another'</p> <p><b>Absent:</b>      'A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be'</p> <p><i>Statutory Guidance On Children Who Run Away Or Go Missing From Home Or Care</i> (January 2014) uses the following definitions:</p>
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<b>Away from Placement without Authorisation:</b>	A Looked After child whose whereabouts are known but who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.
<b>Young Runaway:</b>	A child who has run away from their home or care placement, or feels they have been forced or lured to leave.
<b>Missing Child:</b>	A child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
<b>Missing from Care:</b>	A <b>Looked After</b> child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts are not known.

The police classification of a person as 'Missing' or 'Absent' will be based on on-going risk assessment. Note that **Absent** within the police definition would not include those defined as **Away from Placement Without Authorisation** above: a child whose whereabouts are known would not be treated as either 'Missing' or 'Absent' under the police definitions.

Children represented approximately two thirds of the estimated 360,000 missing person incidents in 2009 - 2010 (*Missing persons: data and analysis 2009 - 2010*, National Policing Improvement Agency, 2010). The reasons for running away are varied, complex and unique to individual children. The most frequent reason given is 'problems at home'. Physical abuse from adults, mental health and substance misuse problems, and involvement in criminality are commonly associated with children running away.

Missing children are at high risk of physical and sexual abuse, criminality and homelessness. Persistent running away is increasingly understood to be an indicator that a child may be a victim of sexual exploitation (*Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care*, The All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care leavers, 2012). Each locality delivering services to young people and children missing from home or care has a local awareness of this link. This highlights TCS's commitment to open up new referral pathways via assertive engagement in order to identify all young people in need of a service.

3.

### National context

For over 25 years TCS has campaigned to protect young runaways through our policy and practice work. TCS has produced 3 major research reports (Still Running I; II and III) and campaigns focused on missing young people leading to lasting policy and practice change with the publication of the Guidance on Runaways and Missing from Home and Care (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009).

The current statutory guidance defines a missing child or a young runaway as 'children up to the age of 18 who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave, or whose whereabouts are unknown' (*Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care*, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). This guidance makes it a requirement for Local Authorities to prepare local Runaways and Missing

from Home and Care protocols and offer all children that run away or go missing from home or care an independent return interview.

A national strategy to reduce the number of children and vulnerable adults who go missing from home or care was published by the Home Office in December 2011 (Missing Children and Adults: A Cross Government Strategy, Home Office, 2011). The action plan sets out how local and central government should respond to the problem, including plans for preventative work, education and early intervention.

The strategy followed an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) inquiry into the support for families of missing people in July 2011, which made the overarching recommendation that there should be a cross-government outcomes policy framework for missing persons.

The evidence base for this intervention includes:

- Ofsted (2013), *Missing Children*.<sup>1</sup>
- The Children's Society (2007), *Stepping up – the future of runaways services*.<sup>2</sup>
- The Children's Society (2011), *Still Running 3: early findings from our third national survey of runaways*.<sup>3</sup>
- The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012), *Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care*.<sup>4</sup>

4.

## **Local Context**

### **Our work in Birmingham 2004 - 2012**

In 2004 The Children's Society and Birmingham City Council Social Care and Health joined together to establish a project providing an independent visit to children and young people who went missing from care. The project was named LAMP (Looked After Missing Persons).

In 2005 - 2006 LAMP employed a part time Programme Manager and two part time project workers. The Children's Society put in additional income to allow the project to move the Programme Manager from part time to full time and to provide seven hours of administrative support.

In 2006 - 2007, Birmingham Community Safety Partnership funded an Enhanced Visit Programme for Persistent Runaways. The Pilot Programme was devised by the LAMP Project to respond to issues affecting young people who persistently abscond or run away from Local Authority care. The Pilot Programme sessions were based on the five Every Child Matters outcomes and the Self Development Model used by the Foyer Foundation. This Programme was designed to help the young people consider what is happening in their lives, the risks

<sup>1</sup>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/419144/Missing\\_children.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419144/Missing_children.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/research\\_docs/Stepping%20up%20-The%20future%20of%20runaways%20services.pdf](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/research_docs/Stepping%20up%20-The%20future%20of%20runaways%20services.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/still\\_running\\_3\\_full\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/still_running_3_full_report_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint\\_appg\\_inquiry\\_-\\_report...pdf](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf)

they are taking, their attitudes and behaviour, relationships and how they see their future.

In 2007 - 2008 we re-launched as Safe in the City Birmingham, bringing together LAMP and the new Birmingham Young Runaways Initiative.

During 2007, the Community Safety Partnership funded The Children's Society for a 6-month pilot project to look at the issue of young people missing from home across two police Operational Command Units (OCU).

Funding from the Big Lottery for 3 years (from September 2007) enabled The Children's Society to expand this initial pilot and work across Birmingham, providing an independent return visit to young people known to police or other agencies to be missing. The Birmingham Young Runaways Initiative (BYRI) was the result. This return visit looked at reasons why the child had run away; where they had been, with whom, and whether there were safeguarding issues that needed addressing. As part of this work, the project worker reported to the Missing Children and Young People's sub-group to feed into strategic processes for the City.

In addition, Birmingham Community Safety Partnership funded us to develop support for persistent runaways, following the Enhanced Visit Pilot.

In 2008 - 2009, we set up The Safe Friends Scheme to run alongside the Birmingham Young Runaways Initiative – a dedicated volunteer mentoring and befriending service for young runaways, offering consistent and long term support from adult volunteers. Our Persistent Runaways work was developed into The Game Plan, a 10 session intensive programme, allowing young people to define their goals and assess their progress throughout. Together, The Game Plan and the Safe Friends Scheme offered a long term (up to 2 years) package of intensive development and support work for young people who run away.

In 2009 - 2010, we opened the Building Bridges Project, a partnership between The Children's Society and Spurgeons, funded by the Parenting Fund for two years. Our work through BYRI had highlighted the needs of the parents of children and young people who run away from home, many of whom were in need of parenting advice and support which simply was not available for the parents of older children and teenagers. Building Bridges offered individual and group support to parents, using the Triple P and Strengthening Communities programmes.

In addition, we were commissioned by Birmingham City Council to convene and chair strategy meetings for children and young people who had been missing for more than 72 hours.

In 2010 - 2011, with the Big Lottery funding for BYRI ending, we published 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind' a report on running away from home.

During this year, Safe in the City Birmingham took on management of staff at Dudley Circles Restorative Justice project, and work began on Restorative Justice in Birmingham Children's Homes, funded by Birmingham City Council.

In December 2010, Birmingham decommissioned our work on 72hr meetings and Persistent Runaways (The Game Plan).

In 2011 - 2012, the Safe in the City Birmingham team was restructured, and we were

successful in obtaining funding from The Children's Society nationally to continue direct work with runways in Birmingham, in addition to the ongoing funding for LAMP. The programme hosted the Birmingham launch of the Make Runaways Safe campaign with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

In 2012 - 2013, we received funding from Birmingham City Council for LAMP and for the first time for Missing from Home for our work with children and young people who go missing in Birmingham. Most of our direct work with young runaways was funded by The Children's Society, through an allocation of unrestricted funds, which allowed us to maintain our intensive work, support for families, and work with volunteers where external funding had come to an end.

## 5. **Our work in Birmingham 2013 - 2014**

The funding in Birmingham was £35,000 from the City Council and about £75,000 funding from the Children's Society. Towards the end of the year the Birmingham Children's Safeguarding officers awarded TCS some £45,000 to work with intensive cases for a 12 month period.

In 2013 the Birmingham runaways project (Safe in the City/LAMP) and the Coventry CSE project (Streetwise) were amalgamated into the 'Streetwise Birmingham and Coventry' service.

Over 2013 - 2014 the Streetwise service has reached just over 8,000 children and young people in Birmingham and Coventry to talk to them about these issues, risks and behaviours. This has been achieved through the provision of advice, return visits, 1:1 sessions, assemblies and group school sessions.

In 2013 - 2014 Streetwise Birmingham received **1181** referrals **584** of these referrals were children and young people (CYP) missing from care.

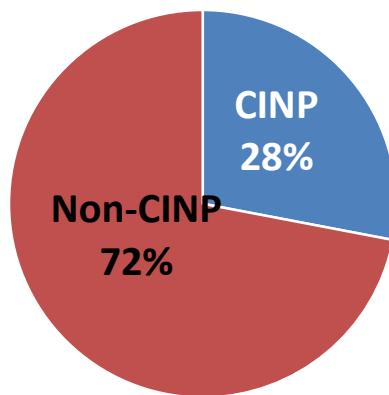
The RAG system (Red, Amber, Green) continues to be used to triage each referral or missing and found report. The RAG rating is dependent on the level of risk identified within each referral (number of missing episodes, associates, CSE, places visited, length of missing episode etc).

Green referrals have less than 2 missing episodes and few or no risk factors. The parent/carer and young person each receive a letter and leaflet offering advice around running away.

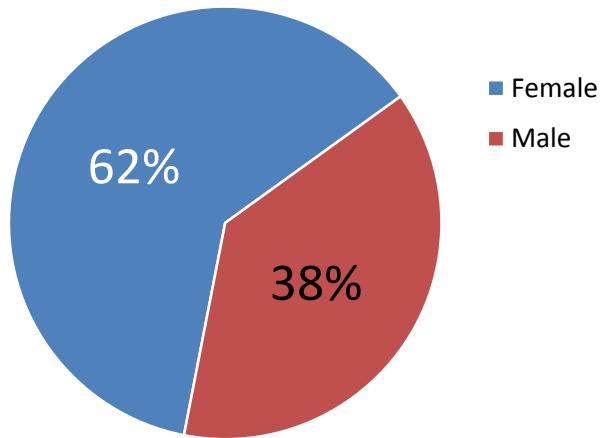
Amber referrals require further information from agencies, young people or families, with the possibility that a return interview may be needed due to risk factors.

Red referrals require a return interview due to identified risk factors. These include (but are not exclusive to) more than 2 missing episodes, associates, places visited, length of missing episode, substance misuse, domestic violence, learning difficulty, troubled family.

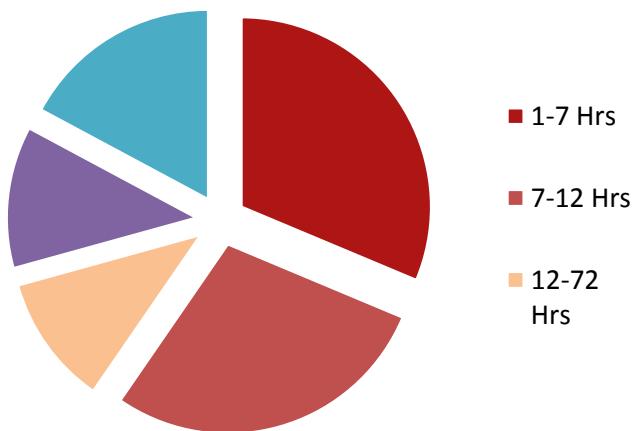
### Ratio of CYP Requiring CINP Referrals



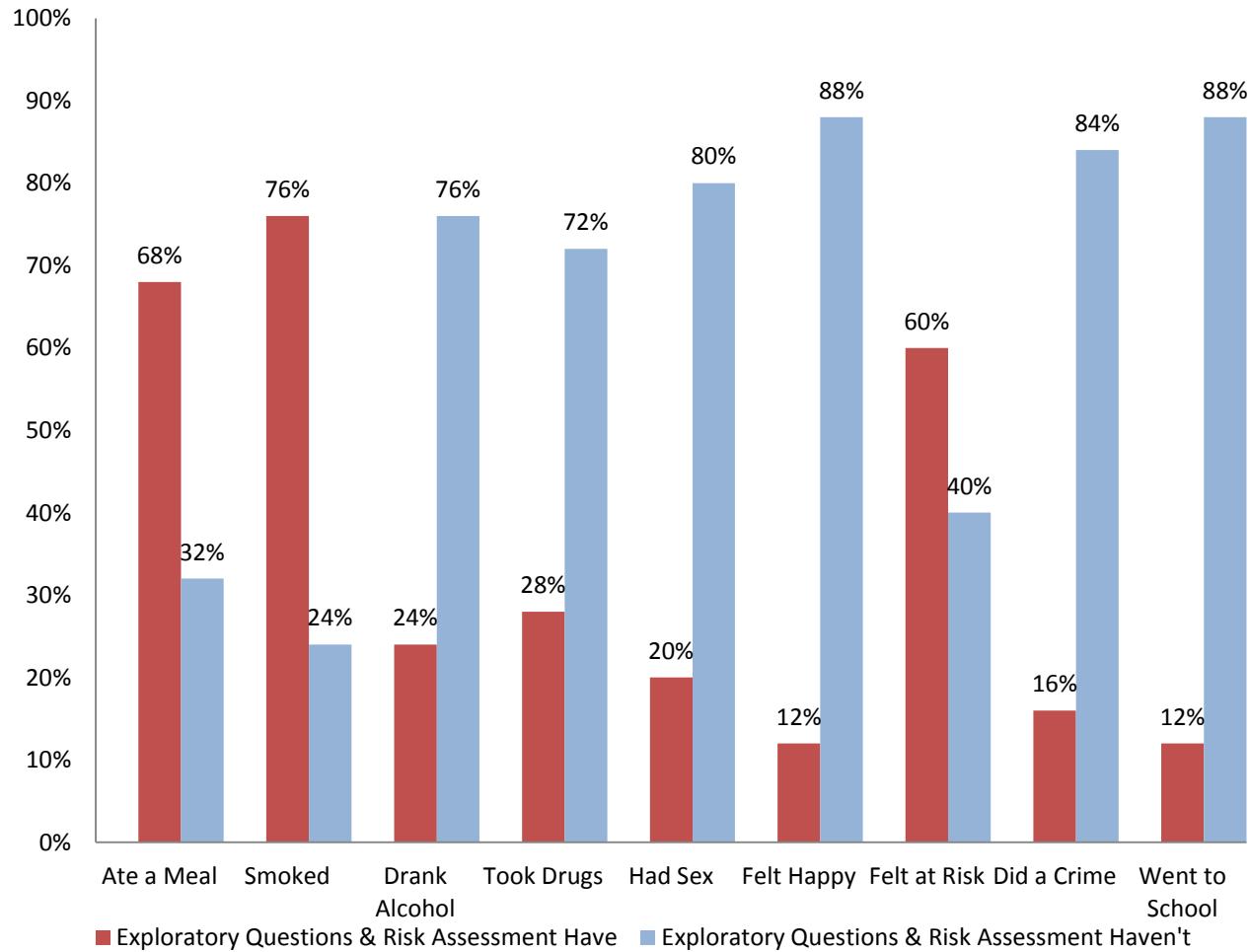
### Sex Ratio of CYP Return Interviews



### Time Missing



## **Exploratory Questions & Risk Assessment**



6.

### **Our work in Birmingham 2014 – 2015**

The work in this year was significantly different in the second six months of the year.

#### **April 2014 – September 2015**

From April 2014 The Children's Society continued to provide Return Home Interviews as best as possible given the resources available.

Funding at the start of this year consisted of some £35,000 from Birmingham City Council, the £45,000 funding brought forward from 2013 - 2014 from the Safeguarding Board for intensive support cases and about £75,000 funding from The Children's Society. However our activities were continuing to be constrained by demand being significantly greater than our staff capacity to respond.

The Children's Society approached the City Council in September 2014 with an urgent request for further resources – which were made available within a matter of days. This was a six month grant for some £83,000 that enabled additional staff to be recruited and deployed.

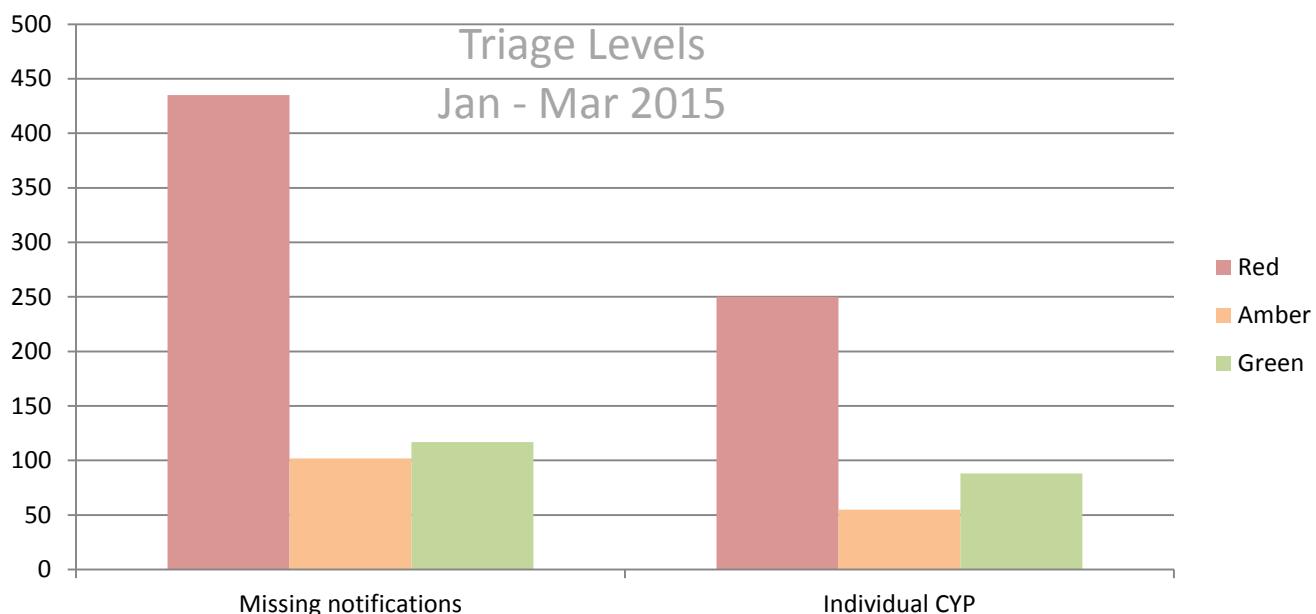
### October 2014 – March 2015

During October 2014 – March 2015 Streetwise Birmingham dealt with 654 missing episodes (equating to 1308 missing and found notifications) for 393 children and young people (CYP).

100% of these young people were contacted by Streetwise (this was by phone or letter).

In addition, we have been able to analyse the West Midlands Police absent statistics for the same period and the implications this has for managing missing episodes.

The number of CYP classed as Red has increased from the October – December 2014 figures (54.8%):



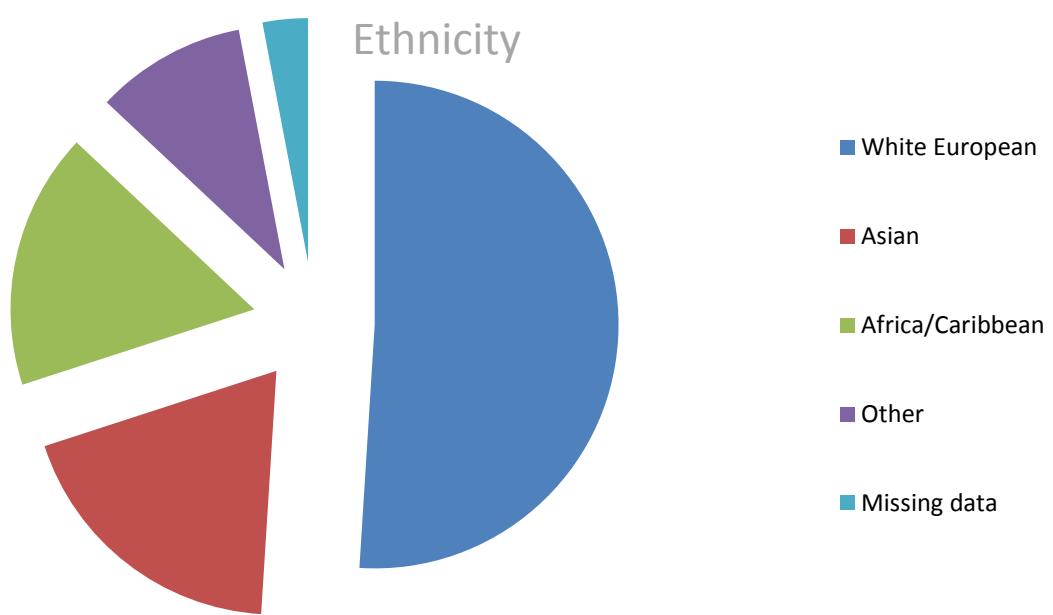
### Gender

The proportion of boys to girls referred remains constant across the whole period at about 74% girls and 26% boys. In our interim report we did not analyse how many from each gender were triaged as red. However, in the period from January 2015 we found that of the 146 girls referred, 79% were triaged as red compared to 61% of boys. It is difficult to say with certainty why this is because it could be due to a number of factors:

- The information provided on the police compact sheets/referrers does not highlight risk as often with boys
- A general societal attitude that boys are not as much at risk as girls
- Bias by Streetwise in assessing risk

## Ethnicity

- White European - 51%
- Asian - 19%
- Africa/Caribbean - 17%
- Other - 10%
- Missing data - 3%



Thus 46% of missing CYP are from BAME communities.

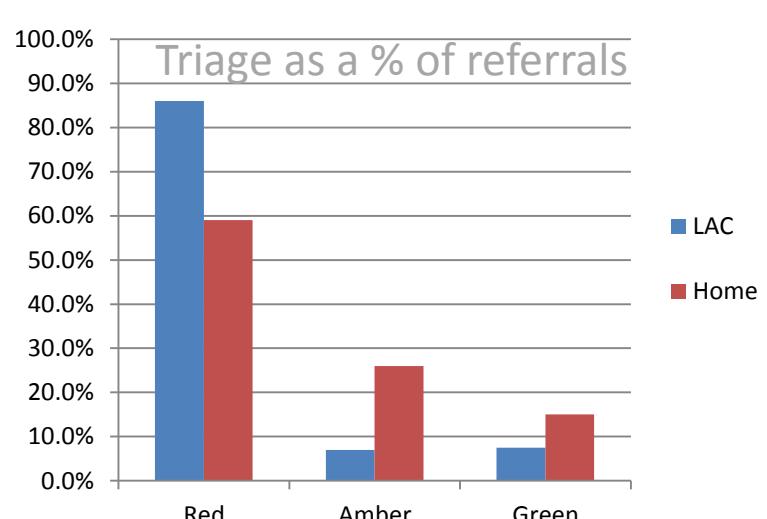
## Home or Care?

In our interim report we found that the number of referrals for young people in care (51%) was slightly more than those from home (49%). From January 2015 until April the figures were significantly different:

Of the 185 CYP **119 (64%)** were in care and **66 (35%)** were living at home.

Of those CYP referred who were in care:

- **86% (102)** of them were offered return interviews i.e. triaged as red,
- **7% (8)** were classified as amber i.e. requiring more information, and
- **7.5% (9)** classified as green and thus received a letter informing them of where to go to



for advice and information.

Of those that lived at home:

- **59% (39)** were classified as red
- **26% (17)** as amber
- **15% (10)** as green.

It has been reported that return interviews weren't being done on CYP in care but these figures show that in fact Streetwise offered proportionately more return interviews to CYP in care than to those living at home. This is to be expected if one assumes that those CYP in care are more likely to exhibit concerning behaviour. The gap in perception could be due to:

- More CYP in care refusing a return interview when offered
- A misunderstanding by care staff of what constitutes a return interview vis-à-vis a police safe and well check, and whether all CYP in care get a safe and well check
- A misunderstanding by care staff of whether incidents are being classified as absent rather than missing and so not requiring a return interview.

## Comprehensive Data Analysis

This information is based on the young people who were triaged as red and offered return interviews.

At the point of the interim report 86% of red triaged CYP were offered a return interview. From January to April this figure went down to 46%. This is due to:

- A protracted period of funding uncertainty leading to a number of staffing issues that impacted our ability to deliver outputs and outcomes: redundancy notifications; staff vacancies; low staff morale; project wind-down. This issue emphasises the need to secure medium term funding in order to prevent funding uncertainty affecting the outputs.
- An increase in the need to offer intensive support work impacted on the team's capacity to carry out additional return interviews between January and March. This was exacerbated by the staffing issues mentioned above.

However, between October 2014 and April 2015, 160 young people were offered a return interview and 65% accepted and completed an interview. Given the high levels of disengagement by this group of young people this is a high success rate.

Of the 56 CYP's who did not undertake a return interview, approximately 24% (39) refused and the remainder were added to the waiting list.

In addition between January and April Streetwise has completed Intensive Support Work with 53 individual CYP's. This has been follow up work identified as needed through the initial return interview. Topics covered within these sessions include (but are not exclusive to) the risks of running away and going missing, healthy relationships, grooming, sex and the law, identity, confidence and self-esteem, CSE, internet safety.

## Missing From Locations

**East:** 48% of referrals

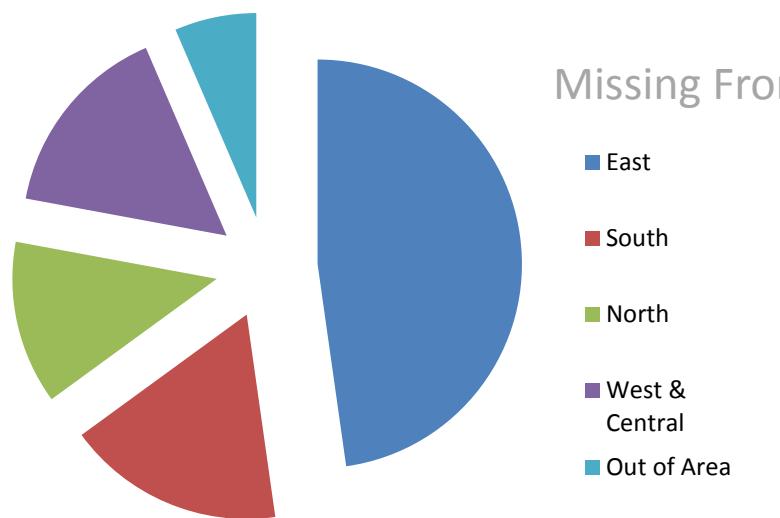
**South:** 17.3% of referrals

**North:** 13% of referrals

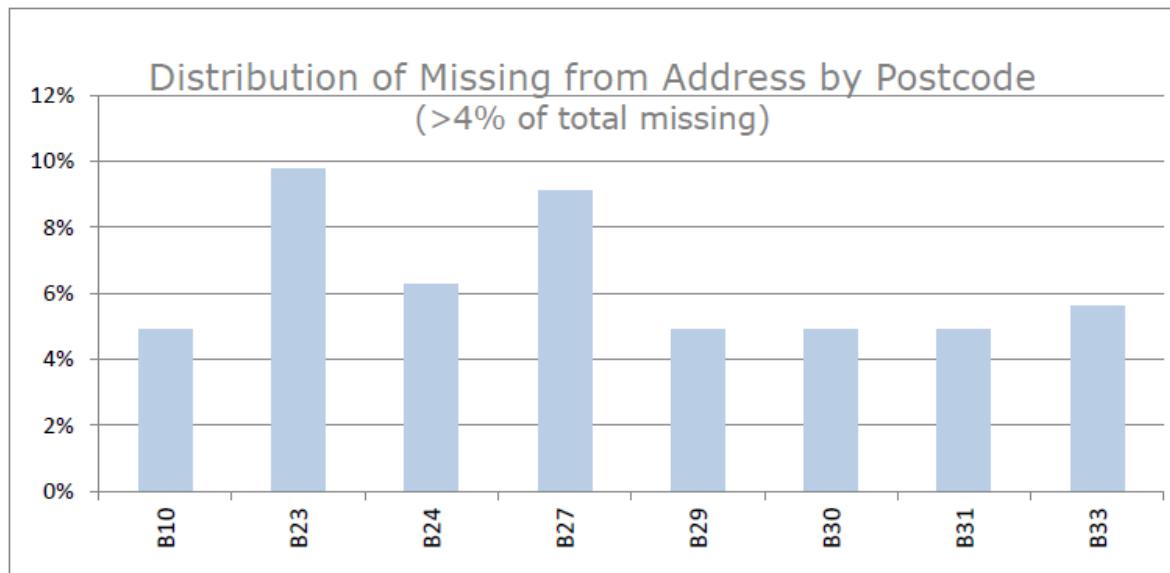
**West & Central:** 15.7% of referrals

**Out of Area\***: 6.5% of referrals

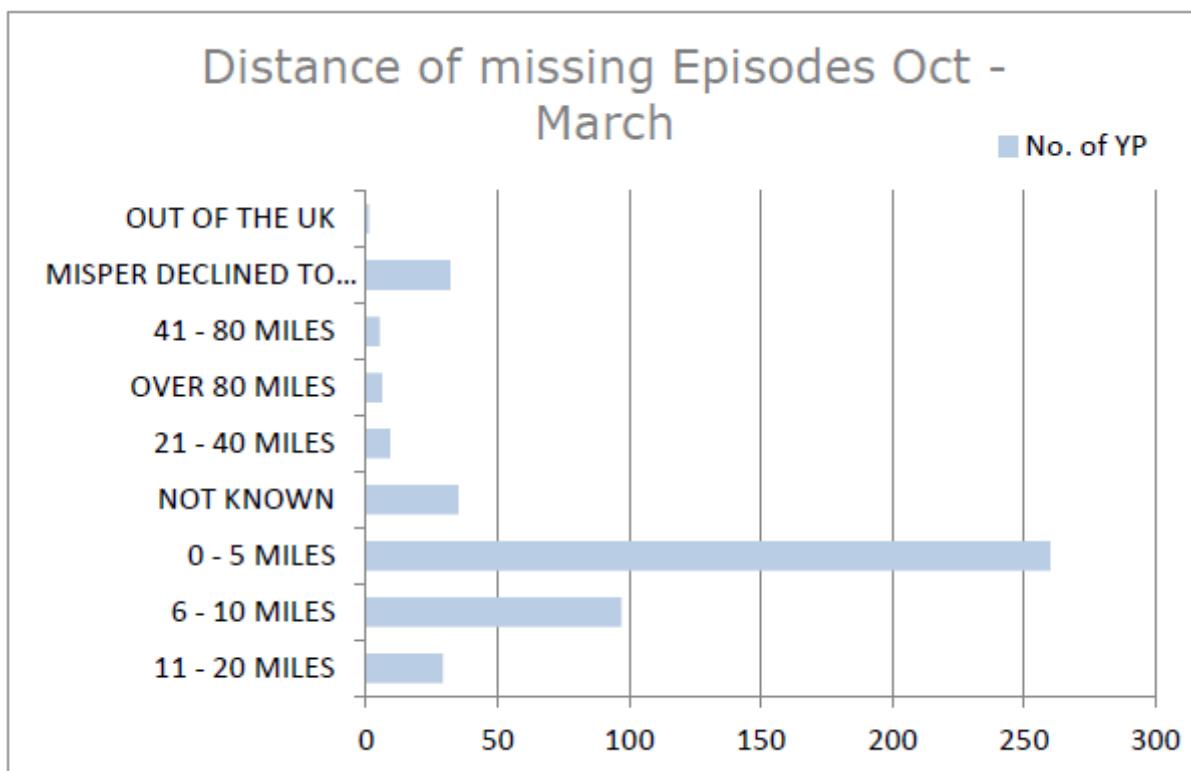
*\*Out of area young people who do not reside in Birmingham*



The following chart shows that approximately 10% of missing episodes in the city between November and April were from the B23 postcode (Erdington, Stockland Green, Short Heath, Perry Common) and 9% of missing episodes were generated by the B27 Postcode area of the city (Acocks Green). These are the two areas of the city young people are most likely to run from.



## How far did young people run to?

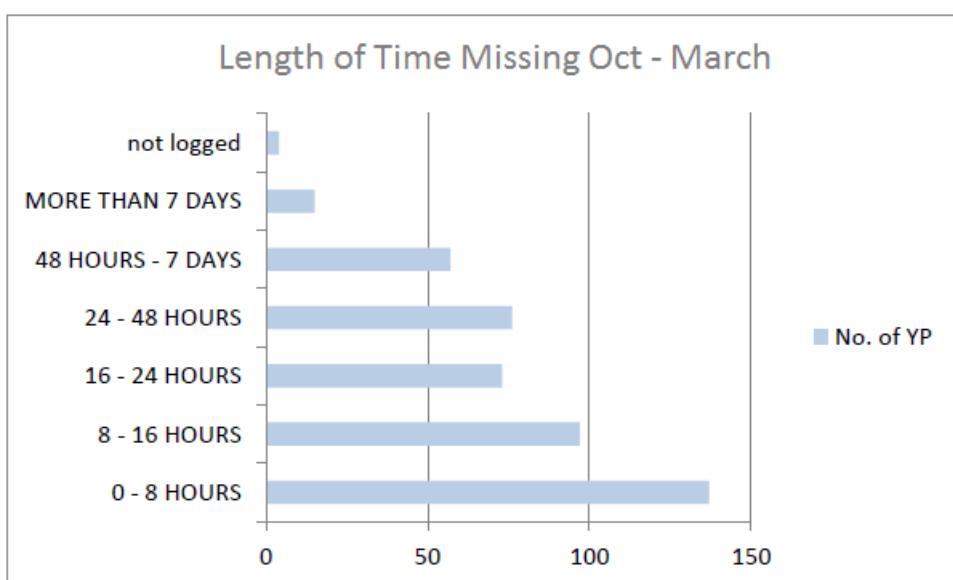


- **59%** of CYP were found between 0–5 miles from their home
- **22%** were found between 6-10 miles  
On the whole these will be CYP found within Birmingham – a total of 81%
- **6.6%** were found between 10-20 miles
- **2%** were found 21-40 miles  
These CYP would be mainly found in the West Midlands region – nearly 9%
- **1.1%** were found between 41- 80 miles
- **1.3%** were found over 80 miles way  
These will be found in other UK regions – 2.4%
- **7.3%** CYP declined to give information.

Thus 89% are likely not to have travelled outside the West Midlands region when they were found.

## Length of time missing

<b>0 – 8 hrs</b>	30%
<b>8 – 16 hrs</b>	21%
<b>16 – 24 hrs</b>	16%
<b>24 – 48 hrs</b>	16.5%
<b>2 – 7 days</b>	12%
<b>7+ days</b>	3%
<b>Missing Data</b>	0.8%



Thus whilst **51%** of CYP are not missing for longer than 16 hrs, we don't have the data to say whether this was overnight, although it is likely that this will usually be the case. What is of additional concern are the percentage that went missing for 24–48 hrs, and in total 21.5% were missing for more than 24 hrs and that the numbers of CYP who were missing for more than two days stands at **15%**.

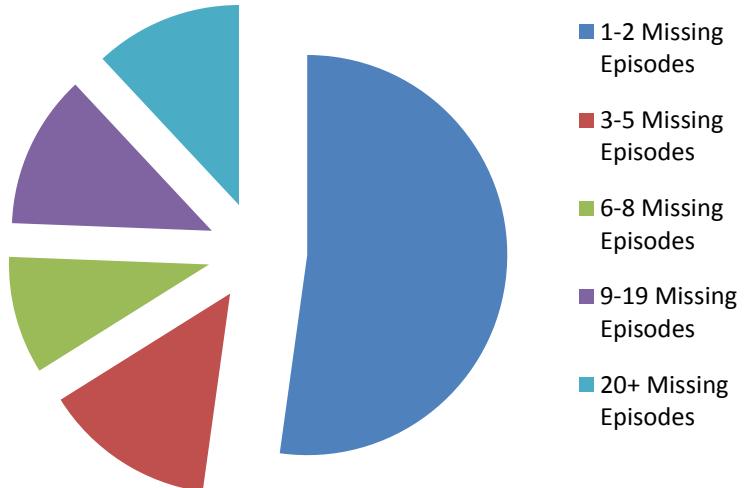
## Persistent Missing

Streetwise classify a persistent missing person as someone who has more than 3 missing episodes.

November – April Figures:

1-2 missing episodes: 214 (52%)  
 3-5 missing episodes: 57 (14%)  
 6-8 missing episodes: 39 (9.5%)  
 9-19 missing episodes: 51(12.4%)  
 20+ missing episodes: 49 (12%)

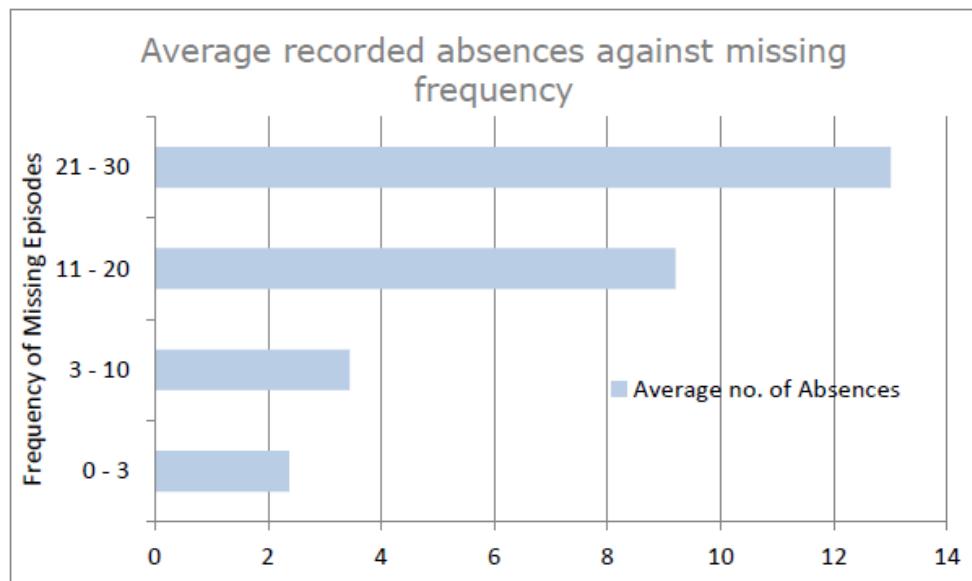
## Frequency of missing episodes per young person



The top three persistent runaways for the period January – March 2015 are all from care and together have a total of 34 missing episodes between them.

In the period from January to March 2015 there was a significant increase in the number of CYP who had more than 9 missing episodes. From October to December 13.4% of CYP had more than 9 missing episodes whereas after January 2015 this went up to 38.9%. This may go

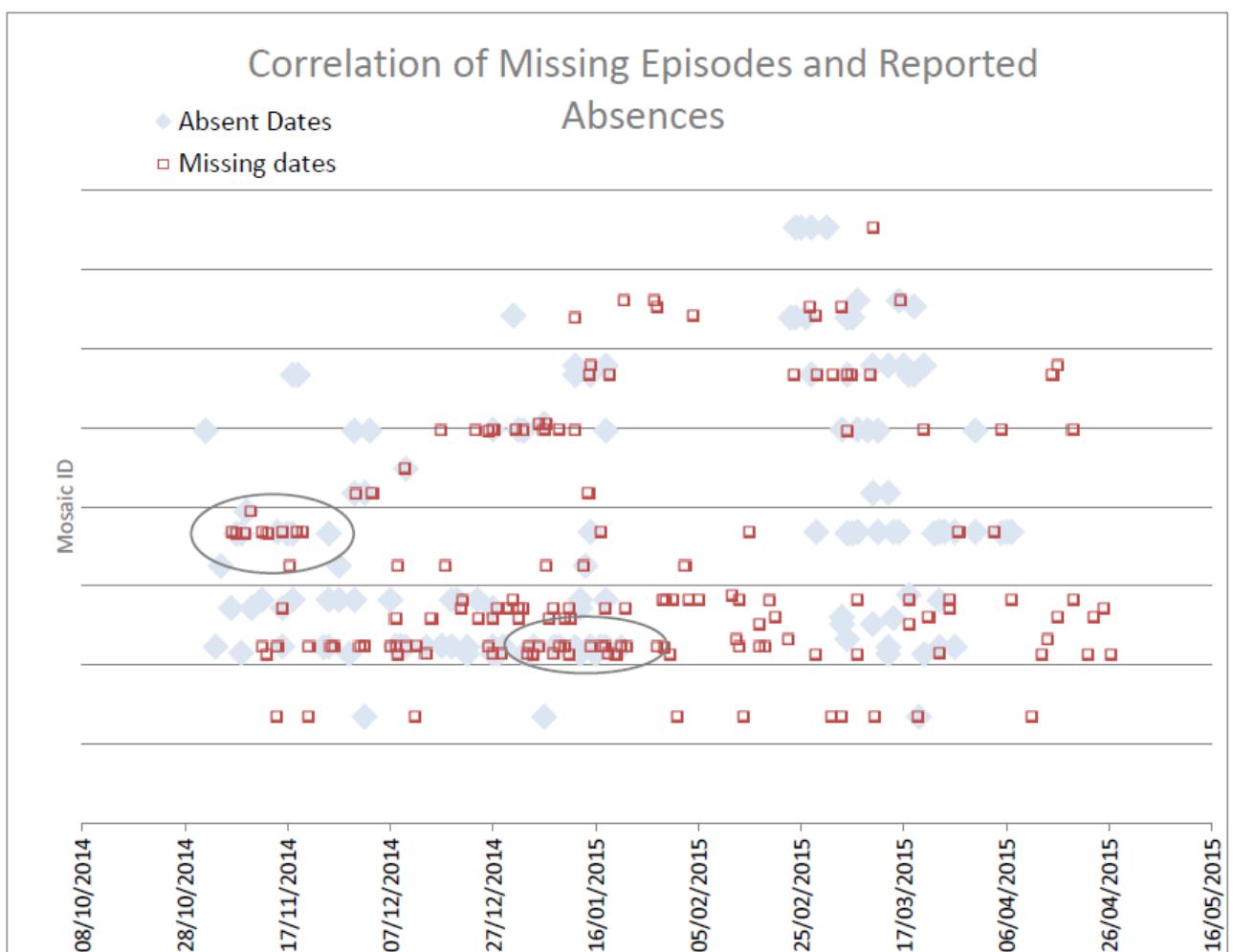
some way to account for the drop in numbers of return interviews completed in the second period – it is not possible to complete a return interview if the CYP is missing at the time. Additionally it may also explain why we have done more intensive support work with young people as the vulnerabilities and risks increase. Alternatively it may also be a result in the drop in return interviews delivered in the second period due to the funding uncertainties, as Streetwise were unable to intervene as early as a backlog built up. This explanation would also fit with the drop in CYP who went missing 1-2 times (68.8% October – December; 52% from January - March) as we were unable to intervene earlier, the CYP went on to go missing more times.



In addition to the missing episodes, we can look at how many 'absences' were also recorded for young people classed as missing.

The chart previous correlates the two measures and shows that a young person who went missing between 21-30 times also, on average, had 13 recorded absences *in addition* to the missing episodes.

Similarly to our previous report, we can identify that persistent missing young people are often simultaneously categorised as absent and missing as demonstrated by the following chart. On the following chart each horizontal line represents an individual with their missing and absent plotted in date order.



The blue diamonds indicate when an individual has been classified as absent, whilst the red squares indicate a single missing episode. Where the dots coincide (examples circled) one individual has been classed as 'absent' at the same or very similar time as being classified as missing.

There have been instances where a missing young person whom we would consider high risk has simultaneously had several incidents characterised as absent. Absences carry a default lower risk rating within the Police service. Streetwise is increasingly concerned about a failure to correlate missing and absent for individuals. This is leading to procedural mis-diagnosis of risk levels for the most vulnerable.

Streetwise triages its missing referrals by examining the number of missing episodes, absences, and other risk factors. There have been instances, before absence data was made available to us, where we've assessed a young person as low risk without the contextual intelligence of 5 or more absent incidents attributable to that young person. This intelligence catapults the young person into a red risk category requiring a return interview. We have seen that early intervention works better than later trouble shooting. Correlating the missing and absent together from the start allows us to spot problems and intervene earlier to prevent escalation of issues and entrenchment of behaviours. We would recommend that others in this field also correlate data to have more complete context when assessing risk.

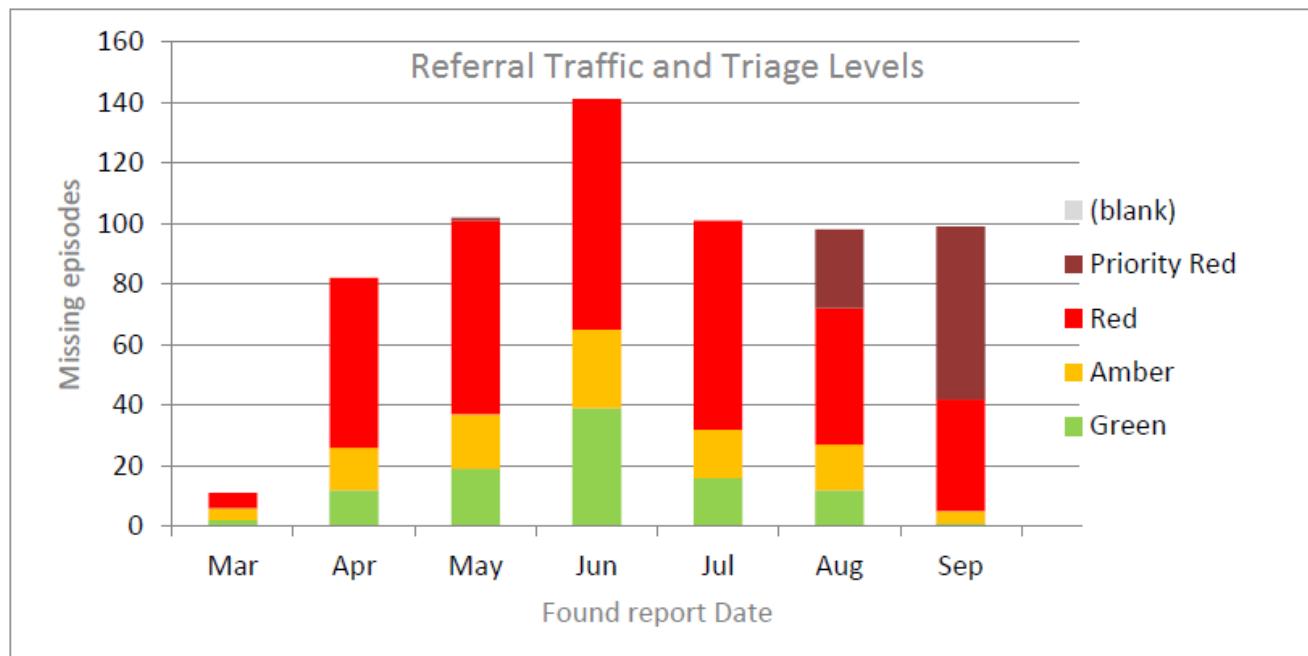
## April 2015 – September 2015

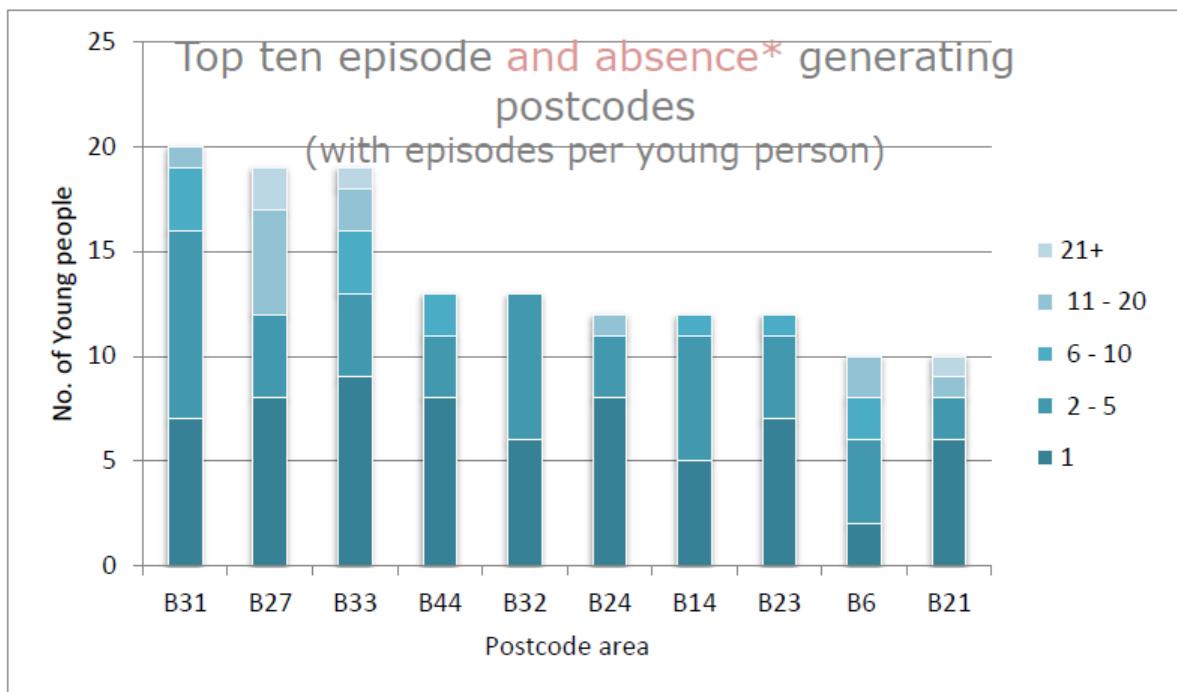
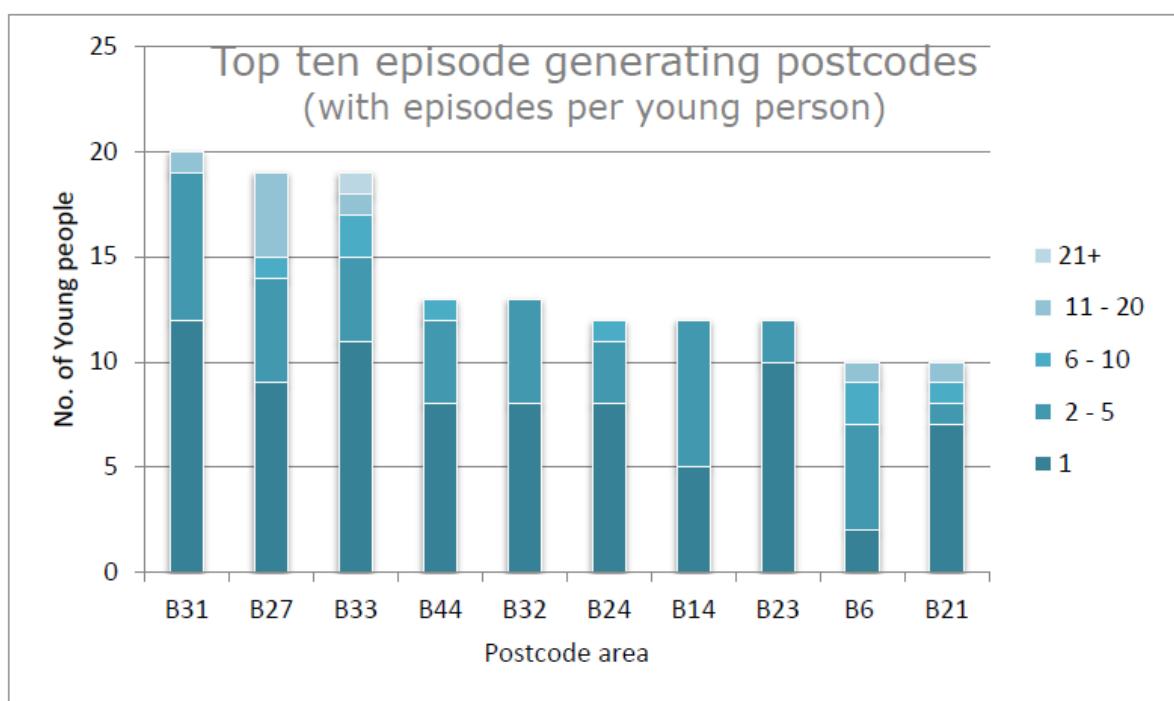
### Funding

At the end of 2014 the Big Lottery Fund awarded a three year grant to The Children's Society to support its work with CSE and missing in Birmingham and Coventry. This funding is complimentary to the support from the City Council and TCS focusing on additional counselling capacity, volunteers and family support.

In addition although it has taken a long time in the current year for funding from Birmingham City Council to be confirmed we have now the following contributions to support the missing RHI service over the following three years.

Schedule	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Total	% of total
Birmingham City Council	152,087	154,310	161,023	467,420	49%
Lottery	79,720	80,566	82,983	243,269	26%
TCS	77,521	79,620	81,765	238,906	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>309,327</b>	<b>314,496</b>	<b>325,771</b>	<b>949,595</b>	<b>100%</b>





The two charts above (Episodes and Absence) show which Birmingham postcodes generate the most individual young people that go missing. B31 (Northfield), B27 (Acocks Green) and B33 (Kitts Green/ Stetchford) have each generated at least 19 missing young people in the rolling year.

The colours of the individual bars denote how many times an individual has been classified as missing in the rolling year.

The charts above are the addition of absence and missing which gives a fuller picture of activity for prolific missing young people.

\*NB: Absence data not provided for July - September by Police

## 7. **Key issues for the future**

- The Children's Society would like to see the Missing Operational Group become much more effective in managing the interagency support for and intelligence gathering concerning children who are missing.
- The Children's Society is very concerned about the welfare not just of the children notified to the police as missing but also absent, and we know that some of these absent categorisations concern young people with known levels of vulnerability.
- The trigger questions for WMP call operators to assess young people as absent or missing may not be the right questions. We recognise that this is a national standard/ procedure. Streetwise suggests that at least there needs to be a more considered look at the type of questions to ask to assess risk. The safeguarding board and West Midlands Police to make representations to review this process.
- Streetwise is concerned about the poor level of information supplied from children's homes who make referrals to us. More training for residential care workers on risk indicators around safeguarding, CSE, substance misuse, gang involvement and criminality and corporate parenting responsibility and on the difference between safe and well check and return interviews.
- Placing a young person out of area does not necessarily reduce missing episodes and on occasions exacerbates them. Streetwise does not have the resource to conduct out of area return interviews, or to offer intensive support. Consideration to be given to explore a "spot purchase arrangement" to enable out of area return interviews/intensive support.