

Welcome -

If you have logged onto this page, then it's more than likely that you were part of the Children Missing from Home and Care Conference last week...

"Listen, Listen, and Listen some more..." was the clear message.

Also, 'Give them time, and give yourself the time.'

The workshop proved powerful, and four young people's voices were certainly heard. Within the workshop delegates were asked to put themselves in the shoes of a young person trying to run away, and to write this on a postcard - the most common words used were as follows:

Upset
Angry
Lonely
Hatred
Escape
Relief
Frightened
Misunderstood
Confused
Alone
Lost
Fed up
Desperate
Guilty
Nobody listens
Unloved
Depressed
Invisible
Free
Smothered
Trapped
Ignored

We hope the workshop last week was useful to you and that it will help inform thoughts and ideas you can pass onto your colleagues and friends.

If you get the chance, remind yourself of ONE KEY THING, write it on a piece of paper and pop it into your shoe - you never know when you'll find it next...

The Process;

Kevin Dyer (Associate Writer, Action Transport Theatre) worked with four young people, Sarah,

Emma, Liam and Jeff from Barnton, Cheshire, to listen to their personal stories and experiences of living in and running away from care. In working together, and with the support of Hannah Rayfield (Children's Rights and Participation Officer, Barnton) Sarah, Emma, Liam and Jeff contributed significantly and practically to this conference.

Their stories were delivered at the conference by two professional actors, Paul Dodds, and Claire Dixon. Sarah, Emma, Jeff, and Liam were our panel experts - there to answer questions on ways of supporting vulnerable groups of young people and to suggest alternative ways of working with young people at risk of running away from care.

Extracts from Nathan's story.

I went to school. Cos my mum was drinking too much. It was like boarding school – only you didn't pay. And different foster placements, so many I can't remember 'em. An' different social workers, no one listening to me. Me fosterer asked me what I wanted for tea. I was 10.

I said that I didn't want anything because I was unwell.

She then started to argue saying that I have to eat my tea and if I didn't then she would mash it up and feed it to me like a little baby.

I ran upstairs into my room and she came after me and pushed me into the wall. I ran out of the room and was standing on the stairs. She came onto the stairs so I pushed her out of the way.

She tripped on the stair and fell into the wall.

I grabbed my bag, walked out of the house. I got the bus up to the town and then a bus to Northwich.

I got off at Northwich and walked to Hartford train station.

I decided to get on the train to Liverpool Lime Street station.

When I arrived I didn't know what I was going to do or where I was going to go.

I walked round the station for a while and then I saw a train to St Helens.

I decided at that point that I was going to St Helens. When I got there I managed to find where my cousins were and I went and stayed with them overnight.

The next day my cousin rang my social worker. The police came and picked me up. I was livid. It took 'em three hours to get me out of the house and into the car.

Foster carers suffocate you, smother you.

They control your money.

You do it just to get your own back.

When I went back it was somewhere else. Pillar to pillar to pillar. I was in a centre then, I was on 24-hour watch. This is for your own protection, they say, but it's a punishment. If you kick off they say you'll be back on 24-hour watch.

Running away makes you feel better, great, but you're worse off, you're in the shit.

Frustrated.

Social workers - what do they do?
Sit on their arse and drink tea.
Give me money.
Sort things out.
Just talk.
Ring you, text you.

I hid under the stairs at school. They just left me there.

Once I ran away from the social worker and hid in the boot of her car. Hours later, she found me when she came to get her handbag.

That time I spent six months with the travellers, fixing double-glazing. They wouldn't turn me in, see. When the work stopped, I went to the cop shop, just walked in. It was a free ride home wasn't it. Then my GCSEs were going bellies up - too much running off and not enough anything else.

I tried to hang myself with my shoelaces but they snapped, so I slashed my wrists. There was no pain as I sat there watching the blood run clear of my body all my emotions, all the hurt just faded away. I thought of all the bad things I had done in my life – I was a little shite when I was young - and all the good things I had done. I must have sat there for half an hour, or so it felt like. A lifetime. I looked down at the bed it looked like a crime scene then I blacked out.

Only way to get them to listen. Run away.

I'd walk the streets and see how far I could get. Or hide round the corner.

I hid in the yard behind the cop shop.

I went to the house over the road. This bloke lived there. No one would think of looking for me there.

Sometimes I'd come back at night. When it gets dark it is scary, real scary. And cold.

Going back is like giving in, especially if they know you'll be coming back. In my stomach, shit scared, about coming back. My hands shaking.

More you do it, it loses the impact, gotta stay away for longer. There are bags of freaky places to sleep and hide. Slept in a burnt-out car once.

It got me away from the you know, didn't it? Stopped me getting beaten up.

I don't know why I went, bags of times. Just my brain took me. I knew a woman she had a dog. It was dead. I slept in the dog pen.

I couldn't go to my sister cos she'd've handed me in.

Run away, get drunk. 4 cans of Tennants was the only thing that keeps you warm, made you sleep.

I hid on the roof of Bargain Booze.

Pete Muirhead – he's OK. He's the best. I can pick up a phone and he'll be there. He's like a father to us all. He'd do anything for anyone.

With thanks to all those who participated in our workshop.

With special thanks to Sarah, Emma, Liam and Jeff.

Some comments from Hannah Rayfield, **Children's Rights and Participation Officer, Barnton**, after the conference.

Before I started working with the group of young people for this conference I didn't really know anything about why young people run away. Their stories have had a big impact on me and provoked me to think hard about how I would treat someone who runs away.

There were many themes that came out of listening to these young people. The main one was just that – LISTEN. We mustn't think we know what is going on and why they are running away. That's why we need to listen. The fact that they are running should alert us to the fact that they are running FROM something, feelings they need help and support to work through or circumstances that need to change.

Apart from people not listening, the way that people treated them when they were found or returned back was a recurring theme.

The young people talked of feeling branded as attention seekers or time wasters and of the focus being how much they had put people out or worried their carers.

Treating the young person with the respect due to someone who is dealing with very difficult issues might go a long way in helping to break the cycle of running away.