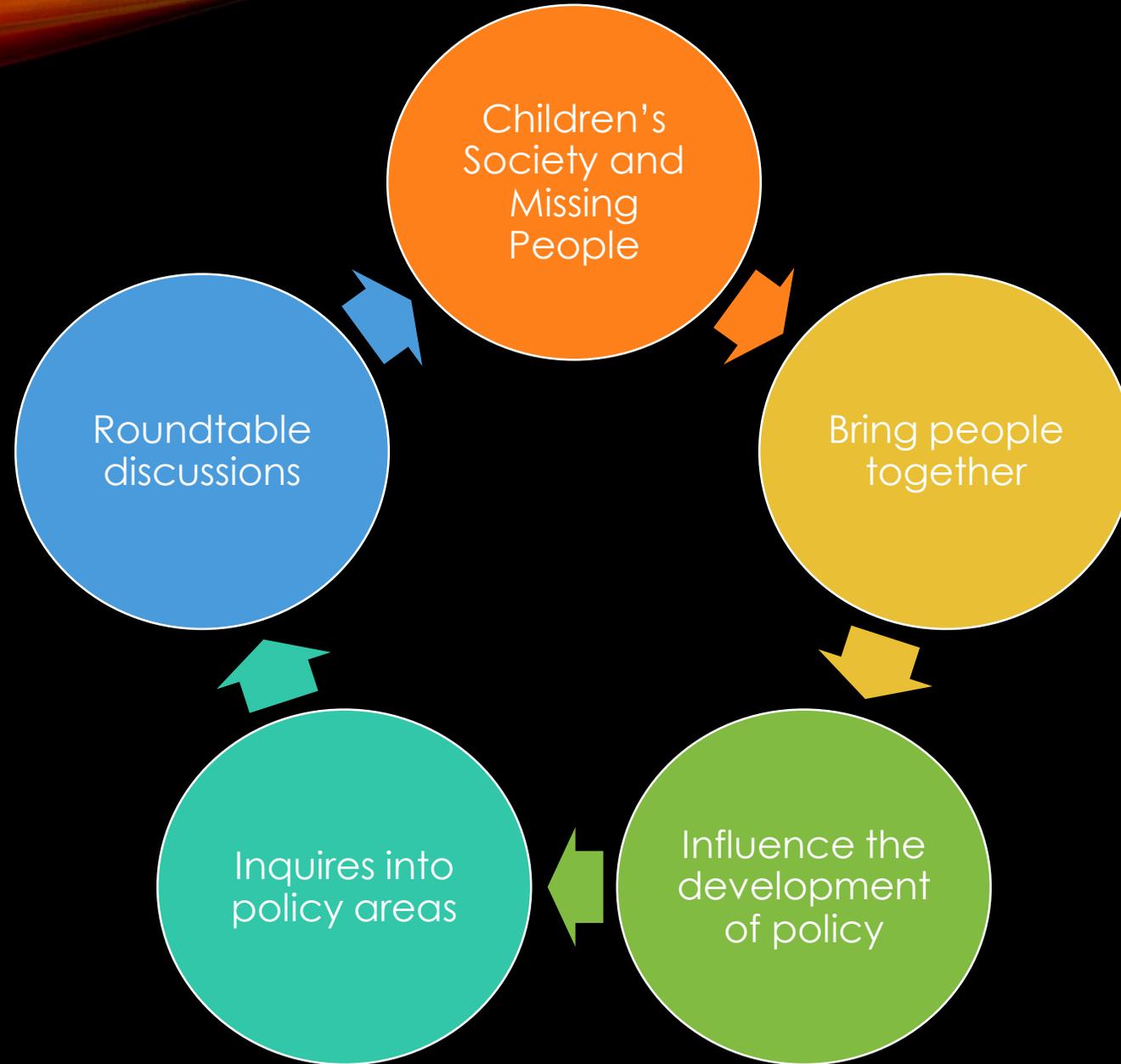




ANN COFFEY MP

Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and
Missing Adults and Children



Revisiting the first conference

- ‘Coming Together’
- Importance of partnership between organisations
- Significance of missing not understood – poor data collection and sharing
- Too many children slipping through the net
- Children, families and communities are a resource
- Instead of asking “is this the responsibility of my agency” ask “*What needs to be done to protect this child?*”

2012

Help and support families of missing people:

Presumption of Death Act

Missing Persons (Guardianship) Act

June 2012

Report on Children missing from home and care:

Highlighted that the harm to children was not being identified whilst missing

May 2015

Roundtable on vulnerable 16-17 year-olds who go missing:

Age used as an indicator of risk, older children not seen at risk.

May 2016

Inquiry into the safeguarding of 'absent children':

Absent children received no police response

Missing boys seen as low risk despite exploitation by gangs

December 2017

Roundtable on County Lines:

County Lines the new grooming phenomenon

June 2018

Inquiry into safeguarding missing adults who have mental health issues:

Opportunities for intervention and prevention of further harm are frequently being missed

People are found and forgotten.

June 2012 – Children who go missing from care

- Children in care three times more likely to run away
- Children in care targeted for sexual exploitation
- Practitioners and professionals failed to protect children - 'child prostitute'
- Data discrepancies
- Out of area placements – 46% of children in children's homes placed away from home area. Repeatedly running away.
- 31 recommendations, including clampdown on numbers of out of area placements
- Issues with data and information – paedophiles knew where the children's homes were but police didn't
- Children's homes must now notify host authorities when a child is placed into their area

May 2015 - Roundtable 16+17 year olds who go missing

6

- Children aged 16 and 17 are more likely to go missing from home or care than any other age group
- Many of the young people who were frequently reported as going missing in their early teens stop being reported at all upon turning 16
- Children placed off radar in semi-independent unregistered children's homes
- Children placed with adults
- Called for greater regulation of supported and semi-independent children's homes

May 2016 – Inquiry into the safeguarding of ‘absent’⁷ children

- 10,000 children a year were at high risk because classed as ‘absent’ not missing
- Absent children received no police response
- Called to scrap police two-tier ‘absent’ and ‘missing’ system
- Lack of awareness around boys groomed for child criminal exploitation

December 2017 - County Lines roundtable

- Parents anguish of seeing children groomed.
- Struggle to get agencies to see them as victims
- *“It become so frustrating as all services that were assigned to working with my son in this period.... were all working as separate entities – with this came, on many occasions, lack of communication, oversight or duplication of that was meant to be done or not take place, this caused me great distress.”*

Parent of exploited child

June 2018 - Inquiry into safeguarding missing adults⁹ who have mental health issues

- Up to 80% of people who go missing are struggling with mental health issues
- A third go missing more than once
- 600 missing people found dead each year – suicide most common cause
- Going missing is a red flag moment
- Mental health services and the Department of Health must take on a greater role
 - Police are firefighting the problem single-handedly
- Discrepancies in the data collected by police and the NHS especially those missing from Accident and Emergency departments
- No obligation to offer a return home interview
- Adults not receiving mental health or risk assessments when taken to hospital and disappear again – found and forgotten

2019 – Ongoing inquiry into children who go missing from out of area placements

- Despite government promise to clamp down on out of borough placements
- 64% of children in children's homes now placed away from their home area (increase of 77% since 2012)
- Children aged 15 – 17 three times as likely to go missing as other age groups – same age as for County lines grooming
- Rate of out of area children missing from children's homes has doubled since 2015 to nearly 1,990 in 2018.

Interim findings

- Children experiencing trauma when sent away
- Local authorities are placing children out of borough because of the marketplace – not because of the children's needs 73% of homes are privately run
- Perfect storm
- Being placed miles away without a trusted relationship or adult increases their risk of vulnerability
- To go missing is a symptom of a much deeper problem caused by decision of social care system to place children away from home.

Interim findings continued

- 80% of police forces concerned about children placed in unregistered semi-independent children's homes
- A record 5,000 children now in these placements doubled from 2009
- Targeted by paedophiles and drug gangs
- Inappropriate placements
 - A child who had been sexually exploited housed alongside a perpetrator of CSE
- Lack of notifications
 - children not known to police until they go missing

Progress

- Since 2015 the Department for Education now publishes more comprehensive data on children who go missing from care
- National Missing Persons Register (due by the end of 2019) will allow forces to share data
- The data only as useful as the information inputted by individual police forces and must include those classed as 'no apparent risk'
- Up to 60 per cent of people who go missing are classed 'no apparent risk'
- Thames Valley Police / ELPIS software – information from other agencies included
- Identify where missing people are and what is happening in their life

Changes

- Ofsted has begun collecting information on children who are victims or at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation at the point of inspection
- Joint Targeted Area Inspections
- 2016 Deep Dive into links between CSE and missing children:
 - Local Authorities need to gather all available intelligence to understand why a child went missing in the first place.
- Since 2014 Department for Education issues guidance that all children reported missing are offered a Return Home Interview – not all are offered and take up can be low
- Children are more likely to speak to someone they trust

Recent research on return home interviews

Children's Society – May 2019

- On average just 50% of missing episodes result in a return home interview
- One in five local authorities are not recording information accurately
- Information sharing from RHIs and police is inconsistent.

Missing People – June 2019

- 1 in 7 children experienced CSE and nearly half disclosed high risk signs of CSE.
- On in 10 had been victim of criminal or other exploitation
 - 1 in 5 disclosed information about mental health issues
 - 1 in 10 at risk of self-harm
 - 1 in 20 suicidal
- DfE statutory guidance needs revisiting – joint guidance with the Home Office

Working Together to Safeguard Children: July 2018

16

www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk

- The guidance highlights that practitioners should be alert to potential need for early help for children who are:
 - frequently missing/goes missing from care or from home
 - at risk of modern slavery, trafficking or exploitation
 - showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups

Collecting information is not an end in itself but needs to inform intervention and prevention of harm

- “Children may be vulnerable to neglect and abuse or exploitation from within their family and from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives. These threats can take a variety of different forms, including: sexual, physical and emotional abuse; neglect; exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Whatever the form of abuse or neglect, practitioners should put the needs of children first when determining what action to take”
- “Assessments of children in such cases should consider the individual needs and vulnerabilities of each child. They should look at the parental capacity to support the child, including helping the parents and carers to understand any risks and support them to keep children safe and assess potential risk to child.”

Changing attitudes is key

- The Rochdale and Rotherham scandals and media coverage changed attitudes towards girls once described as 'child prostitutes'
- Serious Crime Bill 2015 removed term 'child prostitute' from legislation and replaced with 'sexual exploited child'
- When language has change then work practises to safeguard children also change
- We now have a responsibility to change attitudes towards children who get mixed up in criminal gangs

Conclusion

- The aim Collecting data is to protect children and young people from exploitation
- We must Understand why people go missing
- Missing is a symptom of a problem we must tackle the underlying cause
- Listen to children and families – co-design services
- Failure to address the causes of why people go missing will lead to further harm
- Develop services with missing people for missing people

“Going missing was the easy bit, returning home to no help was far harder”