

Running from hate to what you think is love:

The relationship between
running away and child
sexual exploitation

Emilie Smeaton

**Believe in
children**



Barnardo's



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Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for their contribution and support in completing the action research addressing the relationship between running away and child sexual exploitation.

Firstly, deepest thanks to the young people who participated in the research and shared their lives and experiences. Thanks also to the professionals and parents who facilitated young people’s participation in the research.

Thank you to all the professionals who contributed to the research by sharing their views and experiences.

Thank you to Dr Myfanwy Franks (Associate, Paradigm Research) for the work she carried out on the second level analysis.

Thank you to Alison Worsley (Deputy Director – Strategy, Barnardo’s), Julie Harris (Assistant Director for Research and Evaluation, Barnardo’s), Caroline Paskell (Senior Research and Policy Officer, Barnardo’s) and Dr Myfanwy Franks for acting as ‘critical friends’ and providing feedback on the draft report.

The members of the Research Dissemination Group have provided valuable support and contributions to the project so thank you to:

- Joe Apps (Missing Persons Bureau Manager)
- Jane Birkett (Crime Analyst, Missing Persons Bureau)
- Julie Dawber (Targeted Safeguarding Team Leader, Department for Education)
- Carlene Firmin MBE (Principal Policy Adviser, Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England)
- Dr Sandra Gulyurtlu (Researcher, Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England)
- Charlie Hedges (Manager, Missing, Abducted and Kidnapped Children, Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP))
- Bina Parma (Specialist Team Member, National Working Group)
- Nicola Sharp (at the time of membership of the Research Dissemination Group, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Missing People)
- Natalie Williams (Policy Officer, The Children’s Society)

Thanks to Alison Worsley for her general support and work to complete this project. It should be acknowledged that Alison played a key role in developing the evidence-based recommendations.

Finally, thank you to Comic Relief for funding this project.

Further information

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Contents

Part one:
Introduction 7

1.1 Definitions used in the research and report 7

1.2 Setting the context: running away and CSE 8

1.3 The action research study addressing the relationship between running away and CSE 11

Part two:
Research findings addressing the relationship between running away and CSE 17

2.1 Indication of prevalence of both running away and CSE 18

2.2 The relationship between running away and CSE 18

2.3 Impacts of experiencing running away and CSE 40

Part three:
Diversity and running away and CSE 46

3.1 Boys and young men 47

3.2 Black and minority ethnic (BME) young people 48

3.3 Young people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties 54

3.4 Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children and young people 55

Part four:
Professionals and young people’s experiences and views of measures to address running away and CSE 57

4.1 Resource issues 58

4.2 Factors relating to multi-agency approaches to running away and CSE 61

4.3 Factors relating to collating and sharing data and information 66

4.4 The need to improve professionals’ awareness and knowledge through training 68

4.5 Factors relating to the local authority 72

4.6 Factors relating to the criminal justice system 75

4.7 Factors relating to specialised projects working with young people who experience both running away and CSE 78

4.8 Factors relating to parents and carers of young people who experience running away and CSE 79

4.9 Factors relating to direct practice with children and young people who experience running away and CSE 82

Part five:
Discussion of the research findings 94

5.1 Recognising the relationship between running away and CSE 94

5.2 Who does running away and CSE affect? 97

5.3 Reaching young people who experience running away and CSE 98

5.4 Responding to young people who experience running away and CSE 99

Part six:
Recommendations and actions for national and local policy and practice 108

6.1 Commissioning and funding 108

6.2 Managing risks 109

6.3 Improving and sharing knowledge and information 114

6.4 Roles and responsibilities 115

6.5 Supporting young people and parents and carers to address running away and CSE and move forward into the future 117

6.6 Diversity 119

6.7 Gaps in knowledge 121



Part one:

Introduction

Since the 1990s research focused on running away, child sexual exploitation (CSE) and youth homelessness has documented that an intrinsic relationship exists between running away and CSE. A review of this research literature (Smeaton, 2011)¹ reveals that:

- None of the research projects addressing running away have explored the issue of CSE in depth. A 2009 study (Smeaton, 2009)² exploring the experiences of particularly vulnerable and marginalised young people who become detached from parents and carers for four weeks or more offers the most in-depth exploration of the relationship between running away and CSE. However, these findings cannot be applied to all young people who run away.
- While sexual exploitation is experienced by some children and young people who run away, research findings suggest that the majority of young runaways do not experience CSE.
- The limited evidence relating to practice responses to young people who run away suggest that, while there are examples of good practice, because of the challenges involved in working with young people who experience both running away and CSE, it can be difficult to achieve positive outcomes.
- Previous research has started to explore the relationship between running away and CSE but there is need for research that explicitly explores this relationship.

In recognition of this gap in learning, Barnardo's and Paradigm Research developed a proposal to undertake an action research study to address the relationship between

running away and CSE in England, which was funded by Comic Relief. This report presents our findings.

The remainder of this introductory section of the report focuses upon the following:

- defining running away and CSE used in the research and the report
- setting the policy and practice context of running away and CSE in England
- providing details of the action research study addressing the relationship between running away and CSE, including the research methodology and the consultation with young people and professionals.

1.1

Definitions used in the research and report

1.1.1

Definition of running away

The term 'running away' is used to describe young people either leaving home or care, staying away without permission or being forced to leave home by parents and carers. The term is often used to describe being away from home or care for one night or more.

It is important to note that while some young people are reported as missing to the police by parents and carers when they run away, it is not appropriate to use the terms 'running away' and 'going missing' interchangeably.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has defined 'missing' as³:

¹ Smeaton E (2011) *A Review of Research Findings Addressing the Relationship between Running Away and Child Sexual Exploitation*. Unpublished Paper.

² Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People Living on the Streets in the UK*. London: Sandbach.

³ Section 5 addresses the Association of Chief Police Officers and the College of Policing's definitions of risk and consideration of risk.

“Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be a subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another person.”

(ACPO, 2013; 5)⁴

There are some factors relating to running away that require specific consideration and appropriate responses as the majority of young people who run away are not reported as missing to the police (Rees & Lee, 2005; Smeaton & Rees, 2005)⁵. Many young people who are reported as missing do not fit the definition of running away, such as those who are abducted, get lost or are routinely reported as missing when returning late to a care placement.

1.1.2
Definition of CSE

NWG Network has developed the following definition of CSE, which is also used in government guidance to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation (DCSF, 2009)⁶:

“The sexual exploitation of children and young people under the age of 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing, and/ or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child’s immediate recognition,

for example the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones with no immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources.’

(National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People, 2008)⁷

1.1.3
Definition of child and young person

This research addresses running away and CSE among children and young people while under the age of 16. In England a child is defined as ‘anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday’ (DCSF, 2010)⁸; and this is also reflected in the definition under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the UK ratified in 1991. Those participating in the research were aged 14 and above, and throughout this report we have used the terminology ‘young person’ and ‘young people’ to recognise the particular age and vulnerabilities of this group of adolescents, although they are still children.

1.2
Setting the context: running away and CSE

1.2.1
Young runaways in England

Research has consistently reported how children and young people often run away because of family problems, and that young runaways often face significant risks while away from home or care. Research has also

provided learning about the effectiveness of interventions with young people who run away, alongside learning about specific subgroups of young runaways and their experiences.

Since 2001, following the publication of *Still Running* (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999)⁹, the Government’s Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) produced a consultation report on young runaways (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001)¹⁰ and a second publication¹¹ in 2002 offering guidance for establishing policy and practice to meet the needs of young runaways. Also in 2002, The Department of Health (DH) produced guidance relating to children and young people who go missing from home and care¹². The cross-governmental Children and Young People’s Unit (CYPU) funded a programme of 27 pilot projects to develop models of working with young runaways.

A 2005 survey, *Still Running 2* (Rees & Lee, 2005)¹³, revealed that despite a range of guidance and recommendations to implement good practice, very little had changed for young people who run away. This survey and a second research study (Smeaton & Rees, 2005)¹⁴ also revealed that the majority of young people are not reported as missing to the police by parents and carers when they run away.

In 2007 The Children’s Society, with support from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), conducted a survey

(Evans et al, 2007)¹⁵ of local authorities and police forces, which demonstrated that there had been inconsistent implementation of government guidance to meet the needs of young runaways.

In 2008 the government launched its *Young Runaways Action Plan* (DCSF, 2008)¹⁶ with updated guidance, a review of emergency accommodation for young runaways and the introduction of a national indicator, NI71, monitoring local authorities’ performance relating to young people who go missing from home or care, which was later abolished.

In 1999 research estimated that 77,000 children ran away for the first time each year and that there were 129,000 incidents of running away each year (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999)¹⁷. These estimations of prevalence were confirmed by surveys carried out in 2005 and 2011. The 2011 survey (Rees, 2011)¹⁸ found some indication of a modest reduction, from around 10 per cent to 9 per cent, in the proportion of children and young people who run away overnight but no evidence of reduction in running away rates among children and young people aged 14 to 15 (Ibid, 36)¹⁹. The proportion of children and young people who run away before the age of 13 and the proportion of repeat runaways is comparable to the 1999 and 2005 surveys (Ibid)²⁰. The 2011 survey provided further evidence of the substantial risks and harm that young runaways face and confirmed previous learning that very few children and young people approach agencies for support when they run away and only a minority are reported as missing to the police (Ibid, 37)²¹.

4 Association of Chief Police Officers & College of Policing (2013) *Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2013*. London: College of Policing.

5 Rees G & Lee J (2005) *Still Running 2*. London: The Children’s Society; and Smeaton E & Rees G (2005) *Running Away in South Yorkshire*. London: The Children’s Society.

6 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

7 <http://www.nationalworkinggroup.org/who-we-are/what-is-child-sexual-exploitation>

8 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) *The Children Act (1989) Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review*. London: DCSF.

9 Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999) *Still Running: Children living on the streets in the UK*. London: The Children’s Society.

10 Social Exclusion Unit (2001) *Consultation on Young Runaways: Background paper by the Social Exclusion Unit*. London: Cabinet Office.

11 Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Young Runaways: Report by the Social Exclusion Unit*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

12 Department of Health (2002) *Children Missing from Home and Care: A Guide to Good Practice*. London: Department of Health.

13 Rees G & Lee J (2005) *Still Running 2*. London: The Children’s Society.

14 Smeaton E & Rees G (2005) *Running Away in South Yorkshire*. London: The Children’s Society.

15 Evans E, Houghton-Brown M & Rees G (2007) *Stepping Up: The Future of Runaways Services*. London: The Children’s Society.

16 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) *Young Runaways Action Plan*. London: DCSF.

17 Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999) *Still Running: Children living on the streets in the UK*. London: The Children’s Society.

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

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

In June 2012 the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers published its *Report from the Joint Inquiry Into Children Who Go Missing From Care*²². This report made a number of recommendations relating to preventative and responsive measures to protect and support young people and ensure provision of a safety net for young runaways.

The Department for Education (DfE) is in the process of developing guidance for local authorities addressing children and young people who run away and go missing from home or care. The guidance is being updated to ensure it is brought up to date and to incorporate changes in legislation to, for example, care homes and to address learning from recent enquiries addressing running away and CSE.

1.2.2
CSE in England

Since the 1990s Barnardo’s and other organisations have worked to both prevent this abuse and provide support so that sexually exploited children and young people can recover. Alongside this Barnardo’s and others have campaigned to raise awareness of CSE and for policy and practice changes based on evidence from direct work with young people.

In 2000 Government guidance for *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* (DH/Home Office)²³ emphasised the intrinsic need to treat children involved in prostitution as victims of abuse. This guidance was reviewed in 2009 and *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual*

22 All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults & All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012) *Report from the Joint Inquiry Into Children Who Go Missing From Care*. http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf 18 April 2012.

23 Department of Health/Home Office (2000) *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution: Supplementary Guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children*. London: HMSO.

Exploitation (DCSF)²⁴ forms supplementary guidance on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children as presented in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*²⁵. In 2011, the DfE launched its *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*²⁶, which built upon existing guidance and identified a set of actions for key agencies to address. In 2012 the DfE published its progress report against the action plan²⁷.

Government guidance recognises the widespread prevalence of CSE and highlights the need for local responses to be set in place:

‘Every Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) should assume that sexual exploitation occurs within its area unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, and should put in place systems to monitor prevalence and responses.’
(DCSF, 2010; 191)²⁸

Research published in 2011 by The University of Bedfordshire revealed that only a quarter of LSCBs in England have implemented government guidance (Jago et al, 2011)²⁹. A 2011 thematic assessment addressing localised grooming of children and young people concluded that most LSCBs do not provide a local response to CSE and stressed the need for multi-agency working:

‘Most LSCBs do not fulfil the pivotal role described for them in statutory guidance in respect of child sexual exploitation.’

24 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

25 HM Government (2013) *Working Together to Safeguard Children: a guide to interagency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*. London: HMSO.

26 Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE.

27 Department for Education (2012) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan – Progress Report*.

28 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) *Working Together to safeguard children: A guide to interagency working*. London: DCSF.

29 Jago S, Arocha L, Brodie I, Melrose M, Pearce J & Warrington C (2011) *What’s Going on to Safeguard Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation? How local partnerships response to child sexual exploitation*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire.

All agencies need to improve their recognition of this abuse and exploitation, intervening with safeguarding activity at an early stage. The need for commitment to multi-agency work to tackle this issue encompasses all agencies.’
(CEOP, 2011; 93)³⁰

There are a number of factors that make it difficult to estimate the prevalence of CSE including, for example, that the majority of young people who experience CSE are hidden from public view and are encouraged to be secretive about their meetings and activities by perpetrators of CSE. Some young people may not self-identify as being sexually exploited and therefore do not seek support. As some professionals and services working with young people may be unaware of the indicators of CSE, sexually exploited young people are not always recognised and recorded at the local level. Different responses to assessing their local situation also exacerbate the difficulty in estimating the extent of CSE. As noted by The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), there is no single system for LSCBs to record CSE, which significantly undermines the possibility of building a national picture of the extent of CSE³¹.

However, recent studies have provided some indication of prevalence of CSE. A 2005 research study carried out in London found 507 individual cases where CSE was known or indicated, with a further 1,002 young people estimated to be at risk across all London boroughs (Harper & Scott, 2005)³². A 2011 research study found that on one date in 2011, 1,065 sexually exploited young people were worked with in nine areas of England (Jago et al, 2011)³³. The Office of the Children’s

30 Child Exploitation and Online Protection (2011) *Out of Mind, Out of Sight: Breaking down the barriers to understanding child sexual exploitation*. London: Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre.

31 Ibid.

32 Harper Z & Scott S (2005) *Meeting the Needs of Sexually Exploited Young People in London Boroughs*. London: Barnardo’s.

33 Jago S, Arocha L, Brodie I, Melrose M, Pearce J & Warrington C (2011) *What’s Going on to Safeguard Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation? How local partnerships response to child sexual exploitation*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire.

Commissioner for England’s (OCCE) inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups found that there were 2,409 confirmed victims of CSE in either gangs or groups during a 14 month period from 2010 to 2011 (Berelowitz et al, 2012)³⁴. Barnardo’s worked with 1,185 young people in its sexual exploitation services in England in 2011-12, a 19 per cent increase on the previous year.

1.3
The action research study addressing the relationship between running away and CSE

1.3.1
Aims of the action reserch study addressing the relationship between running away and CSE

The aims of the project are to:

- collect data relating to the experiences of young people under the age of 16 who experience both running away and CSE
- collect data from practitioners and projects working with young people who experience both running away and CSE
- produce an evidence-base that outlines the relationship between running away and CSE and supports recommendations to support policy and practice responses to young people who experience both running away and CSE
- produce a final report outlining findings, a summary document and a tool-kit for practitioners
- work with key national agencies to ensure evidence-based findings are incorporated into national policy and practice.

34 Berelowitz S, Firmin C Edwards G & Gulyurtlu, S (2012) *“I thought I was the only one in the world” The Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups Interim Report*.

1.3.2
Research methodology

There were three elements to the research methodology for the action research study addressing the relationship between running away and CSE:

1. A consultation with young people who have experienced both running away and CSE while under the age of 16. This consultation took the form of individual semi-structured interviews carried out in an informal manner while following a specific line of enquiry, in which the young person is placed as storyteller and the researcher as listener. The aim of the consultation with young people was to provide a realistic and up-to-date perspective of running away and CSE and generate data about running away and CSE.
2. A consultation with professionals working directly with young people who have experienced both running away and CSE. This consultation took two forms: a survey and telephone interviews with practitioners working within projects that support young people who have experienced running away and/or CSE.
3. Development of, and work with, a Research Dissemination Group (RDG)³⁵ to develop national and local dissemination strategies to ensure the research findings are included in national and local policy and practice.

Approach to ethics

A robust set of core ethical principles and values framed the research:

- consulting as widely as possible
- facilitating opportunities for participation
- respecting differing viewpoints

³⁵ The following organisations provided representation on the RDG: Barnardo's, CEOP, Department for Education, Missing People, NWG Network, Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (OCCE), Paradigm Research, The Children's Society, UK Missing People's Bureau.

- being sensitive to diversity
- being open and transparent
- ensuring informed consent and assent
- respecting privacy, confidentiality and anonymity
- recognising responsibility for the welfare of research participants and others.

The Barnardo's Research Ethics Committee (BREC) also scrutinised and approved the research proposal to ensure:

- openness about the research methods used and data gathered
- honesty about interpretation and presentation of the findings
- acknowledgement of the boundaries of professional competence
- safeguarding young people who participated in the research.

1.3.3
The consultation with young people with experience of running away and CSE while under the age of 16

The consultation with young people took the form of semi-structured interviews. In some cases young people were involved in more than one interview. The interview was structured according to the individual young person's experiences and what they were comfortable discussing.

Interviews focused on:

- a history of the young person's life and events and experiences they considered to be important
- experiences of running away and CSE
- what could have prevented them from experiencing both running away and CSE
- their experiences of support seeking
- recommendations to both prevent and respond to running away and CSE.

Characteristics of the young people who participated in the consultation

Forty-one young people participated in the consultation; of these 25 are female, 15 are male and one is transgender (male to female).

The age of the young people at their time of participation in the research is as follows:

Age of young people	Number of young people
14	4
15	8
16	8
17	9
18	7
19	2
20	2
21	1
Total	41

The ethnicity of young people who participated in the research is as follows:

Ethnicity of young people ³⁴	Number of young people
Bengali	1
Mixed Asian / White British	2
Mixed Black Caribbean / White British	3
Roma Traveller	2
Sikh	1
White British	32
Total	41

³⁶ Children and young people self-defined their ethnicity.

Ten young people self-defined as gay, one as bisexual, one as being uncertain about his sexuality and 29 as heterosexual.

Seventeen of the young people who participated in the research self-defined as having some form of learning disability or difficulty. Four young people described how they had general learning difficulties; nine described themselves as having a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN); two as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); one as having ADHD and Dyslexia; and one as having Dyspraxia.

Accessing young people

Of the 41 young people who participated in research interviews, 18 were accessed through specialist projects addressing running away and/or CSE. Four young people were accessed via a general drop-in project for young males. In order to include a range of experiences in the research, work was undertaken to reach young people who were not known to services. Nineteen young people were accessed 'on the streets' in a range of locations where young people are likely to spend time, such as places where food was supplied to the homeless and parks.

Methodological approach to the consultation with young people

The consultation with young people took the form of semi-structured interviews presented by the researcher in an informal manner while focusing upon specific lines of enquiry. However, as no two lines of enquiry were the same and focused upon individual young people's experiences, there was flexibility within the interviews for a young person to discuss issues that were unique or important to them. With young people's permission, a digital recorder was used to record the interview to enable the researcher to fully concentrate upon the young person and what they were saying. A narrative approach to interviewing was undertaken, which placed young people as 'storyteller' and the

researcher as ‘listener’. Young people therefore told the stories of their lives and experiences and it is through these stories that their experiences and views are understood. Young people’s stories and experiences are presented in the report in their words and accounts of their experiences, which can be challenging for the reader but represents the reality of young people’s experiences of running away and CSE.

A grounded theory approach was adopted where the theory is grounded in the data so that general small-scale theories represent what is taking place in young people’s lives. There were two stages of analysis: the first stage was a thematic analysis of each young person’s story and the second stage was undertaken using Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software programme, to identify themes and issues and make comparisons across the data.

Responding to needs raised through the research process

Eleven of the young people who were accessed via the streets were not receiving support to meet their needs at the time of their participation in the research, and work was undertaken with all of these young people to link them to support services. Two young people who were not receiving support and were aged 18 or older at the time of their participation in the research chose not to have support set in place for them. However, agreement was reached with these young people that if they were to change their mind in the future, the researcher would facilitate their access to support. In some of the interviews with young people who were accessed via projects, young people raised issues for which they were not receiving support and, with the young person’s permission, the researcher liaised with project staff to ensure appropriate support was set in place.

1.3.4 Consultation with Professionals

There were two stages to the consultation with professionals: a survey questionnaire and a telephone interview. Professionals’ participation in the research was sought by a number of means. Information about the research and an invitation to participate was presented in the NWG Network’s newsletter, which was sent to a membership of more than 500 professionals. A number of children’s charities supported the process of recruiting professionals from projects across England, and individual projects working with young people who experience running away and/ or CSE were also contacted and invited to participate in the research.

The survey questionnaire

The first stage of the consultation was a survey questionnaire using Survey Monkey, which was completed by professionals from 28 projects. The survey questionnaires covered a range of issues relating to running away and CSE including:

- the nature of the relationship between running away and CSE
- identification of factors that facilitate projects’ work with young people who experience both running away and CSE
- identification of factors that hinder projects’ work with young people who experience both running away and CSE
- identification of groups of young people who experience both running away and CSE that projects find difficult to engage
- gaps in national and local policy to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE
- gaps in national and local practice to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE.

Information about projects that completed a survey questionnaire

Of the 28 projects that were represented in the survey questionnaire:

- 14 projects described themselves as working with young people who experience running away and CSE
- 7 projects described themselves as working with young people who run away
- 7 projects described themselves as working with young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE.

The majority of the 28 projects are based in the voluntary sector, with two projects describing themselves as a voluntary sector project based within the statutory sector.

While the majority of projects work with young people under the age of 18, four projects work with young people under the age of 21, one project works with young people under the age of 14, and another with under 16s.

Fourteen of the projects have existed for more than 10 years with a further five projects having been in existence for five to 10 years. One project has existed for up to six months and the other projects have been in existence for one to three years.

The majority of projects (18) serve urban areas with 11 projects covering suburban areas. Only three projects serve rural areas. Six of the projects cover a range of geographical areas. Projects are also working with young people from outside the area they cover and continue to work with young people when they move out of area. There were significant differences in the numbers of young people projects are able to work with. For example, while one project received and worked with 92 referrals in a six month period, one project carried out direct work with four young people during the same time period. Another project directly supported 112 young people in the past year while another directly supported 42 young people.

Some of the projects work with a significant proportion of young people who have spent time living in care during the past year. For example, one project works predominantly with Looked After young people while 50-60 per cent of another project’s direct work with young people is with those who have spent time living in care during the past year. Some projects have not worked with any young people who have spent time living in care during the past year and others are working with very low numbers who have lived in care during the past year (5-10 per cent of the project’s caseload).

Telephone interviews with professionals

The second stage of the consultation with professionals was telephone interviews with 27 professionals who work with young people who experience both running away and CSE. These professionals had a variety of roles including: programme managers, project managers/co-ordinators, senior practitioners and project support workers.

The telephone interviews focused upon a range of issues in-depth including some of the issues addressed in the survey questionnaire. Professionals’ experiences of working with diversity in relation to running away and CSE was considered alongside identification of what would further support professionals and projects to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE. Professionals were also given the opportunity to raise and discuss any other issues relating to running away and CSE that they considered to be of importance. As with the consultation with young people, two stages of analysis were undertaken to identify themes and issues.



Part two:

Research findings addressing the relationship between running away and CSE

This section of the report presents the experiences of young people who were under the age of 16 at the time of running away and being sexually exploited. It should be recognised that where CSE features or there is risk of CSE, support should be set in place for young people aged 18 and under and that these young people are children who have been abused by adults. This section of the report starts with Ben's story, which highlights how a young person's experiences of early abuse can act as a precursor to involvement in running away and CSE, and also lead a young person to normalise sexual exploitation. All of the young people's stories are in their words; this can be challenging for the reader but it represents the reality of young people's lives.

Ben's story

Ben described how his family history of intergenerational abuse influenced the direction in which his life developed and played a part in him ending up living on the streets. When Ben was five, he was raped regularly by an adult babysitter who also abused Ben's cousin and other young children. Sometimes Ben would offer himself to the perpetrator to prevent him from abusing Ben's cousin. The perpetrator started to pass Ben on to other men. Eventually the perpetrator was prosecuted and served a prison sentence. Ben experienced further sexual exploitation from the age of 11 and, at the age of 14, started cottaging and charging men for sex. At this point, Ben was experiencing a lot of conflict with his parents relating to boundaries and differences of

opinion about what he thought he should be able to do as a young person and what his parents thought was appropriate. He started to run away, staying away for a number of nights, attending parties and drinking alcohol and taking drugs. Ben and a female friend met a number of men at these parties who passed Ben's phone number around and Ben and his friend became well known among groups of men:

'We'd get phone calls from men we knew and met before but also men that had heard about us that we hadn't met. They'd say "come to a party". Sometimes they'd come and pick us up in some fancy car. There'd always be lots of alcohol and drugs. We knew we'd be expected to do something [sexual] with the men but we just got wasted and got on with it. We knew why they were inviting us but we liked the drink and drugs and were having a good time. It also made us feel wanted and popular and we liked that. ... Sometimes it was quite a big party with lots of younger people there but sometimes we'd get a call saying there was a party and turn up and we'd be the only two young people there.'

When Ben was 15 he ran away from home for a final time and lived on the streets. Ben sold sex to survive:

'Then I started working outright as a ho [whore] and working out on the streets ... to pay my bills and that. ... We [Ben and his two friends] were just like "we need some fucking money". We were bored of being skint. We thought "well, X Road [a well-known red light area] is only ten minutes away, shall we just fuck it and go?" and it just went from there.'

we started working [selling sex]. It was good quick money. I didn't mind it. I didn't think giving head for ten minutes for forty quid was that bad; it didn't bother me.'

While still 15 and away from home, Ben sublet a flat from a cousin and started selling sex from the flat:

'We were just well known, we were real well known. A number of people had our numbers. More and more people had our numbers and were coming to see us.'

Ben then describes how he started to run the flat as a brothel:

'It was with these two friends I'd been selling sex on the streets with and we got these two older girls coming to work with us. We put a red light in the window and people used to just come or ring up and knock on the door and let themselves in. It was people we knew from selling sex on the streets and people used to refer us to other people. It was like: "are you wanting some fun tonight? ... Well, go to this place".'

At the time of participating in the research interview, Ben was working as a sex worker selling sex from his home.

2.1 Indication of prevalence of both running away and CSE

While the research is not able to provide exact representation of the extent of running away and CSE among young people under the age of 16, it is able to give some indication of prevalence. The survey questionnaire completed by project staff working directly with young people who experience running away and/or CSE revealed differences in the proportions of young people who experience both running away and CSE:

- Projects with a focus upon working with sexually exploited young people reported that anywhere between 25-57 per cent of the young people they work

with experience both running away and CSE. Some of these projects do not record information about running away so were not able to provide figures relating to what proportion of the young people they work with experience both running away and CSE.

- Projects with a focus upon working with young people who run away report that between 11-12.5 per cent of young people they work with experience both running away and CSE. Some of these projects do not record information about sexual exploitation so were not able to provide figures relating to what proportion of the young people they work with experience both running away and CSE.
- Projects with a focus upon working with young people who experience running away and/or CSE report that anywhere between 50-90 per cent of their caseload experience both running away and CSE.

2.2 The relationship between running away and CSE

All of the professionals who participated in the research identified that there is an important relationship between running away and CSE. Professionals stressed the importance of recognising that there is no single link between running away and sexual exploitation but identified that there are a number of factors, including bereavement or other loss, social issues relating to the family and a history of abuse, which leads to a young person experiencing both running away and sexual exploitation:

'These issues [running away and CSE] that happen in young people's lives are linked to so many other problems [such as] drugs and alcohol, homelessness, domestic abuse, family breakdown, bereavement, just to name a few.'

There were differences in how professionals viewed this relationship. Some professionals identified running away as an indicator of

CSE, which can be framed in the context of push and pull factors:

'One of the push factors coming from within the family home or the home the child was living in could be about domestic abuse, sexual abuse or just general unhappiness, typical teenage angst, trying to push back parental boundaries. So we consider the pushes that might encourage the young person to run and then we look at the pulls: that will be where the outside factors that encourage the young person to run. For instance, when the young person is being groomed or invited to parties. ... Inside the home parents are saying they can't go but outside [the home] the pull is much stronger.'

Other professionals view running away and CSE as being intrinsically linked:

'I always explain the link [between running away and CSE] as a chicken and egg as I have heard various stories from young people, which begs the question: which comes first? Some young people have issues that cause them to run away which, in turn, makes them vulnerable to exploitation. Others are vulnerable to exploitation due to low self-esteem, often caused by issues at home, which led to running away.'

The relationship between running away and CSE can change with the model of CSE:

'There is definitely a link between running away and CSE when it is the more traditional boyfriend model. ... What we saw historically was young women running away for periods of time, be it a night or a couple of nights or a week, when they were being exploited then [during the running away episode]. ... They were running to be with their boyfriends and they were being kept in flats or houses with their partner, or partners, whereas the party lifestyle takes place in the park and on the streets and then the girls are going home after that.'

Professionals working with young runaways stressed the importance of recognising that, while many young people who experience CSE do run away, not all young people who run away experience CSE.

A sole focus upon CSE can lead to a lack of prioritisation of young people who run away but do not experience CSE and, also, to them being viewed as a problem and their needs not being addressed:

'There are many children who run away to escape abuse at home, to escape really horrible situations ... who end up getting involved in serious situations but it's not about child sexual exploitation. They end up not getting seen as being at risk or as victims of crime. They are seen as not engaging, putting themselves at risk and basically deserving the consequences.'

A few professionals highlighted that, possibly due to all the media attention upon CSE and the fear of not being seen to respond to a young person who has experienced CSE, local authorities do not take running away as seriously as they should be doing:

'It's a case of getting the authorities to take the missing/running away side of things as seriously as well but ... it seems the missing/running away has been brushed over by the national agenda.'

2.2.1 CSE following running away

Section 2.2.1 outlines the relationship between running away and CSE where a young person starts to experience running away prior to CSE, and the relationship between running away and CSE can take the following forms:

- CSE as a risk of running away
- CSE takes place after a young person spends time living on the streets
- CSE as a survival strategy of running away
- perpetrators exploiting the vulnerability of young people

- CSE as experienced after a young person runs away and spends time with friends who are involved in sexual exploitation
- young people running away to attend parties with older men.

CSE as a risk of running away

Professionals identified that sexual exploitation is a serious and likely risk of running away and that running away renders young people vulnerable to CSE:

‘We work with children and young people whose lives are on the edge and whose behaviours are often very difficult for parents and carers and professionals to manage. And one of the behaviours is running away ... and in our experience, and we’ve been working with these children for seventeen years, when a child is missing and someone is concealing them ... then there’s going to be a real risk of sexual exploitation. It’s only a matter of time before the person who’s hiding them needs something in return or requests something in return and, in our experience, that is usually sex.’

Young people recognise that the relationship between running away and CSE is such that, through running away, they can find themselves in dangerous situations and environments where they experience CSE:

‘If I hadn’t left home then the things that happened to me wouldn’t have happened because I would have been in a safe environment. ... If you leave home and spend time in dangerous places it is more likely that you are going to get raped and more likely that you are going to get sexually exploited.’

Lily’s experiences highlight how a young person can be exploited when they run away:

Lily started to run away because she did not like living in the children’s home:

‘It was horrible. ... The staff, the rules, the kids. It was like a prison.’

Lily experienced sexual exploitation on a number of occasions when she ran away from children’s homes. On one occasion, Lily’s friend persuaded Lily to run away with her to spend time with a male who was unknown to Lily. This male lived with his mother and did not want her to know that Lily and her friend were with him in his bedroom:

‘He did [sexual] stuff to me as well. ... And, that time, I really wanted to go home [to the children’s home] and I just wanted to turn me phone on and ring the home and be like “will you come and get me?” but I couldn’t; I couldn’t move. And then I thought “I’ll get up and I’ll run downstairs to his mum and say look, I’m going home” but I couldn’t; I couldn’t do anything.’

Lily described another incident where she ran away and experienced sexual exploitation:

‘I was just walking out [after running away] and someone ... shouted “oi, come up here and I’ll give you some free drink” or something and I don’t know, I don’t what it is but you just go [to be with the person who has offered the free alcohol] and I don’t know why. ... What happened that time was like it was a house share and I sort of knew one of them [who lived in the shared house] and I didn’t know this other person. This person [the one that Lily sort of knew] got me really drunk until the point that you don’t know what you’re doing and after he did whatever he did to me, we went into this like communal living room and I fell all over the settee and then it got really serious because then the other guy [who Lily did not know at all] came in and he was twenty-five and the guy I was with was like “get out now” to me but this other guy was like “oh no, she’s staying with me”. ... Because you’re bladdered you can’t move or get out and then [after further sexual assault has taken place] you’re like “oh my god, oh my god” but still you can’t move and you’re just laid there going “oh my god”. ... It happened a lot that stuff.’

Many of the young people described how running away can unintentionally lead a young person to experience sexual exploitation. Jasmine’s experience is a stark reminder of how this can happen as she was locked in a room for two weeks and raped daily by 15 men:

Jasmine started to run away when she was 11 because she was so unhappy living with her aunt and cousins. On one occasion, when still 11, Jasmine ran away and was taken by an older female friend to a male’s house. There were a number of men present who offered Jasmine alcohol:

‘I was getting more and more drunk ‘cos, them days, I was drinking to just forget everything and all of the time I was meeting more and more people [who were] coming to the house ... and I started to feel a bit iffy and everything ... and I started to get more and more paranoid. And when I was going to leave, I dunno, something happened and I ended upstairs just getting raped. And what happened is I tried to go and couldn’t go and my friend was gone. ... I tried to scream and that but they [the men who raped Jasmine] wouldn’t let me and then I felt something in my arm and the next minute I was knocked out. And I woke up feeling drowsy and I was hurting; all down there [around Jasmine’s vagina] I was really hurting. And I was in the bedroom with no clothes on and, I dunno like, I just didn’t have any energy to go, move or anything. ... I didn’t know what to do really. And one of the lads came in and gave me some food and I asked him what was going on like ... and he just laughed and closed the door and locked the door. And I couldn’t even touch the food that he made me. ... When I stood up, my legs were all numb and in pain and that. ... And later that day ... this lad came up the stairs and let himself on to me and they [the other men] all just kept doing that and I couldn’t move and my legs and all that were numb and I just couldn’t move. ... I did try and crawl out of the bed and that - I did fall over a few times - and I did try and get through the [bedroom] door but it was locked from the outside and I was only a kid and

couldn’t get it open. The windows were all blacked out so I couldn’t do anything.’

Jasmine experienced further running away and CSE but was referred to a specialist CSE project and has received long-term support to enable her to move on with her life.

Living on the streets and experiencing CSE after running away

For a small number of young people there was a quick transition from making the decision to run away and finding themselves living on the streets which, in turn, led to them experiencing sexual exploitation:

After running away from home and finding herself alone on the streets, Leanne survived by becoming involved with a group of homeless adults:

‘It was like one big family. ... We [Leanne and another young person] were like the babies of the group so everyone was around us making sure we were alright and that.’

While a number of the homeless adults were caring and protective towards Leanne, she was sexually exploited by a number of males who used some of the homeless community to gain access to Leanne.

Being sexually exploited can result in young people being rejected from the homeless community and becoming increasingly isolated, which exacerbates the risks they face:

Sadie was sexually abused from being a young child by her stepfather and was sexually exploited by a group of older boys in the local area. When her Nigerian family found out that she had been having sex with a number of white boys her loving family circumstances changed and her stepfather became very strict with her while continuing to sexually abuse her. Sadie was not allowed out of home after school and at

weekends. Sadie started to run away when she had chance, spending time with other young people in the city centre and parks, sometimes staying away overnight with adults from the homeless population. Sadie began exchanging sex with adult men in the homeless community for alcohol and drugs. This made her unpopular with some of the women within the homeless community who seriously assaulted Sadie. One of the men from the homeless community who was exploiting Sadie asked her to leave the local area with him. Sadie was fed up with the problems she was having at home and with the women from the homeless community so agreed to leave with him. They went to another town and Sadie began to view this older male as her boyfriend. He asked Sadie to have sex with other men so that they could have money for alcohol and drugs. Once again Sadie found herself disliked by women within the homeless community. One day the man Sadie thought of as her boyfriend left the local area without saying goodbye. Sadie manages her situation by staying with men and exchanging sex for somewhere to stay. She also exchanges sex for alcohol and drugs and has sex for money if the opportunity arises. She sometimes sleeps rough on her own on the streets as she is excluded from the homeless community because the adult males just want to have sex with her and the females do not want her around.

CSE as a survival strategy of running away

Professionals stated that sexual exploitation can be a survival strategy to manage running away:

‘Some of it is about survival. They’re running away because many of them have got issues at home in terms of relationship breakdown and stuff like that and that makes then quite needy at an emotional level. So then if they’re approached on the streets whilst they are on the run and are given food, money, gifts and stuff like that, then it’s very easy to groom them. The

groomer already has a head start. It’s very easy for the groomer to say “your family don’t care but I do. It’s best to just leave them and cut yourself off from them”.’

Professionals described how many young people who run away do not foresee that they may experience sexual exploitation. But being involved in sexual exploitation becomes a survival strategy and something that they have to do in order to get a roof over their head and a meal. Professionals commented that often young people would not consider that they have been exploited but are doing what they have to do in order to survive while away from home or care. Many of the young people clearly articulated how the link between running away and CSE can be related to survival as it is much easier for young people to get money in exchange for sex than in other ways:

‘If you’re on the streets and you’re begging for money or something like that, you’re trying to hustle up a bit of money to eat, you’ll be going round the less salubrious places and people will see that you’re vulnerable and will see that you’re desperate for money and they will offer you it [money]. Men aren’t shy about offering you money or something like that; men are very straightforward about things like that. They’ll say “do you want to come into this toilet with me? I’ve got some money I’ll give you twenty quid”. And twenty quid’s very tempting when it took you all day to make a couple of quid. Twenty quid for ten minutes is very tempting for a young person.’

Perpetrators exploiting the vulnerability of children and young people who run away

Professionals presented how perpetrators of CSE are often skilled at recognising when a young person is vulnerable:

‘I think generally young runaways are vulnerable from the fact that they’re not at home, for whatever reason. [This] makes them vulnerable. So if you ask someone

who is going to groom a young person, then a runaway is an easy target because they already feel that they can’t talk to their own family or that they [their family] are looking for perfection or whatever. So they are going to be easy prey for someone who is offering so-called love, affection and attention.’

Young people described how adults recognised that they were in a difficult situation and targeted them for sexual exploitation:

‘It’s obvious, isn’t it? If they [male] adults see some 15 year old girl walking around in the middle of the night, they’re going to think “well, why is she walking around in the middle of the night? No-one must care about her. No-one’s looking for her. What’s she doing all on her own”?’

A few of the young people who were thrown out of home were offered a place to stay by adults previously unknown to them who made it clear to the young person, once they were in the adult’s home, that they were expected to have some form of sex with them. Due to the risks of the unknown involved in staying out overnight or sleeping rough, young people can feel that they have no choice but to do what an adult wants them to do in exchange for somewhere to stay:

‘Now I get it: if kids are on the streets, if they run away or their parents kick them out, there are men out there who will take advantage of them and ‘cos you’ve got nowhere else to go, you’ll do it [have sex with them]. ... It’s better than sleeping out and getting raped by someone you don’t know who could do anything to you. ... There’s always someone who will take advantage of you. When you’re a kid, it’s hard to say no to an adult who says they want to help you and offers you a place to stay ‘cos what other choice do you have?’

Fay’s story exemplifies how the stress of being thrown out of home and having nowhere to go can make the offer of somewhere to stay attractive to a young person:

When Fay was 12 her mother started throwing her out of home. Fay was very confused by her mother’s behaviour and didn’t know what to do when her mother threw her out. Sometimes Fay was able to stay the night with a friend but this was not always possible. One evening, with nowhere to go, Fay sat on a swing in the local park worrying about what she was going to do. A man who lived in the local area sat on the swing next to Fay:

‘He asked me if I was alright. He could tell I was unhappy and asked me what was wrong. ... I told him me mum had said I couldn’t go home that night and that I didn’t know where to go. ... He knew all the right things to say: he said that he knew me brother [who was in prison] and that he [Fay’s brother] wouldn’t like to see me with nowhere to stay. He said he knew what it was like to be chucked out of home ‘cos his dad used to do it to him and that I could stay at his house. ... I now know I was stupid to go to his house but, at the time, he seemed really nice and like he understood how I was feeling. I thought ‘cos he said he was a friend of me brother’s, it would be alright [to go to his house].’

The man made Fay some food and then told her that he needed something from her and forced her to have oral sex:

‘Looking back on it, I didn’t feel right about it but I didn’t know anything [about sex] then.’ Fay continued to stay with this man when she had nowhere to stay:

‘He basically told me that nothing is for nothing and that I had to pay my way in some way.’

In a few cases, the adult perpetrator of CSE befriended young people before they had run away and provided somewhere for the young person to go once they ran away from home:

Freddie, one of six children, was singled out by his father and physically and emotionally abused. To avoid his home situation, Freddie spent time with his older siblings and other

young people out in the local area. When he was nine Freddie started to run away from home to be alone:

I used to just run off and be on my own. I went to this wood and this field. ... I just wanted to be on me own.'

When Freddie was ten he got to know a 20-year-old male who invited him to his house. Freddie started to spend time at this male's house when he ran away from home:

'At first we used to play on his Xbox but then he started giving me booze and touching me and that.'

Freddie was taken into care and lived in a residential school for two years. He often ran away and, at first, stayed with this older male. However, this older male's sexual advances became more and more forceful. During one episode of running away the adult male raped Freddie. Freddie continued to run away after this incident but spent time on his own as he had done when he was younger and had first started to run away.

Other young people were encouraged by older adults to run away from home and stay with them:

James describes himself as having learning difficulties and as being lonely and socially inept. James' parents separated when he was 14. James did not spend much time with his father when his father lived with the family and found it awkward being with him on his own after his father left the family home. At the same time that James and his father were finding it difficult to be with one another, James was befriended by an older male in his mid-twenties. This male invited James round to play on his games console. James enjoyed having what he thought was a friend as he has always found it difficult to make friends. The older male gave James alcohol and encouraged him to stay overnight at weekends without letting James' mother know where he was and James started to run away regularly.

One night when James ran away to stay with the older male, he was given more alcohol than usual and, when James was very drunk, the adult male raped James. James did not tell anyone because he was unsure about what had happened and because he did not know if it was his fault or not.

Running away to seek attention and care

Many of the young people who participated in the research described how the link between experiencing running away and CSE is feeling generally uncared for and not listened to. This was particularly the case for Looked After Children. Running away can be a response to feeling unwanted, feeling the need to be cared for and seeking attention. CSE is the form that the attention takes:

“Cos you feel like you’re on your own [when you feel uncared for] so you just want somebody else there for you. ... Pretty much anyone would do at that time when you feel that low.’

Feeling uncared for and unloved can act as a push factor for running away and becoming involved in sexual exploitation. Jasmine, for example, started to run away when she was living with her aunt and cousins because of the way she was treated by these relatives. As Jasmine succinctly stated, the relationship between running away and CSE can be about:

‘Running from hate to what you think is love.’

In contrast, Ellie knew that her mother loved her but that she was unable to show it due to her mental health illness. Consequently, Ellie ran away and became involved in sexual exploitation to experience what she thought was love:

I knew that my mother always loved me but I never felt that loved because she was so ill ... so it was good to feel like that [loved] at the time [by the men who were sexually exploiting Ellie].’

Running away and spending time with friends involved in sexual exploitation

A number of young females who participated in the research described how they were sexually exploited after running away because they spent time with other young people who were all being sexually exploited:

Shar became involved with older men through the friends she ran away to be with passing on her number to the older men:

‘They’d [Shar’s friends] like meet them in the park or on the streets and they’d [the older men] ask for my number and my friends would give it to them.’

Shar’s friends also invited Shar to go to parties with them during episodes of running away:

‘They said “Oh, there’s this party. We’re gonna have a drink and there’ll be a few people there. Do you wanna come?” So I’d go with them. ... They gave us alcohol and cannabis so that they could do what they wanted to us. ... At the time it seemed like fun and like it was normal and you’d think “Well, they have got us drink and everything” so you’d feel like you’ve got to return the favour ... like you had to give something back.’

Running away to attend parties and be with older men

A number of the young people who participated in the research started to become involved in sexual exploitation as a result of running away but then started to run away with the sole purpose of attending parties with older men or to be with older men:

‘It was always to go to parties or stay the night with someone.’

2.2.2 Running away following CSE

Section 2.2.2 addresses the relationship between running away and CSE where the young person experiences CSE prior to running away and:

- perpetrators of CSE encourage young people to run away to be with them
- young people run away to be with an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- young people run away because of the desire to have sex
- running away is a consequence of how a young person's disclosure of CSE is responded too
- young people run away because of the pressure of being involved in a police operation into CSE.

Perpetrators of CSE encouraging young people to be with them

Professionals described how perpetrators of CSE often encourage those they are exploiting to run away and this forms part of the grooming process:

I think virtually all of them (children and young people who experience CSE) are encouraged to run away by their perpetrators. It’s part of the grooming process because what they need to do is make that young person dependent upon them so they need to convince that young person that it’s good to run away because the people who are caring for them ... don’t have their interest at heart.’

Professionals reported that perpetrators are sometimes aware that if a young person is away for more than a few hours, they may be reported as missing to the police. Therefore, perpetrators can encourage the young person to run away to be with them but ensure that the young person is returned home after a few hours:

‘It’s about where the young person is when they’re not at school and they’re not at home and it’s not that they’ve run away overnight or for a couple of days but it’s where they are in between school and when they’re allowed home or they’re leaving home at seven and arriving home between eleven and midnight.’

Running away to be with an older boyfriend or girlfriend

Several young people who experienced both running away and CSE ran away to be with an older boyfriend or, in one young man’s case, an older girlfriend:

‘She was 22. ... I hadn’t had sex before and my first time was with her. ... I used to run away so that I could see her. ... At one point I was with her most of the time. ... Me dad never said that much about it but one night him and his mates were pissed and that and were teasing me about it, saying that it was every young lad’s dream. ... Me mum wasn’t very happy about it and it was her [house] I used to run from so that I could see X [the older female].’

After running to be with an older boyfriend, young people have found themselves living on the streets:

Abi is 15 and lives on the street in a tent with her older boyfriend who she ran away to be with. Abi’s parents initially liked her boyfriend but became unhappy with Abi’s relationship with him. Abi ended the relationship but after an argument with her father where he threatened her with violence, Abi contacted her ex-boyfriend and asked him to run away with her. He agreed and they made plans to run away:

‘I got me [school] uniform on; I packed me handbag full of stuff and packed another bag of stuff, walked up as if I was walking up to where me bus stop is for school and X [Abi’s boyfriend] was there and we carried on walking. [I] got changed in some alley way and ended up here. ... I slept in the night

shelter just for one night and then they found out me age and I wasn’t allowed to stay there and so the next night me and me boyfriend slept out on the street ... for about two months. We moved in with someone else and her husband but they were alcoholics. Stayed there for about three weeks, got kicked out. Stayed in a tent, lived in a tent and we’ve only just moved into this flat that’s X’s [Abi’s boyfriend’s] mate’s.’

Running away to be with an older boyfriend or girlfriend can take different forms. Sometimes older males encourage young people to run away:

Liam is gay and did not know any other gay men. He wanted a boyfriend and thought that the best way to meet a boyfriend was to go online. One man Liam met online invited him to his house, said that he wanted Liam to be his boyfriend and that he should run away and not tell anyone where he was going. As Liam desperately wanted to have a boyfriend, he agreed to do this and the adult male ordered a taxi to collect Liam from a phone box and bring him to his house.

After running away to remove himself from his stepfather’s violence, Jordon met an older male who became his boyfriend and sexually exploited him. This male used to text Jordon while he was at school and encourage him to run away to be with him. Jordon would run out of school and travel the thirty mile distance to the city where this older male lived. Jordon usually stayed with the older male for a couple of days, but sometimes stayed for a couple of weeks and, on one occasion, for a month.

Sean is gay and a Traveller. He lived on site with his father who has mental health issues and is physically abusive towards Sean. After a particularly violent incident when Sean was attacked by his father, he started going online and chatting to adult males on Facebook:

‘I was so desperate to leave my daddy like and I got chatting with this man on Facebook and I felt so bad about myself and I opened up to

him and told him like what was going on and he said “do you want to come and live with me?”.’

After deciding that he would run away from home, Sean went to stay with the adult male:

‘We got into a relationship really quickly. ... He ended up raping me ... After it happened, I went for a walk by the river and I climbed on to a bridge and I freaked and I thought about jumping [into the river]. ... I didn’t know what to do. It was like ‘who am I going to tell this to because they’re going to think I’m sick?’.’

Running away to meet adults for sex because of the desire to have sex

Many of the males who participated in the research stated explicitly that the reason they ran away was to have sex with older males and, in one case, an older female. The experience of sex was very powerful and was something that young males enjoyed and wanted more of:

‘All my friends were just talking about it and I was doing it! It was like the best thing ever and I just wanted more and more of it.’

‘When I was 14 and having sex with X [the older female], it was like nothing else I’d ever done. I just wanted to do it [have sex] all the time. None of me mates were having sex and there was I getting laid by this gorgeous girl; it was great.’

‘I felt like just wanted in a way that I had never felt wanted before: like more of a lust than love. ... And then when I was with a guy, I felt like I was being loved in a way that I hadn’t been loved by my parents and stuff. ... Like a different kind of love than what my parents gave me. ... I liked those feelings of being wanted and the sex and how it made me feel and I wanted those feelings.’

Some of the females described how they enjoyed sex but often this enjoyment stopped

when they were coerced into doing sexual acts they did not want to do, were forced to have sex with men they did not want to have sex with and/or were hurt during sex:

‘At first I did like the sex; I really liked it and I would run away to do it but then it changed and he made me do things I didn’t want to do and sometimes I was hurt.’

Running away to escape CSE

The relationship between running away and CSE can be to avoid further sexual exploitation as young people also run away to escape being sexually exploited. Shan ran away to avoid sexual exploitation that was facilitated by his father:

Shan has early memories of his father taking his brother and sisters away for the day and not knowing where they had gone. One day, when Shan was six, he was taken along with his siblings. His father drove them to a location in their home town and Shan was sexually abused for the first time by a man from within his local community. This became a regular pattern and Shan and his siblings were internally trafficked³⁷ for sexual exploitation for which their father was paid. Sometimes they were taken on longer journeys to other towns and cities. Sometimes there was one man who abused Shan, sometimes more than one man.

When Shan was ten his older brother ran away from home and was never seen again by his family. Shan started to exhibit problems at school and now realises that this was because of the abuse he was experiencing. He fought with other children and generally caused problems at school. He was

37 ‘Internal trafficking’ can be defined as the trafficking of people within state borders (where the nationality of victims and perpetrators is irrelevant). Many children and young people who are sexually exploited are moved by their coercers and exploiters to locations outside of the child or young person’s place of residence to a location where sexual exploitation occurs and then returned to their original location.

excluded when he was 13 and no alternative educational provision was set in place. As Shan was not at school, he started to spend a lot of time on the streets during the day. He met older males who were part of a gang and started to hang around with them. One of the older males said that Shan could start to make money by doing a bit of drug running.

Shan’s father intensified his violence towards Shan because he didn’t like him being out of the home so often. One day Shan overheard his father on the phone making arrangements to take Shan and his sisters somewhere and presumed this was to be sexually exploited. Shan felt that he could bear it no longer and decided to run away. Shan did not tell anyone why he had run away or that he was being sexually exploited but said that there were problems at home. He was offered somewhere to stay by one of the gang members. After a week Shan returned home. Shan’s father was furious that he had run away. Shan thinks that this was because he had lost face with, and money from, the men who were expecting to have sex with Shan. Shan’s father hit him across the back with a metal bar and Shan ran out of the back door never to return home again. He was 14.

Jimmy, a gay young male from the Traveller community, also ran away from his family and community to escape CSE:

When Jimmy was 13 he realised he was sexually attracted to men, which troubled him as he knew that being gay would not be accepted by his family and community, and that he would be expected to marry a woman and have children.

When Jimmy was 14 he got to know an older male in his mid-twenties who was the son of another Traveller family on site. This man invited Jimmy to his caravan where they drank alcohol and smoked cannabis. One night the man asked Jimmy if he had ever had sex with a girl. The man made a joke about Jimmy preferring boys and then said there was nothing wrong with that. The man’s response stunned Jimmy as he had not

thought that there was anyone who thought that being into boys was acceptable. One night when Jimmy was round at this man’s caravan he saw a pornographic magazine featuring men. The man saw Jimmy looking at the magazine and told him to have a look. Jimmy did and the man told Jimmy that he was better looking than any of the men in the magazine and why didn’t they take photos of Jimmy. So Jimmy took his top off and the two of them fooled around with the camera on the man’s phone. At one point, the man grabbed Jimmy and kissed him roughly on the lips. This frightened Jimmy who put his top back on and ran back to his caravan.

Jimmy tried to avoid the man as he was having conflicting feelings about what was happening. On one level he was frightened because he knew that this man should not have kissed him because of how others within his family and community would react but the kiss had also excited him. After a few days Jimmy went back to the man’s caravan. The man said he had missed Jimmy coming round and gave him a beer. They watched a film and smoked weed and drank. Nothing was said about the kiss. After a while, when he was drunk and stoned, Jimmy leant over and kissed the man on the lips. Jimmy and the man embarked upon a sexual relationship. At first Jimmy enjoyed the sex but then the man’s demands changed and he became violent.

The man started making up excuses to take Jimmy off site ‘to help him with a job’ but this was an excuse to get Jimmy away from the site. At first Jimmy was excited by leaving the site with the man he thought of as his boyfriend but he found that the man had arranged to meet other men, outside of the Traveller community, in a hotel and they were expecting to have sex with Jimmy and a couple of other boys that they had brought along with them. Jimmy did not want to have sex with these men and said so. The man he thought of as his boyfriend took Jimmy into the bathroom and said that if he did not do what he was told, he would show his father the photographs he had of Jimmy on his phone. The man then calmed

down and told Jimmy while stroking his hair that he owed these men money and that they would harm him if Jimmy did not do what they wanted.

After being forced to have sex with a number of men, Jimmy changed. He started to get into a lot of fights and generally cause a lot of problems at home with his family. Jimmy wanted to tell someone what was being done to him but felt trapped and that there was no-one he could go to as being gay was viewed as unacceptable. He had a lot of arguments with his father who was violent towards Jimmy to teach him to respect. Jimmy continued to meet the man in his caravan because he was too frightened to stop doing so.

One day the man came to Jimmy’s father and said that he had work that he wanted Jimmy to help him with and that Jimmy would get paid. Jimmy had a feeling what the work would involve and told his father that he did not want to go. His father told him not to be so stupid and to go. Jimmy could not face being forced to have sex with a number of men again and jumped out of the car when they were driving through the city centre. Jimmy then did not know what to do. He was too frightened to return back home to his family and site but also knew that it would be hard to return to his community if he stayed away for too long.

Nicole ran away to prevent further sexual exploitation by a male relative and his friends:

Nicole’s life changed when a male relative started to sexually abuse her and invited his friends to do the same:

‘He came round to me house when me mum and dad were at work. He forced me to give him a blow job. He hit me when I refused to do so and grabbed me round the throat. I was really scared and felt sick afterwards. He told me to keep it quiet and said that no-one would believe me if I told anyone what had happened. And he was right – no-one would believe me; things like that didn’t happen in

my family. It would be my word against his and no-one would believe me.’

After a while Nicole’s relative forced her to have oral sex with his friends. Nicole became very depressed and started to self-harm. Nicole’s relative went on a family holiday and she ran away just before he returned as she dreaded the exploitation resuming:

‘After two weeks of having a break from him I felt like I couldn’t bear it all starting again. It was the beginning of the summer holidays so I was off school and I knew he [her cousin] would be round when me mam and dad were at work so the day before he came back from holiday, I ran away. ... I planned it all out. I took some stuff with me – clothes and that – and some money that I’d saved up and I went to me friend’s. ... I’d never done anything like that before so me mam and dad were really worried but I didn’t understand why they hadn’t noticed the change in me [as a result of being sexually exploited]. ... I was quiet when I didn’t used to be. I wasn’t doing so well at school. I was so unhappy but they [her parents] didn’t notice any of it and I felt angry about it. ... I wanted them to notice me and to see that something was wrong and to stop what my [relative] was doing to me.’

Nicole returned home and the following day a police officer came to see her:

‘The police came to speak with me and asked me why I was running away. Like I could really say “my [relative]’s making me suck his dick and his mates’ dick”. It just wasn’t going to happen.’

Nicole continued to run away, sometimes staying with friends and sometimes staying out all night on her own or with other young people:

‘I ran away so me [relative] couldn’t find me and couldn’t make me do all that stuff. ... There was no-one to help me with it all so all I could think to do was run away and be omewhere where he couldn’t find me.’

Running away as a consequence of how disclosure of a young person’s sexual exploitation is responded to

Running away also takes place after a young person has been sexually exploited as a result of how professionals and family members respond after they have disclosed CSE:

Lucy was sexually exploited by a number of men. Due to arguments with family members Lucy started to talk to men online and was raped on two separate incidents by men she met online.

‘He turned really nasty and he raped me and then he dropped me off afterwards and was like “I’ll see you later, babes” as if nothing had happened.’

Alongside being sexually exploited Lucy was sexually abused by a relative for a number of years and all the sexual abuse Lucy experienced began to have a significant impact upon her. Lucy had good relationships with some of the teaching staff in her school who all noticed a change in her behaviour and were concerned about this change. Lucy disclosed to the head teacher that she had experienced sexual exploitation and sexual abuse from a number of males. The head teacher responded in a positive manner to Lucy and made it clear that Social Care and the police had to be informed of her disclosure. When the social worker and a police officer arrived:

‘The police woman acted like she had already made her judgement before she had already met me so I stood up and said “I’ve had enough of this” and that was the first time I ran away.’

Lucy was worried about how her disclosure would be received so she was prepared to run away. Lucy ran away on subsequent occasions because of how her family reacted to her disclosure:

“Cos they don’t believe me. Their attitude is “we don’t believe you”.’

While other young people initially run away for other reasons, they also run away because of how family members responded to their sexual exploitation. Lauren, for example, started to run away to be with a man who she thought of as an older boyfriend, but later running away was linked to how her parents, particularly her father, responded to the sexual exploitation that Laura experienced:

Lauren told a policewoman what had happened during an incident of running away to be with her older boyfriend:

‘She was nice so I told her what had happened. ... I told her that I met Pete online, that we had met and that he had given me a phone. ... I told her that I had gone to his flat with him and what he had made me do to him. ... The policewoman said that because of my age, it was a criminal offence what he had done.’

The policewoman said that she would have to tell Lauren’s parents what Lauren had told her. Lauren was very worried about this, especially about what her father would say and do. While Lauren’s parents did not mention to her what had happened, they did accompany her to the police station to make a statement. Lauren’s perception was that her parents did not want charges pressed against Pete:

‘They wanted to sweep it all under the carpet and pretend it never happened.’

Lauren thinks that she became depressed after all of this happened and spent most of the time at home in her bedroom. She felt even more detached from her family. Her school attendance decreased as she often felt too depressed to go to school and her school grades dropped. She also felt isolated from the few friends she had. Lauren’s relationship with her parents deteriorated even further:

‘My dad barely looked at me never mind spoke to me. ... My mum tried to make effort with me but I could tell she didn’t know what to say or do.’

Lauren met a new group of young people who stayed out overnight and eventually ran away to be with them and escape her home situation:

‘I couldn’t bear being somewhere where I felt like I wasn’t wanted and didn’t fit. At least with these friends I felt like they wanted to talk to me and wanted to be with me.’

Lauren started to drink alcohol and smoke cannabis with this group of friends, which caused more conflict at home as Lauren’s father started to shout at her when she returned from running away overnight. He also started to hit her:

‘He used to lose the plot and just scream at me that I should be showing him and my mum some respect. ... I told him that I did respect my mum but not him. He used to slap me when I said things like that.’

Once Lauren was 16 she left home and presently lives in a hostel for young people who are homeless.

While Nicole originally started to run away to escape being exploited by a relative and his friends, her reasons for running away changed after she made a statement to the police and the sexual exploitation stopped. Nicole then began to run away because she was so angry about how her family behaved when they found out she had been sexually exploited by her relative and his friends:

‘I can’t sit at home with me mum and dad. They want to pretend it all never happened but it did. They don’t stick up for me when me gran and grandad start going on about it, saying I must have done something to encourage him [the young person’s relative]. I don’t want to be with them. ... I want everything to be back to normal with them but I can’t change how I feel. Sometimes I’m so mad I want to throw things at them, scream at them and kick them. Other times I feel so sad and want to cry because I miss having them the way I used to have them. Me mum

looks so sad and upset all of the time and my dad hasn’t been able to look me in the face since it came out. I know it’s hard for them but I’m the one it all happened to. ... I run away now because of everything that has happened and because it’s changed everything with me family. Sometimes I just have to get away from it.’

Running away because of the pressure of being part of a police operation into CSE

While only a small proportion of the young people who participated in the research have been part of a police operation addressing CSE, some ran away because of the stress of being involved in a police prosecution, taking part in police interviews and fear of the forthcoming court process.

‘It was all the questions that did it [led the young person to run away during the police investigation into the CSE she had experienced]. ... Having men [male police officers] ask me all that personal stuff was really difficult. I much preferred it when it was a woman [police officer]. You don’t wanna discuss stuff like that with a man when you’re a girl. Some days I just couldn’t take any more and I ran away to have a break from it.’

Young people described running away because of being so stressed by the police operation into their sexual exploitation:

‘It was just all so stressful. Being asked time and time again about the men [who had sexually exploited the young person], worrying what the court hearing was going to be like and feeling frustrated because sometimes nothing was done about some of the men who had groomed me and could be doing the same thing to other kids. ... [When the young person ran away] I just had to get away from it so when X [name of a man the young person met online] said he would come and get me and take me to his house for the weekend, I couldn’t wait to get away.’

Other young people, who had run away on previous occasions, found it very stressful when the perpetrator of their exploitation was released on bail and this stress played a part in running away after a police investigation had begun:

‘I couldn’t sleep thinking that I might bump into him when I was out in town or with me friends or summat so I used to run [away]. Just knowing he was out there and could come up to me at any minute really frightened me. ... He used to come up to me in the street and threaten me if I didn’t withdraw my statement. He used to shout at me, asking me why I was making up lies about him. ... He used to get these other girls to come up to me at college and say they were going to hit me and why was I telling lies about him. ... It just all did my head in and sometimes I ran away to get away from it all.’

2.2.3
Other links between running away and CSE

Section 2.2.3 identifies other links between running away and CSE relating to:

- drugs and alcohol
- the internet
- parents’ and carers
- trust
- the need to escape
- feeling isolated
- young people experiencing a shift in their experience of running away and CSE
- experiencing running away and CSE and becoming a sex worker.

This section also describes how there can be no direct link between a young person’s running away and sexual exploitation; and presents possible impacts of experiencing both running away and CSE.

The role of drugs and alcohol in the relationship between running away and CSE

Both professionals and young people who participated in the research identified the importance of drugs and alcohol in the relationship between running away and CSE. As noted by one professional, alcohol and substance misuse:

‘Features in every single case that we’ve got. ... Getting the girls hooked on alcohol and drugs are the way groomers get the girl to do what they want them to do. ... It’s also a way for the girls to cope with what’s happening; self-medicating, isn’t it?’

The role of alcohol and drugs in exacerbating the risk that a young person faces when they run away was explicitly stated by one professional:

‘By running away they put themselves at risk ... particularly if they have issues around drugs and alcohol because they will always be in danger of exchanging drugs or alcohol for sex.’

A significant proportion of the young people who participated in the research outlined how their desire for alcohol and drugs was behind their running away and being sexually exploited:

‘I didn’t go for the fun or to see those people, I went for the drink and drugs ... to take like all my feelings away. ... I felt like not good enough ... and I felt depressed sometimes ... and then I started drinking more and taking more drugs.’

While young people were aware that they were running away to be sexually exploited by older males, they continued to do it all because:

‘I needed to drink and to take drugs.’

Young people often regretted what had taken place when they had run away to seek alcohol and/or drugs:

‘The next day you always really regretted something because when you’re drunk you do something that you wish you hadn’t done.’

A number of the young people whose use of alcohol and drugs was linked to their running away and CSE began to rely upon drugs and alcohol to help them to cope with the sexual exploitation they were experiencing. For example, when realising that they were going to be forced to have sex, young people decided that their only way they were going to be able to manage what was going to happen to them was to take a lot of alcohol and drugs:

‘One time there was just me and my friend and all these men. She got really drunk and passed out. They were all about to rape her and I thought “I can’t let that happen to her” so I jumped up and told them to fuck off and leave her alone. I had a knife so I pulled that out but a couple of them [adult men] got it off me and pinned me down. So I got off my face as this was the only way I was gonna get through the evening and me and my friend did to them what they wanted us to do all along. ... We knew what was going to happen so we would just think “need to get wasted for this” and enjoy the drugs they gave us – they were free drugs for us so they paid for us in some way.’

The role of the internet in the relationship between running away and CSE

The internet played a role in the experiences of many of the young people who participated in the research, as grooming and encouraging the young person to run away took place online. As described previously, many of the young people met perpetrators of CSE via Facebook and grooming took place online. In some instances, the perpetrator was known to the young person prior to contact via Facebook:

Abi had known the man she considered her boyfriend for a few years as his family lived on a neighbouring estate and he used to spend time on the estate that Abi lived on. Abi considered this man to be a mate before he became her boyfriend. He used to say to her:

““Hey babe” – he always called me babe – “you should come out with us [him] just by yourself”. I always thought he was just one of the lads, you know, and said stuff like that but one day [on Facebook] he convinced me to go and see him.’

Tina met an older boyfriend for the first time face-to-face and then invited him to be her friend on Facebook, which is how they started communicating and arranged to see each other:

‘I saw him and suddenly got attracted to him and added him on Facebook, started talking to him [messaging via Facebook] and we got together. ... I went round to his house and we watched a film and then obviously had sex.’

In other cases, adult males who were unknown to the child or young person made contact with the young person via Facebook. Many of the young people who participated in the research used Facebook as a means to alleviate their loneliness and met perpetrators who responded to the young person and encouraged them to run away. In some cases, young males were going online to seek potential boyfriends but were groomed by perpetrators of CSE and encouraged to run away.

As previously noted, Liam felt isolated because he does not know any other gay people and wanted to have a boyfriend. Liam has met a number of men via Facebook and run away to meet them. While Liam is now not allowed out on his own and has limited access to the internet because of the risky situations he finds himself in, he disclosed that a 39-year-old male who he was in touch with via Facebook had asked Liam to call him ‘daddy’ and called Liam ‘son’. This male lived

a significant distance from Liam and wanted to meet him. He wanted to bring his adult friends to meet Liam and for Liam to dress up as a girl and have sex with his two dogs.

Lucy’s father moved abroad when she was a young child and Lucy did not see him often or have much contact with him. As Father’s Day approached, Lucy felt sadder and sadder about her father and went on to Facebook to seek company. She had been talking to an older male on Facebook for some time and told him how sad she felt about missing her father and about Father’s Day. This male said that Lucy could spend Father’s Day with him and arranged to meet her. He collected Lucy in his car and drove her to his house, where he locked her in a room and raped her before driving her back home.

Young people also experienced positive outcomes of using Facebook. Part of Jasmine’s motivation to leave her violent older boyfriend came from a number of comments her friends posted on Facebook telling Jasmine that she shouldn’t allow him to treat her in the way he did and that she should leave him. Tina posted that she wanted to kill herself as her status on Facebook. One of Tina’s friends saw this status and called the police who realised that Tina had gone missing and was at risk and began to search for her.

Young people were not always initially seeking sex or to meet someone when they went online but were looking for something to fill a gap and a need in their life. Lauren joined an online forum to chat to others who had experienced bereavement. Tom accessed a number of gay websites and forums because he wanted other gay people to talk too. While a number of men who he chatted to online were supportive and did not ask to meet Tom, other men did:

‘I really needed to talk to someone about it [being gay] and I didn’t think of charities or anything but I wanted to talk to other gay guys and I had an iPod touch so I downloaded a few gay chat line apps on it and I started talking to guys on there

and, for about four weeks, guys were just like helping me out and making sure I was okay. But then one guy was like “have you ever had sex with a guy before?” and I said “no” and he was like “do you want to try?”. So I started meeting up with guys and I liked it so I started doing it more often and I set up more profiles. ... When I told guys my age, some said “well, we’re only going to be able to talk on here” [online]; they refused to meet up and said we couldn’t even meet up for coffee but then there were a few [men] who said “yeah, we’ll meet up” and some were like “yeah, we can have sex if you want to try anything”.’

Many of the young people who met perpetrators online and ran away to be with them did not give thought to the risks involved. A small number of young people did consider the risks involved in meeting men but perceived there to be an element of safety to meeting men online prior to meeting face-to-face:

‘While I never thought I would be harmed, I did think “he’s a man, I’m a 13 year old boy; if he really wanted to do something he would get his way”. ... I always felt like I was safer checking men out first on the internet ‘cos on the internet I could see if I liked them first but if I went down to the toilets [to a local location well-known for cottaging], I might have to have sex with someone who was really unattractive and I’d have to do it even if I didn’t like them. ... [Online] you can decide what you were going to do beforehand whereas in a toilet you could be like “I don’t want to do this” and they could be like “well, I do”.’

Parents’ and carers’ role in young people’s running away and sexual exploitation

In a few young people’s experiences, parents played a part in their running away and involvement in sexual exploitation. For example, both Scarlett and Shar did not live with their fathers but they played a role in their daughter’s running away and CSE.

When Scarlett was 13 her father gave her 24 cans of lager when she was running away to be with an older man who sexually exploited her. When Shar ran away to attend parties with older men her father, who had an alcohol misuse issue, accompanied her to the parties where she was sexually exploited so that he could gain access to alcohol. Shan’s father organised and facilitated Shan’s sexual exploitation. Chloe’s mother sold Chloe to men for sex and, after Chloe was taken into care, also encouraged her to run away so that she could continue to make money from charging men money to have sex with Chloe.

While other young people’s mothers did not explicitly have a role in their running away and involvement in CSE, a small number of the young people’s mothers sold sex, which possibly led to the normalisation of exchanging sex for something. Where young people’s mothers sold sex, their children also sold sex. For example, Jake’s mother sold sex to fund her heroin use and when Jake was thrown out of home by his uncle, he survived by selling sex. Maria described how it was normal for her to experience CSE when she first ran away aged nine as she sold sex because her mother sold sex:

‘When I ran away when I was young, I got sexually abused [through selling sex] because my real mum she was doing prostitution so I thought “oh, if me mam does, it must be okay” because it’s normal to take after your mum, isn’t it? ... So I did that and ever since then I’ve just ran, ran, ran.’

A small number of young people’s parents did try to prevent their child from running away and being sexually exploited. Ellie’s mother, for example, did what she could to try to prevent Ellie from running away to be with her older boyfriend:

‘She was telling me to stay away from him [and] I was ignoring her and she was grounding me and I was [running away] to be with him. I was going to school and going missing from school to be with him and then she [Ellie’s mother] was stopping

me from going to school; I was getting home schooled. And then I’d go to the shops and run away and not come back [from the shops]. ... She took me phone off me and I wasn’t allowed on the internet. ... And then some nights I’d wait until she [Ellie’s mother] went to bed and the kids [Ellie’s siblings] were in bed and I’d sneak out of the back door [to run away to be with her older boyfriend] so she started locking the door and taking the keys with her to bed sometimes. ... Everything she did, she couldn’t stop me [from running away to be with her older boyfriend]; she tried her hardest.’

Tom’s parents also did what they could to prevent him from running away and experiencing CSE:

‘My dad came after me in the car; he drove miles to get me when I had run away and was with a man. My parents took my phone, iPod touch and laptop off me. They didn’t let me use the phone or go out on my own. They got me help. They tried to talk to me about what I was doing and the risks I was taking and how dangerous it was to meet men off the internet.’

Trust and the relationship between running away and CSE

The relationship between running away and CSE can be about trust when young people want to find someone and search for someone they can trust. There are adults who try to make young people feel like they can trust them and then use the young person’s trust to exploit them:

‘You run away ‘cos you want to trust someone and find someone to trust and then you think you’ve found someone to trust so you trust them and then you realise that they made you trust them so they could exploit you.’

Relationship between running away and involvement in sexual exploitation being part of a need to escape

Sometimes the link between running away and CSE can be the young person’s need to escape as Lucy’s experiences reveal:

Lucy initially started to run away to escape the fallout from the disclosure she made about her relative sexually abusing her. She then continued to run away because she was not believed by her family and some professionals about the sexual exploitation she had experienced. Lucy realises that professionals often accuse her of running away for attention but says that part of the reason she runs away is because she wants someone to realise how deeply unhappy and lonely she is. Lucy identified that at the heart of her running away is a need to escape her daily life and all the difficulties it holds. There is a shared link with CSE as the men Lucy is at risk of sexual exploitation from also offer her a means of escape, as they have cars they can drive her away in, and provide her with the alcohol she so desperately craves to escape how she feels.

Feeling isolated and experiencing running away and CSE

For many of the young people who participated in the research feeling isolated was part of their route into running away and CSE. For some of the boys and young men who are gay, the isolation they felt in relation to their sexuality also played a part:

Tom recognises that his route into sexual exploitation was via the internet and that he ran away to be with men he met online, stemming from being isolated in relation to his sexuality. While his sexuality had not caused any problems with his family and some of his friends, Tom did not know anyone else who was gay and wanted to be part of a community so that he could talk with other gay men. Tom thinks that he would

have felt less isolated if he knew other gay young people:

‘Because I could have talked to them about it [being gay] because the first thing I did when I was on the internet was to talk to someone about how I felt. So if I hadn’t done that, I wouldn’t have got into the whole sex [ual exploitation] and running away thing. ... It escalates.’

Isolation was also experienced by young women as a consequence of how CSE is responded to by family members:

‘I can’t talk to me mam and dad about it. I’ve lost all me good friends so can’t talk to them. There’s me mates here [the street in the town centre] but I don’t talk to them about this stuff [being sexually exploited]. I run away here to get away from it.’

Sometimes feelings of isolation stem from circumstances that precede running away and CSE can be exacerbated by their experiences of running away and CSE:

Lauren was born as one of a set of twins but, sadly, her twin sister died when she was a few days old and her death has created a void for Lauren who feels incomplete as a person:

‘I’ve always felt like part of me was missing’.

Lauren would have liked to visit her sister’s grave and thinks that doing so would help her as it would at enable her to have more of a connection to her sister. For as long as she can remember, Lauren has felt lost:

‘As a small kid I didn’t feel all there and I didn’t feel like I belonged to anyone’.

This sense of not belonging to her family and feeling isolated stayed with Lauren throughout her childhood and teens.

When Lauren was 14, because she felt unable to talk to anyone about her dead twin sister, she began looking online for information about twins and death. She joined an online

forum for people who had experienced bereavement and began chatting to people. There were some people that Lauren chatted with more than others. One man, who called himself Pete, also said that he had lost a twin at a young age. Pete seemed really understanding and to know how Lauren felt. One day Pete suggested that he and Lauren meet up face-to-face.

After Lauren ran away to be with Pete and realised that he had only paid her attention to exploit her, she felt devastated:

‘I began to see that he only wanted me for the sex and that he hadn’t treated me well. I felt stupid that I had thought we had got on so well because of both losing a twin. I felt like heartbroken as well because I had really liked him and thought that he had liked me. ... I hadn’t been so lonely since meeting him but now all that was gone and I was on my own again and felt even more isolated than before.’

Young people experiencing a shift in their experience of running away and CSE

For several young people who participated in the research, the relationship between running away and CSE could change. For other young people the relationship between running away and CSE was consistently present but shifted over time:

Jasmine started to run away to escape the aunt and cousins she lived with. After running away and being locked up in a house for two weeks and raped daily when she was 11, Jasmine started to live with her mother again. Jasmine does not know why but she started to run away again. Jasmine’s home situation once again became problematic after her mother’s boyfriend was violent towards her. She then moved in with her father and started to run away with a female friend who took her to a number of different men’s houses:

‘And then all the sexual exploitation started.’

Jasmine’s running away became directly linked to CSE because all of the friends she stayed with or spent time with while she was running away were all involved in sexual exploitation:

‘It seemed like every friend I had was involved in it [sexual exploitation]. ... Like this girl ... I used to go out with [when Jasmine ran away], ... there just used to be this one house that she took me too ... and then we went to a different house ... and another house.’

Jasmine is not sure why she became sexually exploited by a number of men but recognises that offers of alcohol played a part, as did receiving attention and feeling cared for:

‘Even though I learned from what happened to me when I was locked up in that house for two weeks, it’s like I didn’t really learn from it. I started going out with even more older males and anybody at all who would buy me a drink. I’d go to their house. ... I just wanted to feel the attention and cared for ... and the drink would make me forget things.’

Sometimes Jasmine ran away because she wanted to be at the men’s houses with them to get the alcohol they provided and, other times, the men contacted her and suggested that she come over:

‘Sometimes they would contact me and sometimes I would, if I had an argument with me mam or something, I would run away and contact them. I’d go round and have a drink and stuff.’

Scarlett started to run away when she was 13. There was a lot of instability in her life at this time as her mother had thrown her out of home so Scarlett had moved in with her biological father who also threw her out of home. Scarlett experienced rejection from both parents and spent time living between both of their houses. Scarlett said she ran away at this stage because:

‘I just wanted to do what I wanted to do ... and I started running away.’

While at this point, Scarlett’s running away was not linked to CSE, she experienced CSE by an older male for the first time when she was 13:

‘I’d known him for ages. ... I’d liked him for ages and he asked me, well he asked me and my best friend, if we wanted to stay round his and I said “I’ve got to ask my mum” and he said “oh, don’t worry; I’ll ring her and ask her”. ... He said that everything was alright and I could stay there. ... He said to me “where do you want to sleep tonight?” and I said “don’t mind” and he said “you can sleep with me”. Obviously I told him I was still a virgin and everything and that’s when he done the things that he did. It hurt but I kind of consented to it. At the time I thought I could consent to it but ... that was the thing: I didn’t know what I was consenting to. I didn’t know anything; I didn’t even know what that thing was [sex] at the time. I didn’t know what I did or anything [when she was having sex]. He got me drunk and everything before that and got me smoking a bit of cannabis.’

Scarlett was taken into care and ran away from the majority of the foster placements she lived in:

‘Put it this way, I’ve run away from practically every foster placement I’ve had except from two.’

When Scarlett was 15 she ran away to be with a 28-year-old man that she met through a woman she described as ‘a sort of pimp’. On another occasion Scarlett ran away to go away camping with a group of adults. The camping trip did not take place and the party of people went to one of the adult’s flats. Some money was stolen from this adult who then forced Scarlett to have sex with a man for money so that he could replace the money that had been stolen:

‘He [the man whose money was stolen] said to me “go and sleep with X” [another adult male who was present in the house] to get his money back. And I said “no, I can’t do that” and he said “you go and do it now” and I said “why?” and he says “because I wants

my money back”. I said “I ain’t no prostitute” and he said “well you are going to be for one night”. ... That’s when he splits his can [alcohol tin] in half and he went “you go do it now” [threatening Scarlett] ... so I had no choice in the matter.’

After this incident, Scarlett continued to run away to spend time with an older male she classed as her boyfriend.

Some young people’s experiences highlight clearly how CSE can be a consequence of running away but also how experiencing CSE can result in running away:

Joe lived with his father and his father’s girlfriend, who mostly ignored Joe. He started running away when he was 14 as he did not feel welcome at home. One night when it was cold and there was nowhere to go, one of Joe’s friends told him about a flat they could go to where there was always alcohol and cannabis. The man who lived in the flat told Joe that he was welcome any time:

‘He said he knew what parents could be like and how they didn’t understand kids and that I could crash at his flat anytime I wanted.’

After another argument at home, Joe ran away and went to the flat of the man who had offered him a place to crash. This time it was just the man and Joe. They drank vodka and smoked cannabis and, after passing out, Joe was raped. He did not tell anyone what had happened to him but he feels that everything changed because of being raped. He also felt that he could not see his friend who had introduced him to the man who raped him and that, therefore, he had to self-exclude from his group of friends.

From this point Joe’s running away changed and he started to leave the local area and stay away for longer periods of time. Joe shoplifted to survive and was caught and charged and, once again, had a youth justice worker. The arguments at home intensified and Joe’s father said he didn’t want Joe to live at home anymore. Joe moved in with

his grandparents. At this point his running away ceased and his attendance at school improved. Joe is much happier living with his grandparents.

Experiencing running away and CSE and becoming a sex worker

The link between running away, experiencing CSE and becoming a sex worker was identified by both professionals and young people who participated in the research. One professional described how:

‘Some of these young people (those who experience running away and CSE) ... as they get older are moving towards that (becoming a sex worker). It’s a very short distance to travel really from having a gift, mobile phones, food, to actually charging. ... The other issues are around the alcohol and substance misuse, which is the other common factor between sexual exploitation and sex working.’

Of those young people who have experienced running away, CSE and selling sex, the link between running away and CSE includes selling sex:

‘If you’ve done it [had sex] for somewhere to stay, you might as well do it for money – it’s the same thing really as you’re having sex so that you can survive.’

The uncertainty of life as a runaway on the streets also plays its part in selling sex:

‘It’s also the uncertainty of “where’s my next meal coming from; where am I sleeping?” and all those questions. ... Those things are not a problem when you’ve got money in your hand. If you don’t have cash there, all of these things are an issue and they are obstacles that you need to overcome. Now the quickest way to get money, as I’m sure most people will know, is to sell sex.’

No direct link between running away and CSE

A young person can experience both running away and CSE but it is also possible that the two are not directly interlinked but are indicative that a young person has a number of difficult issues or experiences in their life. For example, Tina’s sexual exploitation took the form of a number of relationships with older males and her running away was not linked to this in any obvious way. However, Tina’s home experiences and difficulties with peers are likely to have played a role in both her running away and CSE:

Tina has had a number of experiences that she has found difficult. These coincided with starting puberty and experiencing a lot of hormonal change. Her parents split up when she was young and at first her father regularly visited Tina and her brother:

‘But then he stopped coming round. He used to come round every week and bring me and my brothers chocolate and that but then he didn’t come for a couple of weeks and we thought he might have been called away for work and then he didn’t come round after that and we just gave up on him.’

Tina has not seen her father since she was 12. They now know that he has moved house and, while he is believed to still live in the local area, they do not know where he is. A couple of months after Tina’s father disappeared from her life, her nan, who she was very close to, was diagnosed with cancer.

‘She was like my second mum and my best friend as well.’

Tina’s nan died when Tina was 12 and, two years later, she is still very affected by her nan’s death:

‘Every day is like a challenge to me because obviously I was really close to my nan. ... I was angry and upset ... because I thought it was my fault that my nan had cancer.’

Tina’s mother and brother were also experiencing anger and grief about the death of their mother/nan:

‘And they started to take it out on me by hitting me. My mum didn’t hit me that much but it was my brother who was hitting me the most. ... Once he grabbed my hair and my arms and literally chucked me to the other side of my bedroom, nearly cracked my head open because I landed on a sharp corner of my desk and then, once, he tried to suffocate me.’

Tina was also getting bullied at school and everything that she was experiencing led her to start self-harming. Tina has made a suicide attempt and had an abortion when she was 14.

2.3
Impacts of experiencing running away and CSE

A few of the young people who participated in the research were no longer involved in running away and CSE and offered reflections upon how their experiences had affected them.

2.3.1
Impact upon health

Young people accepted that their involvement in running away and CSE posed risks for their health:

‘I met up with a guy last October for sex and he was arrested and, when he was arrested, they found out that he was HIV positive and it just brought hell into my life for about two months because I couldn’t be tested [for a period of time] until it [the possible virus] would show up in my blood ... and I was like absolutely distraught for about two months until I could get the [HIV] test.’

Some young people’s experiences of running away and CSE led to them drinking and smoking as a coping strategy to manage their memories:

‘I started smoking and drinking and I’d be at parties [with peers of his own age] and I just couldn’t cope with some of the memories I had.’

Young people have often experienced feeling ‘down’ or depressed as a consequence of their experiences of running away and CSE:

‘It always gets to me at night when you’re just sat there or sometimes you sit and think like “why did I do it?” and “why did I let them do that to me?” and “why would somebody do that [sexually exploit] to young people?”. ... It all gets to you sometimes. ... It does all get me down to this day.’

2.3.2
Impact upon education

Running away and being involved in CSE is also identified as having an impact upon a young person’s education. Many of the young people who participated in the research self-identified as having low literacy levels:

‘I can’t read that well. I can’t spell that well. ... I missed so much school. ... I find it hard to spell; I find it hard to read and I will never read out loud; I don’t like letting people know that I can’t read.’

A number of the young people who participated in the research had been achieving well academically prior to their involvement in running away and CSE, but found that their education achievements were hindered after starting to experience both running away and CSE:

‘I was quite a bright student but all the time I missed school meant that ... I missed my GCSEs so I failed most of my GCSEs ... so it’s had a big impact on my education.’

2.3.3
Impact upon emotional well-being

The majority of the young people experienced emotional pain and distress from being involved in running away and CSE. The realisation that the men they had run away to be with had sexually exploited them can be very painful for young people:

‘One night it just like came to me. ... I woke up about three in the morning and I thought “oh my god, none of them cared for me”. I just broke down crying. I didn’t want to wake my parents and I just stayed up for two hours crying. I told X [the young person’s support worker from the specialist sexual exploitation project that he had this realisation]; I told him that it had literally torn me apart when I realised [that the men did not care about the young person and had used him for sex] and he said “that’s the effect it will have because the past two years of your life have been based on these guys and then, all of a sudden, you realise it’s all been a lie. You realise nothing is real and it’s incredibly painful”.’

‘When you realise that they [perpetrators] don’t care about you and were just using you, it’s awful, just awful. ... And nobody really talks to you about that. And how are you supposed to trust somebody else after all that?’

A small number of young people described how a young person’s heart can be broken when an exploitative relationship ends and/or a child or young person realises that someone they thought had loved them did not love them and had betrayed their trust:

‘A lot of young people don’t find it easy to trust people and they put all their trust in these men who are exploiting them and don’t really love them. ... And sometimes they’re [an older man who has been exploiting a child or young person] the only person you have ever trusted so when somebody breaks it [that trust] it can be very difficult.’

2.3.4
Inability to trust or be trusted

Feeling unable to trust others was also identified as a significant impact of young people’s experiences of running away and CSE:

‘I don’t trust a lot of people now ... because of everything that happened down town [when the young person was living on the streets] and because of the experiences I’ve had.’

A few of the young women stated that they have particular difficulty in trusting males:

‘I don’t trust boys anymore. ... I just don’t trust no-one [no males]. Like before I used to trust boys and that and now I just don’t let a boy anywhere near me and like get inside of me [both physically and emotionally].’

‘When I got with me partner that I’ve got now ... I got with him when I was four months pregnant with me son [whose father was an adult male who had sexually exploited Ellie]. ... I was a bit wary at first. I didn’t trust him at first. ... I was always watching everything he did and always analysing every little thing he done and sometimes it did piss him off but I opened up and told him why.’

A handful of young women now feel unable to have a sexual relationship with anybody else:

‘The thought of somebody touching me now: I just couldn’t do it. I can’t let a boy get too close to me. ... I feel like sex has been ruined for me.’

The inability to trust can also extend to professionals whom young people recognise as working to support them. Marie, for example, sees a counsellor whom she likes and does talk to but doesn’t tell much to as she finds it so hard to trust other people and mostly keeps her own counsel:

‘I like to keep some things to meself.’

As well as finding it difficult to trust others, young people recognise that their involvement in running away and CSE makes it hard for others, such as parents, to trust them:

‘Me and me mam, we get on sometimes but we always argue ... like when I’m going out and who I hang around with, what I get up to and stuff. ... She’s probably worried because I’ve done all sorts of things and [because] of all the things I’ve been involved in. ... So that’s what the hard bit is: she doesn’t trust me.’

2.3.5
Feeling anger

Many of the young people who participated in the research recognise that they feel angry about how adults have responded to them. For example, some young people feel angry about the adults who sexually exploited them and encouraged them to run away:

‘I feel really angry with those men [who sexually assaulted young people]. It’s caused all sorts of problems with my life and I thought they cared about me but they didn’t; they just used me and I feel really angry about that.’

A few young people feel angry about how professionals have responded to their running away and CSE:

‘It’s like they didn’t believe me and didn’t want to hear too much about it. ... They just thought I was a problem child who behaved badly. ... I don’t know why they didn’t try and help me.’

Anger is also directed towards family members because of how they responded to the young person’s running away and sexual exploitation:

‘I’m really angry with me dad. ... I feel really sad too about how he is with me but I’m also fucking angry with him. Does he think I wanted all of this to happen to me?’

‘That’s part of the reason me and me mum row such a lot: ... ‘cos of how she doesn’t believe me [about being sexually abused] and she doesn’t understand that I can’t stay in the house ‘cos of that and have to run away when I feel so angry like I’m gonna hurt someone.’

2.3.6
Impact upon parents and carers

A couple of young people recognised that their running away and CSE was very difficult for their parents:

‘It was hell because [at the time] I didn’t think about it [how it was for the young person’s parents] and I didn’t care about it. I was like “you’re stopping me from being who I want to be”. Now I realise I was being stupid and if it was my kid [who was running away and being sexually exploited], I would have done exactly the same thing. It put them through hell.’

2.3.7
Young people’s feelings about the adults who encouraged them to run away and sexually exploited them

Young people did not like how they were used for sex by the perpetrators of CSE while they were away from home or care:

‘[The young person does not like how he was] being used like a sex toy. ... I began to see that I was just a bit of dick to them [the men who exploited him while he ran away from home].’

Young people were also able to recognise the inappropriate behaviour of the perpetrators who encouraged them to run away to be with them. One young person, who was 18 at the time of his participation in the interview, reflects that:

‘I think it were quite bad, you know ... because I wouldn’t go [have sex] with a 15-year-old lad; I just wouldn’t. ... So that’s why I think it’s quite bad. ... When you have a boyfriend who’s a lot older than you, they’re a lot more experienced than you and they can take advantage of you. A lot older people take advantage try to take advantage of young people. ... And you can get hurt [by adults].’

2.3.8
Young people’s views of their experiences of running away and CSE

Young people describe how experiences of running away and being sexually exploited have led to some positives such as enabling them to become stronger:

‘It’s definitely made me a stronger person, especially with boyfriends; like I won’t put with crap anymore.’

Young people identified elements of their experiences of running away and CSE that they enjoyed such as spending time with older men who they viewed as desirable and having power:

‘[The young person liked] driving around in fancy cars with powerful men, men that people looked up too, and knowing that you were going to be shagging them later; that they had chosen me when they could have anyone they wanted. I know that’s really shallow now but when you’re 14/15, getting bullied and having a hard time, all the attention and being with these powerful men made you feel good about yourself.’

Young people also have mixed feelings about their experiences of running away and being sexually exploited. For example, while not regretting what had happened to them, some young people recognised that running away and being sexually exploited also led to them being harmed:

‘I wouldn’t change it because I’m glad I met them [the older men who sexually exploited him], and they moulded me in a way, but I wish it hadn’t happened as well. Like I wish I hadn’t done all that stuff I did because I put myself at risk and stuff and I’ve been hurt a few times by guys and stuff; I wish that hadn’t happened.’

Young people also identified that while there was nothing good about their experiences of running away and CSE, it was something they feel was inevitable and had to experience:

‘Now when I look back on it, there was nothing good about it, really. ... I mean, I was a bit stupid because like taking that much drugs and drinking that much alcohol but I’m glad I done it. ... Yeah, I got summat out of my system. ... I’ve been there, done it; gonna do something with my life now. ... I reckon it was something I had to go through.’

2.3.9
Experiencing mental health issues while involved in running away and CSE

Ten of the young people who participated in the research were presently away from home and involved in exploitative relationships. Many of these young people were experiencing a range of difficult issues that were related to their circumstances. Feeling depressed and self-harming are common for these young people as Abi’s story illustrates:

Abi has never previously experienced depression but thinks that she is now depressed because she is living rough with her older boyfriend and having little contact with her family:

‘When I feel depressed, I want to sit in all day and don’t move. If I have to go out, I think everyone’s looking at me and talking about me. ... Yeah, I do feel paranoid. I end up crying and I take everything to heart. When I get angry, I get dead angry and I beat meself up.’

Part two:
Research findings addressing the relationship between running away and CSE

Abi’s self-harm has taken a number of different forms:

‘I head-butted a window; I was punching myself in the head; I was biting myself and pulling my hair. X [Abi’s older boyfriend] took me to hospital. ... I took an overdose a few months ago [while living on the streets].’

Abi also recognises that her situation is problematic in many other ways and causes pressure:

‘It’s put loads of pressure on my and X’s [Abi’s older boyfriend’s] relationship. ... There’s been days when I haven’t slept properly and X likes to get up early and I haven’t slept and I want to sleep and he wants me to wake up and get up ... and he’s waking me up and I’m like “just get away”. And it’s like starting the day in that situation is like horrible and it’s horrible being horrible to each other. ... And there’s just silly things like money like if X wants to gets his hair cut and we can’t afford it. ... Just loads of silly things but it puts on the pressure.’

Abi also describes how there have been some good things about running away and living on the streets with her older boyfriend but that a person can present as experiencing their circumstances in one way while feeling differently about it:

‘It’s like made me more independent; I can see that. ... I’ve met new people, learnt new things. ... everyone’s different and things, aren’t they? People can put a brave face on but inside they can be killing.’



Part three:

Diversity and running away and CSE

The research has produced findings relating to young people’s gender, ethnicity, sexuality and learning difficulties or disabilities. These additional characteristics often played a part in a young person’s experiences of running away and CSE; and also affected young people’s ability or willingness to recognise risk and/or disclose their exploitation. Professionals also did not always know how to raise awareness of and/or prevent or respond to running away and sexual exploitation among particular groups and communities. Sunny’s story, presented below, touches upon some of the issues that can be faced by a young person from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background:

Sunny’s story

Sunny was raised by her father. After Sunny’s father remarried, her younger siblings were born. Although Sunny was not close to her stepmother, she was happy at home, had friends she enjoyed spending time with and was working hard at school.

After a long illness Sunny’s father died when she was 14. Sunny was devastated and felt like her world had been ripped apart. She continued to live with her stepmother and siblings but Sunny’s stepmother’s behaviour towards Sunny became physically and emotionally abusive. One of Sunny’s siblings copied this abusive behaviour and her home life became very difficult. Sunny began to feel depressed and her school work was affected. Through friends Sunny met an older White British male who asked for her mobile number and she started spending time with him at his flat. Sunny began to think of this

older male as her boyfriend. Because of how she was treated at home, Sunny wanted to feel loved and to be somewhere where she felt cared for. Sunny started to run away to spend days at a time with her boyfriend. When she was with him, she just wanted to cuddle up to him and feel safe but he wanted more than this and pushed her to have sex with him. Sunny’s relationship with her boyfriend caused problems within Sunny’s wider family and community. Sunny started to feel more estranged and not wanted which, in turn, pushed her to spend more time with her boyfriend.

Eventually Sunny’s school contacted a specialist project working with children and young people who experience CSE, as they had a number of concerns about Sunny. A project worker from the specialist project started to see Sunny at school. At first Sunny did not want to discuss her relationship with her boyfriend. However, after building a trusting relationship with her project worker, Sunny disclosed that she had a number of problems at home and within her community that related to her relationship with her boyfriend. Through work with her project worker, Sunny started to understand that her relationship with her boyfriend was an exploitative one. Sunny ended the relationship with her boyfriend but, by this time, her step-mother had thrown Sunny out of home and her extended family were not speaking to her because of the shame she had brought upon them through running away and having an relationship with a White British male.

Sunny was living in temporary accommodation and felt lonely with no family, boyfriend or community to turn too. Sunny’s project worker continued to support Sunny through this time and also acted as an advocate on Sunny’s behalf, meeting with Sunny’s grandfather with the aim of getting him to understand that Sunny had felt lonely and isolated after her father’s death and that she had been a victim of abuse through no fault of her own. As an older male, Sunny’s grandfather was influential within his family and community. It was hoped that if he could understand the reasons for Sunny’s running away and sexual exploitation he could support the process of facilitating Sunny to have contact with her family and community, which would go some way to alleviating her loneliness and isolation. At first Sunny’s grandfather was not receptive to considering that Sunny was not at fault, but over time and a lot of hard work from Sunny’s project worker, his attitude has changed and Sunny has started to spend time with her family and slowly begun to be reintegrated into her local community.

3.1 Boys and young men

Some of the professionals who participated in the research described how, across England, there is a general lack of professionals’ understanding of the sexual exploitation of boys and young men:

‘A colleague of mine went to team meetings in social services and a [social services] manager actually said “oh, does it happen to boys?” and that’s what we’re dealing with.’

Professionals outlined how there are different attitudes towards boys and young men who experience running away and CSE than towards girls and young women:

‘We had a 12-year-old boy last week who actually came into a different service for a

different need but within the referral the social worker said “oh, and he’s having sex with a 19-year-old girl”. Now [our] worker questioned that and suggested it was sexual exploitation and the social worker said “no, it’s okay; he’s streetwise” and [our] worker said “you know, I don’t think our sexual exploitation team would view it like that. ... What if this was a 12-year-old girl and a 19-year-old boy? Would you view it differently?” and the social worker said “yes, we probably would”.’

Young people’s experiences also emphasise how professionals’ response to a male who is being sexually exploited can differ from their response to a female:

‘Pretty much nothing happened. They [the police] just said to me “what are you doing? You’re really young”. We didn’t get referred anywhere. ... They [the police] knew we were selling sex on the streets as well. ... They gave a girl who was with us – she was twenty-five at the time while I was 15 – a leaflet to go to this women’s outreach prostitutes’ project. They used to look at me like I was some kind of pimp or something but she was older than me and they didn’t give me any kind of help.’

Professionals working in specialised projects addressing running away and CSE described how they often have to point out to other professionals that any child, irrespective of their gender, who experiences, or is at risk of, running away and CSE should be viewed as being at risk of harm and in need of support.

Many professionals working within specialised projects addressing running away and/or CSE acknowledge that they are not very successful at reaching boys and young men who experience running away and CSE. For example, one professional believes that a fifth of young people who experience running away and CSE are male but that the referrals do not reflect this. Low levels of referrals for boys and young men are believed to be due to two reasons: firstly, fewer males come to the attention of professionals; and, secondly, there is a general lack of awareness. Professionals

also cited how boys and young males are often recognised as being involved in other forms of exploitation, which can mask running away and sexual exploitation:

‘I think people [professionals] suspect that they [boys and young men] may be involved in something else [other than running away and CSE] ... and what we’re finding is that boys are being exploited in different ways, such as drug running and things like that. So some of the concerns that people [professionals] pick up on may not be related to sexual exploitation because of the links to other forms of exploitation.’

Professionals identified how boys and young men who experience running away and CSE are often criminalised for engaging in anti-social behaviour rather than being recognised as being exploited and/or relying upon criminal survival strategies.

Professionals also pointed out that the reluctance of boys and young men to disclose can partly be attributed to the lack of work taking place with boys and young men who run away and experience CSE. However, where work with boys and young men is taking place, professionals emphasised the need for a long term approach; it can often take years of supporting a boy or young man before they disclose CSE:

After repeatedly running away from his care placement Lee was referred to a specialist runaways’ project. Years of work took place with Lee before he disclosed to his project worker that there were only so many nights he could sleep by the canal, or in a car that he had broken into, and that when he feels desperate:

‘There’s a flat. If I go there I get booze, get drugs and get somewhere to sleep but I need to take it up the bum to pay for it.’

To identify, reach and work with boys and young men who run away and experience, or are at risk of, CSE, professionals highlighted the need to use different techniques than

those used with girls and young women. For example, to identify boys and young men:

‘I think you have to look for it differently; you have to look in the parks and target the clubs or the [public] toilets.’

Professionals often find that it is easier to engage and communicate with girls than it is with boys, and girls tend to attend on a regular basis whereas boys don’t:

‘Even if they [girls] are not talking about sexual exploitation, they are seeing you weekly ... with boys it’s very different. There is a different process at work and that is a huge challenge for professionals. You can look at it from the angle that they [boys and young men] don’t make it easy for us but who said this is supposed to be easy?’

To address these differences professionals recommended activity-based interventions with boys and young men and finding strategies to counteract the possibility that boys and young men may not engage on a regular basis.

3.2 BME young people

The research highlighted a number of issues relating to diversity and culture among Asian, Eastern European, Roma and Traveller communities. These issues relate to:

- referrals, access to services and identifying risk
- perceptions of risk and safety in relation to extended family and family friends
- non- reporting of young people as missing to the police when they run away
- a lack of resources to work effectively with young people from a range of BME backgrounds
- language barriers.

Professionals identified that BME young people who experience running away and

CSE face additional issues to White British young people; often relating to inner city deprivation, poverty, and reduced life opportunities. These additional issues add to young people’s vulnerability to running away and CSE and also require consideration when responding to meet their needs.

Referrals, access to services and identifying risk

Many of the professionals who participated in the research reported that very few BME young people are referred to specialist running away and sexual exploitation projects, despite projects being located in and covering areas with a number of BME communities:

‘The majority of the referrals we have received are for young White British girls and I’m not convinced that’s how it is; I think it’s only the tip of the iceberg. One young person has actually said that a young Asian friend of hers is involved with this group of Asian men that the police are investigating.’

‘There are only a handful of girls who I have supported [within a three year period] that are not White British. I believe it is because we are not getting into the right organisations that are supporting these communities to deliver training to them so they can spot the signs and indicators. I don’t think that it is not happening in BME communities. Perhaps the professionals in those communities are not aware of how to refer on when there are concerns about CSE?’

BME young people who run away and experience CSE are believed to often be particularly hidden and entrenched:

‘I’m thinking about girls who are BME who are heavily involved in gangs ... and even though we probably know more about them than any other professionals about their level of risk, because they engage better with us than others, I think we only

have the tip of the iceberg in terms of level of information. I don’t think we get a full sense of the world that they live in.’

One professional identified that resource issues prevent work with BME communities. Despite a need to work with these communities demands upon the project prevent the required targeted work:

‘We would hypothesise that there are vulnerable BME groups in our communities that are wrongly assessed or overlooked in relation to running away and CSE and we haven’t got any capacity to really go out there and raise awareness and target.’

Working with BME communities often means working outside workers’ norm and requires extra effort on the part of project teams:

‘We’re entering communities that are not our own norm and are outside of [our] cultural norm and so are not our norm in any respect, really, and we need to work harder at that.’

There was a sense that professionals need to do more to assess risk among BME young people:

‘I think there is more work to be done in general in relation to the workforce’s assessments of risk in minority groups; I think we’re still not quite there. I think there’s a lot of fear around getting it wrong ... about doing the wrong thing, saying the wrong thing and not understanding and not relating etc. etc. ... And we assess risk in a very different times span than say in comparison to a British white girl.’

One professional highlighted that there are cultural issues within the project she manages as the project team are all White British and there are no BME workers. This professional recognises that, even though the project team all work in an anti-discriminatory manner and are aware of a range of cultural issues, there are likely to be groups of young people who will not find the project accessible. The project

does work with some young people from BME backgrounds and ensures that they consider and discuss issues with young people relating to race, culture and ethnicity so that any issues can be raised and addressed.

Factors relating to perceptions of risk and safety of extended family and family friends

Professionals have noted particular cultural factors that play a part in running away and CSE among some BME groups. For example, one professional outlined how there were assumptions that young people were safe when staying with adults who have a distant connection to the family:

‘I’m thinking of a girl who was away for six weeks. ... She’s Black Caribbean ... and all of her friends are BME. ... They do talk about their absconding and being missing; “being away” is what they call it ... and they are just staying with friends of friends of friends of family so the connections are very loose in terms of whom they are staying with and still really, really risky and those girls have been sexually exploited but there’s a sense that this is the norm for those girls in that community – “it’s okay to just go and stay with friends of friends of family” as, how they view it, all they did was get on a train and stay with a family friend for a few weeks. What they failed to assess was that actually a gang member in X [home city] had communicated to a gang member in London and had facilitated that movement [of girls from the home city to London] and had concealed them.’

One professional cited how, without wanting to make simplistic statements, their project’s experiences of working with BME young people who run away and experience CSE has led to the possibility that patterns of CSE differ between cultural environments. For example, a project that works with young people from mainly Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds found that young people who run away and experience CSE may be with

friends or relatives within the community with whom it is assumed they are safe:

‘We’ve got another young girl who is clearly being groomed by somebody at the local temple. And that’s really difficult ... because it actually [means] saying to the family “well, actually, the temple is the risk”; a place where they think the young person is safe.’

This professional warns against using a ‘rule book’ of indicators across different BME communities and suggests that professionals give more thought to how they work with different BME communities, rather than taking one approach, as there are different patterns of running away and CSE and some indicators could be inappropriate or culturally insensitive.

Professionals noted that the risks of disclosing running away and CSE can be too high for some BME young people:

‘I think when we look at the South Asian community, when we look at risks of disclosure for girls in those situations [experiencing running away and CSE], it [the risk of disclosure] is so high that it’s better not to disclose. ... I do think there is that hidden rump of young people for whom it’s almost impossible for them to disclose without catastrophic consequences.’

Risks of disclosure can include being sent back to the country of the family’s origin, being married early or being forced into marriage. One project’s experience is that a young female was rejected by her family after running away and disclosing CSE:

‘We had a young girl where there were graphic images of herself posted on Facebook and then she got pregnant. So she came into care; she had an abortion. Ostensibly it looked like the family were standing behind her but when we tried to move her back into the home, when we got there, we discovered that they’d sold her bed and there was nowhere for

her to be and when the social worker arranged to take her back home, there was nobody there to receive her. ... It just never really worked.’

Another project’s experience reveals that disclosing CSE can also be problematic for young males who may find themselves forced into marriage outside the UK:

‘[He was] a young man, identified as gay from the Asian culture but not expressing his ... sexuality despite lots of periods away from home. [He was] being befriended by other males who then then abused him ... and passed him around. He eventually moved out of the area completely because when the family finally found out he was gay, they wanted to get him an arranged marriage.’

One specialised runaways’ project reported experienced resistance from BME young people’s families to their child receiving support from the project:

‘We have found that many times when we have got involved, there is resistance from families. Very often the young person wants us to get involved and we had to work with the parents to gain consent. Because the young person has agreed to work with us, they’ve consented but the parents haven’t.’

Other projects have also found that while they are sometimes ‘blocked’ from working with BME young people who experience running away and CSE, their experiences of gaining consent can sometimes be more positive:

‘I have just started seeing a young girl from the Asian community and, again, I was expecting dad to put blocks on it but he’s agreeing that I see her again next week and take her out. And when I asked if I could speak to her on her own, they [the young people’s family] were more than happy for me to do that. Whereas, with previous experiences, some of the ethnic communities, particularly around the Muslim community, I’ve been blocked

at every opportunity. ... I think this is to do with their cultural values and beliefs particularly in relation to what is okay and ‘cos of their views regarding outsiders. I think sometimes they feel that they can deal with issues themselves and that sometimes they don’t want outside interference.’

A few professionals described how, when working with young people from Asian backgrounds, they sometimes work with the young person when they are at school as this is the only way to access them.

Some professionals reported a higher level of resistance to reporting young people as missing to the police when they run away among the parents of BME young people. Possible reasons given to explain this include: the hope the issues can be addressed either within the family or by the community; or to avoid having the police involved because of distrust or embarrassment. One professional described how there are particular issues for BME parents relating to pride and reporting their child as missing to the police when their child runs away:

‘One of them is definitely a pride thing about their child or young person actually being out of control. With some of the BME families I’ve worked with it has been a big embarrassment that their child might be out drinking or might be out having sex with somebody. I think that’s even more the case than with White British families that we’ve worked with. That’s just a generalisation of what we’ve found over the past three years.’

Other reasons for BME parents and carers not reporting their child as missing to the police when they have run away include loss of credibility and the stigma for being perceived as not being able to take care of their child.

Work with Polish communities

Professionals from different parts of the country described how they have recently started to work with young people from the

Polish community. Work with Polish young people has revealed that some Polish parents do not understand why the police are not able to take certain measures to prevent their children from being sexually exploited:

‘What was happening was that this girl was running away four out of seven nights a week and she was being found in areas of the city the police said they knew were hotspots. And the parents said “well if you know they’re hotspots, why don’t you just mop it up? Why don’t you arrest these people [perpetrators of CSE] and lock them up?”. And the police were trying to explain why they couldn’t do that and I think maybe that’s what they would do in Poland [“mop up” the hotspots and arrest the people operating in the hotspots]. ... They [the young person’s parents] were really struggling with how systems work.’

Professionals from two different projects working with Looked After Polish girls and young women described seeing a pattern of young people rebelling against their parents’ expectations. The two quotes below represent the experiences of each of these two projects:

‘The ones who are accommodated³⁸ seem to have more vulnerability to CSE. And I think a lot of it is the culture which they came from where parental authority or strictness is very high and then they come to England and kick against that. This causes a lot of tension and friction within the family.’

‘What seems to be coming out is the shift from a very strict upbringing that is largely based around Catholicism in Poland and the family’s culture around, you know, very strict rules about beliefs, about how young people should be young people and not mini adults, so to speak, balanced against their needs to integrate into probably the more liberal culture here. ... The initial stuff seems to be around that kind of confusion around young people wanting to fit in with their peers somehow and struggling with where they’ve been.’

38 The term ‘accommodated’ refers to young people placed in local authority care.

Another project has started to identify patterns of sexual exploitation that are taking place within the Eastern European communities but are not yet clear about the nature of this exploitation. Through partnership working with agencies working with these communities, the project is trying to support Eastern European communities to understand CSE.

Working with Traveller and Roma communities

Many professionals reported that they were not working with young people from Traveller communities despite being based in an area that includes them. One professional who has a personal contact within a Traveller community has been allowed access on-site:

‘They’re a very close-knit community. The girls after [the age of] 11 don’t go to school and are usually on the site there; and it’s very rare that they’re allowed to socialise with outsiders. So it’s very very tight and the chances of them [girls] going missing are pretty slim. We had one case with a travelling family that were living in a house. She went off with an older member of the travelling community ... [who] lived in a house; he didn’t live on-site. Because of the age difference, it was still very much frowned upon and also there were drugs involved and they [others within the Traveller community] weren’t happy about that. Again, the parents were partly blamed for it because it was thought they should have more control over their daughter.’

One project is in the process of planning work with young people from the local Traveller community by working with professionals who have an established, trusted relationship with the Traveller community.

The difficulties of providing support for Traveller young people were also highlighted by Sean who is a Traveller and gay:

Sean stressed how difficult it is for children and young people in Traveller communities who are gay and/or experience CSE. As Traveller communities are so closed to non-travellers and Traveller children’s attendance at school is often sporadic, the only option left to children and young people within Traveller communities is to hope that they have a very close friend who they can trust and talk too:

“Try and let a close friend [within the Traveller community] know [what is happening] who you can 100 per cent trust. If you’re gay and want to tell someone, hope you can have a Traveller friend you can trust 100 per cent.”

Sean also acknowledged that is very difficult for girls and young women who experience CSE to tell anyone what has happened to them and receive support, because of the Traveller communities’ expectation that girls and young women remain virgins and not engage in any sexual activity until they are married:

‘If you went down the aisle in a white dress when you weren’t a virgin and you were found out, you could get murdered for it.’

Sean also described how running away from Traveller communities was a particular weighty decision as there was often no option to return:

‘If you want to leave [the Traveller community], then you’ve got to be certain.’

Some professionals identified the need for training that focuses upon working with Traveller communities as they recognise they do not have the knowledge or understanding to effectively support young people from Traveller backgrounds.

A small number of professionals raised how their practice has led to concerns about Roma young people. One project has limited experience of working with a Roma community and found that there were a number of barriers to carrying out work with

Roma young people. As illustrated by this example of how the project’s attempts to work with a young woman were thwarted:

‘She was 16 and had two children; the oldest was something like three. She had run away and left her young children. But before we could get to her, she telephoned us and said “I’m back in Romania now”. Firstly, she may not have been in Romania or, as soon as the Roma community realised that the authorities are on to them, they move.’

One professional raised concerns about Romanian and Czech Roma young people but feels that it is not possible for her project to effectively work with them because they do not have the resources to do so. This professional also raised the added complexity of the tendency of Eastern European Roma to relocate if Social Care get involved.

Language barriers

One professional raised how translation issues can hinder their work with young people who experience both running away and CSE. This professional’s service does not have any financial resources for employing interpreters and often has to rely upon young people acting as interpreters between project staff and their parents or carers:

‘That’s where a lot of difficulties around the language barrier come in because all of a sudden the parents are disempowered because the children are the ones leading. X [the project], for instance, cannot afford an interpreter; it just doesn’t sit in our budget. ... There are so many agencies out there that just utilise the brother or sister to get the message to mum or dad. And that’s really disempowering.’

3.3

Young people with learning disabilities and learning difficulties

Of the 41 young people who participated in the research, 17 self-defined as having some form of learning disability or difficulty. Learning from previous research and practice has highlighted how young people with disabilities are at higher risk of abuse than those without (Stalker & McArthur, 2010)³⁹. The research findings confirm that young people with a learning disability or difficulty are more vulnerable to being encouraged to run away so that they can be sexually exploited; and that there are added complexities in working with these young people to develop their awareness of risk.

Professionals discussed how there are particular vulnerabilities relating to running away and CSE for young people who have learning disabilities or difficulties. One project described, for example, how they work with only a small number of boys and young men but the referrals they receive relate to boys and young men who are on the autistic spectrum. There are concerns about their sexual health and sexual behaviour rather than concerns that the boy or young man is being sexually exploited. Brian’s experiences reflect this:

Brian has Asperger’s Syndrome and lives with his elderly grandparents. The police and school raised concerns about Brian and he was referred to a specialist runaways’ project. Brian is often used by other boys to go into shops to steal and is then left behind by the other boys. The specialised runaways’ project has a worker with particular expertise in working with children and young people with Asperger’s Syndrome who helped Brian to understand how to keep himself safe, and to understand that sometimes people are

not who they initially seem to be. As a result of this work, Brian made a disclosure of serial rape. Via Facebook, a perpetrator had given Brian instructions to follow so that he could rape Brian. The perpetrator repeated this process and Brian did not know how to stop it.

Young people with learning disabilities who also have parents or carers with learning disabilities are particularly at risk:

‘Children with learning needs can be incredibly vulnerable and targeted by exploitative adults. And where their [children and young people’s] parents have learning difficulties as well, the families can be at risk. Risky adults gravitate towards vulnerable families who are not always able to recognise the level of risk.’

Professionals recognise that it can be difficult to fully understand the nature of a learning disability or difficulty. Sometimes it is hard to know if a young person has a learning disability or difficulty or if their development is delayed because of being subjected to abuse:

‘I worked with one young person and her learning disability wasn’t diagnosed until she was 15. She was being sexually abused from a very young age but she went to school every day so everything appeared to be okay. The young person is now 16, nearly 17. She’s never been statemented but we know she has an attachment disorder and is possibly autistic. But how do you distinguish what it [the learning disability] is? It is very difficult. ... We just know that the early trauma has had a massive impact on the young person.’

39 Stalker K & McArthur K (2010) ‘Disabled Children and Child Protection: A Literature Review’ *Child Abuse Review* Vol 21 1 pg. 24 -40.

3.4

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children and young people

Professionals highlighted how sexuality can be an issue relating to young people who run away and experience CSE. Boys and young men who are gay are viewed as being at risk of exploitation because, for example, it can be hard for them to meet other gay boys and young men so they use the internet to meet others, which can render them susceptible to sexual exploitation:

‘It’s quite difficult if you’re a young gay man to actually meet a like-minded young person so a lot of young gay men will often try and meet other young people online and so they get into difficulty that way.’

Professionals also described how it seems to be accepted among some members of the gay community that it is the norm to have sex with underage males:

‘It’s almost like it’s the norm; that it’s accepted among older gay people, not all; there is almost this acceptability. You hear them talking about “fresh meat”. It’s really quite derogatory.’

This acceptance of older males having sex with underage males also extends to some professionals, who view this as males exploring their sexuality rather than young people being sexually exploited. This view contrasts to that of professionals working directly with young people who experience both running away and CSE:

‘We would see an older man picking up a younger man as sexual exploitation – totally irrespective of their sexuality, actually – and it is very difficult to tap into that because you are talking about a big cultural shift.’

Professionals had limited experience of working with young women who are gay

and experience both running away and CSE. However, there was limited evidence of young women being passed around by a group of women:

Trudy, at the age of 15, was having relationships with men. She then came out as gay and started to meet and have a relationship with a 21-year-old woman who assaulted Trudy. The woman then passed Trudy’s phone number to a 40-year-old woman who contacted Trudy. Trudy was then passed around between a group of women.

A second young woman ran away to be with an older woman:

Sasha’s mum was bisexual and had a 27-year-old female partner who lived in Sasha’s family home. Sasha ran away from home with her mother’s partner. Sasha was not reported to the police as missing but went to the police station and self-reported. The police referred Sasha to a specialist project that works with children and young people who experience running away and CSE.



Part four:

Professionals and young people's experiences and views of measures to address running away and CSE

This section of the report outlines professionals and young people's experiences and views of responsive and preventative measures to address running away and CSE and meet young people's needs. To distinguish between the professionals who participated in the research and the professionals they describe, the term 'research participants' is used to describe the professionals who participated in the research.

Where research participants describe other professionals, unless particular professionals are cited, this represents a range of professionals who commonly come into contact with young people who experience both running away and CSE, including professionals from voluntary sector agencies, the police and other statutory agencies.

Danny's story

Danny's family background is one of parental substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health issues. Danny and his five siblings were neglected and when Danny was seven he and his siblings were taken into care. Danny was placed in a separate foster placement to any of his siblings and eventually moved into a children's home because his behaviour was deemed too difficult for foster carers to manage. Danny started to run away overnight when he was nine, started drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis when he was ten and diagnosed with ADHD when he was 12. For a number of years Danny missed his parents and siblings but believes that no-one got to know him well enough for him to trust them and tell them how he was feeling:

'I was just another kid in care, another kid in trouble. ... I've had that many social workers I've lost count of them all. ... I've been moved from care home to care home and had that many people looking after me.'

After being placed in yet another children's home, Danny started to run away to be with a group of young people who took him to parties held by adults. After being given large amounts of alcohol and drugs, Danny was taken to a room where a number of men sexually assaulted him. Danny describes how he started to 'act out' after this incident and smashed up his room in the children's home. Danny was moved to a secure unit then after returning to a children's home was once again sexually exploited after being introduced to adults by young people who lived with him. Danny felt like he had no control over what was happening to him and started to carry out increasingly violent criminal acts. No-one ever asked him why he was doing what he was doing and if there was anything wrong. Danny wanted to tell someone what was happening to him but felt that there was no-one there for him who he could talk to:

'The police just thought I was a waste of space and got fed up of coming to look for me when I ran away. None of my social workers stayed around long enough to get to know me. I went to this project for kids in trouble with the law but they just focused on all the things I did wrong. Who was I supposed to talk too? Who was I supposed to tell what was happening to me?'

Danny has recently committed a violent crime for which he was caught, is awaiting a court appearance and been told that he is likely to be sent to a Youth Offending Institution (YOI). Up until his research interview, Danny had not told anyone about the sexual exploitation he experienced. There are no specialist projects in the local area to support children and young people who experience running away and CSE. Danny has agreed that the researcher can tell his Youth Offending Team (YOT) worker, who Danny likes, what has happened to him so that the process of providing Danny with some support can begin.

The consultation with professionals and with young people revealed a range of factors that facilitate and hinder meeting the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE.

4.1
Resource issues

Research participants overwhelmingly identified that for national policy addressing running away and CSE to work and meet the needs of young people there needs to be additional funding allocated, as policy without funding will not result in change. Professionals recommended that there should be funding to implement the *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan*⁴⁰. Funding should also accompany the forthcoming guidance for local authorities addressing children and young people running away and going missing from home and care. Many professionals outlined that a range of resource issues impact negatively upon direct practice to meet the needs of young people who experience running away and CSE. There is a general recognition that projects working to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE

40 Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Action Plan*. <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/c/tackling%20child%20sexual%20exploitation%20action%20plan.pdf> 23 May 2013

often find it hard to meet these young people’s needs because of commissioning restraints:

‘CSE projects have always been or increasingly become a bit more prescribed in what they can offer because of commissioning.’

There are a couple of factors relating to resource issues that facilitate direct practice with young people. For example, young people who experience running away and CSE can directly benefit when a project is largely funded by voluntary funds⁴¹ as this enables the project to have the flexibility to deliver their service in response to the young person’s needs:

‘We can be creative. We can say “what does this young person need? Let’s work from that place rather than what our service can offer?” and I think that helps us get the results that we do. And that’s why over time, and we are often talking long periods of time, we can make a difference and achieve positive outcomes.’

While many areas of England have no specialised services for young people who experience running away and/or CSE in one area there are three projects that directly work to address running away and CSE, each covering a different specialism upon boys and young men, girls and young women and supporting parents and carers. This ensures that a wider range of young people can be reached and there is specialist support to meet their needs.

41 This term refers to income received by charitable organisations through, for example, donations that are not for a specific programme of work or activity. The organisation is therefore able to determine how this income can be used.

4.1.1
Resource issues that hinder meeting the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE

Research participants described a number of issues relating to resources that hinder specialist projects’ ability to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE.

Funding cuts

Cuts in funding and services have limited professionals’ general ability and capacity to assess young people’s risks and meet their needs:

‘Everyone in the workforce with children and young people has less capacity to assess children’s risks and levels of needs.’

Some projects do not receive any funding to work with young people in the local area who experience running away and CSE and, while these projects are often not able to meet the demand for their services, they do work to support young people who experience both running away and CSE:

‘We’ve got two part-time workers for the whole of the city and we get no funding from the local authority at all to do any of this work; not a penny and never have.’

The predominance of short-term funding cycles was also recognised as playing a part in the lack of long-term vision and effective strategies to address running away and CSE. Alongside ensuring third sector organisations are adequately resourced, it is also necessary to ensure that statutory services are funded to provide responses to young people who experience running away and CSE.

There was a significant degree of concern about the limitations that services have to work within. Young people are often provided with a time limited intervention that does

not meet their individual needs. Despite the importance of taking time to work to meet the needs of young people who run away and experience CSE, some projects are only able to deliver a service over a short timescale, which is recognised as inadequate practice:

‘I do hear of projects that offer twelve sessions; that’s just engagement. I wouldn’t even ask a girl or boy to tell me about his or her experiences of sexual exploitation in that time. ... You just need to [take the time] to build up a picture of their world.’

A small number of research participants described how their project funding was coming to an end with no identified possibility of further funding, which means that the service will no longer exist and young people will stop receiving the specialised support:

‘Our funding runs out in March [2013] so from January [2013] onwards I’m going to have to start winding down.’

Specialised projects not being able to meet demand

Many specialised projects provide the only services in the local area, and in some cases, their own and neighbouring counties, for young people who run away and experience CSE. Many projects are therefore not able to meet the demand for their services and are not in a position to employ more workers to enable them to meet it. Research participants often identified that the caseloads being carried by professionals are too high; that there is a constant struggle to maintain the quality and intensity of the work they are providing; and managing referrals to their service is difficult.

As an example of the impact upon individual workers’ caseloads and their ability to meet young people’s needs one professional described how, in the six months prior to her participation in the research, she received an average of 34 new referrals per month, which she is trying to address in addition to those young people who she is already working with. To manage this increase in referrals a

decision has been made that the professional will not meet with all of the young people who are referred but will make a decision about levels of need and risk based upon the information provided on the referral form:

‘What I do is look at the referral and make a professional judgement about the level of need and risk and if it’s first time [reported as] missing and it looks quite straightforward ... then that would just be a letter offering them a service at the agency and a leaflet. Obviously I prioritise all the looked-after children, those on child protection plans and where I can see other issues impacting, for instance, where there is a history of parental mental health problems, substance misuse, alcohol abuse etc.’

Lack of services for young people

Research participants also illustrated how in some parts of England there is a general lack of services to work with young people who experience both running away and CSE. Rural areas in particular are identified as lacking in support services. Specifically, there is a lack of services able to provide the long-term flexible support required to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE.

Many research participants also described a lack of specialist services to address individual’s needs as part of a multi-agency approach. Lack of resources results in practitioners with expertise in one particular field often being expected to work with young people who have issues outside of their skill set, which can have a negative impact upon young people:

‘The culture we’re working in at the moment is you need to be all singing all dancing ... and it’s just not a reality. And, you know, with cutbacks, you’re expected to just be multi-talented. ... I think there are specific areas that you need specialisms in and you need to be fully aware of what may or may not happen in that area, rather

than somebody inexperienced who may end up being involved and inadvertently not providing what the young person needs. ... Running away is a field in itself and so is CSE so I do think that [local] areas should have very skilled dedicated workers who can cope with that.’

Lack of appropriate supported accommodation

Research participants commonly described how it is very difficult to find appropriate supported accommodation for young people who run away and experience CSE; and that there are a number of issues relating to the use of children homes for these young people. Professionals outlined how using specific children’s homes to address a young person’s running away and sexual exploitation can be problematic as young people have been:

‘Taken into care homes, especially those that are a bit more remote from transport, for obvious reasons, and then we’ve loaded these children’s homes with young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and it actually destabilises that home so that we can’t use it anymore. And then you get young people running away together so they actually strengthen their networks’

It can be difficult to continue to support young people who experience running away and CSE when the young person is placed in an out-of-area placement. For example, one young person was placed in a children’s home that resulted in a five hour round trip for her support worker when she visited the young person:

‘We had to go up fortnightly to do the work with her [the young person who had run away and experienced CSE]; it’s a whole day out for one of our workers.’

Placing young people who have experienced running away and CSE in out-of-county placements can also result in a young person becoming disconnected and disengaged from a service that was supporting them.

Professionals also described how sometimes the local authority response to a young person who runs away and experiences CSE focuses upon placing them out of area. When the young person is returned to the local area there is often an accompanying incorrect assumption that this intervention has completely addressed the young person’s circumstances and needs:

‘They have the young people out of the city [in out-of-area placements] and then they move back into the city and it’s like the thing with giving up drugs when all their friends are drug takers, it’s the same with these young people. If they go into a secure or therapeutic unit, they come back and the care package is never as intense as it was when they were in an out-of-area placement. So it’s not long before they’re networking back in that social group and they are back at risk again.’

Research participants stressed how the lack of available therapeutic accommodation significantly hinders work with young people who experience running away and CSE. Research participants also highlighted the need for foster care placements where the foster carers are trained and supported to provide care for young people who experience CSE:

‘They need to be recognised as professionals and be trained further in the area and to get that on-going support with their dealings with young people who have been sexually exploited.’

Alongside considering accommodation options for young people under the age of 16 there is also a need to provide appropriate accommodation options for young people aged 16 and upwards. Research participants described how, due to not being provided with accommodation or being provided with inappropriate accommodation, young people sometimes return to an exploitative relationship they have left because they feel that they do not have any other choice. It is also important that housing providers who support young people are aware of running

away and CSE, and that the perpetrators of CSE may target supported housing projects where young people are placed. One research participant described how, as a result of being sexually exploited, a group of young females in a supported housing project began to exhibit some behavioural issues and as a result some of them were evicted. The supported housing project was informed by a worker specialising in running away and CSE that:

‘They’re [the young females] behaving like that because ... they’re being exploited. Your unit’s being targeted and you need to put things into place to prevent that from happening, not just evicting the girls.’

The research participant who provided the above quote drew attention to the importance of ensuring that commissioning arrangements for supported housing projects include safeguarding compliance elements to protect vulnerable young people and ensure providers of supported housing are informed about running away and CSE.

In general, research participants stressed the need for national and local policy and practice to ensure young people under the age of 18 are provided with safe and appropriate accommodation and are not placed inappropriately, including in bed and breakfast accommodation. There is also recognition of the need for safe accommodation so young people are not returned home immediately after running away when there are concerns about their home circumstances.

4.2 Factors relating to multi-agency approaches to running away and CSE

Research participants consistently identified how multi-agency working is crucial to address the needs of young people, and their families, and enable them to move forward. Professionals revealed how there were a

number of factors relating to multi-agency working that both facilitated and hindered work to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE.

4.2.1
Factors facilitating general multi-agency working

Effective working relationships with other local voluntary sector agencies

The ability of voluntary sector agencies to work effectively together was identified as important to meeting the needs of young people who experience running away and CSE:

‘The voluntary sector is working together very well ... and that’s a real plus. ... I work with another three agencies to deliver my sessions [on CSE] and that’s something I’m really proud of and it’s something that means we can reach more children and young people.’

Some voluntary sector projects are part of multi-agency sexual exploitation forums, which are viewed as supporting positive developments in identifying perpetrators of CSE and undertaking mapping exercises to support identification of the prevalence and nature of running away and CSE in the local area.

Strong relationships with the police

Strong positive relationships with the police were identified as key by the majority of research participants. One project, for example, has developed a very close working relationship with the police missing persons’ co-ordinator, which has benefited the project, the police and young people:

‘She [the police’s missing persons’ co-ordinator] almost feels like a, well best friend is an understatement really: she’s part of the family. I speak to her and

email her probably twenty times a day. The links are so strong. Any names she comes up with that she’s worried about she just contacts us and sees if we’ve heard about it and we do the same back to her. We work really closely together and we’ve got a really solid relationship. And she’s a really dedicated worker and understands the issues and it’s been fundamental to the police seeing MISPERs as victims, really, rather than being “a pain in the arse” and a drain on resources. Her role has been instrumental in changing people’s attitudes. ... We would be lost without her.’

Research participants also identified how it was of immense benefit to have police officers in the local force who lead on running away and CSE:

‘And that’s been really helpful in terms of a link with an officer who we can just call up and ask questions or give information too. These officers are really keen to get out there and not only meet the young people but also to meet parents and carers and meet professionals and foster carers – they [the police officers with responsibility for CSE] get involved in our training for foster carers. ... Once you have a name and a face for someone, you’re much more likely to phone them up and say “are you sure about this? Can you help with this?”.’

Effective working relationships with schools

There is a beneficial impact upon young people who experience running away and CSE when projects are able to develop good working relationships with schools. As well as developing positive relationships with school personnel, some projects have also worked with schools to help them to recognise the signs that a child or young person may be experiencing difficulties in their life and may be running away or being sexually exploited. Developing school staff’s awareness of running away and CSE has often resulted in schools taking appropriate action to meet young people’s needs. Schools can

also support practitioners to have contact with young people when they return from an episode of running away:

‘The schools I work with will say “yep, pop up [to the school]” and see a young person when we know she’s been missing for two weeks and has just appeared at school again. The school will give us the space and the time to do our work with the young person.’

It is acknowledged that schools can play an important role in picking up on those young people who are not reported as missing to the police when they run away. Schools can also ensure young people are provided with support when parents or carers do not give permission for a young person to receive support or when it is not possible to arrange to see a young person in other environments, by allowing support workers to meet with the young person on school premises in school time:

‘We’ve got some schools that are really good at letting us to see a young person in school time when we can’t visit them at home. Without the school’s support, it would be really difficult to see some of the young people.’

While a few research participants identified that they often receive very positive responses from schools in relation to providing preventative work addressing running away and CSE, some also identified that other schools do not allow young people out of lessons:

‘Others get a bit precious about “oh, we don’t want them missing any of their core subjects”. I know they [schools] have all their targets and the rest of it and want them [young people] to go to their lessons but it can be quite frustrating if they won’t allow them out for an hour or whatever. They [schools] highlight the vulnerable young people and only let them out to see us during PE.’

Working with health professionals

Research participants frequently identified how health professionals, such as school nurses and Looked After Children nurses, are well-placed to provide information and support to young people who run away and experience CSE, alongside referring to specialist projects.

Working with sexual health clinics

Sexual health nurses were recognised as playing an important role in ensuring work goes well with a young person who experiences running away and CSE:

‘Sexual health nurses are fantastic. They really get it and there’s been a strong relationship between them and the agency [the voluntary sector project] over many years.’

A small number of research participants described how strong links with sexual health clinics have facilitated their work with young people who experience running away and CSE. In other areas of England, research participants described how they are focusing upon raising awareness with health practitioners, particularly those working in sexual health clinics, to ensure that health professionals are informed of recent developments in CSE and are aware of indicators of CSE and running away:

‘We’re going into meetings with the sexual health clinic. In my experience, they’re [sexual health professionals] aware of the boyfriend model where it’s one older man exploiting a young person in a relationship but ... that’s not what we’re really seeing: what we’re seeing is young men giving young people gifts but not gifts such as mobile phones or hair straighteners – not such tangible gifts – but giving them cigarettes, alcohol and drugs, which the parents aren’t necessarily looking for. It’s like new indicators that we’re seeing and with the GU [Genito-Urinary Medicine clinic] that’s what we’ve got to tell them.’

One research participant described how an established working relationship with local sexual health clinics has benefited from developing a confidentiality policy, ensuring that Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics are able to pass on relevant information on to the police:

‘They understand the difference between safeguarding and confidentiality so they actually do share [information] when they can. ... We have the GUM clinic actually passing on information to the police. ... They have one standardised form to share information with the police. Previously you wouldn’t have had certain agencies filling those in.’

Despite having good links with sexual health clinics and being aware that nurses ask young people under the age of 16 about whether they have been forced to have sex, research participants suggested that the manner in which some sexual health practitioners ask young people questions can be problematic, and is likely to automatically lead young people to say no. There is therefore need for sexual health practitioners to be supported to ensure that they communicate with young people in a manner that encourages open responses. Sexual health clinic nurses are in a good position to speak with young people who may be experiencing CSE because there is a perception that:

‘It would be okay to talk to GU nurses because they talk about sex all day and they talk about STDs and young people think they will not be judged by GU nurses in the same way that they may be by other professionals in young people’s lives. ... GU nurses hold quite a powerful position in relation to children and young people who experience CSE and may be running away so it’s about GU nurses thinking about their position and thinking about how they go about asking questions of young people.’

Having health workers based within specialised projects

Having a specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) nurse based part-time at specialist projects was identified as significantly leading to positive outcomes:

‘She’s [the specialist CAMHS nurse] got a lot of expertise around sexual exploitation. To have that link to actually be able to get some of the young people I’ve been working with into CAMHS – I don’t think that would have been possible without having that dedicated role here.’

Specialised projects also benefit from having a presence from the sexual health clinic at the project:

‘That’s essential in terms of meeting the needs of children we work with. If you take them along to another sexual health clinic and there’s a long wait, it is just very different being in a young people-friendly environment. Having it as part of our project makes a world of difference.’

Lack of engagement with Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments

In recognition of the important part that A&E departments are able to play in providing information about young people who experience running away and CSE, one project has made substantial effort to engage with local departments but has not been successful in gaining a response:

‘Cos they deal with the young people who (unintentionally and intentionally) overdose and they need to know what CSE looks like ... and they could give information to the police like what address they pick the girls up from ... but we’re not getting any response from A & E.’

Good relationships with individual social workers

Research participants highlighted how having good relationships with social workers supported their work with young people who run away and experience CSE. Rather than providing a focus upon running away and CSE, social workers have to consider the range of young people’s needs and circumstances, which can be beneficial as long as young people receive specialist support to address running away and CSE:

‘We also have very good relationships with most of the social workers we work with and I think that’s really important. ... We can all support each other in our work. Social workers are not specialists in CSE and need to look at the wider picture whereas we can provide all the support around CSE. And it’s the same with running away: social care wants to look at the bigger picture and we can focus upon trying to reduce the running away episodes while they [social workers] try to address the bigger picture.’

Having co-located teams with designated workers

Having co-located teams with designated workers was viewed as an important development to improve services for young people to effectively prevent, respond to and tackle running away and CSE:

‘We should have co-located teams X [name of co-located team working to address CSE] don’t use the safeguarding procedures when they work with sexually exploited people – they don’t need to because everybody in their team is sitting there already. So [they’ve] got a social worker, somebody from health, somebody from the police, somebody from the voluntary sector and somebody from education. That means they can focus on the young person. Stuff around prevention, protection and prosecution ... they are all sitting in that team.’

Contributing to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)

Contributing to MARACs that take place within the local authority can effectively support work with young people who run away and experience CSE because of the knowledge and information that practitioners working directly with young people are able to provide:

‘We have a sexual violence MARAC. ... I’m a member of the panel so I go every month and sit on the panel and talk about the cases that are referred ... and we pick up referrals from that process as well. ... I’m now also a member of the perpetrator MARAC as what was recognised from my attendance at the sexual violence MARAC was that we talk a lot about victims and then we talk about who the perpetrators are and actually we have all that information about the perpetrators; it’s the same names over and over again.’

4.2.2 Factors hindering multi-agency working

Lack of support from Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)

Approximately a third of research participants reported that, in their local area, there is a lack of support from LSCBs in relation to running away and CSE, which results in difficulties in both progressing a multi-agency approach to respond to these issues and in meeting the needs of young people in the local area:

‘There’s just no support from the LSCB, which makes getting a response to children and young people who run away and experience CSE really, really difficult. ... If the LSCB were on board it would help to get a response from other agencies, both in terms of raising awareness of the need to develop responses to running away and CSE and getting a response from other agencies.’

Clash of working cultures between the voluntary and statutory sectors

Several research participants described how the voluntary and statutory sectors sometimes have different working cultures and agendas that can clash and cause problems for young people and their families and carers, who find it difficult to be faced with such different responses from professionals and agencies.

The Government has acknowledged that the voluntary sector plays an important role in addressing running away and tackling CSE⁴². Despite this formal acknowledgement a number of research participants identified reluctance from some local authorities to acknowledge the voluntary sector’s expertise and include it in both strategic and operational responses. Some research participants stated that they would like to see more recognition from statutory agencies within their local area of the value of the voluntary sector and the expertise and skills that it can bring, particularly in delivering return home interviews and in work with ‘hard to reach’ young people:

‘Often the local authorities think that the voluntary sector isn’t as skilled and qualified as them. ... Just recognition that we have something different to offer from the statutory sector [would help]. Often we have been able to engage with young people when they haven’t.’

**4.3
Factors relating to collating and sharing data and information**

The majority of research participants highlighted the importance of collecting and sharing data and information relating to running away and CSE. A failure to effectively

⁴² For example, the role of the voluntary sector is acknowledged in forthcoming guidance addressing children who run away and go missing from home or care and in guidance and the action plan addressing CSE.

collate information and data in some areas was identified as hindering the ability of services to meet the needs of young people who experienced both running away and CSE. In particular, poor information sharing was reported where young people move across areas. Some professionals were able to identify some effective developments in relation to how information and data is collated and shared, which has both benefited the service offered and support with meeting young people’s needs. As a consequence of improving how data relating to running away and CSE is collected and collated it has become possible to effectively ‘map out’ the extent and nature of running away and CSE in the local area to identify which young people are linked to other young people, and how perpetrators are connected.

**4.3.1
Approaches to information-sharing**

As some young people who experience both running away and CSE do not disclose the extent of the risk and harm they face, projects often have to work with high levels of risk. In acknowledgement of this, some local areas have implemented measures to improve information sharing across agencies by developing an information-sharing form and delivering training so that professionals can correctly complete the form and ensure that all the necessary information is provided. In one local area completed forms are entered onto the police database and flagged where running away and CSE is suspected or known.

Improved attitudes and responses to sharing information and risk is identified as key to improving specialised practitioners’ and projects’ ability to meet the needs of young people who run away and experience CSE. Many research participants reported that other agencies can sometimes have different approaches to information-sharing about young people, which hinders work to address running away and CSE:

‘Some agencies in the city seem to have very different guidelines on information sharing. We’re very much a project where safeguarding comes first so if we are concerned about a young person, we will share information about anything else. Obviously we talk young people through that system so they understand that from the start. ... Some other professionals are very precious about information sharing and don’t seem to want to share even despite the fact that it could make all the difference to that young person getting the right help.’

**4.3.2
The role specialised projects can play in providing information about running away and CSE in the local area**

Projects who work directly with young people hold a wealth of information about patterns of running away and CSE in the local area. Where this information is effectively collated and shared there are a number of benefits. For example, the formal recognition that a local area does have a problem with young people running away and experiencing CSE:

‘Historically, some statutory agencies have stated that there was no problem with CSE and running away in the local area and that it was a problem for other areas ... but now they’re beginning to see that we do have a problem with CSE and that it might not be the same model as in other parts of the country but that this area does have a problem with CSE and running away.’

Effectively collating and sharing information can also support a project to have influence at a strategic level:

‘Because of all the information we hold that is gathered through our work with children and young people who run away and experience CSE, we have become quite influential in strategic processes and that feels really exciting.’

Some projects have provided information that is used by the police and turned into intelligence. While some projects have received training on how to present information so that it can be turned into police intelligence, other professionals identified that there is a lack of knowledge about how project information can be turned into intelligence. They identified that there is need across England for training that addresses how projects can effectively collect information and present it so that police can, in turn, use it for police intelligence. A project’s information can be used in additional ways. One project, for example has mapping meetings with the police:

‘We [the project and the police] look at perpetrator networks and organised crime within the homeless community. We have young people who gravitate to that world and we know that there are massive networks of crime within that in relation to sexual exploitation and children and young people running away, children living in squats and children going to food providers for the homeless. ... [I] mapped one sex offender who has never been convicted and all the children and young people who linked to him and all the perpetrators who are linked to him. ... I took this map to a meeting with a whole load of criminal justice agencies and they were just blown away to the point where they were taking photographs of the map.’

**4.3.3
Using Missing Persons (MISPER) reports to identify young people who experience both running away and CSE and to ensure services are linked**

A small number of research participants described how they use MISPER reports to identify young people who experience both running away and CSE. For example, one project has a service that works with young people who experience CSE, as well as an early

intervention service that focuses upon young people who go missing from home, with the aim of preventing these young people from ever needing the CSE service. The referral for the service working with young people who go missing is via MISPER reports, which the project receives on a weekly basis. The use of MISPER reports not only provides important information about young people but also enables join-up between the project’s two services:

‘So when I’m made aware of a young person who may need the CSE service, the first thing I will do is look at the MISPER reports and see how many times that young person has been reported missing. ... Because we’re getting those MISPER reports on a weekly basis, we can really map out and track someone’s progress, someone’s deterioration and there’s been times when ... we’ve been able to say “well ... that boy can really do with the X [the CSE] service” and no-one’s flagging that to us and then I go out to the people involved with that young person, often social care, and say “do you want to refer them to us?”. I will say, for example, that not only have they been missing ten times but they have been found at inappropriate addresses, they’re found in the red light area, etc. etc. So we can proactively target young people at risk.’

4.4
The need to improve professionals’ awareness and knowledge through training

A number of factors relating to improving awareness and knowledge of running away and CSE were highlighted by both professionals and young people who participated in the research.

4.4.1
Professionals general lack of understanding and knowledge

More than half of research participants outlined how statutory sector professionals have a general perception that the local area does not have a problem with running away and CSE and perceive that these issues are a problem for other parts of the country, despite evidence suggesting otherwise. Some research participants described a particular unwillingness to acknowledge that CSE is taking place. It is recognised that the failure to recognise running away and CSE in a local area can stem from a lack of knowledge which, in turn, forms professionals’ perceptions. As an example of this, one professional cited how lack of knowledge that perpetrators of CSE are from a range of ethnic backgrounds had resulted in a police perception that CSE was not a problem in the local area because there was no sizeable Asian community.

Many research participants raised how there is still a lot of misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about running away and sexual exploitation among some professionals:

‘Even though we’ve come so far [in relation to sexual exploitation], I’m still up against professionals who just feel like this [sexual exploitation] is a consensual relationship or they just say “well, they’re over 16 and girls can have sex with 50-year-old men if they choose to”. Well, nope, that’s not consensual, that’s exploitation. I think there is still a lot of misunderstanding of what sexual exploitation is, how it manifests.’

‘You get that “it’s [running away and CSE] just normal teenage behaviour”.’

Lack of knowledge and understanding of running away and CSE can also lead to professionals having perceptions of young people who experience running away and CSE that can be problematic when trying to set support in place:

‘Perceptions such as: “they’re challenging girls and they don’t want to be supported”.’

Many research participants described how some professionals do not understand that young people’s ‘difficult to manage behaviours’ are a consequence of the abuse and trauma they experience. There is need for work to shift professionals’ perception of young people as aggressive or provocative to recognition that young people who experience running away and CSE are vulnerable and in need; and that young people’s acts and issues often shroud this vulnerability and need.

Research participants reported that many professionals from a range of agencies are often not familiar with the complexities of running away and CSE; and that there is often need to work with a young person for a lengthy period of time to address their issues and meet their needs. Research participants stressed the need for agencies and workers to improve their understanding of running away and CSE; and that this understanding needs to include comprehension of the risks and complexities associated with running away and CSE.

Research participants also raised the difficulties where knowledge and understanding of running away and CSE is held by a practitioner in a post and not embedded in an agency’s policies and processes. This can be problematic when the person with the knowledge and understanding leaves the post and a new member of staff is appointed who is not aware of the issues or processes:

‘If there is a new officer or a new member of staff who doesn’t understand the process or they don’t want to understand the process, you are back to square one.’

4.4.2
Lack of understanding of young people’s choices and ‘constrained choice’

Many research participants described as problematic some professionals’ perception that running away and CSE is a lifestyle choice and stated that they often have to challenge such assumptions. Where these assumptions are held there is a distinct lack of understanding of the concept of ‘constrained choice’, which stresses how the involvement in exploitative relationships is significantly characterised by lack of choices for young people as a result of the young person’s emotional and/or economic vulnerability; and that legislation, policy and practice outlines how young people cannot consent to their abuse. Young people’s lack of power relating to age, need and social vulnerability also makes it impossible to give their consent to being sexually exploited. While the concept of ‘constrained choice’ is not always fully understood in relation to CSE, there is even less understanding in relation to running away:

‘Running away is often seen to be the young person’s free choice and not one based upon circumstances. ... In a climate of criticising hoodies and looking at antisocial behaviour, running away tends to get lumped in with this kind of perspective rather than being seen as children at risk or children suffering harm.’

A few research participants noted that in discussions of a young person’s choice there can be a lack of recognition that there are adults who are choosing to abuse children:

‘Whatever the child’s choice, there is always a willing choice that has been made on the part of an adult who should have not had sex with that child.’

4.4.3
Difficulties in relation to attitudes and knowledge relating to young people’s age

A significant proportion of research participants described how, in their local area, responses to running away and CSE do not acknowledge that support should be set in place for young people aged 18 and under where sexual exploitation, or risk of sexual exploitation, features. Research participants stated that it can be difficult to get other professionals to respond to young people who are aged 16 and older:

‘It’s just about remembering that when they turn 16, children and young people are not necessarily more savvy or got any more life experience than they day before they were 16. ... Because resources are always being cut left, right and centre, professionals just decide “we can’t do anything with 16 year olds” but she is still just a kid and we do need to be providing support even past 18.’

‘There should particularly be a greater understanding with children’s services in terms of when cases do get considered because their thresholds are very different from ours, and we will be saying “they are still a child” and they will be saying “well, they’re 16 – they can make their own decisions”.’

Some research participants also identified that professionals from other agencies sometimes perceive there not being a problem when young people are 15 and 16; and the term ‘agency neglect’ was used to describe some agencies’ response to young people aged 15.

‘We still hear things like “well, she’s 15; she’s old enough to make her own decisions”. That’s a constant battle, really.’

4.4.4
Knowledge and use of law, policy and guidance

A small number of research participants described how being knowledgeable about law, policy and guidance relating to running away and CSE, and using this knowledge effectively, can improve outcomes for young people. Utilising law, policy and guidance can take place at the strategic level and when providing an advocacy role for young people:

‘On the strategic front it’s about using policy and law to support our work. We’ve got the Working Together supplementary guidance, which makes it clear that child sexual exploitation is a child protection issue and that 16 to 18 year olds can be sexually exploited. Sometimes we [use] that ammunition when people say that they [young people who are sexually exploited] are 16 and choosing to go there [to where their perpetrators are] and we need to be able to refer to that guidance, that evidence and that law as often we canto be an advocate for that young person at a time when resources are tight. We’ve got to make sure we’re using the law and policy to [the] best advantage. The Sexual Offences Act equally makes issues around CSE really clear so that’s also really important.’

It can be difficult to ensure the needs of young people are met when other agencies and professionals are not familiar with policy, law and guidance relating to running away and CSE.

4.4.5
Use of language and definitions

Language and definitional issues can hinder work with young people who run away and experience CSE. Many research participants described how the terms ‘going missing’ and ‘running away’ are used interchangeably and sometimes revealed other professionals’ lack of understanding of running away and acknowledgement that different forms of ‘going missing’ require different responses.

While ‘stopping out’ or ‘staying away without permission’ are included in definitions of running away⁴³, research participants who work directly with young people who experience both running away and CSE often described how these young people do not always associate with running away:

‘If I say “have you run away this week?” they [young people] would say no. If I asked “have you stopped out?”, they would say yes; they don’t see themselves as running away.’

When professionals use language that young people do not share, it is not possible for young people to identify with what the professionals are saying to them. It is therefore necessary for professionals to consider the language they use with young people who experience both running away and CSE. Research participants also stressed the need for agencies to have a shared language and understanding:

‘There is something around agencies working together and communicating better and understanding the issues and definitely recognising the indicators from the off. One of the blocks we have is ... the police and children’s services ... have to work on evidence, or they do work on evidence. ... They’ll be looking at evidence and we’ll be talking about indicators and there needs to be somewhere in between instead of cases getting “no further action” because of lack of evidence.’

A few research participants also identified how it is important to not solely focus on running away that takes place overnight, as CSE can also take place during the day:

‘Most of our young people are home at night so the exploitation is taking place during the day and after school. Parents aren’t too worried if their children are

home by 8 or 9 pm but they don’t realise that the exploitation is taking place in the day or [early] evening.’

In recognition that young people can be sexually exploited during short periods of time when they have run away, some research participants suggested that running away should not be defined as being away overnight:

‘I think we have to define it as not always being overnight or being missing for days. Young people are at risk when they are away for chunks of time and not accounted for by any individual that knows them.’

There are also implications for parents and carers not reporting their child as missing:

‘Parents and carers often say to us “I know she’ll come back and she’s never stayed out overnight” but what we’re trying to say is that if there’s an agreed time for her to be back and she hasn’t come back or contacted you to say she’ll be late then you need to report her as missing. And it’s about the importance of giving the parents the confidence to report their child as missing but, unfortunately, they don’t always get a very good response from the police as they say “she’s not missing, she’s only been gone a few hours; she’s not technically missing”. ... Just because the child’s not labelled as missing, there are still extreme risks if there’s CSE involved.’

Many research participants also pointed to the need for further consideration of the definitions of CSE, as present definitions⁴⁴ do not always match the forms of CSE that professionals are witnessing and can become outdated.

43 Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK*. Sandbach: Railway Children.

44 Research participants were mostly familiar with the NWG Network definition of running away as presented in Part 1 of the report.

4.4.6
Awareness-raising

Professionals and young people who participated in the research stressed the vital need for awareness-raising about running away and CSE among the general public, professionals, parents and carers, and young people. Young people stressed the need for increased general awareness-raising about the dangers and potential impacts of running away and CSE to ensure that young people are able to identify the risks:

‘Make sure kids think through what can happen to them when they run away. ... If you tell ‘em of the dangers and how it can affect them, other people and their family, then they might think “oh, you shouldn’t do that then”.’

Schools and other educational settings are recognised as places where awareness-raising should take place. Young people outlined how there should be more sex education that includes discussion of running away and sexual exploitation so that young people are more informed and less likely to find themselves in various situations:

‘[There should be] more sex education in schools. If I had learnt more about it in school, I would have realised when I went online that these guys didn’t want me for me; they wanted to have sex with me – that’s it.’

As part of the drive to improve sex education in schools, young people highlighted the need for more information about and discussion of sexual relationships, which includes consideration of using drugs and alcohol and use of the internet:

‘If they’re [children and young people] going to have a relationships with someone, [they should] make sure it’s with the right person before you start smoking or drinking with them. ... Be aware it’s the right person who you drink or smoke with and make sure it’s someone who you can trust.’

‘In school, like, we never really got taught about internet safety. We’d probably get shown a video in ICT about once a year.’

Young people also identified the importance for school-based discussions about sexual and emotional relationships to include gay and lesbian relationships as well as heterosexual ones. The present focus upon heterosexual relationships results in those who are not heterosexual feeling isolated and unable to discuss both their interests and concerns and about keeping themselves safe in same sex relationships.

Training of professionals to
raise awareness

Professionals and young people highlighted the need for statutory and voluntary sector practitioners working with young people to receive training to raise their awareness of running away and CSE and how to respond to young people to effectively meet their needs. Young people recommended that practitioners who specialise in running away and CSE should deliver training to social workers:

‘To find out how they should approach a young person who is in that situation [running away and being sexually exploited] because they [social workers] often go about it in the wrong way because they are not specialists.’

4.5
Factors relating to the
local authority

There is recognition that, to ensure there are effective measures to support young people who experience both running away and CSE in a local area, there has to be acknowledgement by the local authority at a strategic level that running away and CSE are connected. A few research participants expressed the view that their local authority lags behind strategically in relation to running away and CSE; and that

while there is local knowledge and expertise, processes and procedures are not in place so there is:

‘Lots of good ideas but nothing actually in place.’

In some local areas the running away and CSE have been amalgamated strategically so that there is one group of professionals who deal with both issues at both a strategic and operational level; and have developed a range of protocols. In other areas, there are separate groups that address running away and CSE but with a significant degree of crossover. These two sets of developments are viewed as being intrinsic in meeting the needs of young people who experience both issues.

4.5.1
A lack of processes and
responses in the local area
to support young people who
experience running away
and CSE

A number of research participants identified that there is a lack of processes and responses in their local area to meet the needs of young people who experience running away and CSE:

‘It is like shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. ... On a higher level we haven’t got the strategic processes in place so we’re still getting the referrals coming in but we haven’t got the processes in place to support those young people [who experience both running away and CSE].’

At the time of participation in the research, some projects are working with other agencies to improve processes and responses as they are presently not adequate. It is recognised that a lack of policies and processes to address running away and CSE can also result in local authorities failing to provide adequate resources to meet young people’s needs.

4.5.2
Lack of clarity around
statutory processes

Many research participants outlined that, in their local area, there is a lack of clarity around statutory processes to follow when a young person runs away and/or is being sexually exploited. For example:

‘In my area, there are really complex local procedures when CSE is taking place or suspected. It’s really hard for us [a specialist CSE service] to follow the procedures let alone for other agencies who may not be very clear about CSE and how to respond when there are suspicions that it is taking place.’

Professionals emphasised the importance of ensuring clear referral processes to ease the process of referring young people to projects that address running away and CSE. Some professionals highlighted how practice on the ground with young people does not reflect policy and procedures agreed at the strategic level, and how it is problematic when guidance and protocols are not followed:

‘Because it’s [the local authority] got lots of things in place but the experience and the practice on the ground suggests people [professionals] aren’t doing what they claim to do. The experience of children is not so great.’

4.5.3
Lack of action and/or
slow responses by the local
authority

There was a perception that some local authorities are not acting in accordance with government guidance and will only act:

‘If there is a local major incident or if there is accountability to central government; so it is a key priority that local government must be forced [to address running away and CSE] by central government.’

To ensure that local authorities act in accordance with government guidance, professionals recommended that there should be statutory service accountability on how they respond to young people who experience both running away and CSE.

Some research participants described how their local authority responds very slowly to young people who run away and experience CSE due to cumbersome bureaucratic processes. Professionals who raised this issue would like to see their local authority take faster and more robust action:

‘We do know there are some little wins we could do very quickly. ... We know who the perpetrators are and ... sometimes it’s like pulling teeth getting them [the local authority] to see what can be done.’

Research participants said that it is crucial that the local authority’s delays in supporting young people who experience both running away and CSE are addressed because the levels of risk and harm experienced by these young people is detrimental to their well-being.

4.5.4
High levels of turnover of local authority staff

High levels of turnover of local authority staff were identified as hampering work to effectively meet the needs of young people who experience running away and CSE. Due to high levels of staff turnover there are reports of large numbers of agency staff working with young people who experience running away and CSE, which can be problematic:

‘For example, I’ve got one young person who has had four different social workers [in a six month period]. ... She was accommodated [four months ago] ... and since then she’s had three different Independent Reviewing Officers so there’s absolutely no opportunity for them to make a relationship with the young person. ... And of course the other problem is

that, with the change of social worker, it depends upon their knowledge [of running away and CSE] and basically some get it and some don’t.’

In one area protocols from care, or relating to young people running away from home who are on a Child Protection Order, are set in place but are not implemented due to a high turnover of staff:

‘This is in the process of being addressed [as] there are discussions going on with the child safeguarding unit ... to deliver training on running away and CSE ... and that will be mandatory. Obviously that is going to have to be a rolling programme because, sadly, there is a high turnover of staff here.’

4.5.5
Having a lead person within the local authority with responsibility for running away and CSE

A number of benefits were identified of having a lead person in the local authority responsible for running away and CSE:

‘She [the lead person] is now collating information so every time a young person is reported missing ... the police will be emailing her [on a weekly basis] with the young person’s details ... and she will have the information about young people involved in CSE and make the links between CSE and running away. ... We haven’t had this [role and system] for long and it feels a real positive step forward; and she [the lead person with responsibility for missing and CSE] leads on all the missing subgroups and forums and meetings as she does with CSE, so it really helps to have one person lead on both and know all the names of the young people who run away and who experience CSE and she can line the dots.’

One research participant stated how improvements relating to running away

and CSE in the local area have been greatly facilitated by running away and CSE being parts of a social care professional’s job description:

‘CSE and running away being somebody’s job description rather than someone’s passion in social care is of immense benefit. CSE might be someone’s passion who’s working in social care but when they leave, when it’s not in someone’s job description, it just all gets left on the back burner because it was someone’s passion rather than their role. ... Now we’ve got particular workers whose job is CSE and/or running away.’

4.6
Factors relating to the criminal justice system

The consultation with professionals and young people raised a number of factors relating to the criminal justice system that focus upon being part of a police operation into CSE, police responses to running away and CSE, and to the criminalisation of young people.

4.6.1
Young people’s experiences of being part of a police investigation into CSE

All of the young people who experienced being part of a police investigation addressing CSE described this as very stressful and difficult. Some young people were not prepared to speak to the police about their sexual exploitation because it was viewed as being too difficult to do so. Research practitioners who worked directly with young people also echoed how traumatic it can be for young people to testify against perpetrators of CSE and that the whole prosecution process, including the initial court process, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) response and giving evidence in court, needs to become

more child-centred and less stressful for young people.

4.6.2
Factors relating to the police

Having a police investigation addressing CSE in the local area

A number of research participants highlighted how having a police investigation into CSE plays an important part in improving processes and responses to young people who run away and experience CSE. One benefit of having a police investigation has been to improve how agencies work together:

‘Before we had the police operation, some agencies worked really well together but some worked better than others. ... Having a police operation has forced agencies to really pull together.’

One project started practice with young people who ran away and experienced CSE at a time when a police operation, which facilitated the project’s work, began:

‘We came in at a time when there was a real drive from local agencies to try and understand the issues a lot better and to do something about it.’

A local police investigation also improves relationships between the police and specialised projects which, in turn, results in the police improving their awareness of running away and CSE and benefits young people:

‘I can pop down to the police station and talk to their child protection officers and they can come to me and share their worries about children – and that wouldn’t have happened [before the police investigation]. ... I’ve also been doing some sessions [to improve awareness about running away and CSE] with the police ... and that wouldn’t have happened either last year. I think that’s a really good thing

and we’re working with the Neighbourhood teams as well as the Community Officers.’

Lack of appropriate responses from the police

Professionals and young people who participated in the research identified that police responses to running away and CSE can be inappropriate. Police responses can differ between police boroughs and individual police officers within one force. As an example of this, one professional described how the response of one officer was inappropriate and did not reflect overall practice of the local police force:

‘A young girl was taken to a place like a warehouse and all these men were sitting around drinking and she guessed what was probably going to happen and she started to cry. The car dropped her off and she went to the police. The person on the desk said “do you think we are a taxi service?”. The police could have carried out a raid and missed the opportunity. The information could have been turned into intelligence.’

Professionals who participated in the research also pointed to police responses to parents and carers when young people run away and experience CSE:

‘The police don’t always know what the thought processes are of parents. For example, we had a case where a young girl ran away for a week and then a uniformed policeman turned up on the door step and the parent immediately thought that her daughter was dead.’

Young people emphasised the need for an appropriate response from police offers when a young person discloses that they have been subjected to CSE:

‘Don’t be judgemental when you [police officers] first meet the young person like some police officers when they first met me. ... [Some] would make a judgement straight away after meeting me.’

Responses from the police when young people are reported as missing

Many research participants described how there is a mixed response from the police when parents and carers report them as missing after a young person has run away:

‘It’s really varied [the response from the police] and some police officers are really great and know what CSE means, they know the risks and they will actually go out and look for the young people but some [police officers] just see it as a bother ... “do you know how much money this costs ... you [the parent] go and find the young person” and sometimes that’s really not appropriate for the parents to put themselves at risk and when there’s other children in the house as well. ... If they [the police] are aware that sexual exploitation is involved and has been identified ... if they’ve got a social worker involved and/or a specialist worker for CSE and there are high or medium risk indicators then they [missing reports] need to be acted upon sooner and the response to parents needs to be improved because, in our experience, the parents really lose faith not only in the police but in other professionals because they’re receiving completely mixed messages.’

When parents and carers receive a negative or mixed message from the police after reporting a young person as missing this can be confusing, as the police response can negate messages given by other professionals about the importance of reporting a young person who has run away as missing to the police:

‘Parents and carers of young people who are involved in CSE are being told by all professionals about the importance of reporting their child as missing but when they go to the police and they report their child as missing, they’re being told that they [the police] are not a taxi service, have you actually looked for the girl – they’re only two hours late. You know, they [parents and carers] could be at a child protection conference where someone says

“why didn’t you report your child [to the police] whilst she was missing?”“ Well, I tried to do that but the police told me I was wasting their time”.... Parents can be seen to be not engaging or failing to protect their children when actually they’re not but they’re getting the wrong response [from the police].’

Experience reveals that the police do not always respond in a positive manner when a young person from care is reported as missing:

‘I think there is a difference between the children and young people at home and those accommodated.’

‘I’ve got a young person who’s just had his 22nd missing episode this year who is looked after and I think there is an element of “oh no, not again”. If the name appears regularly there’s just an attitude that “oh well, they are a regular absconder”.’

Young people raised the need for the police to consider how they respond to young people who run away and have been reported missing:

‘When you get reported missing, they [the police] need to think about what they say [to a young person] because they’ve never approached me in the right way. They’ll say stuff like “we’ve got better things to do; there could be murderers and robbers and stuff and we’re out looking for you”. Stuff like that and it’s like I’ve not asked to be reported missing and the situations like I said before [of being sexually exploited during incidences of running away]: how do they [the police] not know that something has happened?”

Young people described how the police should give more thought to why they run away and that being returned to the place they have run away from may not always be the best option for the young person:

‘It’s like they find me and take me back to the children’s home and I’d be like “I don’t

wanna go back to the children’s home; I just ran away from there”.’

Improving young people’ experiences when contributing to a police operation

Young people with experience of police operations into CSE outlined a number of ways in which the police could improve their response so that young people who run away and experience CSE have a more positive experience of being the focus of a police operation. Some young people felt that the police could do more to target the perpetrators of CSE:

‘They [the police] don’t take the cases [against perpetrators of CSE] as seriously as they should. ... The police don’t do as much as they should.’

One young person described how the police did not take enough action against an older male that groomed and exploited him:

‘They never seized his phone or anything and he was grooming me for nine months and I never understood why they [the police] never arrested him. ... He [the lead police officer on the young person’s case] was like “I’m too busy with other cases [against other perpetrators of CSE] you’ve given me” and I was like “that’s no excuse; he could still hurt somebody else [another child or young person]. Why aren’t you arresting him?”. I got into a massive fight with the police about that and they still didn’t do anything so they [the police] just need to take it [sexual exploitation] more seriously.’

The length of time it takes to build a case can be problematic for young people as can the knowledge that their perpetrator of CSE is out in the community:

“Cos obviously they [the police] have to come round and do reports and it takes like forever for everything to be processed. ... It’s taking ages ... and I find it really difficult when he’s [the main perpetrator] still out there.’

Young people described how the prosecution process was stressful for them and could impact upon running away. Young people also found it particularly difficult when perpetrators of CSE were out on bail:

‘It’s really difficult. ... He [the perpetrator] is still out there and the police can’t do anything about it until it goes to court.’

Need for improved police training to increase awareness about running away and CSE

The majority of research participants identified the need for further statutory guidance for the police at the national level relating to perpetrators of CSE, along with accompanying resources. Because the police play such a crucial role in addressing running away and CSE, research participants stressed the need for a general improvement in police awareness of running away and CSE:

‘The police are really key in all of this because they’re the ones who get the reports when young people go missing and so it’s getting them trained up and it’s happening but slowly. ... It’s about working with the police, training them, making them more aware around issues of sexual exploitation; sometimes they cannot really see the issue of sexual exploitation because they don’t have the knowledge, basically.’

Research participants recommended that all non-specialist police officers who carry out ‘safe and well checks’ should receive training addressing running away and CSE, so that they are more informed to recognise where CSE may feature in the running away, and be clear about the steps to follow when this is identified.

**4.6.3
The criminalisation of young people who experience running away and CSE**

As noted in section three, research participants raised how boys and young people who experience both running away and CSE are often criminalised. Girls and young women who experience both running away and CSE are also criminalised, as Lucy’s experiences highlight:

Lucy has a history of mental health issues including self-harm. During one occasion of running away, she threatened to cut herself with a knife and was arrested for being in possession of a dangerous weapon:

‘I had a standoff with the police with a knife. For about half an hour I held it [the knife] to myself and was saying that I was gonna hurt myself. They [the police] took it [the knife] off me and arrested me for having an offensive weapon.’

Many research participants stressed the need for improved understanding from the criminal justice system that involvement in criminal activities can be linked to running away and CSE.

**4.7
Factors relating to specialised projects working with young people who experience both running away and CSE**

The majority of research participants acknowledged that there were some issues directly related to projects who provide specialised support for young people who experience both running away and CSE.

**4.7.1
Lack of organisational support for projects working to address running away and CSE**

In some cases, where projects are part of a larger organisation, research participants described how their work can be hindered by a lack of commitment and support from the wider organisation to ensuring that projects are able to effectively deliver and continue their work. Some of this lack of support takes the form of the wider organisation failing to ensure funding continues. There was also a concern that organisations have not responded to the increased demand for CSE services generated by increased awareness-raising, often as a consequence of the media focus upon CSE, with increased support for these services. Research participants who cited the above stated that the organisation needs to award some priority to the work their project undertakes; and to ensure that this priority is shared among other parts of the organisation.

**4.7.2
Support for practitioners working with young people who run away and experience CSE**

Due to the challenging nature of work with young people who run away and experience CSE, it is important to provide practitioners with appropriate support, clinical supervision and time to reflect upon their practice. Some practitioners receive such support:

‘We’ve got really supportive management and also get group supervision, which is independent clinical supervision on a monthly basis. ... That is really important in terms of meeting our needs as practitioners [because] it’s really challenging, and emotionally challenging, work. ... Being skilled up and having time to process is really important; having time to think about our work and not having panic knee-jerk responses to things.’

Other practitioners, however, do not receive the required support and are not able to ensure that their team are supported as effectively as they should be. To address this, research participants suggested that all practitioners should receive quality supervision, training and learning from practice; and that there should be staff and team professional development groups to address and minimise impact upon practitioners and ensure they are effectively supported.

**4.8
Factors relating to parents and carers of young people who experience running away and CSE**

**4.8.1
Being able to work with parents and carers of young people to achieve positive outcomes**

A few research participants described how they worked with a small number of parents and carers who both facilitate and support the project’s work with the young person. Working with parents and carers can improve outcomes and parental/carer support can make a significant difference:

‘When parents and carers are supportive, the difference it makes is huge.’

‘If you’ve got parents and carers on board that helps the work. ... We find in some cases that parents are key to it really.’

Support work with parents and carers to facilitate their understanding of the importance of reporting their child as missing when they run away is identified as being crucial. One project has made a concerted effort to focus upon this and, as a result, there has been a significant increase in rates of reporting in the local area. Parents and

carers can feel upset when the police arrive at their home to search the house after a young person is reported as missing so it is important to work with the parents and carers so that they are able to understand the need for this to happen.

When young people’s parents and carers are able to implement consistent boundaries, operate in a manner that is not sanction-oriented and be able or prepared to consider rewarding positive behaviours, this can directly benefit young people who run away and experience CSE. Therefore, some practitioners work with parents to achieve these outcomes.

Some projects are not funded to work with parents and carers of young people who run away and experience CSE and the focus of the work is primarily upon young people. However, due to the recognised benefits of working with parents and carers, some projects do support them:

‘We might indirectly offer some support to parents. We do sometimes talk to them on the phone or advocate for them on their behalf. We sometimes struggle when the parents seem not to be supporting the young person or sometimes encouraging some of the risky behaviour, so we might try and reinforce certain messages and that obviously helps if you have them on board.’

Of the young people who participated in the research, only a very small proportion of their parents and carers received support. Where this was forthcoming young people were able to recognise the value of this support:

‘She [the professional] would mediate between me and my parents. ... Like at the time when I was still talking to guys on the internet, it was much better her [the professional] talking to them [the young person’s parents] than me talking to them, ‘cos if I spoke to them, it would always result in a fight whereas if I talked through her, it wouldn’t.’

**4.8.2
Parents and carers not reporting young people who run away as missing to the police**

As discussed previously, many research participants view parents and carers not reporting young people as missing to the police when they run away as hindering work to meet the needs of young people who run away and experience CSE. A few research participants stressed how young people who are not reported as missing when they run away are more vulnerable to being sexually exploited. There is, therefore, a need to work with parents and carers to reinforce the importance of reporting a young person who runs away as missing to the police.

**4.8.3
Lack of resources to work with parents and carers of young people who experience both running away and CSE**

Research participants consistently identified the lack of resources to work with parents and carers as a factor that hinders their work with young people:

‘We can either work with the young person or the parents, we can’t do both, and I haven’t got enough workers to put one worker with the parent and one with the young person so, because we’re X [a child-centred organisation], we concentrate on working with the young person.’

Research participants outlined how not enough work is done with parents and carers, who often end up being viewed as ‘bad’ parents by agencies, but do not understand what is happening with their child. Professionals witness parents and carers not being supported to respond to the circumstances of their child. For example, one young person returned to live with her mother after being placed in an out of area placement:

‘She [the young person] came back from X [the out of area placement] and we placed her in a children’s home near X [the local city] and then there was a LAC [Local Authority Care] review and it was decided she should go home to her mother who she hadn’t lived with for quite some time. So she went back to her mother on Friday and by Saturday it had broken down because this young woman went out and did what she had been doing. ... She got very drunk, she stayed out all night and there were rows and within 24 hours the mother chucked her out. She [the young person] then spent Sunday on the streets ... and it was picked up on Monday and she was back in care. I don’t know how much work was done with that parent to prepare her for what her daughter’s behaviour might be like and what supportive help she [the young person’s mother] had with that. ... You just wonder how much work has been done with the parents and the young person to work out some ground rules and all that stuff.’

A few research participants stressed the importance of working with the whole family:

‘Let’s look at re-establishing the family dynamics [and] the positives of being in a family. That’s a scary process when the child is so disconnected from that family and we need to work with the family to bring them back together.’

‘Sometimes it takes a long time to gain the trust of the young person and build trust with the parent and the young person to allow you to work with the parent as well, so I think that would be a very good development. Some other projects have that [family workers]. ... Once you have got that relationship with the young person you are then able to do really good family work but it takes time for the young person to want that to happen. ... It’s vital that we need to be working with both the family and the parents.’

Almost without exception, research participants cited that the resource that could

most improve their practice with young people who experience running away and CSE would be a worker that supports parents and carers. Some young people were able to recognise that parents and carers were not always well-placed to care for and support them and that they needed help to do so:

*‘Some parents don’t know how to be a parent. ... That’s why kids are finding that the streets are a better alternative to home. ... If [the] kid’s biological parents don’t give a f**k about the kid, then the kid will always have a f**ked up life. The kid will know [that their parents don’t care about them] and you can’t just send them off to some foster parents or something and expect the kid’s life to be grand. ... If you help the parents when the kid is still young, so that the parents can become supportive to the kid and loving individuals, then the parents will be able to support the kid through life and the child won’t need to find validation and support and a way out [of home] because they won’t have the need.’*

**4.8.4
Parents’ experiences of how professionals behave towards them**

A small number of research participants described how, in an attempt to understand the push factors relating to a young person who is experiencing both running away and CSE, professionals can sometimes deal with parents and carers in a manner that is problematic:

‘Professionals sometimes basically interrogate the family in terms of “what are you doing that is causing this?” or “what are you not doing?”.’

This focus can detract from the actions of perpetrators and is disempowering for parents:

‘Parents do not automatically think “my

child has run away so she must be being exploited; she’s being raped tonight”; their first thought is to say “where the hell have you been?”. So when parents are told “your child has been raped” or “your child has been exploited”, they’ve got to go through all of that. Yet at the same meeting they would be told what to do. That is information overload and they can feel like they are being judged. It’s a lot for parents to have to deal with.’

There is, therefore, a need for consideration of how professionals communicate and work with parents and carers of young people who run away, so that they can effectively engage them with the process of addressing their child’s running away and sexual exploitation.

4.8.5
Parental responses to CSE

Young people who ran away as a consequence of how their parents responded to their sexual exploitation highlighted the need for parents to ensure that they are open with their children and show them that they love and care about them:

‘Having someone force you to do sex stuff is awful ... and the way my dad acted just make it worse. ... I felt ashamed as it was without him making it worse. ... I would have liked my mum and dad to have talked about it with me and tell me they were sorry it had happened and to have supported me.’

Where young people have run away to be with an older adult who they view as a boyfriend or girlfriend, there was some suggestion from young people that parents and carers should allow the relationship to continue to ensure that their child remains living in the home and is kept safer. Abi, for example, whose parents will not allow her to return home unless she leaves her older boyfriend, has some understanding of her parents’ response but thinks it is more important to ensure a young person’s safety:

‘I can see where they’re [her parents] coming from but they should know I’m not going to come home without X [Abi’s older boyfriend] so if it was my daughter. I’d just say “listen, you both come home; you can both live at mine”. I’d rather have them both at home being safe rather than knowing they were out on the streets never mind how much it hurt me her being with him [an older boyfriend]. But I’d have to let them home because it’s my daughter, at the end of the day.’

4.9
Factors relating to direct practice with young people who experience running away and CSE

Professionals and young people outlined a number of factors relating to direct practice with young people who experience running away and CSE. The first set of factors relate to those that support direct practice with young people:

4.9.1
Factors supporting direct practice with young people who experience running away and CSE

Providing more services for young people

Young people identified the need for more services where they can just turn up and where there are professionals they can talk to:

‘There should be places where kids can go to tell someone what’s happening to them – someone who will believe them and be able to help them and know what to do for the best. I know there’s Childline and that but there’s some things you don’t want to say over the phone. Kids want to go somewhere where there’s people they can talk to face-to-face.’

‘There should be places where kids can go ... safe places where there’s people to help them.’

‘There should be more places they [young people] can go to for help.’

The benefits of non-statutory agencies providing services for young people who experience both running away and CSE

Being a non-statutory agency is viewed as being a key factor for gaining the trust of young people. Research participants also outlined how being a non-statutory agency allows for project workers to implement a flexible approach and carry out meaningful advocacy work. Young people who participated in the research described how it is often easier to trust workers from the voluntary sector because they were often more able than statutory sector workers to give them the time and support they required:

‘There’s just something about how they [voluntary sector practitioners] work. They just seem to have more time than social workers and know how to talk to young people. ... They just seem to get kids. ... My social worker’s alright but X [voluntary sector project support worker] always has time to talk to me and always gets back to me when I leave a message. ... She takes the time to listen to me.’

‘I don’t tell me social worker anything. ... I don’t trust social workers. ... I don’t really know why. ... I trust X [the young person’s voluntary sector project support worker]. ... I like all the staff at X [the voluntary sector project]. ... I used to come in here, kicking off and that and they always stuck with me and let me calm down so I felt like they would stick with me. ... My social worker tells me off if I swear and I just don’t feel like I can be myself with her or tell her stuff in case she goes running off to me mum or the police or whoever. ... I know that the workers at X [the voluntary sector project] have to tell the police and social work stuff if they think I’m gonna be harmed

but I know they would talk to me about it and not just tell other people what I said without talking about it with me first.’

‘My social worker keeps changing and they never really get to know me or spend proper time with me. ... I’ve been with X [voluntary sector project support worker] for more than two years now and I feel like she really knows me and understands me. I trust her ... so I’d tell her the truth about what’s going on.’

Ensuring young people are able to access services

Some research participants stressed how access is vital to how a service works to support young people who experience running away and CSE and that young people should be able to self-refer by self-presenting at a service. Self-referral is also identified as supporting strong engagement and retention rates. Some projects ensure that young people can self-refer:

‘Children and young people can knock on our door, they can phone us up; they can self-refer in those ways.’

However, it was also acknowledged that not many young people who experience running away and CSE do self-refer but that work can snowball to other young people:

‘Because of the so subtle ways that they [young people] are sexually exploited, they don’t come to us with their hands waving saying “I’m being sexually exploited; can you help me?” ... What we do get, however, is piggy back referrals so we start working with one young person ... and because of our work with him or her, we’re made aware of all of their friends that are vulnerable and involved in such risky behaviours. And we ask them [the young person that the project is initially working with] to bring in their friends. We make a Care Pathway for their friends whilst trying to keep it boundaried so that the original young person has their own worker and the friend

gets a different worker. Young people can often not identify their own risks but can identify their friends’ risks. ... They’re really good at caretaking for their friends.’

‘I’ve often got young people in [to the specialised support service] through their friends. They are sometimes more at risk than the young person they have been referred by because they are not known to services. We’ve got that flexibility to say “well, actually, we can offer you support”.’

Providing support in a warm and friendly environment

Some practitioners identified the importance of ensuring that work with young people takes place in a warm and friendly environment that operates in a young person-friendly manner to facilitate positive engagement:

‘The project itself is a very warm and young person-friendly environment. I think this has a really positive impact when we try to start engaging young people. They do actually come into the building and think “oh this is very nice”. It’s very homely and very different from a lot of the social service buildings and other projects that they have been to.’

Presenting support to young people in a caring and non-judgemental manner, which includes active listening, was recognised as part of what is necessary to provide support in a warm and friendly environment.

‘Taking them for coffee and chatting with them; it’s more relaxing.’

Listening to young people

Young people stressed the importance of professionals listening to them:

‘She [the young person’s support worker from a specialised runaways’ project] just listened to me and I just told her how I felt. ... I just felt like someone was listening to me.’

‘Someone who listens to you and actually shows they understand me and other young people.’

The importance of professionals showing young people that they care was stressed time and time again by the young people who participated in the research. As well listening to young people, care can be shown by asking young people about their experiences and feelings.

Providing outreach work

Both professionals and young people recognised outreach work as being effective in engaging and meeting the needs of young people who experience running away and CSE, and crucial in reaching young people who are not referred to support services:

‘I had to be referred to get help [when the young person was living on the streets and being sexually exploited] and I reckon kids [who run away and experience CSE] need somebody to go to them when they are living on the streets and to help them. ... I’m sure there’s [young] people living on the streets who don’t know this place [a specialist support service for children and young people who experience CSE and children and young people who go missing] exists.’

Young people’s requirements from practitioners working to support them

A few research participants highlighted how young people stated that what they wanted from a support service is a practitioner who works with them long-term:

‘When we wrote the initial bid [to gain funding to provide the service] we did some consultation with young people who were really clear that they wanted a worker who would stay in their lives for as long as was necessary. So ‘stick-ability’ is what I’m talking about: someone who will stay with them for a long time to build up the trust. ... At about the seven month stage

we begin to see the changes that the young people are beginning to make. Obviously it did take a long time to build up the trust. ... We’re also hearing from professionals: the feedback ... is just how well the work is going because we’re in the young person’s lives for such a long time.’

Research participants emphasised the importance of providing young people who run away and experience CSE with a worker who consistently works with them:

‘Consistency is really important. ... I have a young person who I have been working with for four or five months and she now has her fourth social worker and I’ve been there from the start. I think consistency of workers is something that they [young people who run away and experience CSE] really really like: actually having the same worker consistently and knowing that they’re going to be seeing them every week and actually building up that relationship with them.’

It is important that practitioners who work directly with young people who experience both running away and CSE have the skills to work with boundaries and a structured manner while presenting to the young person as warm, approachable and caring:

‘So there’s a lot of crisis response work and ensuring there are boundaries in ... a very warm, very nurturing way, very approachable way, and it takes a very skilled worker whose very confident at holding that because, to the naked eye, it just looks like you’re very woolly and ‘having a chat’ but that chat is what changes things.’

Young people described the benefits of having a good relationship with a professional as being paramount. Certain attributes such as showing understanding of the young person and explaining rather than telling them why they should and should not be doing certain things facilitate a good relationship:

‘She [the young person’s social worker] understood us and that. She wasn’t forceful, if you know what I mean? She used to explain why we shouldn’t be doing things like that [running away and having sex with older males] ... and what was acceptable like.’

Many of the young people who participated in the research commented upon how it was important for practitioners to work in an informal manner with them:

‘We’ll go into town for a coffee. ... It’s like having a friend who’s also guiding me.’

Young people also stressed the importance of professionals that do what they tell young people they will do:

‘She [the young person’s social worker] was mint; absolutely mint. If she said she was going to do something, she’d do it straight away.’

Young people are realistic that sometimes it is not possible for a professional to do what they hoped they were able to in support of the young person. However, it is important that professionals explain why they cannot do what they said they would so that young people can understand why and are not left to feel that they have been let down again by an adult in their lives.

Providing a flexible approach to work with young people who experience running away and CSE

Having a flexible approach is seen as crucial when working with young people who run away and experience CSE, so that work can be tailored to individuals. One research practitioner described how different approaches had to be taken to work with boys and young men than with girls and young women:

‘The boys in particular, they don’t want formal appointments; they want to go out and talk while they’re doing rock climbing

or whatever and that’s the model that we’ve adopted and that’s been borne out by the progress we’re seeing a year down the line.’

Other research participants stressed the need to be flexible in relation to how often they are able to meet with young people and work with them:

‘Able to be flexible with seeing young people means if there is a crisis, I can see young people many times during the week.’

To achieve positive outcomes it is necessary for young people who run away and experience CSE to be willing to engage with the support offered by services and to give their willingness on a voluntary basis. Therefore, to encourage engagement, it is very important to work in a way that fits with the young person. Some of this relates to working at a pace that fits with the individual to slowly engage them and get to know them as a person and not just as someone who runs away and is sexually exploited:

‘In the early stages of our work it is about engaging with the child and getting to know the child for them, and not because they are having lots of sex or taking drugs or because their foster placement has broken down, but simply because they are a person and we need to look at their lives holistically rather than just the problems.’

Through effective engagement and assessment work that is built upon getting to know a young person, it should become apparent when the young person is ready to start the more structured work, which should be undertaken in a manner that does not cause pain or distress:

‘Only when a child is ready can we do that structured support. It’s very much based upon on a third person account of what’s happening. Children find it too painful to talk about themselves and the experiences they’re having so we do a lot of third person: “so if that was your best friend or your sister, what messages would you give them?”. And it’s only when a

child’s ready do we move to the much more private sensitive work around them and their experiences.’

As well as carrying out structured work related to identify issues, there is also need for projects to support young people with events and issues that arise as the structured work is being done:

‘We also manage those crises in between. ... So if their foster placement has broken down or their relationship with their abuser has gone tits up, they will come to us in a crisis because of how we work with them.’

Acknowledging that it may not be possible to prevent a young person from running away and experiencing CSE but providing support for long-term benefit

Some young people identified that when a young person is embroiled in running away and being sexually exploited, it can be very difficult to do anything if the young person does not realise that they are at risk and being harmed:

‘If the child believes that the life they are leading [after they started to run away and become involved in CSE] is 100 times better than the one they were leading before because they feel like they’re in control and they’ve got a regular income ... unless the child wants to be helped and the parents want to help, there’s not a right lot you can do to get the child to move away from the streets.’

At some points, it is not possible to do anything to prevent them from running away and being sexually exploited:

‘I don’t think that there was anything anyone could have done. ... Lots of people did a lot for me [to support the young person so that she could stop running away and being sexually exploited] but I just didn’t listen.’

It is intrinsically important that support for young people continues to be provided while they continue to run away and be involved in sexual exploitation to deal with issues that arise; and to still be there until the young person is ready to address their running away and sexual exploitation:

‘I think you have to keep that support in place even when the young person isn’t listening and continues to run away and have sex with older men so that when they realise what is going on, there is support in place for the young person. ... Don’t just brush them aside because they can’t be bothered at the time. To be honest, it’s at the time that they can’t be bothered with the support when they don’t realise the situation that they’re in.’

‘Sometimes there’s nothing you can do to get a kid to stop right there and then doing what they’re doing [running away and being sexually exploited] but there needs to be someone to be there for them and to chat to them.’

It is also necessary to work hard to maintain contact with a young person during an episode of running away and also, even if there is not face-to-face or direct work with a young person, to ensure that other agencies are working to address the young person’s needs:

‘So, in relation to a girl who was away for six weeks, we made phone contact, we had text contact and we tried to hook her back in; we made sure the local authority was doing what they should be doing and we contacted other services in X [the city where the young person had run away to]. We worked very closely with the police. So there was a lot of work happening but no direct support.’

Once a young person returns from a running away episode, there is also a need to work closely with them after their return which, in some cases, can take a significant amount of time:

‘And when she [the young person] came back [from running away], X [the young person’s support worker] spent 20 hours with her over three days.’

Ensuring young people who experience both running away and CSE are provided with practical support and have their basic needs met

Research professionals working with young runaways stressed the importance of ensuring their basic needs are met before carrying out other work with them:

‘We can’t expect a child to have structured therapeutic support when they’re in crisis, if they haven’t changed their underwear for a week because they’ve been missing. They need to come somewhere safe and have a shower and get some clean underwear and brush their teeth and get some nice smelly deodorant on – whatever it may be: we’ve got a clothes store, food, everything; and have their basic needs met.’

Linked to the above point, young people recommended that when working with young people who are engaged in survival sexual exploitation after running away from home or care, it is necessary to give thought to alternative survival strategies other than selling/exchanging sex. Until alternatives are set in place, it will not be possible for the young person to consider withdrawing themselves from those situations where they are sexually exploited.

Providing a range of support

Young people who have experienced both running away and CSE and received support from specialist projects described how they have received a range of support to meet their needs, which has resulted in positive outcomes for them:

‘I’ve changed my life around [as a result of the support received from the specialised voluntary sector project that addressing

both running away and CSE]. ... Like, they’ve helped me get back home; they’ve helped me with a lot. ... Even though I’ve been back home for a year now, she [the support worker] still sees me to make sure I’m alright and makes sure I’m not hanging around with the people I used to hang round with. ... She meets up with me regularly, like, and if I’m upset or need somebody to talk to like, I can just call her up and I know she’s there’s. ... And I trust her and that. ... And she teaches me about things I never knew like, ‘cos I never went to school, I never knew about sexual health and sexual relationships and missed out on lessons about drugs and stuff; and she teaches me about stuff like that.’

Ensuring responses focus upon a young person’s future as well as the past

Young people who have experienced both running away and CSE stressed the need to ensure interventions focus upon the young person’s future:

‘All I did was talk about my past. What I wanted somebody to do was to be there and to help me with what to do with my life in the future. ... I wanted help to move on in the future but all they [support workers] kept doing was dragging up the past.’

Rewarding young people who run away and experience CSE when they do something ‘right’

The importance of rewarding young people when they do something ‘right’ was emphasised:

‘The children and young people we work with often don’t get rewarded when they do something “right” but are often pulled up and receive attention when they do something “wrong”. ... [Rewarding] demonstrates to our young people that they are worthy, and worthy of recognition.’

Research participants recognised that it was important to reward young people who run away and experience CSE because of the often negative labels that are attached to these young people:

‘Everywhere they go there is negativity. It’s almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy because they get labelled naughty or not very good and think they will live up to that label.’

Peer support

Some of the young people who participated in the research have been provided with support that includes work with other young people who have experienced both running away and CSE, and found a number of benefits of this peer support:

‘Hearing what they’ve been through. ... We could trust each other and talk about what we’d been through. ... I just felt like connected to them all because we’d all been through the same stuff. It was really good being with other young people who’d been through the same stuff as us. .. Knowing that it’s not just me [who’s experienced running away and CSE]. I don’t have to feel ashamed of myself ... and I started getting all my confidence back and stuff.’

Young people with experience of both running away and CSE described how it can be effective to talk with other young people who have experienced both running away and CSE:

‘I wasn’t taking any notice of what X [the young person’s support worker from the specialist sexual exploitation project] was saying so he got this guy who was 18 and had similar experiences as me to come and talk to me. ... It helped because it was like another view of what I would see in three years’ time. ... He [the 18-year-old male] was like ‘I know how it is: it’s like the best thing in the world and you think they [perpetrators] all love you but they do not; they genuinely do not love you; they don’t

care about you”. And it did help me because he had been through this.”

“Cos when you’re like a young teenager, whatever adults say you’re like “whatever: I don’t care”. Like when you’re at school and a teacher tells you off you’re like “okay” and when parents tell you off you’re like “whatever”. So when someone’s [an adult] telling you not to do something, you’re like “well, why shouldn’t I?”.’

Young people also stressed the role that other young people with experience of both running away and CSE can play in the preventative work:

‘Like I think you’ve got to find a young person [whose experienced both running away and CSE] who’s willing to do that because I think it will get hold of the girls and they’ll start thinking “oh my god”.’

Gay boys and young men outlined how it has been very helpful to become part of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) group and attend sessions with the group, as this reduces their isolation, enables them to meet other gay young people and receive support.

Providing creative means for young people to express themselves

While some young people like to talk about their experiences of running away and CSE and how they feel, other young people find talking difficult and prefer alternative means of communication. A number of the young people who participated in the research described how using creative outlets, such as art or writing, allowed them to express their feelings in a way they were more comfortable with.

Young people recognising that they have been abused and that they are not at fault

Research participants working directly with young people who run away and experience CSE have identified that it is when a child or young person is able to recognise that they are being abused that work is able to move in a particularly positive direction:

‘The most powerful thing is when a girl is able to recognise that what she has experienced is abuse and for them to stop blaming themselves and thinking of themselves as a “slag”: “well, everyone keeps calling me a slag so that’s what I must be”. And this [the realisation that they have been abused] doesn’t happen with all young people at all but some of the young people say “I see what’s happened; I know why they [perpetrators] picked me; I know how they managed to get me to do it all and I see that’s not my fault”.’

4.9.2 Factors that hinder direct practice with young people who experience running away and CSE

Professionals and young people also identified a range of factors that hinder direct practice and positive outcomes:

Having to stop work with young people when they reach the age of 18

Many research participants emphasised that running away and sexual exploitation does not stop when a young person turns 18 and neither do the risk or impacts. There is a need to have flexibility about when work with a young person stops, rather than an assumption that work automatically stops when a young person reaches 18. One professional described how she has worked with a young female for more than six years and the work had stopped because the young person has reached 18:

‘The young person was part of this project from the age of 12 and she needed that. She popped in recently and I can just see that her outcomes are still not brilliant but had she not had that long-term intervention from our project, I’d question whether she’d be alive. ... We are working with some of the most vulnerable young people with poor attachment history and ... their needs to be a long-term investment [in work with young people].’

Professionals finding some young people who run away and experience CSE difficult to engage

Research participants working in specialised projects identified that there are groups of young people who run away and experience CSE that they find difficult to engage. These young people include:

- Those who are not reported as missing as it is not possible to identify who these young people are and work with them (where there is reliance upon referrals via MISPER reports, and a lack of outreach work).
- Those who run away for long periods of time and/or are internally trafficked, as their longer-term absence can make it very difficult for projects to continue their engagement with, and support of, the young person.
- Those who have experienced running away and CSE and then become entrenched in ‘red district culture’ as they often become wary of, and adverse to, services and it can be difficult for professionals to access these young people.
- Roma children and young people: as professionals recognise that they do not possess knowledge or understanding of the different Roma cultures or family structures and require training and support to be able to enable them to work effectively with these young people.
- 16- 18 year olds where there is no statutory safeguarding involvement.
- Those who have fended for themselves for

- long periods of time as they are generally mistrustful of agencies.
- The ‘macho’ heterosexual males as they are ‘playing into the masculine stereotype’ and are unwilling to disclose that exploitation has taken place.
- Younger children, such as those aged 11 and under, due to difficulties in explaining the risks of running away and CSE and the lack of resources for working with younger children.
- Those who have had a number of professionals involved with them over a number of years as they become ‘fed up’ of professionals ‘dipping in and out’ of their lives.
- Those who have not developed any trusting relationship with adults.
- Those who have a late diagnosis of ADHD.

Young people experiencing a lack of time from social workers

Young people who were allocated a social worker often described how they see very little of them and would have liked to have seen their social worker more often:

- ‘I hardly ever see my social worker ... she doesn’t really know what’s going on with me.’*
- ‘I haven’t seen my social worker for months. ... Yeah, I’d like to see her more often; then I’d feel like I was getting some help.’*

Practitioners’ poor communication with young people who experience both running away and CSE

Some young people identified how statutory practitioners sometimes communicated poorly with young people. Young people gave examples where a practitioner, whose role it was to support the young person, did not communicate directly with them but relied upon what was often incorrect information from other professionals:

‘Professionals need to speak with children and young people themselves and not go on what other professionals say about them.’

‘My social worker got most of her information about me from a duty worker but most of it would be wrong and she [the young person’s social worker] would be like, before a meeting, “why’ve you done this?” and “why’ve you done that?” and I’d be like “what you on about?”. Because she hadn’t spoken to me about it, she didn’t know what she was doing.’

Young people also described how sometimes their social worker had failed to keep an appointment and had not informed them that they were not able to meet them as planned. This could be distressing for young people and reinforce their negative perceptions of their self-worth:

‘I was waiting where me social worker had said we were gonna meet and she just didn’t turn up. There was no text, no nothing. She just left me there waiting for her. ... She said later that something had come up but she could have let me know. ... It just made me think even more that I wasn’t important.’

Professionals who young people perceive as failing to do what they tell young people they will do, and not informing young people that they are unable to do that previously agreed, are described as being particularly unhelpful to young people who run away and experience CSE:

‘She [the young person’s social worker] just doesn’t do anything. She says to you “oh yeah, I’ll do it” but she never does.’

Young people described how it doesn’t work when an adult professional ‘hammers’ it in to them after they return home from an incidence of running away where they have experienced CSE:

‘It’s not good to like hammer it in to them like “you shouldn’t do this” and “you shouldn’t do that”. Like you do feel uneasy

when you return [from running away]. Like for two or three weeks after [running away] I did feel like I still wanted to run away and that’s when people like my social worker were like “you shouldn’t have done it; you were silly”, like preaching. It just makes you want to get away from it again.’

Another young person stressed the importance of not ‘nagging’ young people about the risks of running away and CSE but, as an alternative, tell them about the stories of other young people who have experienced both running away and CSE:

‘Don’t nag at them [young people]. ... Tell them, like, my story and tell them that it happened and it will happen. ... And don’t just tell that it will happen – you’ve got to make them believe that it will happen.’

Issues relating to young people’s families

Research participants often described how issues relating to the families of young people who run away and experience CSE can negatively impact upon their direct work. Specialised projects work with a significant proportion of young people in the care system, which highlights how family breakdown features in the lives of young people who run away and experience CSE. Family breakdown can have a range of impacts upon young people that make it hard to effectively support them. Among those young people who do not live in care, family issues, particularly substance misuse and mental health issues, are prevalent and play a significant part in young people’s involvement in running away. This can also negatively impact upon projects’ work with young people.

Lack of recognition by young people that they are being sexually exploited

As noted previously, young people’s recognition that they are being sexually exploited can support work to meet their needs. Research participants cited that where

young people do not recognise that they are being sexually exploited it can be very difficult to work with them and effectively meet their needs. The existence of a range of complex factors that lead to a child or young person not realising that they are being exploited highlights the need for long-term intervention:

'One of the most difficult ones [hindering factors] is that young people don't recognise their exploitation and so that is a challenge in itself. ... The young people are needy, they want love and a sense of belonging and that's what exploiters home in on. ... It may be the only love they've [young people] experienced is in the context of sexual abuse. Some of these children don't have any experiences of safe supportive adults and they distrust professionals, obviously. It's not a quick fix: some of them have really poor attachment history; there needs to be long-term work.'



Part five:

Discussion of the research findings

The research addressing the relationship between running away and CSE has produced a number of findings that highlight the different forms that this relationship can take, and learning related to professionals’ and young people’s experiences of preventative and responsive measures. This section of the report offers a discussion of the research findings and provides a context for the evidence-based recommendations presented in the following section. These final two sections of the report identify how the research findings have implications for the national context and policy framework, the local strategic context, and service delivery alongside the community, families and young people.

5.1 Recognising the relationship between running away and CSE

The research has outlined how the relationship between running away and CSE can take a number of different forms and can shift for individual young people who may experience more than one form of this relationship. The form that the running away takes can be directly linked to the model of CSE that a young person experiences and, similarly, a young person’s experience of running away can increase their vulnerability to particular forms of CSE.

For example, some young people run away and encounter sexual exploitation as part of their survival strategy and others run away

to attend parties where they are sexually exploited. Other factors in a young person’s life can also lead to their running away and to exploitation. For example, young people who feel isolated may turn to the internet to alleviate their loneliness and find themselves groomed online and encouraged to run away. It should also be acknowledged that young people’s running away and CSE can take place separately and not be directly linked, yet be indicative of a young person’s vulnerabilities based on their experiences, issues and difficulties.

Responding to incidences of running away

As noted by guidance addressing children who run away and go missing from home or care, any incident of running away should be taken seriously, recorded and a response set in place in accordance with the young person’s circumstances. Some young people are unscathed after an initial incident of running away while others are subject to horrific sexual exploitation. Running away can increase vulnerability to sexual exploitation in many ways and, in some cases, this seems an almost unavoidable outcome of running away. It is therefore crucial that young people who are reported as running away, either through a Missing Person (MISPER) report or by self-reporting, receive a return home interview that is carried out by skilled professionals with knowledge and understanding of running away and CSE.

Given the advantages that the voluntary sector can bring to work with young people,

it is suggested that return-home interviews are carried out by specialised voluntary sector agencies. The research findings suggest it is good practice that specialised running away and CSE projects receive MISPER reports in order to identify young people at risk. However, it is important to acknowledge that, as the majority of young people who run away are not reported as missing, alternative measures need to be established so that these young people are not overlooked.

Meeting young people’s basic needs

As sexual exploitation may represent a survival strategy for some young people when they run away, it is crucial to ensure that their basic needs are met so that young people do not have to engage in risky survival strategies. At present, in most parts of England, there is a lack of support and safe places for young people when they run away and many young people do not know where or who they can go for support. This makes them vulnerable to exploitative adults who present as offering support and/or lead young people to have constrained choices. Once young people are entrenched in street life and sexual exploitation, they have to be offered concrete support that, at the very least, meets their basic needs so that they can see a realistic alternative to running away and relying upon dangerous survival strategies.

Providing appropriate responses to disclosures of CSE

When a young person discloses CSE to an adult, be it to a parent or professional, it is vital that their disclosure is responded to appropriately and they feel they are taken seriously. Initial responses that indicate a young person is not believed or is to blame for what has happened can be damaging and lead to further episodes of running away and increased vulnerability.

Ensuring young people feel cared for and listened to

Young people feeling cared for and listened to were themes that recurred throughout the research, both as explanations for the relationship between running away and CSE and as necessary requirements in providing effective responses to young people who experience both running away and CSE. Young people feeling isolated is another key theme that linked running away and sexual exploitation. Previous learning from research and practice has identified the vulnerability of Looked After Children to running away and CSE. The experiences of young people who participated in the research and spent time in care revealed that feeling uncared for in their care placement was a significant factor in running away and becoming involved in sexual exploitation. This stresses the importance of ensuring that Looked After Children feel cared for, listened to, and are placed with carers who understand their needs and the factors that contribute to running away and CSE.

Acknowledging and accepting young people’s desire for sex

Young people’s sexuality and desire for sex can be challenging for parents and carers, professionals and adults to confront. However, in order to ensure that young people are protected and able to make informed choices, it is necessary to acknowledge and accept their desire for sex while supporting them to understand the risks and consequences of engaging in sexual activity and ensuring they are able to keep themselves safe.

Young people’s perception of risk, choice and control

Young people’s descriptions of their experiences of running away and CSE reveal how they can perceive risk, choice, constrained choice and control. For example, young people may consider it safer to initially meet adults online rather than face-to-face and assume that that they have undertaken some form of risk assessment through ‘chatting’ online to adults. While these perceptions may not match those of professionals and other adults, they do inform young people’s actions, or their non-action, and require further consideration if we are to understand how and why a young person has become involved in running away and sexual exploitation.

Making informed risk assessments

An incident of sexual exploitation can take place during a short period of time. Some perpetrators of CSE ensure a young person is only away for short periods in order to avoid them being reported as missing to the police. In recognition of this, where CSE features or is suspected, there is a need to focus upon periods when the young person is not where they should be and not just, for example, overnight incidences of running away. The element of a person not being where they should be is presented in the Association of Chief Police Officer’s (ACPO) and the College of Policing’s proposed definition of ‘absent’ as follows:

‘A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.’
(ACPO & College of Policing, 2103; 5)⁴⁵

This stresses the importance of making informed risk assessments when reporting a young person as missing to the police. The importance of ‘risk’ is considered in

the police’s proposed changed definition of missing, which states that a missing person is:

‘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 or themselves or another.’
(Ibid)⁴⁶

Consideration of definitions of running away and CSE

This research has revealed that present definitions of running away and CSE are not always helpful in responding to young people who experience both running away and CSE, or their parents, carers and the professionals who work with them. Previous definitions of running away have included ‘staying away from home’ and ‘staying away’ and previous research has identified how young people view running away in these terms (Smeaton, 2009)⁴⁷. However it is important that professionals working with young people are familiar with the language they use and how it can be a synonym for running away and therefore requires a ‘running away’ response. A similar approach should be taken with parents and carers. As models of CSE develop, it is also important that changes in associated forms of running away/being ‘absent’ are also recognised so that effective risk assessments take place to ensure that young people are appropriately safeguarded.

As highlighted by professionals, there are problems with existing definitions of running away and CSE as they often do not describe the forms of running away and CSE professionals are witnessing, so do not always lead to an appropriate response. It is therefore timely to reconsider these definitions and language to reflect the diversity of young

people’s experiences, which can be used by professionals in their daily practice, thus promoting a shared understanding in both operational and strategic contexts.

Recognising that the majority of young runaways do not experience CSE

The research findings indicate that the majority of young people who experience running away do not experience CSE. This is supported by previous research that highlights how young runaways may not experience sexual exploitation but have a range of other risks in their lives and are subject to other forms of abuse (Rees, 2011; Rees & Lee, 2005; Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Smeaton; 2009; Smeaton, 2005; Smeaton & Rees, 2005)⁴⁸. CSE guidance and action plans will not meet the needs of the majority of young runaways and it is important to provide guidance and an action plan, along with accompanying funding, which addresses running away where it does link directly with CSE.

5.2 Who does running away and CSE affect?

The research reinforces that young people from a range of backgrounds including economic circumstances, race, gender, sexual orientation and disability can experience both running away and CSE.

It is apparent that some young people, such as boys and young men and LGBT young people, are often judged primarily by their gender

and/or sexuality rather than as young people who are experiencing, or are at risk of, harm through running away and CSE. Similarly, young people who are labelled as ‘challenging’ can be defined by their behaviours rather than by consideration of how their behaviours can be indicative of abuse, distress and trauma. These perceptions can prevent the identification of a young person’s needs and the required response from being set in place and, ultimately, in a failure to effectively safeguard them.

The indication of high numbers of young people with learning difficulties experiencing both running away and CSE reveals how particularly vulnerable these young people are; and that preventative and responsive measures should account for their specific needs. The limited evidence provided by this research suggests that having specialist workers with knowledge of running away, CSE and learning difficulties/disabilities can be effective in achieving positive outcomes with these young people.

The impacts of running away and CSE

This research has offered explanation as to how some of the impacts of experiencing running away and CSE can have both short and long-term implications. For example, there are links between experiencing running away and CSE under the age of 16 and going on to become a sex worker. Missing substantial amounts of school can lead to literacy difficulties that cause problems when seeking or undertaking further education, training or employment. It is important that responses to these young people consider these issues so that young people are offered a more positive future. Services should also include responses to young people when they have ‘had their heart broken’ after realising that the person or people they trusted and believed cared for them are in reality exploiting them. This realisation can be very painful for young people and lead to future difficulties in trusting others and developing healthy relationships. These points and

45 Association of Chief Police Officers & College of Policing (2013) *Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons 2013*. London: College of Policing.

46 Ibid.

47 Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People Living on the Streets in the UK*. Sandbach: The Railway Children.

48 Rees G (2011) *Still Running 3*. London: The Children’s Society; Rees G & Lee J (2005) *Still Running 2*. London: The Children’s Society; Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999) *Still Running: Children on the Streets in the UK*. London: The Children’s Society; Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People Living on the Streets in the UK*. Sandbach: Railway Children; Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways*. London: The Children’s Society; Smeaton E & Rees G (2005) *Running Away in South Yorkshire*. London: The Children’s Society.

others outlined in sections two and three of the report stress the importance of taking a holistic approach to supporting young people who run away and experience CSE, as their issues and experiences are likely to have a far-reaching impact if not addressed. As well as taking a holistic approach, it is also important to ensure that the responses set in place are tailored to individual experiences and needs.

5.3
Reaching young people who experience running away and CSE

The fieldwork with young people revealed that there are young people who experience both running away and CSE who are not linked into support services so do not receive any formal support, despite experiencing a range of problematic issues and experiencing harm⁴⁹.

As previously discussed, the majority of young people are not reported to the police as missing when they run away. Guidance addressing children who run away and go missing from home or care notes that under-reporting is evident and that local authorities need to take proactive action with regard to those not reported as missing. Non-reporting to the police when a child or young person runs away is problematic for a range of reasons. While MISPER reports can be an effective referral route to ensure some young people receive support, there are others who are less likely to be reported as missing to the police, for example, those who are thrown out of home, or abused at home and those from minority ethnic backgrounds⁵⁰. Where referral mechanisms rely solely upon MISPER reports, young people who are not reported as missing when they run away will not be referred for support.

Services working with young people who experience both running away and CSE should reflect the ‘hidden’ nature of running away and CSE and ensure that interventions address this by recognising that there is no ‘one size fits all’; and that different approaches are required to identify and engage different groups of young people. For example, working effectively with boys and young men is likely to require a different way of working than that adopted with girls and young women.

The research also highlights how some young people can be harder to reach because of cultural factors or because the personal cost of disclosure is too high. There is a need to improve knowledge about black and minority ethnic (BME) groups of young people and their communities, cultural practices and beliefs. This work requires a range of indicators for running away and CSE that are culturally appropriate. The research has highlighted the need to improve effective assessment of risk within BME communities. Further consideration needs to be given to working with individual BME communities and the development of local and national strategies. This needs to occur in order to remove obstacles to more positive engagement with young people from BME communities and to ensure they are able to access support that is sensitive to cultural factors in meeting their needs. While there is a need to increase knowledge about a range of cultural factors relating to BME communities, there appears to be a particular lack of knowledge about how to best meet the needs of children and young people from the Traveller, Roma and Polish communities.

It is the case that some projects find it harder to reach certain groups of young people who experience running away and CSE than others. However there are examples of good practice in working with different cultures across the country. Projects can therefore seek and share learning to improve practice.

49 As stated in the introduction of the report, 17 of the 41 young people were, at the time of their participation in the research, without support to meet their needs.

50 Rees G, Franks M, Raws P & Medforth R (2005) *Responding to Young Runaways: An Evaluation of 19 Projects, 2003 to 2004*. London: The Children’s Society.

5.4
Responding to young people who experience running away and CSE

The research findings have outlined how responses to young people who experience both running away and CSE need to be considered at a number of levels.

5.4.1
The national context and policy framework

The first set of discussion points relate to the national context and policy framework and illustrates how these can both inhibit and drive local policy and responses.

Funding

The research has revealed how a lack of available funding for specialised projects and statutory services supporting young people who experience running away and/or CSE is problematic in a number of ways. In some areas, funding cuts and a general lack of funding has resulted in an absence of provision for these young people. In other areas, funding issues result in services failing to effectively meet needs, either through being unable to meet demand for services or through being inadequately resourced. It is also important to note that failing to provide funding to respond to the needs of these young people has a number of financial costs as well as human costs. For example, Barnardo’s (2011)⁵¹, identified that there is an estimated potential saving of £12 for every £1 spent on providing an intervention to young people who experience CSE, in addition to the non-costed reduction in the

51 Barnardo’s (2011) *Reducing the Risk, Cutting the Cost: An assessment of the potential savings from Barnardo’s interventions for young people who have been sexually exploited*. Barking: Barnardo’s.

risk of sexual exploitation. Smeaton (2009)⁵² found that the average cost of crime among young people who spend time living on the streets was £500,000 per child or young person. In addition, investing in services to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE will also save costs relating to offending, substance misuse and youth homelessness (Smeaton and Franks, 2011)⁵³.

Commissioning

The research findings highlight the importance of the process of commissioning of specialised services. Government guidance outlines how the needs of young people who have experienced or are at risk of CSE, and their families, should be considered in the commissioning of services (DCSF, 2009; 7)⁵⁴. Commissioning constraints can result in services being unable to provide support in a form that appropriately meets needs.

Awareness-raising as part of a preventative strategy

The research findings clearly outline the need for awareness-raising about running away and CSE as part of a preventative strategy. The *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan* (DfE, 2011)⁵⁵ and *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation* (DCSF, 2009)⁵⁶ recognise the importance of awareness-raising about CSE with young people; as does the proposed guidance for children who run away and

52 Smeaton E (2009) *Street Life*. Public Finance, 10 December 2009 www.publicfinance.co.uk/2009/12/street-life/ accessed 6 July 2013

53 Smeaton E & Franks M (2011) *Best Practice in the Commissioning and Delivery of Emergency Accommodation for Children and Young People Who Run Away in Scotland*.

54 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

55 Department of Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE.

56 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

go missing from home or care. Awareness-raising activities need to be targeted towards the general public, professionals, parents and carers, and children and young people. Young people have stressed the effectiveness of having young people who themselves have experience of running away and CSE deliver awareness raising and preventative work. This is also emphasised in the *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan* (DfE, 2011)⁵⁷. Despite the actions addressing awarenessraising among children and young people, parents and carers, and services outlined by the DfE (Ibid)⁵⁸, the research findings suggest that there is still a need for further awareness-raising about running away and CSE.

Preventative work needs to include the message that running away and CSE can be experienced by any young person regardless of sex, ethnicity and location. Awareness-raising and preventative strategies also have to reach all communities and be presented in a culturally aware manner that recognises diversity. In particular, the research has highlighted the need for this work in schools. Due to the links between missing school and running away and/or CSE, it is also important to ensure that awareness-raising and preventative work also takes place outside of mainstream settings, such as pupil referral units (PRUs), care homes, youth groups and other environments where young people spend time. Preventative and awareness-raising work should also include drugs and alcohol and safe use of the internet, given the role that these issues play in young people’s experiences of running away and CSE.

There is also need for outreach work to enable young people who are not in touch with services to benefit from awareness-raising and preventative work addressing running away and CSE.

While this research indicated that some adults within the gay community are clear that it is not appropriate to meet with young people they come into contact with via the internet, it also reveals that it is necessary to carry out work with the gay and lesbian community to raise awareness of the impacts of sexually exploiting young people.

Measures to address perpetrators of CSE

While the focus of this research is not upon perpetrators of CSE, it is necessary to address them given the prominent role that they play in young people’s experiences of running away and CSE. Young people’s experiences reveal how perpetrators can encourage running away and/or manipulate a young person’s circumstances when they have run away from home or care, or have been thrown out of home. *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation* (DCSF, 2009; 63)⁵⁹ outlines how identifying, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators is a key part of safeguarding young people from sexual exploitation. It is important for professionals to recognise that whatever a young person’s actions are in relation to running away and sexual exploitation, there is an adult who is perpetrating sexual and possibly other criminal offences and that there should be proactive investigation of perpetrators of CSE. It is important that each local area utilises disruption tactics and that professionals from a range of agencies work together to deliver disruption plans. The research highlights how mapping perpetrators is a useful activity and something that specialised projects are often able to contribute to due to the information they receive from the young people they work with.

Improving the process for young people involved in police investigations

Being part of a police operation into suspected CSE can be very stressful for young people and in itself can lead to running away to avoid stress and pressure. To prevent this happening and to encourage more young people to press charges against perpetrators of CSE, the process needs to change so that young people as witnesses are not subjected to such high levels of stress and pressure. These findings add weight to the identified need to ensure changes are made to the whole prosecution process.

The role of education providers

The role of education is important and is recognised in statutory guidance addressing CSE (DCSF, 2009)⁶⁰ and in the *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan* (DfE, 2011)⁶¹. As previously described, schools have an important part to play in ensuring vital preventative work takes place with regards to sex education, healthy relationships, drug and alcohol use, internet safety, running away and CSE. The scope for school staff being able to identify when a young person is experiencing difficulties raises the importance of ensuring school staff are aware of possible indicators of running away and CSE and have clear processes to follow when there are concerns.

Improving online safety

As technological developments progress the internet is increasingly used by perpetrators as a medium to meet children and young people and encourage them to run away for sexual exploitation. The internet is also extensively used by young people to seek out others when they feel isolated or uncared for by those around them; and also to seek sexual relationships. Facebook and gay web chat

sites are common routes through which they can be groomed to run away and be exploited, which presents a challenge to safeguarding young people. However, other sites offering support with issues such as bereavement can also be used by perpetrators to target young people. These findings suggest that there is a general need to improve internet site security to protect young people.

Support for parents and carers

The need to provide appropriate and effective support for parents and carers is stressed by both professionals and young people. Support for parents’/carers’ issues and general parenting plays an important role in preventing young people from experiencing running away and CSE. Supporting parents and carers is also a crucial part of responsive measures to address running away and CSE, and will ensure positive outcomes are achieved for both individual young people and the wider family.

Lack of specialised accommodation

The lack of specialised accommodation for young people who experience running away and CSE is regarded as a significant gap in resources to effectively meet needs. As noted in *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan* (DfE, 2009)⁶², previous research carried out by the University of Bedfordshire (2011)⁶³ raises concerns about the availability and appropriateness of accommodation provided by the local authority for Looked After Children who have experienced sexual exploitation. Previous research has also outlined the lack of emergency accommodation for young people who experience running away (Evans et al, 2007;

57 Department of Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE.

58 Ibid.

59 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

60 Ibid.

61 Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE.

62 Ibid.

63 Jago S, Arocha L, Brodie I, Melrose M, Pearce J and 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.

Smeaton, 2010)⁶⁴. Given the complexities involved in why young people experience both running away and CSE and the associated need for accommodation that supports their needs, further consideration needs to be given to the provision of accommodation.

5.4.2
The local strategic context

The research has identified how the local strategic context is important to meet the needs of young people who experience running away and CSE. Further consideration needs to be given to:

- the role of Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards (LSCBs)
- recording and sharing information
- local authority responses
- training of professionals
- establishing processes to respond to running away and CSE
- multi-agency responses
- establishing parent and carer support strategies.

LSCBs

Statutory guidance addressing CSE (DCSF, 2009)⁶⁵ outlines in detail the crucial role that LSCBs should play to prevent and respond to CSE and lists the LSCBs’ responsibilities. Research carried out by the University of Bedfordshire (2011)⁶⁶ revealed that only a quarter of LSCBs in England were implementing this guidance and the 2012

Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan – Progress Report noted that:

‘There is growing evidence of LSCBs and local authorities establishing and acknowledging the existence of child sexual exploitation in their areas and taking steps to address it. Some, however, are still not giving this issue the priority it requires.’
(DfE, 2013; 18)⁶⁷

The findings from this research also provide evidence that a number of LSCBs have not issued guidance to address running away and CSE and do not have a plan to meet the needs of these young people.

Recording and sharing information

Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (DCSF, 2009)⁶⁸ provides some guidance on sharing information stating that the child’s best interests must be the overriding consideration (Ibid, 48)⁶⁹. It is stated that, as a minimum, LSCBs should ensure that procedures specify how professionals can share information about CSE concerns in line with *Information Sharing* Guidance (HM Government, 2008)⁷⁰. The guidance also describes how effective identification and recording of information that can be turned into intelligence is intrinsically important to the disruption and/or prosecution of perpetrators. It also states that all those working with young people who have been sexually exploited, or are at risk of being so, should continually gather, record and share information with appropriate agencies (Ibid, 68)⁷¹. These research findings have emphasised both the need to collate and

share data and information about running away and CSE and the benefits of doing so. Guidance addressing children who run away and go missing from home or care also states the expectation that LCSBs, local authorities and the police share information relating to young people who run away. Specialised voluntary sector projects have been identified as being able to provide information that can be used for intelligence. While some projects and areas appear to have effective data and information collation and sharing systems in place, this is not consistent across the country. There is, therefore, a need to improve data collection and collation and information sharing processes in general at individual project levels, between agencies and local authorities.

Local authorities

In some areas of the country, despite government guidance and an action plan addressing CSE, and national recognition that running away and CSE are a problem, some local authorities are not responding to young people who experience running away and CSE nor meeting their needs.

The importance of having a named lead professional in the local area with responsibility for running away and CSE is outlined in statutory guidance. Forthcoming statutory guidance addressing running away and going missing from home or care states the need for a person to be responsible at a local level. Statutory guidance outlined in *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation* states that there should be a dedicated lead person in each partner organisation with responsibility for implementing the guidance (DCSF, 2009; 7)⁷² and that LSCB functions should set out procedures, as a minimum, for the establishment of lead professionals in key agencies (Ibid, 24)⁷³. The research findings

also highlight the benefit of having a named lead person within the local authority who leads on running away and CSE. It also outlines the difficulties in ensuring a co-ordinated approach and challenges to central data collection relating to running away and CSE when there is no named lead person with responsibility.

Training

Guidance draws attention to the importance of ensuring that local safeguarding training includes information about sexual exploitation and that specialist training is available for key professionals (Ibid; 7)⁷⁴. Similarly, the forthcoming guidance for local authorities addressing children who run away and go missing from home or care highlights how local safeguarding training should include reasons why young people run away. Despite the implementation of a number of actions from *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan* (DfE, 2011)⁷⁵, this research reveals that too many professionals, from a range of agencies whose role it is to meet these needs, are still not informed about running away and CSE. Some professionals are not aware of the legal framework and of what is required from them as prescribed by statutory guidance. For example, there is often a lack of awareness that, where CSE features or is a risk, there is a need to respond to young people under the age of 18 as set out in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. There is sometimes a lack of knowledge about the indicators and impact of running away and CSE and what is an appropriate response to a young person in these circumstances. This lack of knowledge and awareness can act as a barrier to both providing support and for recognising that young people are experiencing harm and are in need. There is, therefore, a need for appropriate training to be provided to relevant professionals so that they are able to implement law and guidance and recognise when a young person is at risk.

64 Evans K, Houghton-Brown M & Rees G (2007) *Stepping Up: The Future of Runaways’ Services*. London: The Children’s Society. Smeaton E (2010) *Evaluation@Last: Findings from the Evaluation of the SAFE@LAST SAFEPLACE Refuge*. Sandbach: Railway Children.

65 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

66 Jago S, Arocha L, Brodie I, Melrose M, Pearce J and 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.

67 Department for Education (2012) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan – Progress Report*.

68 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

69 Ibid.

70 HM Government (2008) *Information Sharing Guidance*. London: The Stationary Office.

71 Department for Education (2012) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan – Progress Report*.

72 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE.

Ensuring processes are set in place to respond to running away and CSE

In some areas of England there are no processes in place for professionals to follow when they become aware of a young person’s running away and sexual exploitation. While the Department for Education (DfE) has produced a step-by step guide for professionals in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors (DfE, 2013)⁷⁶, where there are a lack of established processes to follow in the local area it can be very difficult for professionals to refer a young person for support. A lack of procedure results in a lack of recognition of these issues at operational and strategic levels and, therefore, no funding is allocated to address running away and CSE.

Multi-agency working

Multi-agency working to address running away and CSE is not only beneficial but an intrinsic part of providing effective responses. This is recognised by government guidance addressing CSE (DCSF, 2009)⁷⁷, the forthcoming guidance addressing children who run away and go missing from home or care, and by the *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*, which states, for example, how the DfE will consider how to strengthen LCSBs to:

‘Develop an effective local strategy ensuring there is a co-ordinated multi-agency response to child sexual exploitation.’ (DfE, 2011; 39)⁷⁸

This research highlights how there are still parts of England where a multi-agency approach to running away and CSE is not

established, or is not working effectively, and that this poses distinct challenges to addressing the issues and safeguarding young people appropriately.

The police

Guidance addressing CSE sets out a number of key functions of the police (DCSF, 2009; 30)⁷⁹. This research reinforces how the police are recognised as playing a vital and central role in addressing running away and CSE and the benefits of having strong working relationships with the police are highly valued. In some parts of the country there are still inappropriate police responses to young people and to their parents and carers. This is despite:

- The government’s insistence of the need for the police to be aware of early indicators of CSE and ensure that an appropriate intervention is made (Ibid; 40)⁸⁰.
- Commitments made in the 2011 *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan* relating to ensuring training for frontline police officers.
- The production of the ACPO action plan to support improvements in partnership working, victim prevention and protection, pursuit of offenders and overall service delivery (ACPO, 2012)⁸¹.

There is a need to ensure a consistently appropriate response to running away and CSE by the police across the country and to guarantee that the police are provided with relevant training.

Health services

Echoing statutory guidance about the key role that health services play in recognising CSE and identifying adults who may be perpetrators (DCSF, 2009; 34)⁸², the research findings stress the importance of health professionals’ roles in the identification of young people at risk who may not be in touch with other services. Health professionals are also in a prime position to gather information and build trusting relationships with young people. Strong relationships and links with health professionals as features of specialised support services can result in positive outcomes in both meeting the needs of young people and addressing the perpetrators of CSE. While the *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan* commits the Department of Health (DoH) to continuing to work with stakeholders and key partners to promote awareness of CSE and extend training (DfE, 2009; 15)⁸³, the research reveals that there is some effective health practice in some areas of the country but that this is not consistent across England.

Schools

As previously discussed, young people with experience of both running away and CSE describe how these experiences have often resulted in their education being adversely affected and in them experiencing literacy difficulties. There is, therefore, a need to ensure that young people who experience both running away and CSE have their educational needs met as part of a holistic response. Schools can play an important part in allowing specialised projects access to young people so that they are able to receive support to address their running away and CSE when, either due to a lack of parental or carer permission or chaotic living environments, it is difficult for professionals to access them

elsewhere. Positive working relationships with schools strongly support the work of specialised projects while, unsurprisingly, a lack of engagement by schools acts as a distinct barrier to meeting young people’s needs.

Establishing parents and carer support strategies

Government guidance recommends that local authorities should have comprehensive parenting and family support strategies set in place and should consider support services for parents to enable them to gain information and access to relevant services (DCSF, 2009; 14)⁸⁴. The *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan* suggests the likely need for statutory and voluntary agencies to support families to move on with their lives once CSE has ended (DfE, 2009, 28)⁸⁵. Despite this the research findings suggest that many parents are not accessing support to address their own needs and enable them to protect their children.

5.4.3 The service delivery context

The research has revealed a number of factors, presented in section 4.9, that should be incorporated into voluntary and statutory sector direct practice with young people who experience running away and CSE to ensure positive outcomes. Similarly, there are also aspects of professionals’ direct practice with young people, also presented in section 4.9, that is indicated do not work well and should be avoided.

76 Department for Education (2013) *What to do if you suspect a child is being sexually exploited*.

77 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF

78 Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE. <http://www.educatuib.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/healthandwellbeing/safeguardingchildren/a00200288/tackling-child-sexual-exploitation-action-plan> 8 April 2013.

79 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF

80 Ibid.

81 Association of Chief Police Officers (2012) *Association of Chief Police Officers’ Child Sexual Exploitation Plan*.

82 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

83 Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE.

84 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*. London: DCSF.

85 Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*.

Addressing diversity and culture

The research findings stress the importance of addressing diversity and cultural issues so, as discussed previously in this section of the report, service providers are able to identify the risks faced by young people from a range of BME backgrounds and ensure that their service is accessible for all young people. Similarly, consideration needs to be given to meeting the needs of boys and young men, LGBT young people and those with learning disabilities or difficulties.

Building relationships based upon trust

The research findings echo previous research (Smeaton, 2005; 2009)⁸⁶ about the intrinsic importance of building trust and developing relationships for longer-term benefit. While young people may not be ready to engage with an intervention to address their running away and CSE, it is necessary to keep them engaged and focus on building trust so that when their own survival strategies break down, or they decide they want to change their lives, there is a service and project worker who they feel able to turn to and request support.

Supporting practitioners

In recognition of the challenging nature of some of the work involved in meeting the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE, and to ensure practitioners are able to effectively deliver the best possible intervention, it is important to ensure that professionals are soundly supported to reflect upon their own practice. They must be provided with good quality supervision, with opportunities to become aware of new developments relating to running away and CSE, and to develop new skills where necessary.

86 Smeaton E (2009) *Off the Radar: Children and Young People Living on the Streets in the UK*. Sandbach: Railway Children. Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways*. London: The Children's Society.



Part six:

Recommendations and actions for national and local policy and practice

The evidenced-based learning from the action research addressing the relationship between running away and CSE has produced a set of recommendations for national and local policymakers and practitioners to ensure the needs of young people are met. These recommendations address both the macro and micro environments and require responses at both national and local levels. In line with the identified need to provide a holistic approach to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE, these recommendations should not be undertaken in isolation but recognised as being interdependent upon one another and marking an important contribution to an overall set of measures to reduce both running away and CSE.

6.1 Commissioning and funding

6.1.1 Funding

In a time of austerity and financial cutbacks it is difficult to offer practical and feasible recommendations that relate to funding. However, funding cuts, the lack of funding available to specialised projects, and to statutory agencies with responsibility for working with young people and their families, all significantly hinder meeting the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE. As significant long-term costs can be incurred by failing to invest in children and young people who experience

both running away and CSE, there is also an economic argument for preventing harm to children and young people.

The research has revealed that elements of the statutory guidance addressing CSE and the *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan* (DfE, 2011)⁸⁷ have not been implemented; and it is suggested that it is not possible to do so without additional ring-fenced funding.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- The Department for Education (DfE) should ensure that guidance and action plans to address CSE and running away are accompanied by appropriate levels of funding to ensure their implementation.
- In accordance with guidance, Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) should undertake scoping activity to identify the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE to inform local authorities' allocation of the required funding to prioritise meeting need.

6.1.2 Commissioning services to meet the needs of children and young people who experience both running away and CSE

Those with strategic and managerial responsibility for commissioning and delivering services for children and families

⁸⁷ Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE.

should use the learning from this research to inform both their commissioning processes and the information they require tendering organisations to provide.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- When commissioning services for children and young people who experience running away and CSE, commissioners should produce tenders that highlight factors that the research has identified as 'what works' with children and young people who experience both running away and CSE.
- Commissioners should ensure funding and service provision that allows projects to implement a flexible approach to effectively meet the needs of children and young people who experience both running away and CSE.
- Commissioners should request that tendering organisations provide information relating to: understanding and meeting the needs of children and young people who experience both running away and CSE; skills and abilities of project staff; and meeting the needs of children and young people from diverse backgrounds reflected in the local area.
- Commissioners should ensure that commissioning of housing projects for young people should include safeguarding compliance elements.

6.2 Managing risks

6.2.1 Recognising that the relationship between running away and CSE takes a number of different forms

To meet the diverse needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE, policymakers and practitioners should recognise that the links between running away and CSE can take a number of different

forms; and ensure that policy and practice responses and processes and protocols to address running away and CSE are flexible so that they can respond to individual young people's experiences and needs.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- This learning should be incorporated into national Government's responses to running away and CSE by clarifying that there is not one model of the relationship between running away and CSE but that it takes a number of different forms, which should be accounted for in both national and local policy and practice responses.
- LSCBs should undertake mapping activity to understand how the relationship between running away and CSE occurs in the local area, as well as acknowledging that the form this relationship can take can shift over time and between individual children and young people.
- Commissioners of services for young people who experience both running away and CSE should be aware that the link between running away and CSE can take a number of different forms and commission services that can respond flexibly to meet the needs of individuals who experience both running away and CSE.
- Local authorities should incorporate learning about the relationship between running away and CSE into strategic and practice responses to young people and their families.
- Specialised projects supporting young people should ensure that their practice responses can address the diverse forms that the relationship between running away and CSE can take.
- Professionals from a range of agencies who work with young people and their families should receive training on the different forms the relationship can take between running away and CSE.

6.2.2
Awareness-raising among the general public, professionals and parents and carers

Development and implementation of an awareness-raising strategy to improve awareness about running away and CSE among the general public, professionals working with parents and carers, and young people, is essential. This awareness raising strategy should be designed and implemented to ensure the public pay attention to running away and CSE and do not perceive there to be an oversaturation of information about child sexual abuse. The strategy should target a diverse range of communities in England.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- National Government should coordinate efforts to promote awareness in line with statutory guidance and the national action plan by taking an active co-ordination role where there are gaps in awareness-raising; and by working in partnership with others to address those gaps and deliver targeted awareness-raising. So, for example, to raise awareness among parents and carers, national Government should work with key stakeholders and partners, including parenting charities, to encourage and facilitate their work with parents and carers to raise awareness about running away and CSE.
- National Government should undertake analysis to identify the appropriate awareness-raising activity for the general public, professionals who work with young people and their families, parents and carers, and young people.
- Awareness-raising activities targeted towards parents and carers and professionals should include details of Facebook's social reporting so that they can encourage young people to share any concerns they may have as a result of someone else's activity on Facebook and report on behalf of young people. This awareness-raising should also include

how agencies such as Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) are able to undertake 'authority reporting' to Facebook where there are concerns relating to the sexual exploitation of young people via Facebook and how, through using its 'groomer tool', Facebook is able to report concerns about perpetrators of CSE to CEOP and other law enforcement agencies.

6.2.3
Building professionals' knowledge and understanding of running away and CSE

There is a requirement to ensure that professionals who work directly with young people who experience both running away and CSE are knowledgeable about both issues, as this will support improving risk management and meeting young people's needs. Training plays a crucial role in improving knowledge and understanding but processes and protocols should also reflect law and guidance. Training, processes and protocols should ensure that the following, at a minimum, is reflected:

- a shared use of language
- indicators of CSE
- impacts of running away and CSE
- where CSE features, the need to respond to young people up to the age of 18
- how direct work with young people who experience both running away and CSE should be undertaken to facilitate positive outcomes.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- LSCBs to ensure that all professionals who have direct contact with young people receive safeguarding training to build knowledge and understanding of running away and CSE.
- LSCBs to ensure that local strategies to address running away and CSE reflect law, guidance and effective practice.
- Health, social care, education, the police,

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), youth justice and the voluntary sector ensure professionals receive training relating to running away and CSE.

6.2.4
Working with education providers to implement preventative strategies with young people

Schools and other educational providers should implement awareness-raising and preventative strategies addressing running away and CSE aimed at young people.

Awareness-raising and preventative strategies should address:

- the risks involved in running away and CSE
- how to seek support
- healthy relationships, including same sex relationships
- internet safety
- drug and alcohol use.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) is identified as one option where this awareness-raising and preventative work can take place.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- DfE should support education providers to be part of awareness-raising and preventative strategies.
- Awareness-raising and other preventative strategies addressing running away and CSE should be an integral part of PSHE.
- LSCBs should coordinate with education providers as education should be part of the multi-agency approach to address running away and CSE in the local area.
- As part of this research dissemination strategy, Barnardo's and Paradigm Research will discuss the findings with teaching unions to inform them of the important role that schools and other educational settings can play

in preventative strategies addressing running away and CSE.

- Awareness-raising in schools with young people about internet safety should include how young people can keep themselves safe on Facebook and other social media. There are a number of reporting facilities provided by Facebook so that young people can either: self-report that they do not feel safe because of someone else's activity on Facebook; or report that they have concerns about another young person who is using Facebook. Young people should be made aware that they can use 'social reporting' to request that someone else, such as a teacher, youth worker or carer, reports to Facebook on the young person's behalf that they have concerns about what is happening to them or another young person.

6.2.5
Improving risk management

To effectively manage risk it necessary to acknowledge that every young person is potentially at risk of running away and CSE; and that when a young person's needs are not met, they are particularly vulnerable. To address the continuum of vulnerability and risk and gaps in risk management, it is recommended that a tiered approach to identifying vulnerabilities is implemented and that this tiered approach is recognised as a shared responsibility.

The first tier of identifying responsibilities and managing risk relates to parents and carers who, as previously noted, should be informed about the risks of running away and CSE so that they become aware of:

- the role they can play in safeguarding their children
- ensuring that they know the whereabouts of their child and who they are with
- the importance of reporting a child or young person as missing to the police when they have run away
- indicators of CSE
- processes to follow to instigate support for

themselves and their child if running away and/or CSE is taking place.

The second tier of identifying responsibilities and managing risk relates to the police who have to be consistently informed about running away and CSE and have clarity about the appropriate procedures to follow when a young person is reported as missing to the police after running away and being sexually exploited. The police should also ensure that the appropriate action is implemented to engage other agencies to further manage risk.

The third tier of identifying responsibilities and managing risk relates to all professionals who come into contact with young people who may be in a position to identify that a child is experiencing both running away and CSE, and that this young person may not have been reported to the police as missing.

The fourth tier of identifying responsibilities and managing risk relates to social care professionals who, after being informed of the risks and indicators of running away and CSE, and what works and doesn't work with young people who experience both running away and CSE, should set in place effective responses to young people and their parents and carers to respond to the longer term needs of those affected.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- Implementation of this recommendation requires a shared responsibility from a range of agencies:
 - As the multi-agency body with responsibility for coordinating responses to CSE, LSCBs should hold the tiered framework of risk and ensure that each agency is working effectively in their respective tier to effectively manage the continuum of risk.
 - In line with the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO's) Child Sexual Exploitation Plan (2012)⁸⁸, ACPO

88 Association of Chief Police Officers (2012) *Association of Chief Police Officers' Child Sexual Exploitation Plan*.

should ensure that all frontline staff can recognise, protect and refer young people at risk of CSE.

- The DfE should ensure that the continuum of risk and responsibilities for action is part of awareness-raising strategies as outlined in recommendation 6.2.2.
- The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) should ensure that awareness of risks associated with running away and CSE are shared among professionals working with young people and that all professionals are aware of their role.
- As part of this research dissemination strategy, Barnardo's and Paradigm Research will work with The Local Government Association (LGA) to ensure their understanding of risks associated with running away and CSE, and the need for a tiered approach to manage the continuum of risk.
- In relation to CSE, as part of managing risk, professionals should follow guidelines outlined in the DfE document⁸⁹ addressing measures to follow where there are concerns that a young person is being sexually exploited.

6.2.6 Improving internet safety

As well as being used responsibly, social networking sites and web sites that are set up to support people can be used by perpetrators to target young people and encourage them to run away to be sexually exploited. There is, therefore, a need to improve internet security by targeted work with providers of social networking sites and web sites that support the vulnerable and/or those who have experienced bereavement.

89 Department for Education (2013) *What to do if you suspect a child is being sexually exploited*.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- Providers of internet sites should ensure that they are able to identify where perpetrators are using sites for sexual exploitation and take the appropriate measures, including informing law enforcement agencies, to disrupt them.
- Gay web chat sites should ensure that their online security is able to protect young people.

6.2.7 Steps to address perpetrators of CSE

All local areas should have a strategy to address perpetrators and ensure that a range of agencies are part of a disruption strategy.

Required action to implement this recommendation:

- LSCBs to coordinate and organise a strategy to address perpetrators and ensure that a range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies – including representatives from social care, the police, health, education, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), probation, licensing and specialised projects – are part of this strategy.

6.2.8 Increasing services and processes to respond to young people who experience both running away and CSE

There is lack of specialised services to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE. To ensure that service provision meets local need, in line with recommendations from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England

(OCCE)⁹⁰ and the University of Bedfordshire⁹¹, this research highlights the need for LSCBs to undertake scoping activity in the local area. This would identify the level of need and ensure commissioning processes reflect it so that service provision effectively supports young people who experience both running away and CSE.

In addition to the above, local authorities also need to ensure the provision of clear processes and protocols to meet statutory guidance and ensure that professionals from both the voluntary and statutory sectors are clear about the processes and protocols to follow when they have concerns that a young person is experiencing running away and CSE.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- LSCBs to coordinate scoping activity to identify the extent to which young people experience both running away and CSE in the local area.
- Local authorities to follow statutory guidance in the provision of processes and protocols to ensure professionals from voluntary and statutory sectors have clarity about what action to take when there are concerns that a child is experiencing running away and CSE.

6.2.9 Looked After Children

When young people enter the care system a risk assessment should be carried out that includes information gathering about previous running away and involvement in CSE. As many, but not all, young people have experienced running away and CSE before they entered the care system, this

90 Berelowitz S, Firmin C, Edwards G & Gulyurtlu, S (2012) *"I though I was the only one in the world" The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups Interim Report*.

91 Jago S,Arocha L,Brodie I, Melrose M, Pearce J and 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.

risk assessment will identify measures that need to be set in place to prevent and/or address future running away and CSE. A risk assessment will also identify those young people with no previous experience of running away and CSE who may be at risk, and allow for targeted preventative measures to be set in place that relate to the individual young person. This risk assessment should be repeated when a young person moves to a new placement.

Required action to implement this recommendation:

- With support from the DfE, The ADCS should ensure this risk assessment and information-gathering takes place with Looked After Children.

**6.3
Improving and sharing knowledge and information**

Given the hidden nature of both running away and CSE, and the lack of accurate knowledge about the prevalence of CSE, it is necessary to improve the data collection and information-sharing:

- at individual project levels
- among a range of agencies
- by the local authority
- at a national level.

To achieve a national picture relating to running away and CSE, information from local areas should be collated at a central source and a standardised tool, with the accompanying IT solution, developed. Further consideration should also be given to how information is shared between agencies to enable effective safeguarding of children and young people.

Pooling local knowledge that different agencies hold about running away and CSE and mapping exercises should take place in all local areas to build knowledge of local patterns of running away and CSE.

Building upon learning from previous police operations addressing CSE, the police should work with agencies undertaking direct work with young people who experience both running away and CSE to enable them to present information so that it can be turned into intelligence.

Similarly, voluntary and statutory agencies should work together to improve voluntary sector professionals’ knowledge of how to present information so that it fits seamlessly with the statutory sectors’ processes and can be used to maximum impact.

While recognising that many young people who experience both running away and CSE are not reported to the police as missing, specialised projects can benefit from receiving MISPER reports on a regular basis to identify young people who have been reported missing and may be in need of support to address running away and CSE.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- The research supports the All Party Parliamentary Group’s (APPG’s) recommendation (2012)⁹² for local authorities to be supported by central government and ACPO to establish a local multi-agency information-sharing process to ensure information is shared between agencies on individual running away incidents and patterns of running away in the local area. This would also include information about sexually exploited young people.
- With support from ACPO, local police forces should use learning from previous police operations and work with local projects supporting children and young people to enable them to provide information that can be turned into police intelligence.
- In accordance with the need for continued

92 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*.

monitoring of data to assess the nature and prevalence identified in *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*⁹³, LSCBs should ensure that local authorities use the University of Bedfordshire’s data monitoring tool⁹⁴ and this data from LSCBs should be centrally collated.

- In a highly changing context for education provision, national government should give consideration to how schools and other education providers can work better to share information with other agencies about children and young people who are missing from education. Opportunities to achieve this may arise where schools are working in collaboration through academy chains or a local trust model to coordinate activity with the LSCB.
- Projects working with young people who experience running away should ensure CSE is considered as part of a routine risk assessment and that information is collected about CSE.
- Projects working with young people who experience CSE should ensure running away is considered as part of a routine risk assessment, and that information is collected about running away.
- Specialised projects should receive weekly updates of MISPER reports from the police to identify young people who may be in need of specialised support in relation to running away and/or CSE.

93 Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE.

94 www.beds.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/162209/final-version-Updated-data-monitoring-tool-new-Dec-11.pdf 16 April 2013.

**6.4
Roles and responsibilities**

**6.4.1
LSCBs to undertake and implement the actions required of them to effectively meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE**

Given the central role of LSCBs in addressing running away and CSE, it is crucial that all LSCBs take responsibility for their lead role and undertake the action required of them by statutory guidance, the Government’s action plan addressing CSE⁹⁵ and by learning from research.

Required action to implement this recommendation:

- With support from the DfE, LSCBs to take responsibility and undertake the actions required of them to address running away and CSE.

**6.4.2
Multi-agency working**

A successful local response to address running away and CSE requires effective multi-agency working at both strategic and operational levels so it is, therefore, recommended that a multi-agency approach is established in all local areas.

To further enhance multi-agency working, non-statutory agencies need to ensure that they have informed knowledge about how statutory services operate and statutory services should ensure that they acknowledge and integrate the value that the voluntary sector can bring to address running away and CSE. Through accomplishing this, it is possible to combine the strengths of statutory and non-statutory agencies to achieve effective

95 Department for Education (2011) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*. London: DfE.

partnership working and improve responses to young people who experience both running away and CSE.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- LCSBs to coordinate a multi-agency approach to addressing running away and CSE that includes social care, health, education, the police, youth justice, CPS and the voluntary sector.
- Non-statutory agencies working with young people and their families to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge about how statutory services operate.
- Statutory agencies to acknowledge and integrate the value the voluntary sector is able to bring to direct work with young people who experience both running away and CSE and their parents and carers.

**6.4.3
Having a lead named professional for running away and CSE**

There are a number of benefits of having named professionals who lead on running away and/or CSE; and this should be part of job descriptions and roles within the statutory sector. By implementing this it is possible to fulfil responsibility and accountability and ensure that professionals from other sectors and agencies will be aware of who to approach when they have concerns that a young person is experiencing running away and CSE. It is, however, important to acknowledge that patterns of local working and work in different agencies will differ and the lead professional may differ from area to area.

Required action to implement this recommendation:

- Within key agencies in each local area there should be either a named lead individual for both running away and CSE or separate lead individuals for running away and CSE who work closely together. Lead professionals' job descriptions

should specify this role and that they are responsible and accountable for running away and/or CSE.

**6.4.4
Police responses to young people who experience running away and CSE**

The police are central to addressing running away and CSE and it is essential that they are part of a multi-agency approach. The police should work closely with specialised projects supporting young who experience running away and/or CSE so that both sets of agencies, and young people, can benefit from sharing information.

It is also essential that the police respond appropriately to young people they come into contact with who have experienced both running away and CSE, and recognise that these young people are vulnerable, in need of safeguarding and require support from the appropriate support agencies and not criminalisation. It is necessary to ensure that police officers react in a fitting manner to parents and carers when they report a young person as missing when they have run away.

There is need to review how the police work with young people who experience running away and CSE so that the prosecution of perpetrators becomes less stressful for young people who experience CSE.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- With support from the Home Office, ACPO will, as part of its work to implement ACPO's CSE Action Plan⁹⁶, lead on embedding this recommendation into police practice so that local police investigations addressing CSE can become less stressful for children and young people.
- In accordance with the *Tackling Child*

96 Association of Chief Police Officers (2012) *Association of Chief Police Officers' Child Sexual Exploitation Plan*.

*Sexual Exploitation: Action Plan*⁹⁷, ACPO should ensure all frontline police officers receive awareness-raising and training focusing upon running away and CSE so they can respond effectively to young people and to parents and carers.

- LCSBs should ensure that the police are part of multi-agency response to running away and CSE.

**6.4.5
Health**

Health plays an important role in addressing running away and CSE and has a unique position in relation to coming into contact with young people who are unknown to, or do not engage with, other services. Health services should be part of multi-agency responses to running away and CSE and should prioritise developing their service delivery so that health can support with meeting these young people's needs.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- LCSBs should ensure that health services are part of multi-agency responses to running away and CSE at both strategic and operational levels.
- It is important to raise awareness of running away and CSE and work with Directors of Public Health as they decide health priorities based upon an assessment of local need. Health promotion and protection also falls under the jurisdiction of Directors of Public Health.
- There should be local arrangements set in place to enable appropriate information sharing between health services and other agencies to ensure young people are safeguarded.
- Health professionals, particularly local safeguarding nurses, should receive training addressing running away and CSE.

97 Department for Education (2012) *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan – Progress Report*.

- Sexual health clinics should identify a lead health professional who is informed about running away and CSE and can identify those young people at risk and develop trusting relationships with them.
- Projects and professionals working to address running away and CSE should take advantage of the opportunities presented by local arrangements for prioritising health services. For example, Local Health Watch forums provide a context where local organisations and individuals can assess and hold to account health services in the local area and encourage health providers to consider particular health issues and needs.
- Local agencies should also engage with Health and Well-Being Boards to make them aware of the role that health can play in meeting the needs of children and young people who experience both running away and CSE and influence commissioning of health services.

**6.5
Supporting young people and parents and carers to address running away and CSE and move forward into the future**

**6.5.1
Ensuring young people feel cared for and listened to**

Feeling cared for and listened to is very important when considering how young people become involved in both running away and CSE. To reduce young people's isolation and ensure they feel cared for and listened to, there is a requirement to ensure that every child and young person has someone with whom they can build a meaningful relationship. Many young people do not have immediate family or friends who are able to provide them with the care they seek or with a listening ear. Some do not always attend school or do not receive support services

despite experiencing harm. Alongside providing professional support, measures including peer support and buddying should be adopted to meet young people’s needs to ensure that all young people have someone they feel cares for them and listens to them in a positive manner.

When young people disclose that they have been sexually exploited, it is crucially important that the response they receive from both professionals and parents and carers does not implicitly or explicitly convey that the young person is not believed or is thought to be at fault. Responses to disclosure should focus upon ensuring that the young person feels cared for and listened to and that their disclosure is taken seriously.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- Preventative measures should include ensuring young people are provided with someone to care for them and listen to them. Buddying and peer support should be considered when young people are identified as not having anyone in their lives who is able to appropriately care for them and give them the attention they require.
- Awareness-raising and training addressing running away and CSE with parents and carers and professionals should include the need to respond appropriately to disclosures of CSE.
- Professionals that come into contact with young people who experience both running away and CSE, or are at risk of doing so, must recognise the importance of building relationships based upon trust by showing care and listening. In the long-term gaining young people’s trust allows them to seek support and make changes at the point when their survival strategies break down.

6.5.2 Direct Practice with young people ensuring a needs-based approach

Learning about ‘what works’ and ‘what doesn’t work’ in direct practice with children and young people who have experienced both running away and CSE needs to be incorporated into commissioning and service design and delivery. One model of intervention will not produce positive outcomes for all, and it is vital that support for young people who experience both running away and CSE is individually-tailored and needs-based to enable a young person to move to a life beyond running away and CSE.

With the appropriate support, young people with previous experience of running away and CSE who have addressed their issues and ceased running away and involvement in CSE can play an important and unique role in preventing and tackling these issues for other young people at risk.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- Commissioners of services and service providers supporting young people who experience both running away and CSE should incorporate into service design and delivery a needs-based approach for young people that focuses upon providing individually tailored support.
- Commissioners and service providers should also consider how to effectively and appropriately include young people with previous experience of running away and CSE in preventing and responding to running away and CSE.

6.5.3 Reaching a diverse range of young people who experience running away and CSE

To address the ‘hidden nature’ of running away and CSE and reaching all young people who experience these issues, strategic responses and service interventions should ensure that a number of evidence-based approaches are adopted to meet the needs of a range of young people.

Required actions to implement this recommendation:

- Commissioners of services and service providers supporting young people who experience both running away and CSE should ensure a range of interventions are set in place for ‘harder to reach’ groups of young people.
- Organisations and projects working with young people who experience both running away and CSE should ensure that practitioners are supported to incorporate good practice and other learning from research and practice into their work with young people.

6.5.4 Supporting parents and carers

Parents and carers should be provided with appropriate and effective support to meet their needs and assist with their parenting, which will, in turn, benefit their children and enable parents to protect them and meet their needs. As well as targeting parents and carers to raise their awareness of running away and CSE, parents and carers should be informed of the importance of knowing where their child is and who they are with. It is also important to stress the importance of parents and carers reporting their child as missing to the police when they have run away, or when they are not where they should be, and there is the possibility that the child may be at risk from their own or others’ actions.

In recognition of the positive outcomes that are achieved when parents and carers are part of an intervention to address the needs of a young person who has experienced both running away and CSE, the research suggests that a good practice model of support should incorporate a specialist parents’ support worker.

Required actions to implement this action:

- Recognition of the importance of working with parents and carers should be included in local arrangements and planning to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and CSE.
- Commissioners should ensure commissioning processes for services to meet the needs of young people who experience running away and CSE include provision of a specialist parents’ support worker.
- Both statutory and voluntary support services should incorporate meeting the needs of parents and carers to achieve positive outcomes with young people who experience both running away and CSE.

6.6 Diversity

There is a need to improve responses to young people from diverse backgrounds who experience both running away and CSE. The research identified challenges and opportunities in working with: black and minority ethnic (BME) communities; boys and young men; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people; and those with disabilities. There are particular gaps in developing an evidence-based approach to working with young lesbian women, and young people with learning difficulties or disabilities.

To meet these needs, practitioners need to be supported to develop knowledge and understanding of BME communities within the local area, which would, alongside

achieving other outcomes, support with improving risk assessments relating to BME young people. It is therefore imperative that practitioners working with young people receive diversity training that covers the needs of BME young people, their communities, cultural beliefs and practices and how best to respond to young people from a range of BME backgrounds.

Work also needs to take place to raise awareness with BME communities and develop culturally appropriate indicators of, and responses to, running away and CSE in partnership with representatives from BME communities.

National and local strategies, which include the above and other required measures, should be developed to remove obstacles to BME young people accessing and receiving support to effective interventions that are able to incorporate cultural factors and meet young people’s needs.

Practitioners also need support and diversity training to improve understanding, reach and responses to LGBT young people. Awareness-raising also needs to take place with the gay community to improve levels of knowledge about running away and CSE among children and young people and understanding of the negative impacts upon young people of experiencing sexual exploitation.

Given the proportion of young people who experience both running away and CSE who have a learning difficulty/disability, the research suggests ensuring these young people receive specialist support from professionals with expertise in learning difficulties/disabilities.

- Required actions to implement this action:**
- At a national level, Government should address gaps in work with BME communities and faith organisations to raise awareness of running away and CSE.
 - A similar process should take place at the local level to raise awareness of BME communities within the local area.
 - To support this process champions within the BME community should be identified at both national and local levels who can lead on improving awareness and responses to children and young people who experience both running away and CSE.
 - Alternative indicators of, and responses to, running away and CSE should be developed with representatives from the BME community.
 - Work should also take place with the gay community at both national and local levels.
 - Commissioning of services and service design and delivery should include different approaches to intervention to meet the needs of different groups of young people.
 - Statutory and voluntary sector agencies should employ specialist running away and CSE workers with knowledge of learning difficulties/disabilities to improve outcomes with young people with learning difficulties/disabilities.

- 6.7
Gaps in knowledge**
- There are a number of gaps in knowledge about the relationship between running away and CSE that require further inquiry to enable an informed response to be set in place to meet these young people’s needs. These gaps relate to:
- definitions of running away and CSE
 - working with young people with learning difficulties/disabilities who experience running away and CSE
 - working to protect young people with no awareness of the risks they face in relation to online safety
 - working with Roma and Traveller young people who experience running away and CSE
 - lesbian girls and young women’s experiences of running away and CSE.
- Required actions to implement this action:**
- As part of this research dissemination strategy, Barnardo’s and Paradigm Research will work with key stakeholder organisations to progress a reworked definition of CSE.
 - Paradigm Research will progress work to address definitions of running away.
 - Despite the challenges in safeguarding young people who have no awareness of the online risks they face from perpetrators of CSE, there is ongoing need for a range of agencies with the remit of child protection; and for internet site providers to consider measures to safeguard these young people.
 - Work should take place within the local area to build links with those who have contact with Roma and Traveller communities to facilitate access to them.
 - Practice with young people with learning difficulties/disabilities should be collated to provide evidence of ‘what works’ in relation to interventions with young people with learning difficulties/disabilities.



Running from hate to what you think is love:

The relationship between
running away and child
sexual exploitation

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Barnardo's Registered Charity Nos.
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