Ministry of
Justice and
Attorney General

RUNAWAY CHILDREN AND YOUTH

SASKATCHEWAN POLICY AND PRACTICE

Report Prepared for the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons

May 2010

Saskatchewan

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Runaway Children and Youth – Saskatchewan Policy and Practice

A) Introduction

Recommendation 17 of the Final Report[1] of the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons (PPCMP) states the following

> The Committee recommends that the government undertake a study to better understand the issues related to the high number of runaways and to identify prevention and intervention strategies, particularly for chronic runaways and their families.

Officials from the Ministry of Justice (JU), Corrections, Public Safety and Policing (CPSP), Education (ED), and Social Services (SS) met in early December to discuss how to proceed with the recommendation. This document is the result of that meeting where it was decided that the most appropriate course of action would be for someone to meet with various ministries and agencies involved with runaway children and youth to more clearly understand what policies/protocols each agency has for runaway youth, what information is being collected about runaways, what contact there is between agencies, and what preventive or intervention strategies are currently being employed. In so doing this paper is organized into three main sections:

1. An introductory discussion of relevant literature. How are runaways defined? How many children and youth are running away? What risks do children/youth face when they do runaway? Why do children/youth runaway? This section will discuss some of the most important work and research completed in other jurisdictions.
2. A description of current practice/procedures within the various Ministries/Agencies interviewed for this research. This includes the Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert Police Services, the RCMP, Mobile Crisis, Child Find, as well as the Ministries of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, Education, and Social Services.
3. A brief and cursory discussion of findings as well as a number of suggestions to improve runaway services within Saskatchewan.

B) Background

i) Definitional Issues

One of the difficulties faced in the development of policies for runaway children and youth is differences in understanding of what a runaway youth is. One of the main areas of confusion arises around differences between a 'runaway' child or youth as opposed to a 'missing' child or youth. The distinction is an important one and is discussed briefly below

[1] The Final Report of the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons is available at http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca/MissingPersons

a) Runaways

When most hear the term 'runaway' images of an unhappy or rebellious teenager who has left home without parental permission often arise. Although somewhat limited, this understanding of the term is relatively close to more technical definitions. For instance, within the United Kingdom, the term 'runaway' has been predominantly used to "describe a young person who describes him/herself as having spent one night or more away from home without parental permission while under the age of 16"[2] The problem with this definition is that it gives the impression that the act of running is a strictly volitional one on the part of the child or youth. Causal factors are seen to be largely *internal* which is often not the case. More recent definitions have been expanded to include runaway incidents where the child is essentially forced out of the home. For instance, the following definition, also from the UK incorporates this understanding defining a runaway as

> children and young people up to the age of 18 who runaway from home or care, or who feel that they have had to leave, and who face the particular range of risks that come from having to find alternative places to stay and means to survive.[3]

Similarly Biehal and Wade use the term 'running away' to refer "to children and young people who spend time away from where they ought to usually live, without the consent of parents or caregivers, or because they have been forced to leave by parents or caregivers."[4]

b) Missing

Definitions of a 'missing person' are broader than those of 'runaways' and involve any situation where a person's whereabouts are unknown. The UK defines a missing person as "anyone whose whereabouts is unknown whatever the circumstances of the disappearance."[5] This definition reflects a common understanding of 'missing person' as an umbrella term of which there are many different categories. For instance, Canadian police agencies enter information into the Canadian Police Information Center (CPIC) system using this format. Missing children cases are broken down into categories such as 'runaways', 'parental abductions', 'stranger abductions', 'unknown', 'accident', 'wandered off', and 'other'.

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[2] Evans, Kathy; Houghton-Brown, Martin; Rees, Gwyther. "Stepping Up – The Future of Runaway Services: A Review of Services in England, proposing 'a national safety net for runaways'". (2007) The Children's Society. At 9.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Biehal, Nina; Wade, Jim. "Children who go Missing: Research, Policy, and Practice" (2002). UK Department of Health. At 6. Accessed June 9, 2009 at http://www.popcenter.org/problems/runaways/PDFs/Biehal&Wade_2002.pdf
[5] Association of Chief Police Officers. "Manual of Guidance for the Management of Missing Persons" (London: ACPO. 2005). At 8.

For the most part, therefore, the term *runaway can be understood as one category of missing person whereby a child or youth has either ran away volitionally or because they were forced to leave by parents or caregivers.*

ii) Incidence and Prevalence

Statistics on the number of runaways within Saskatchewan are available from a number of different sources. First, National Missing Children Services (NMCS) analyses missing children entries in the CPIC system. Entries are made by accredited Canadian police agencies and the missing children reports, as noted above, are broken down into seven main sub-categories: a) stranger abduction, b) parental abduction, c) runaway children, d) accident, e) wandered off, f) unknown, and g) other. Overwhelmingly runaways make up the majority of total missing person entries. For instance, in 2008 entries in the runaway category accounted for 79% of the total missing persons' entries for Saskatchewan. Out of 3,113 missing persons' entries on CPIC, 2,446 were in relation to runaways. Saskatchewan numbers are fairly consistent with national level statistics where 72% of total entries were categorized as runaways.[6]

In addition, the runaway problem within Saskatchewan was highlighted clearly in the report *Missing Persons in Saskatchewan: Police Policy and Practice.* The fundamental purpose of the report was to analyze the practicality of standardizing police policies, protocols, and practices across the province. In addition, the report was intended to provide the PPCMP with an "overview of the issues and challenges relating to police services in Saskatchewan on the issue of missing persons".[7] Police data was collected for the report from all police services and the RCMP for the years 2003, 2004, and 2005.[8] Each service was asked to provide: (a) the number of reports they had received of missing persons for each of these years, (b) the number of actual persons reported missing for each of these years, (c) the number of CPIC entries made for missing persons for each of these years, and (d) the number of 'cleared' cases for each of these years.

Statistics in relation to points (a) and (b) are the most important in this context. In 2005 a total of 4496 missing persons reports were taken by police agencies in Saskatchewan but this number was significantly different from the actual number of persons missing in Saskatchewan. "Although there were 4496 reports filed, only 2956 people were reported missing in 2005. This differential is a direct result of some individuals missing a number of times during the year. These two numbers are a clear illustration of the challenges facing the police services with regard to chronic runaways".[9]

Finally, the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS) passed along further stats for missing persons for this report. In 2008, the SPS responded to 1,997 calls for service relative to missing persons. Of those calls 1,317 resulted in reports being filed and investigated. A review

[6] M, Dalley. "2008 Missing Children Reference Report". (Minister of Public Works and Government Services. 2009) Online at http://www.ourmissingchildren.gc.ca
[7] J, Pfeifer. "Missing Persons in Saskatchewan: Police Policy and Practice" (2006).
[8] Due to a change in their software program the RCMP was only able to provide statistics for 2005.
[9] *Supra* note 1. at 8.

of those cases indicated that 108 persons were reported missing more than three times and the highest individual occurrence was 21 times in a 12 month period. These numbers indicate that for SPS 25 percent of missing persons' reports for 2008 dealt with chronic runaway youth who had run three times or more. Importantly, these numbers don't reflect those individuals who ran only once or twice during the year.

It is important to note in this context that police missing persons' reports reflect only partially on the extent of the runaway problem. According to research undertaken in the United Kingdom and the United States the majority of runaway incidents are not reported to police. In the report *Stepping Up: The Future of Runaway Services,* from the United Kingdom, the authors estimate that "as many as two thirds of young people who run away are not reported to the police as missing, and even fewer among those who were forced to leave home. Relying on missing persons reports…would lead to a significant underestimating of the scale and nature of the problem"[10]

In addition, research indicates that runaway children/youth disproportionately come from the 'in care' population whether that be foster care or residential care. 2008 data from NMCS indicates that 22% of children/youth in Canada were reported as missing from foster care. This is significant given the low percentage of children who are in the looked after population. Although speaking within the context of the UK, Biehal and Wade state that "while less than 1% of children and young people are looked after, around 30% of those reported to the police as missing were found to be from substitute care, the vast majority being from residential placements."[11]

Research from the United States is similar. The Child Welfare League of America has noted that "almost half of children in foster or residential care have run at some point in time" going on to state that "children in out of home care have more than twice the likelihood of running away"[12] as children who live with their families. This finding is likewise supported by research in the UK which has found that young people living in residential care are approximately three times more likely to runaway than those living in families.[13] It should be noted that although a larger proportion of children are coming from the residential/foster care system, this accounts for a minority of the total runaway cases. As well, the higher proportion of runaways coming from the out of home care system is not necessarily a negative reflection on care systems but is rather a reflection of the high needs population they are looking after.

Characteristics of Runaways

[10] K. Evans, M.H. Brown & G. Rees. "Stepping Up: The Future of Runaway Services". (London: The Children's Society, 2007) Online at http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk
[11] N. Biehal, J. Wade, "Taking a chance? The Risks associated with going missing from substitute care." (1999) 8 Child Abuse Review, 366-376.
[12] Child Welfare League of America. "Children Missing from Care: Proceedings of the expert panel meeting" (2004, March 8-9) Washington, D.C. Online at http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/childmiss.htm#proceedings
[13] G. Rees, J. Lee. "Still Running II: Findings from the Second National Survey of Young Runaways" (London: The Children's Society. 2005). At 11-12.

Research on runaways is lacking within Saskatchewan and little can be said about common characteristics of this population. Statistics from NMCS, from 2008, indicate that 67% of runaways in Saskatchewan were female in comparison to 33% being male which is fairly consistent nationally where 57% of children entered in the runaway category were female in comparison to 43% being male. Research from other countries, mainly the UK, also supports this finding. For instance, an extensive survey, within the UK, which questioned 10,716 children and youth found that 12% of females surveyed had runaway in the previous year whereas only 8% of males had runaway.[14] In addition, national statistics are provided on the most common age of runaways within Canada. In 2008, the vast majority of runaways were between the age of 14-17. 84% of females and 82% of males fell within this category. Research from the UK also indicates that there is some difference in runaway rates according to ethnicity and that there are higher than average runaway rates for young people who define themselves as being disabled or having difficulties with learning and for those who define themselves as gay or lesbian.[15]

iii) What are the causes of the running away?

The causes of running away are commonly understood to be the result of various 'push' and 'pull' factors. The push factors are internal to the home or foster care/residential setting, motivating the individual to runaway from them. The pull factors are external to the home/residential setting and motivate the individual to run towards them. As stated by one source, when speaking in the context of residential care settings, "push factors are those which drive youth to leave and generally relate to environmental factors in their placements; whereas pull factors are influences outside of their placements that draw youth to leave in order to go to something or someone"[16] The United Kingdom's Social Exclusion Unit explains the situation this way:

> Running away is an important **signal that something is seriously wrong** in a young person's life. Children and young people who run away, or are forced out of home, are often struggling with problems. The majority of runaways have experienced family conflict or family break-up, whilst some young people are running away because they are depressed, or because they are being bullied at school. Children in care may run away because they are unhappy in their care placement, or because they want to return to their families.[17]

The top push and pull factors as outlined by the United Kingdom's Social Exclusion Unit are the following:

[14] *Ibid.* At 8.
[15] K. Evans, M.H. Brown & G. Rees. *Supra* note 8. At 8.
[16] J. Kerr, J. Finlay. "Youth Running from Residential Care: 'The Push' and 'The Pull'". 2006. Office of Child and Family Services Advocacy.
[17] Social Exclusion Unit. "Young Runaways". (London: Social Exclusion Unit. 2002). Online at www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk At 1.

Push Factors

- Problems at home – ranging from arguments with parents to long-term abuse or maltreatment
- Family break up – young people drawn into their parents conflicts are less likely to do well in school and are more likely to runaway from home
- Mental health problems – a disproportionate number of young people that runaway from home have some sort of mental health problem
- Bullying – children who are severely bullied are more likely to run away from school and home or care

Pull Factors

- Running to be near friends or family – particularly prevalent when a young person is in care and there are problems in contact arrangements with family and friends
- Grooming for potential sexual exploitation or child trafficking – young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them

Importantly, there is also an increasing amount of evidence that negative economic circumstances are a contributing factor behind children running away. For instance, the New York Times has recently done a series of articles on runaways within America. One article entitled "Recession Drives Surge in Youth Runaways" notes that "over the past two years [2008-2009], government officials and experts have seen an increasing number of children leave home for life on the streets, including many under 13. Foreclosures, layoffs, rising food and fuel prices and inadequate supplies of low-cost housing have stretched families to the extreme, and those pressures have trickled down to teenagers and pre-teens".[18] In addition, the U.S. National Runaway Switchboard in their analysis of trends in relation to crisis calls notes that "there are a number of indicators from the trend analysis that point to economic downturn as negatively affecting runaway and homeless youth. There has been an increase of more than 200 percent in crisis calls from or about a youth which identify economics as a reason for the call".[19] Although interesting these factors are likely of smaller impact within Saskatchewan which has not suffered nearly the economic setback that many parts of the United States has.

iv) Risks while on the Run

Risks for runaways while on the run are extensive particularly for those who are away from home for extended periods of time. Runaway children are not only at an increased risk of becoming victims of violence themselves but may become involved in petty as well as more serious crime to survive on the street. Runaway children and youth have very few legal means by which to support themselves which puts them at a significantly

[18] I. Urbina. "Running in the Shadows: Recession Drives Surge in Youth Runaways". *The New York Times.* (25 October 2009). Available online at www.nytimes.com.
[19] National Runaway Switchboard. "National Runaway Switchboard Crisis Caller Trends 2000-2008" Available online at http://www.1800runaway.org at 3.

increased risk to enter a life of crime. Rees and Lee found that nine percent of young runaways had stolen something, three percent had begged for money, and four percent had 'done other things to survive'.[20] In addition, the study found that eight percent of children who ran away overnight had been harmed. Another study from 2003 found that one in eight runaways (12.5 percent) reported having been physically hurt and one in nine (around 11 percent) reported being sexually abused while on the run.[21]

In regard to sexual abuse, for many young runaways, sex buys survival. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness:

> Homeless youth attempting to survive day to day on the streets are constantly at risk for solicitation and recruitment into sexual exploitation. Given their experiences and histories of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and abandonment, homeless youth are easy targets for sexual exploitation by adults and recruitment into the commercial sex industry

The number of runaways who engage in 'survival sex' varies by study. That said, according to a New York Times review "nearly a third of the children who flee or are kicked out of their homes each year engage in sex for food, drugs, or a place to stay, according to a variety of studies published in academic and public health journals"[22] The prevention of runaway incidents as well as effective intervention into runaway incidents is therefore very important as children and youth in these situations are highly vulnerable.

C) Current Practice in Saskatchewan

As already noted above, information was gathered from various agencies including the Regina, Saskatoon, and PA police services, the RCMP, Child Find, Mobile Crisis Services, and the Ministry of ED, SS, and CPSP. The following provides a brief description of polices/practices, prevention/intervention strategies, issues highlighted by various agencies

i) Police Agencies/RCMP

To begin with investigative procedures are outlined in regard to missing persons as well as runaways within both the RCMP *Operational Manual* as well as the Saskatchewan Police Commission's *Policy Manual for Saskatchewan Municipal Police Agencies.* Section OB 70 of the later outlines necessary standards for policing agencies in missing persons cases noting that special consideration should be given to "particular categories

[20] *Supra* note 11, at 18-20.
[21] N. Biehal, F. Mitchell, and J. Wade. "Lost from View: Missing Persons in the UK". (Bistol: The Policy Press. 2003).
[22] I. Urbina. "Running in the Shadows: For Runaways Sex buys Survival". *The New York Times.* (27 October 2009) Available online at www.nytimes.com

of missing persons (eg: young person, adults, ill or disabled, habitual runaways, persons to be located for investigation purposes, possible parental abduction)."[23]

The RCMP *Operational Manual* has quite an extensive section on procedures in relation to missing persons and runaways. Specific investigative procedures are broken down into five categories: a) general category which applies to all missing person investigations, b) runaways, c) parental abductions, d) non-parental abductions, and e) found persons.

The manual defines a runaway as a "child or young person who leaves the home, group home, or other place of residence for an indefinite period of time, often as a result of potential or actual serious problems that require clinical or social intervention." The *Operational Manual* goes on to list a number of investigational procedures to be followed in runaway missing person cases. RCMP officers are to a) review school records and interview teachers, other school staff, and classmates; b) obtain permission to check the contents of a school locker; c) check possible use of school computers; d) contact community youth assistance organizations and agencies; and e) check the child protection agency for possible abuse reports.

a) Saskatoon Police Service

When spoken to individually a number of differences in each agencies practices on runaways and involvement with runaways became evident. As outlined above the Saskatoon Police Service provided a number of additional statistics on the extent of the problem faced in Saskatoon. Currently SPS does not have any policies/protocols directed specifically to runaways other than section OB 70 of the *Policy Manual for Saskatchewan Municipal Police Agencies.* In addition, they are not involved in any prevention or intervention programs mainly because of a lack of resources and information gathering and data analysis on runaways is sporadic and ad hoc. As noted in correspondence "the demands for service investigating missing persons is enormous and habitual runaways takes up two thirds of our investigative time. The problem is the tracking of information is also time consuming and puts demands on our IT people who have other pressing issues to report on".

From the perspective of SPS the majority of chronic runaways are coming from Government or CBO care facilities funded by government. The four following concerns and challenges were outlined:

- First and foremost, many of the individuals reported missing live high-risk lifestyles while on the run. These are the individuals who are most susceptible to gang affiliations, sexual predator activity, or criminal lifestyles. They have the highest probability of being a victim of violent crime. Many have been victimized physically, sexually or emotionally in the past;

[23] Saskatchewan Police Commission. "Policy Manual for Saskatchewan Municipal Police Services". (2004). Online at http://www.cpsp.gov.sk.ca

- In many cases chronic runaways are driving up certain crime related offences. SPS has found a strong correlation between stolen vehicles, thefts from vehicles, property offences and substance abuse related offences among certain members within this group;
- There is an overall lack of cooperation and effective communication between SPS and staff at care facilities. From the perspective of SPS not enough is being done at care facilities to prevent runaway incidents from occurring;
- The frequency and volume of these reports is burdensome on limited police resources. As a result, police moral is low in this policy area. The general membership responsible for taking complaints, responding to, and investigating these cases have become desensitized to the dangers that repeat runners are exposed to. From the perspective of SPS the 'care factor' has been lost in taking these cases seriously not only for the police but for many of the care givers who have the responsibility to ensure that these individuals are in a safe environment.

Clearly, from the perspective of SPS, the chronic runaway problem is one that is highly problematic. To address these issues, the SPS has established a committee which is looking at alternative ways to address the chronic runaway problem. One of the hopes is that strengthened partnerships will result, predominantly between social agencies and the SPS, but as noted in correspondence "the process is slow and time consuming".

One model the SPS is interested in emulating is highlighted in a 2004 report by the Child Welfare League of America entitled *Children Missing from Care: An Issue Brief.* From the perspective of SPS the problems highlighted and recommendations suggested mirror the approach necessary in Saskatoon.[24] The Report addresses many different topics ranging from previous research completed, definitional issues, the incidence and prevalence of children running from care, characteristics of runaways, reasons why children run, as well as the prevention and response to children missing from care settings. In terms of responding to incidents of missing children from care one of the main recommendations is the establishment of joint protocols between policing agencies and child welfare agencies. From the perspective of SPS it is this aspect that necessitates the most work and would have the most benefit. The SPS is hoping to establish a more structured approach to chronic runaways this fall with a dedicated resource to address the chronic runaway situation they face.

b) Regina Police Service

The Regina Police Service (RPS) is novel in that it is the only police agency which is involved in prevention/intervention programming with chronic runaways. They are in the process of starting a program called Kids in Crisis, which targets repeat runaways who are 12 years of age or younger. The program has been developed in partnership with the Ministry of Social Services, the Ministry of Health, the Randell Kinship Center, Child and Youth Addictions Services, and Ranch Ehrlo. The RPS intervenes in cases where a child 12 years of age or under has run two or more times. In these situations the RPS

[24] C. Kaplan. "Children Missing From Care: An Issue Brief". (Washington: Child Welfare League of America. 2004). Online at http://www.cwla.org/default.htm

undertakes an interview with the child to assess some of the underlying factors behind their running behavior. The information gathered from the interview is passed on to Social Services and Health in order to set up appropriate supports for the child. The interview is predominantly directed towards understanding the various 'push' and 'pull' factors which are outlined above with the hope that programming will be able to at least partially address them. If the program is found to be successful it may be expanded to include those kids in the 12-15 year age group.

From the perspective of RPS, a large number of runaways are coming from the 'cared for' setting as well as from private homes. The RPS has no formally established protocols for information sharing or interactions with other agencies in regard to runaway children and youth (except for polices/procedures in relation to the Kids in Crisis Program). That being said information is shared on an ad hoc basis depending on the circumstances of each case. RPS does not have the capacity to specifically track statistics in relation to runaways but they would likely be available through the RPS data system.

c) Prince Albert Police Service

The PA police have policy on missing persons but do not have any specific policy dedicated towards chronic runaways. There has been some discussion about what role police should have in relation to actively seeking chronic runaways from residential care settings. Should this be predominantly a police responsibility or should it be more of a social agency responsibility? In terms of the statistics gathered, information is available on age, gender, where and how the individual went missing, as well as the number of times they have gone missing. This information would be shared on a case by case basis as deemed necessary and is not formalized with any sort of agreement or protocol between agencies.

The PA Police Service is not involved in any prevention/intervention strategies or programs for chronic runaways because of a lack of capacity and resources. As noted in correspondence "it is often a challenge to just provide the police resource in an already very busy environment to investigate the over 800 annual incidents of missing persons we face." Although there is interest in developing programming in this area, PA currently does not have any capacity beyond that of investigation.

The PA Police Service often has contact, in regard to runaway cases, with the Ministry of Social Services (Ranch Ehrlo, Ranch Ehrlo living units, Eagle's Nest Youth Ranch, Eagles's Nest living units, Sunshine Haven, Prince Albert Therapeutic Group Home). In addition, private foster homes and various RCMP detachments are also typically in contact with the PA police in regard to runaways. As stated above, relationships and information sharing with these agencies are made on an informal ad hoc basis.

d) RCMP

The RCMP's *Operational Manual* outlines in quite specific detail investigative procedures in relation to runaway children/youth. Beyond what is contained in the

manual there are no formal policies in relation to runaways. There are, for instance, no formally established protocols outlining under what circumstances information should be shared. In addition, although there may be some prevention/intervention strategies being tried at the individual detachment level no province wide strategies have been outlined, suggested, or implemented. In addition many of the statistics and information that is available is that which is entered through the CPIC system. As is the case with other policing agencies a lack of specific work within this area is not because of a lack of desire or concern for the issue but rather because of a lack of overall capacity.

ii) Community Based Organizations

a) Mobile Crisis Services

Mobile Crisis Services is an agent of both the Ministry of Social Services as well as the Ministry of Health and receives reports of missing persons, both those under 16 as well as at risk adults. Their services are used mainly after hours when government staff are no longer available. Procedures have been established for receiving missing person reports and for contact with policing agencies and the MSS. MCS has for instance developed both missing juvenile as well as missing adult report forms which provide basic information about the missing person. As well, all individuals who contact MCS in relation to a missing person or runaway situation are directed to contact police service agencies. Mobile Crisis receives calls in relation to missing or runaway children from any number of different sources (private homes, foster parents, residential facilities) and they work cooperatively to return missing children to their designated residence. Mobile Crisis is not involved in any prevention work for runaways because it doesn't fit within their mandate, which is focused on intervening in immediate crisis situations.

b) Child Find

Child Find is a registered charity whose mandate is to assist parents or legal guardians in locating their children, who have either been the victim of a stranger or parental abduction, or who have wandered off or ran away. Child Find normally works with children up to the age of 18 but exceptions are made for older individuals if there is a written request from law enforcement.

Child Find does not have any specific policies or procedures directed towards runaway children. When a parent phones requesting assistance in locating a child, Child Find responds to the best of its ability based on the circumstances of each case. Sometimes referrals will be made to other agencies, sometimes assistance will be provided in the development of posters, sometimes Child Find will simply listen to the family member without providing any other specific assistance. Policy and procedures are not formalized in other words. It is important to note that this is not necessarily a negative thing. It allows for a wider range of responses because action does not need to fit within the provisions of a formalized policy.

Child Find is involved in prevention work in relation to runaways. Their Tweens and Teens program targets children and youth aged 9-18 years of age and addresses issues which may arise both at home, at school or in the community. The program is designed to educate youth as well as parents and communities about negative factors[25] that can influence children and youth through the 9-18 year age range as well as how to respond in those situations. As noted in a pamphlet on the program

> The Tweens and Teens program is designed to educate youth about outside [negative] factors, as well as to create in them self esteem, knowledge and confidence, so if such issues arise they will feel comfortable, confident, and have the knowledge to discuss it with a trusted adult, counselor, elder or clergymen, or even with their fellow peers. The program will educate the parent on their child's behavioral patterns and provide guidance on how to cope with Tweens and Teens issues. Parents sometimes have to be reminded how they felt at the same age, and also to consider a course of action about a problem from a parent and youth point of view. This program is aimed at opening up the lines of communication between the child and parent or guardian. There may be cases that the only reason a child decides to run away, or experiment with other negative factors , is due to lack of communication or that they are afraid to talk to an adult or peer.[26]

If thought about within the context of the push and pull factors discussed above the Tweens and Teens program is mainly directed towards undermining many of the push factors which lead to running away. It does so through educational means and the cultivation of open communication.

iii) Government Ministries

a) Social Services

Unsurprisingly the Ministry of Social Services has done quite an extensive amount of work in relation to runaway children and youth and they have a number of different polices directed towards children/youth missing from care settings. Section 11.18 of the *Children's Services Manual* addresses those children and youth under the care of Social Services but not living in a residential program and section 9.3 addresses those children and youth who are living in a residential program.

1. Section 11.18 of the *Children's Services Manual: Children Missing from Care Policy*:
    - This policy provides direction to regional caseworkers on how to respond when a child goes missing from care.
    - This policy is also used for education purposes to assist care providers with information and direction on how to respond when a child goes missing from their home

[25] Negative factors include conflict with parents/peers, substance use, teen pregnancy, suicide, depression, running away, bullying, being home alone, internet safety, behavioral problems, relationships, eating disorders, violence, anger, stress

[26] Child Find Saskatchewan. "Tween and Teen (Wichi-awasis)".

2. Section 9.3 of the *Children's Services Residential Policy Manual: Children Who Run from Care Policy:*
    - This policy provides direction to the operators of Ministry of Social Services and community operated staffed residential programs on how to respond when a child goes missing from the program

Section 11.18 of the *Children's Services Manual* contains a number of different sections:

- **Preamble**: discusses the risks of running away as well as the necessity for safety planning
- **Definitions**
- **Standards**: lists a number of different responsibilities of both the caregiver as well as the Ministry's caseworker who is responsible for the child.
- **Procedures**:
    - ***Developing Safety Plans*** - Caregivers are to develop safety plans with each child they have in care in the event that the child does go missing or runaway. The safety plans are not meant to condone running behavior but are rather meant to provide information to the child/youth which would keep them safe in the event that they do decide to run away. The safety plans provide information such as: phone numbers for the caregiver, the local police, mobile crisis services, their caseworker, and other support services such as Kids Help Phone; information and addresses where the child could go for safety, such as safe shelters, hospitals, police stations, schools, community centers, and other services; and information on how to contact the caregiver such as phoning collect on a pay phone.
    - ***Required timeframes for reporting children missing from care*** – this section outlines timelines for reporting children missing from care which are based on an assessment of the level of risk involved. Characteristics such as the age of the child and their physical, mental, and emotional condition are taken into consideration
    - ***Information required when contacting the local police*** – the child's name, when they left, where the child left from, what the child was wearing, etc.
    - ***Ministry caseworker responsibilities –*** essentially outlines what the caseworker must do to insure that everything is being done to locate the missing child and that everything is being properly documented as to what has been done and how it was done since the child ran away.
    - ***Guidelines for using the Media in helping to locate a missing child*** – based on a review of the circumstances and risk factors on a missing child the media will or will not be contacted.
    - ***Regional records on Children Missing from Care –*** each region is to record and track all information in regard to children missing from care using a standard form. Each regional director will provide a semi-annual report to the Executive Director of Child and Family Services.

- ***Procedures when a child returns to care*** – the caseworker must notify all involved (police, school, child's parents, etc), meet with the child to discuss the circumstances around the runaway incident, review the child's case plan to ensure that the child's needs are being adequately addressed.

Section 9.3 of the *Children Services Residential Policy Manual* is similar containing the following sections:

- **Preamble –** Much the same as section 11.18 with more emphasis on the fact that those in residential programs have larger behavioral problems often including histories of running away from previous non-residential or residential placements. Breaking the cycle of running behavior with these kids is one of the many challenges that residential facilities face. Because of the high likelihood of runaway incidents all residential programs are to develop safety plans for each child.
- **Definitions**
- **Standards –** Outlines responsibilities of the residential program manager and residential program.
- **Procedures**
  - **Prevention –** At the time of admission an individual care and treatment plan is to be developed for each child which is based on the child's particular needs. Each plan is to establish the level of supervision required to keep the child safe, identify community involvement such as school placement, participation in community activities, the level of family involvement such as home visits, etc.
  - **Intervention –** residential programs are to develop interventions to keep children from running away such as verbal interventions, contracting with the child, utilizing relationships with a program worker, elder, a family member or other significant person who may be able offer support to help stabilize the child, restrict access to the community or specific program activities that would increase the opportunity for the child to runaway, assigning additional program workers to provide intensive supervision of the child who is at risk of running, physically blocking points of exit to prevent the child from leaving, program workers physically intervening in order to prevent a child from running. In addition procedures are outlined as to when a child should be pursued if they successfully run from a residential setting as well as what procedures should be followed by staff if they do pursue a youth who has runaway.
  - **Follow up –** This section outlines procedures to be followed if program staff are not successful in locating or returning a child to the residential setting such as notifying the police, the child's parents, the regional caseworker, etc.

There are a number of important differences between section 9.3 and section 11.18 that result from the fact that residential facilities have to take on essentially a parenting

function for the children/youth in their care. Because of the parental role and because the children/youth are directly living at the facility, prevention and intervention are stressed to a much higher degree in section 9.3 than 11.18.

b) Education

Currently the Ministry of Education does not have any policies/procedures directed specifically to runaway children/youth and they don't specifically collect any information on runaways. The Ministry spent $3 million between 02/03 and 05/06 to expand the provincial student registry which has enhanced its capacity to track student movement and identify non-attending children and youth at the school level. As part of that tracking there is a 'not re-enrolled report' which indicates that a student has left one school but has not been enrolled in another. This function allows school officials to focus their follow up efforts on students who have not made a successful transition between schools. Students within this category would on occasion be runaways but that variable is not specifically tracked.

In some sense the Ministry of Education has more peripheral involvement within this policy area. Obviously they don't investigate runaway cases and unlike Social Services, they are not in charge of administering facilities where a large number of runaways are coming from. That being said schools certainly help with runaway investigations, are a good source of information about the specific circumstances of runaway kids' lives, and provide a logical location for educational strategies directed towards preventing runaway situations in the future.

c) Corrections, Public Safety, and Policing

CPSP, like the Ministry of Education, is somewhat peripheral to this policy problem. For instance, none of the literature reviewed for this report made any reference to correctional services and the role they might play in the development of runaway policy. CPSP does not collect or track any information on runaways and is not involved in any prevention/intervention programming. That being said if definitions of 'runaway' are expanded to include youth 'running away' from either custodial or community based correctional settings, situations can arise in a number of different circumstances. First, a small number of youth serving custodial sentences 'runaway'. These youth are often picked up quite quickly because a warrant is put out for their arrest. A larger group of 'runaways' arise within the context of those serving community based sentences. Approximately 2,000 young offenders are currently serving community based sentences some percentage of which breach the conditions of their sentence and disappear. Statistics in relation to both of these could be tracked though the Saskatchewan Young Offenders Information System if so desired.

Table 1 – Summary of Agency Policy and Practice

AGENCY	FORMALIZED POLICY/PROTOCOLS	INFORMATION COLLECTED/ SHARED	PREVENTION/ INTERVENTION STATEGIES
Regina Police Service	- section OB 70 of policy manual which is directed towards missing persons - some formalized procedure in relation to Kids in Crisis Program	- missing person report information as entered through CPIC - shared on an ad-hoc basis	- Kids in Crisis Program
Saskatoon Police Service	- section OB70 of policy manual which is directed towards missing persons - no specific policy directed towards chronic runaways - committee has been formed to review current practice	- missing person report information as entered through CPIC - shared on an ad-hoc basis	- no, largely the result of a lack of capacity
Prince Albert Police Service	- section OB70 of policy manual which is directed towards missing persons - no specific policy directed towards chronic runaways - no additional policies	- missing person report information as entered through CPIC - shared on an ad-hoc basis	- no, largely the result of a lack of capacity
RCMP	- investigative procedures as outlined in the RCMP Operational Manual	- missing person report information as entered through CPIC - shared on an ad-hoc basis	- no, largely the result of a lack of capacity

AGENCY	FORMALIZED POLICY/PROTOCOLS	INFORMATION COLLECTED/ SHARED	PREVENTION/ INTERVENTION STATEGIES
Child Find	No formalized policies or protocols	- no information specifically collected about runaways	- Tweens and Teens Program
Mobile Crisis Services	- some formalized procedure as an agent of Ministry of SS	-information shared with police services and Ministry of SS	- no, does not fit within Mobile Crisis mandate
Ministry of Education	- No policies or protocols	- no information collected specifically on runaways	- no
Ministry of CPSP	- no policies/protocols	- # of young offenders who go missing from custody or community sentence orders	- no
Ministry of Social Services	- section 9.3 of the *Children Services Residential Policy Manual* and 11.18 of the *Children's Services Manual*	- 9.3 states that whenever a child goes missing from a residential program that a written incident report be completed - section 11.18 states that each region of the province will be responsible for recording and tracking information pertaining to children missing from care.	- under 9.3 for those entering residential programs an individual care and treatment program is to be developed - as well every residential program is to develop interventions to keep a child from running

D) Discussion of Current Policy/Practice

Through discussions that have been carried out so far with the aforementioned agencies a number of observations can be highlighted.

- There is a limited amount of research or information on runaway children/youth in Saskatchewan. That said this report in part remedies the situation.
- Generally, few of the agencies included in this report have any specific policies/protocols in regard to runaway children and youth. As well, although the number of initiatives directed towards preventing and intervening in runaway incidents is improving, the amount of work being done in this area remains limited.

- Agencies are unable to expand services and work in this area predominantly because of a lack of capacity and resources

i) Lack of Research

First, there is a limited amount of research on runaway kids within Saskatchewan. Some information and statistics are available through police service entries in the CPIC system but the information is limited and provides little detail or background information on the characteristics of runaway kids within Saskatchewan. In addition, Jeffrey Pfeifer's research provides interesting and important information on police practice and policy across Saskatchewan, the lack of standardization of police practice, and the importance of standardization. Again, this research provides little in the way of detail or background characteristics of runaways. In addition, it does not help understand how runaway children and youth within Saskatchewan are interacting with the various agencies involved.

This research report is one step towards addressing this issue and provides those within Saskatchewan with a fairly good picture of current policies in place in those agencies that agreed to be part of this research. Although true, it doesn't specifically address those factors addressed in the previous paragraph. Whether or not to undertake this type of research is a debatable one. There is the possibility of undertaking a number of case studies of chronic runaways to determine how they are interacting with various agencies and what the background characteristics of those chronic runaways are. All of the agencies contacted for this report have been open to the idea of providing what information they have if this direction is pursued. That said it is questionable whether the amount of time needed to undertake more detailed research would be worth the effort. Would additional research provide policy makers with novel information that isn't already known from international research? Would it highlight factors that are not understood and need to be understood to come up with effective solutions in Saskatchewan? This argument isn't meant to come down on one side or the other but is rather meant to highlight that ***if additional research is pursued, serious consideration needs to go into clarifying what the research will investigate. As stated above what factors are not understood within Saskatchewan that need to be understood to come up with more effective prevention/intervention policies for runaway children and youth?***

ii) Lack of Formalized Policies, Prevention/Intervention Strategies

It is important to note that all of the police services have quite specific investigative procedures in relation to missing persons, of which runaways are a category. These policies/procedures are highlighted in Jeff Pfeifer's research which has been referenced throughout. Therefore, in some sense all police services have policies in relation to runaways. That said, police/RCMP policies specifically addressing runaways are limited and do not outline policy, for instance, in relation to relationships with other agencies or under what conditions information will be shared with other agencies. The Saskatoon Police Service is currently trying to overcome this limitation through the establishment of more formal protocols and procedures with the Ministry of Social Services and out of

home care facilities. In addition, the Regina Police Service is also in the process of establishing more formalized policies/procedures with other agencies as a result of the Kids in Crisis Program.

Importantly, developing and pursuing more formalized policies is not always necessary or particularly helpful. Child Find, for instance, does not see any particular benefit to developing a more formalized policy for runaway children/youth and they proceed in an ad hoc manner on the basis of the strong working relationships they have established with other agencies. Therefore, the suggestion that all agencies should pursue more formalized policies is too much of a blanket statement. ***Rather, agencies should pursue more formalized policies/protocols with other agencies on the basis of whether or not conflict or confusion exists over responsibilities and roles between agencies.***

Although limited in number there are a number of interesting developments in the context of prevention and intervention. ChildFind's Teens and Tweens program serves an important educational function in preventing children from running away. In addition, the Kids in Crisis program potentially holds great promise and does address the target group outlined in recommendation 17, that being chronic runaways and their families. ***The program does include an evaluation component and if it is found to be effective then its application in other centers would be of obvious benefit (for instance chronic runners are the main problem outlined by the Saskatoon Police Service).***

iii) Lack of Resources and Capacity

One of the fundamental points raised throughout was that agencies want to put more attention on this issue but are unable to because of a lack of resources and capacity. This point was noted not only in the Pfeifer research but also by all of the police service agencies that provided information for this report. For the most part, agencies involved in runaway cases do not have adequate capacity to fully address the issue. Although true, given the current economic climate this lack of capacity is not likely to change and if anything will decrease.