

SAFE@LAST was established nine years ago to provide services for the 1 in 9 children in South Yorkshire who run away from home or care. SAFE@LAST provides preventative work, a 24 hour helpline (0800 335 SAFE), a MISPER (Missing Persons) Scheme and an emergency refuge for young people who are 16 and under. SAFE@LAST receives very little statutory income and the majority of its services are reliant on the generosity of grants from charitable trusts and individuals. The charity is continuing to expand in order to meet the needs of the young people it works with to stay safe.

Running away is not the problem, but a symptom of many and varied problems that result in children and young people seeing no alternative but to risk running away from what they fear or worry about. This response inevitably often puts them in even graver danger, and SAFE@LAST works constantly to reduce this risk

The MISPER scheme works with young people after they have reported missing and returned home by the Police. The MISPER scheme has been operating in Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster for several years and expanded into Sheffield at the end of 2008 meaning the service is available to young people across South Yorkshire.

The young people SAFE@LAST work with face a lot of disadvantage in their everyday lives. 100% of the young people that the MISPER project works with have been missing from home and have been subject to some, if not all of the following:

- Exposure to a culture of binge drinking and drug abuse.
- Exposure to unhealthy lifestyles and a lack of positive role models leading to the young people adopting unhealthy lifestyles such as smoking.
- A lack of sexual awareness and understanding leading to sexual abuse and exploitation, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and unplanned pregnancies.
- Exposure to sexual exploitation and trafficking
- Being in an environment where they are bullied
- Lack of understanding and positive guidance leading to a desire to become a parent at a very early age
- Inadequate support from parents/guardians and sometimes neglect promoting low self esteem, a feeling of isolation and loneliness, depression and self harming
- Exposure to crimes and criminal behaviour often while living in poverty often resulting in the young person committing a crime such as theft/shoplifting
- Being susceptible to becoming a victim of physical, emotion, sexual abuse such as rape, as a result of the lack of safe accommodation

The SAFE@LAST helpline is available 24 hours a day to children and young people and is staffed solely by volunteers. Calls and texts to the helpline continue to increase on the back of our most recent marketing campaign and work in schools. Since the helpline opened we have now received over 1500 calls from young people in our region.

The young person's refuge we operate in South Yorkshire continues to be the only one of its kind in England outside of London and since it was opened over two years ago has provided emergency accommodation for many young people. Our aim is still to prevent young people from reaching the crisis stage of requiring access to the refuge.

Our work continues to achieve very good outcomes, particularly in reducing the numbers of young people who run away more than once. Nationally 59% of young people who have run away do so more than once, in South Yorkshire with the young people we work with less than 5% run away from home again. We continue to work successfully with partner organisations including South Yorkshire Police, local authorities and other charities.

SAFE@LAST is also recognised as an authority on the issue of running away and as a member of the English Coalition for Runaway Children we have been involved in helping to develop the Runaway Action Plan that was published by the government. The Action Plan explores some of the underlying causes of running away as well as setting out the important role that key partners such as the police, local government, the voluntary sector and children's services play in helping to deliver long term improvements for young runaways. SAFE@LAST's Strategic Services Runaways Director Tracy Haycox was present at Downing Street for the launch of the plan. We are hopeful that the phenomenon of running away is becoming a priority on the political agenda.