

# REACHING SAFE PLACES

EXPLORING THE JOURNEYS OF  
YOUNG PEOPLE WHO RUN AWAY  
FROM HOME OR CARE

RAILWAY  
**children**

Fighting for street children

**IT IS ESTIMATED THAT  
EVERY YEAR 18,000  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE UNDER 16 SLEEP  
ROUGH OR WITH SOMEONE  
THEY HAVE JUST MET.**

A child or young person under 16 runs away every five minutes in the UK. Some are able to stay safely with friends or family, but others need help to find a safe place.

A young person who runs away from home or care and has no safe place to go is at risk of ending up on the streets or in other unsafe places where they can be abused or exploited.



**RAILWAY CHILDREN FIGHT  
FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN  
WHO LIVE ALONE AND AT  
RISK ON THE STREETS,  
WHERE THEY SUFFER  
ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION.  
WE PROVIDE PROTECTION  
AND OPPORTUNITY FOR  
CHILDREN WITH NOWHERE  
ELSE TO GO AND NOBODY  
TO TURN TO. EVERY DAY WE  
FIGHT TO CHANGE THEIR  
STORY.**

In 2009 we talked to over 100 young people who were spending long periods of time on the streets and published our report 'Off the Radar' about their experiences. We then developed the 'Reach' model to help young runaways. An important part of 'Reach' is having somewhere safe to go.

In the UK, the law says that young people who run away and have nowhere safe to go should be helped by social care, or can be offered a place in a refuge. But there is only one runaways refuge in the country, with just two beds, so most young people will need help from their local authority's social care department.

By 2014 we were hearing that some young people were struggling to find safe places when they ran away.

**WE WANTED TO UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THEIR JOURNEYS AND WHAT ADULTS COULD DO TO MAKE THEM SAFER.**

**THERE IS ONLY ONE REFUGE IN THE COUNTRY, WITH JUST TWO BEDS**

# SAFE PLACES RESEARCH

We asked local authorities how many times in 2013/14 they had used emergency accommodation to help a young person under 16 who had gone missing from home or care. We asked 216 local authorities and 210 replied.

**ONLY 110 LOCAL  
AUTHORITIES COULD  
TELL US HOW  
OFTEN THEY HAD  
USED EMERGENCY  
ACCOMMODATION IN  
THIS WAY IN 2013/14.  
IN 71 CASES THE  
ANSWER WAS NEVER.**

We asked workers what they knew about young people's journeys and what made it hard for young people who had run away to get to a safe place. 12 workers came to a learning set. 62 workers completed our survey.

**WORKERS SAID THAT YOUNG PEOPLE OFTEN RAN AWAY TO THE HOUSES OF FRIENDS, FAMILY AND ACQUAINTANCES, THOUGH SOME STAYED IN OUTDOOR AREAS. THEY SAID THAT FUNDING CUTS, FEWER SERVICES AND HIGH SOCIAL CARE THRESHOLDS WERE MAKING IT HARD FOR THEM TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE. THEY SAID THAT 16-17 YEAR OLDS WERE NOT ALWAYS ASSESSED BY SOCIAL CARE DEPARTMENTS.**

Peer researchers interviewed young people who had run away or been homeless to ask about the journey and what helped them find a safe place. We tested their research findings through workshops and a survey. 32 young people aged 10-23 were interviewed. 14 young people attended workshops. 31 young people completed our survey.

**PEER RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFE SKILLS WOULD HELP YOUNG PEOPLE GET TO A SAFE PLACE. HAVING SOMEWHERE SAFE TO GO AND HAVING SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS OR A WORKER WAS VERY IMPORTANT.**

SIX PEER RESEARCHERS  
TOOK PART IN THE PROJECT.  
TWO TOLD US WHY THEY  
WANTED TO BE INVOLVED.

# AKLILU

- PEER RESEARCHER



“ I was 21 when the project started and I found out about it through New Horizon Youth Centre. I wanted to do it because it was about people running away and I could relate to it because I ran away when I was 12. I've been helped a lot of times and the fact that I could do this and give something back means a lot to me.

”



# DIONNE

- PEER RESEARCHER

“ I was interested in voluntary work, then when I found out the cause and what you were trying to achieve it made me want to help and be part of it. I was 21 when the research started and things are good for me now but in the past I've been homeless so I know what it's like. I think it's good to talk about your experiences because it helps you to move on.

”



# WHAT IS A SAFE PLACE?

Young people who had been sleeping rough told peer researchers that a safe place was a hostel or shelter; others said it was the home of a friend or relative. To the peer researchers, it was a place where young people could form positive relationships and plan for the future.

Young people are unlikely to feel they have reached a truly safe place until they have a good support network around them, but meeting their immediate need for shelter is a crucial step. This is particularly important for young people who are isolated, or whose support networks are abusive or chaotic.

**SOME YOUNG  
PEOPLE NEED  
ACCOMMODATION  
IN AN EMERGENCY  
TO HELP THEM  
REACH A SAFE  
PLACE**





**IN RELATION TO  
ACCOMMODATION  
FOR YOUNG RUNAWAYS,  
WE RECOMMEND:**

**LOCAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD WORK WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR TO ENSURE THAT THEY CAN OFFER YOUNG PEOPLE A RANGE OF APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATION. SOCIAL CARE DEPARTMENTS SHOULD ASSESS THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS 16-17 YEAR OLDS. OFSTED SHOULD INSPECT AND REPORT ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES' RESPONSES.**

# TYPES OF JOURNEY

## PEER RESEARCHERS IDENTIFIED TWO KINDS OF JOURNEY: CIRCULAR AND LINEAR.

Young people on different journeys need different kinds of help.

People on circular journeys may benefit from help to make home a safer and happier place; people on linear journeys need help to manage living independently.

In both cases, friends have a really important role to play, and can be a major factor in how risky or safe the journey is.

The journeys on the maps reflect some of the experiences and risks that young people described to the peer researchers.



Download the full report at:  
[www.railwaychildren.org.uk/safeplaces](http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/safeplaces)

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The logo for Railway Children features the word "children" in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. The letter "i" is replaced by a stylized green figure of a child. Above the word "children", the word "RAILWAY" is written in a smaller, uppercase sans-serif font. A horizontal green line runs beneath the word "children". Below this line, the tagline "Fighting for street children" is written in a smaller, uppercase sans-serif font.

**RAILWAY**  
**children**  
Fighting for street children