**Practice Notes: *Missing & Returned***

**MASH/EDT** is the Single Point of Contact for all reports of missing children and young people in the London Borough of Newham, reported through police Merlin notifications.

Opening a missing form on a child’s Azeus record creates a **missing flag**, closing the missing form by showing the child as ‘returned’ removes the missing flag. It is critical that missing flags are created and removed in a timely way to ensure that children receive the right response at the right time from the local authority and key partner agencies.

It is an expectation that every child who has gone missing from home or care will have an independent offer of a Return Home Interview (RHI) when they return. This is separate from the ‘safe and well’ visit that is undertaken by our colleagues in the police, and is in addition to any conversations that an allocated social worker (if they have one) might have with them. If a child declines an independent RHI then an allocated social worker or other trusted professional should speak to them to understand what prompted them to go missing, whether any harm has occurred and how to prevent future missing episodes.

1. If the child is **not known to Children’s Social Care**, **where the child has been reported missing *and* returned within a 24-hour period (or at the point of notification),** and having assessed that there is no requirement to progress to referral, MASH will open the missing form and complete it, showing the child as returned. By selecting ‘Y’ to the offer of an independent Return Home Interview (RHI) in the ‘returned’ section of the form, MASH will trigger the request for an RHI which will *automatically* be sent to the CYPS RHI Inbox in Azeus. MASH will create a Contact and will upload the police Merlin with the risk assessment to the child’s Azeus record.
2. If the child is **not known to Children’s Social Care**, **has been reported missing and has not returned within a 24-hour period**, MASH will open the missing form and progress from Contact to Referral in order to proceed to a Strategy Meeting. MASH will determine the appropriate pathway following the Strategy Meeting. MASH will be responsible for ensuring that the returned section of the missing form is completed and triggers the request for the RHI should the child return or be located whilst MASH are overseeing the social work activity.
3. If the child is **known to Children’s Social Care and has an allocated social worker** **and the police Merlin reports the child as missing *and* returned**, MASH will complete the missing and returned sections of the Missing form, and trigger the request for an RHI as per a) above. If the police Merlin does **not** confirm that the child has returned, MASH will open the missing form for the child, re-assign this to the allocated social worker and forward the police Merlin report to them. MASH will upload the police Merlin report to the child’s Azeus record. It is the responsibility of the allocated social work team to convene a Strategy Meeting if the child is missing for 24 hours and to develop a Trigger Plan to support an appropriate response when the child is located or returns. It is the responsibility of the allocated social worker to complete the returned section of the missing form when the child returns, triggering the request for an independent Return Home Interview as in a) above. It is critical that this is completed promptly to ensure that the child can be offered a timely independent Return Home Interview which will support our understanding of their reasons for going missing and how best to safeguard them and promote their welfare.
4. I**f a child is reported as returned but subsequently went missing again**, MASH will close the missing form (selecting ‘N’ to the offer of an RHI in the ‘returned’ section of the form) and will open a new missing form, following the pathways above.
5. For **Looked After children and young people who are placed in LBN by Other Local Authorities (OLAs)** **and reported missing from placement**, MASH/EDT will record the missing notification in an Azeus casenote (subject heading OLA Missing) and will upload the police Merlin report to the child’s Azeus record. MASH will forward the police Merlin report to the OLA MASH along with a standard letter of notification addressed to the OLA DCS which also requests the risk assessment, Trigger Plan and RHI report for the child for information and possible mapping purposes. It is for the OLA to take the appropriate steps to respond to the missing notification.
6. **For Looked After children and young people who are placed by LBN in other local authority areas**, it is the responsibility of the placement provider/foster carer to report the child as missing to the police and to notify LBN (allocated social worker/EDT where the child goes missing out of office hours). The missing episode will be recorded by MASH as per c) above. When a child Looked After by LBN has been placed in another local authority area, a notification process for absent and missing from placement should be in place between LBN, the placement provider and the host local authority. This should be addressed by the allocated social worker as part of the placement arrangements.
7. **If a child is reported missing from home or care out of office hours**, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) is responsible for opening the missing form. If a child is known to LBN Children’s Social Care and has an allocated social worker, EDT will re-assign the open missing form to the allocated social worker who will follow the process as per c) above. For Looked After Children, the expectation is that the placement provider will make the report to the police before notifying EDT of the missing episode and will provide EDT with the police CAD reference number. If the child is not known to LBN Children’s Social Care, EDT will follow the same process as MASH as per a) and b) above. If a child is reported to EDT as located or returned from a missing episode, EDT will complete the ‘returned’ section of the missing form, selecting ‘Y’ to the offer of an RHI as per a) above.
8. Every report of a missing LBN child will automatically trigger a notification to the **Complex Safeguarding Hub** so that the Missing Co-ordinator can track all episodes of children going missing from home or care and contribute to risk assessment and safety planning in respect of individual children, groups of children who are connected to each other and/or to individual or groups of adults who may be exploiting them, identifying any locations of concern where disruption activity would increase safety for children in the borough. The Missing Co-ordinator will have a primary liaison role with the RHI service and the police missing team to draw on intelligence which will support improved practice across the local authority and the partnership to reduce the risk of children going missing from home or care and to take decisive action to safeguard those children who do.

**The Return Home Interview**

In Newham, the Youth Service is responsible for the provision of an independent Return Home Interview service for all children who go missing from home or care. The RHI manager will track all notifications that a child has returned from a missing episode and will allocate an RHI worker to complete an RHI within 72 hours (3 working days) of a child returning home or to placement. A letter will be sent directly to the child by the RHI service with 24 hours of their return to let them know the details of the RHI worker who will be in contact with them.

If a child goes missing again during the period in which an RHI is due to take place, the RHI will be closed pending the child’s return when a new request for an RHI will be submitted as per the process above. When the RHI is undertaken, it should give consideration in line with the statutory guidance to the *pattern* of missing episodes immediately preceding it.

The RHI service will maintain a consistent RHI worker for each child and the worker will be identified on the person summary screen as an ‘involved person’.

The RHI worker completes a 3 step engagement process with every child:

1) Telephone call within 24 hours

2) Text message within 24 hours

3) Unannounced home/placement visit within 48 hours

If no response is received within 7 days of the letter being sent, the RHI offer will conclude with an outcome of ‘declined’. However, the child can approach the service for support at any time.

**Statutory Guidance**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care>