



**SHROPSHIRE ACADEMY & LEARNING TRUST**  
PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST | [WWW.SHROPSHIREALT.ORG.UK](http://WWW.SHROPSHIREALT.ORG.UK)

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for requesting further information regarding our Independent Missing Return Interview Service.

Our service is fully aligned to the DfE's Statutory guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care (2014), and The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 (Regulation 34 (4)(b)). We are also committed to working closely with multi-agency partners, to ensure that our service offer meets the needs and requirements of local protocols.

As you are aware, Section 13 of the Children Act (2004) requires Local Authorities and statutory partners to ensure that their duties are discharged with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of Children. Statutory guidance requires that when a child is found, and returned home after running away, they must be offered an Independent Return Interview within 72-hours of their return. Guidance states that this should be an in-depth interview that is best carried out by a non-statutory agent and someone who is not involved in caring for the child. Our Independent Interviewers provide objective and impartial support within this important information collecting process.

For Children Looked After, it is the responsibility of the Registered Children's Home Manager, Social Worker and Placing Authority to ensure that a Return Interview takes place. This Statutory obligation rests with the placing Social Worker, and the Registered Person is advised to escalate their concern if this obligation remains unfulfilled within the 72 – hour timescale required.

### **Service Overview**

Our Independent Missing Return Interview Service, offers a child-centered, high quality Return Interview with an experienced practitioner, with the purpose of identifying and reporting any harm a child may have suffered whilst absent from care, and to try to understand and address the 'push pull' factors surrounding the child's missing episode.

Using our comprehensive Missing Return Framework, an experienced interviewer will meet with the child referred to us, within an agreed timescale, at a location where the child feels emotionally safe.

The interviewer will help the child or young person to explore alternative options to running away, and provide sensitive guidance and support through an information-seeking interview. Interviewers will offer children and young people practical information and advice to help them to 'Keep Safe' if they continue to engage in patterns of absence and missing.



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We provide the essential requirements of an Independent Missing Return Interview, in line with the following aims to:

- 1. Identify children and young people that are at risk of significant harm**
- 2. Understand the risks that the child was exposed to during a missing episode**
- 3. Explore the 'Triggers' for the missing episode and the 'push/pull' feelings**
- 4. Reduce and prevent the risks of further episodes of running away**
- 5. Provide risk reduction and 'Stay Safe' advice if a child runs away again**
- 6. Identify risk patterns, and share relevant information with key professionals to Safeguard Children and Young People from further risk or harm DfE Statutory Guidance (DfE; 2014:18)**

Offering a collaborative, participative and strengths-based interview process, our interview framework has been developed using interactive techniques, devised through a 'what works' approach to engaging Children and Young People. We particularly recognise the sensitivity and importance surrounding the Missing Return Interview process, and our Return Interviews have been carefully developed with an unconditional focus on 'The Child's Voice' through our robustly developed **RELATIONSHIPS**© Model, designed to proactively engage children and young people.

### **Post Missing Intervention**

Additional or follow up time may also be agreed with the commissioner, in advance of the interview, to further support children with considering alternative strategies to running away. This will be achieved through the co-development of a child/teenage-friendly SMART Action Plan, entitled #BSTS (Better Safe Than Sorry). This practical intervention encourages Children and Young People to 'Stop, Think and Seek Support' rather than running away.

Return interviews are only effective with an appropriate follow up plan, and the offer of unconditional support from primary caregivers, to help a child or young person to begin to manage and understand the 'cause, effect and dangers' of them running away, and the risks that they may face whilst they are missing from home. #BSTS offers a planned, structured and proactive approach to meaningful, follow-up support, and tailored intervention.

Follow up Missing Return Interventions are available as part of a pre-agreed package. Interventions are planned from a multi-agency perspective, incorporating the views, wishes and feelings of children, families, practitioners, carers and foster parents, to support more positive outcomes.



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## Education Support

We fully recognise the important roles that schools and colleges can play in developing and maintaining relationships with children and young people that go missing. We are able to visit the child on the school/college site, in support of a more neutral base for the child or young person that has returned. Our interviewers can liaise directly with the school/college to make the most appropriate and timely arrangements, within the required 72-hour timeframe.

Return Interviews can also be undertaken outside of the school or college day, at an appropriate and emotionally safe venue, in support of planned educational activities and to protect the child's access to formal learning.

## Service Commissioning

The commissioning of our practice and child-centered service offers you:

- 1. A Return Interview Framework developed by health, education and social care professionals**
- 2. A 'What Works' approach to engagement**
- 3. Highly experienced interviewers**
- 4. A keen focus on building a rapport with Children and Young People**
- 5. An activity-based approach to actively engage Children and Young People**
- 6. Formative and dynamic assessment of the interview process to positively influence information gathering**
- 7. A theoretically informed interview process**
- 8. Robust follow-up on identified risks and actions that emerge**
- 9. Follow up interventions where commissioned**

A comprehensive Return Report will be provided directly to the service commissioner, ensuring that Ofsted CIF Standards; (2015:57 (d)) and the Children's Homes Regulations DfE; (2015:9.30) are adhered to.

## Information Sharing

An Information Sharing Agreement (ISA) and (GDPR) Privacy Notice will be signed as part of the pre-service commissioning arrangements, ensuring that all parties adhere to data protection, confidentiality and safeguarding responsibilities. Relevant information disclosed by a Child or Young Person will be shared with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, the Police, Children's Services and other identified professionals as per the ISA. The Seven Golden Rules for Information Sharing are considered throughout our practice. DfE (2015)



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## Practitioner Qualifications

The **Level 3 Award in 'Undertaking Independent Missing Return Interviews for Children'** has been carefully researched, written and developed by **Shropshire Academy and Learning Trust** in conjunction with NOCN, a leading provider of high quality qualifications, apprenticeships and assessments.

This qualification aims to provide further safeguards and proactive support to vulnerable and 'at risk' children, whilst validating and quality assuring practitioner competence for Independent Missing Return Interviewers.

The Award is a nationally accredited and Ofqual approved qualification, which is highly recommended to those with responsibility for missing and high risk children including; **Local Authorities, Police, PCSOs/PC's, Family Intervention Officer, Family Support Worker, Troubled Family Workers, Independent CSE Workers, Missing from Home Specialist, CSE Specialists, Teachers, Social Workers, Psychologists, Youth Workers, Children's Home Managers, Senior Care Practitioners, School Nurses, Mental Health and Well-Being Practitioners, Teaching Assistants, Pastoral Leads and Designated Safeguarding Officers.**

Our practitioner qualification has received Ofqual approval and our training schedule has now been launched. This rigorously developed qualification offers competency-based assurances to service commissioners, and evidence-based training to further support key professionals in their duty to protect, or further protect children from risk and harm. Level 3 qualification information can be found [HERE](#).

If you would like any further information on our training or associated services please do not hesitate to contact us.

Further service information can also be found on our website: [Independent Missing Return Interviews: Children Looked After](#)

Yours faithfully

**Sarah Morgan BA (Hons), PGDip, MCMI, NPQH**  
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