



Six Steps to Protecting Our Youth

Update Report

Introduction

In early 2017, reports about Washington, DC’s missing youth, particularly teenage girls of color, garnered local and national media attention and community concern. The initial focus was on a perceived increase in the number of youth reported missing. Data from the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) shows that the number of youth reported missing in DC is lower than in previous years.

Table 1: Juvenile Missing Persons by Year

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 YTD
Total Juvenile Missing Persons Reports Accepted	2610	2067	2223	2433	2249	885
Total Juvenile Missing Persons Reports Classified as “Critical”	1953	1645	1814	2053	1722	675
Number of Juvenile Reports that Remain Unsolved	0	0	1	0	3	28

Table 2: Juvenile Missing Persons by Year and Gender

	2016	2017 YTD
Total Juvenile Missing Persons Reports Accepted	2249	885
Male	1015 (45%)	384 (43%)
Female	1234 (55%)	501 (57%)

Table 3: CY2017 Juvenile Missing Persons by Month

	January 2017	February 2017	March 2017	April 2017	May 2017 (to date)
Total Juvenile Missing Persons Reports Accepted	197	190	180	212	106
Total Juvenile Missing Persons Reports Classified “Critical”	156	135	139	155	90
Number of Reports that Remain Unsolved	0	3	1	4	20

In late 2016, MPD’s Youth and Family Services Division began aggressively using social media to generate immediate public attention for all critical missing persons. By using social media to make the community aware of missing people, MPD has been able to generate significant public attention around the cases – often a key contributor to finding missing persons. The Tweets and Facebook posts have also brought much-needed attention to the fact that in cities across the country, hundreds of youth, particularly young people of color, are reported missing each year.

On March 24, 2017, Mayor Bowser announced six steps to protect and locate youth in DC who have been reported as missing, provide critical resources to better address the issues that cause young people to leave home, and support young people who may be considering leaving home¹:

1. Increase the Number of MPD Officers Assigned to Youth and Family Services Division
2. Expansion of the MPD Missing Persons Webpage and Social Media Messaging to Include Case Catalog with Broader Information
3. Establish the Missing Persons Evaluation and Reconnection Resources Collaborative
4. OVSJG and CFSA Lead Working Group
5. DMHHS and OVSJG Additional Grant Support for Non-Profits Addressing Runaway Youth
6. PSA Announcement to Support Public Education Addressing Missing Youth in DC

The Working Group, co-chaired by the directors of the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants Administration (OVSJG) and the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) met weekly from March 24, 2017 – May 4, 2017 to develop the findings and recommendations of this report.

Six Initiatives Update

Initiative 1: Increase Number of MPD Officers Assigned to Youth and Family Services Division Tasked with Locating Youth Reported Missing

The Metropolitan Police Department has been tasked with increasing officer staffing of the Youth and Family Services Division. The newly assigned officers will share the responsibility of locating youth who have been reported missing.

To date, the Metropolitan Police Department has a total of 15 detectives and officers dedicated to locating and serving missing youth and their families.

STATUS: Complete

Initiative 2: Expansion of the MPD Missing Persons Webpage and Social Media Messaging to Include Case Catalog with Broader Information

The previous MPD Missing Persons website included a tally of cases and very general information on each open case which was compiled into a Critical Missing flyer. The updated site provides easily navigable information about missing persons across the District, including resources for families and teens, easy to download missing alert flyers, missing person statistics, and helpful resources for families who need to report a loved one missing. The updated site is available at missing.dc.gov.

STATUS: Complete

¹ See <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/bowser-administration-announces-six-new-initiatives-address-missing-young-people-washington>

Initiative 3: Establish the Missing Persons Evaluation and Reconnection Resources Collaborative

The Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG), and identified community-based organizations assisted MPD with outlining a comprehensive evaluation of youth who are found or return home to assess the circumstances for their departure and to provide any additional resources/support/services necessary for the health and well-being of the child and the family. The proposed response and protocol will be reviewed by agency partners and budget teams to identify resources required for implementation.

STATUS: Draft Completed

Initiative 4: OVSJG and CFSA Lead Working Group

The Working Group was charged with:

- developing a protocol to ensure that every runaway youth, upon return, is assessed and the reason for leaving established;
- creating a process that will ensure support for families while a child is missing and services available when he/she returns; and
- identifying prevention efforts with families, schools, the Summer Youth Employment Program, and others.

The Working Group had the following members²:

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES	
AGENCY	NAME / ALTERNATE
Child and Family Services Agency	Brenda Donald (Co-Chair)
Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants	Michelle Garcia (Co-Chair)
Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services	Linda Harlee-Harper / (Adrian Richardson)
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education	Aurora Steinle
Metropolitan Police Department	Commander Dickerson / (Captain Caron)
Department of Behavioral Health	Denise Dunbar
Office of the Attorney General	Erin Cullen
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Greater Economic Opportunity	Faith Leach
Department of Human Services	Hilary Cairns
District of Columbia Public Schools	Kia Jones
Mayor's Office of Women's Policy and Initiatives	Kimberly Basset
Interagency Council on Homelessness	Kristy Greenwalt / (Alexander Smith)
Child and Family Services Agency	Nadya Richberg
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice	Nkenge Garrett
Office of the State Superintendent	Yair Inspektor / (Omotunde Sowole-West)
Court Social Services	Terri Odom / (Pauline Francis)

² Many community providers and constituents reached out to the co-chairs to participate in the working group. Balancing the competing interests of inclusiveness and group manageability, after the group had met three times, the co-chairs decided to have separate conversations with additional interested parties.

Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs	Sheila Alexander-Reid
Department of Employment Services	Thennie Freeman

COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS	
AGENCY	NAME / ALTERNATE
Fair Girls	Andrea Powell
DC NAACP	Carmel Henry / (Celina Stewart)
Sasha Bruce	Debby Shore
Missing & Exploited East of the River	Henderson Long
Children's Law Center	Judith Sandalow
Break the Cycle	Khalisa Jacobs / (Marta Beresin)
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children	Lanae Holmes
Latin American Youth Center	Lori Kaplan / (Patricia Bravo)
Covenant House	Madye Henson
Courtney's House	Phylcia Henry / (Tina Frundt)
Men Can Stop Rape	Rachel Friedman
Casa Ruby	Ruby Corado
Amara Legal Services	Stacie Reimer

Additional participants included: Arnita Fowler, The Lamont Dottin Foundation; Jennifer Porter and Melissa Baiyewu, Children's National Health System.

Working Group Activities

The Working Group began with presentations by government and community partners on current data, policies, protocols, services and supports available to youth and their families in situations where young people had been reported missing as well as those where no report has been made.

In addition, three listening sessions were held with 22 youth involved with Sasha Bruce, Latin American Youth Center, Fair Girls, Courtney's House, and CFSA to ensure that lived experiences of youth centered the recommendations of the Working Group.

The Working Group used a variety of methods to identify gaps in data collection and sharing, policies and protocols, and available services and supports. Finally, the Working Group developed the recommendations outlined below.

The Working Group's final recommendations fall into three categories:

1. Response Protocol
2. Support for Youth and Families
3. Prevention

Recommendation 1: Response Protocol

Attachment 1 is a step-by-step illustration of the response protocol process that the Working Group recommends being put in place for all critical missing youth (under 15 years old), those who are not classified as “critical” but are reported missing frequently, and any additional youth at the discretion of MPD and partner agencies. The Department of Human Services (DHS) will staff the process with a team from its Parent and Adolescent Support Services (PASS) program. PASS provides District families with youth and family assessments; intense case management (in-home and out-of-home) for approximately three to six months; linkage to various services such as therapy, mentoring, after-school programming and parenting resources; and twice monthly youth groups and parent support groups.

This program will be responsible for working with MPD on organizing a daily call to discuss new cases of missing youth and check in on ongoing missing youth cases. In addition, the program will conduct family outreach and engagement, ongoing support and linkage to other services and supports once a youth has been located, as well as data collection and tracking. If the missing youth is already affiliated with one of the agencies, for example CFSA or DYRS, that agency will take the lead in follow-up and family supportive services.

Recommendation 2: Safe Place Drop-In Center

Because most missing youth are found or return within one to three days, the Working Group recommends creation of a 24-hour safe place to conduct intake, screening/assessment, and connect youth and families to services. Youth who have been located or those voluntarily seeking services would be able to access this facility for a bed, shower, and food. While there, they would be assessed and the team would work to coordinate a family team meeting and link the youth and her/his family to necessary services and supports, including re-integration into school. While the overall goal is to reunify youth with their families, the underlying circumstances might require referral to an agency or program that meets the youth’s specific needs. For example, a youth running from an abusive family would be referred to CFSA; a youth who is involved in human trafficking would be linked with Fair Girls, Courtney’s House, or another human trafficking service provider.

Recommendation 3: Family Supportive Services While Youth Is Missing

Families need support during the time their child is missing and after their child has been located. Currently, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) offers telephonic support groups and peer outreach. The Working Group recommends that through the response protocol, the District continue to evaluate the data in order to determine what additional services are needed. It is envisioned that families would be connected to community-based organizations providing support services.

Recommendation 4: Connect Youth to Resources

To ensure that youth are able to access the services and resources available to them, the Working Group recommends that a 24-hour hotline with call, text, and chat capabilities and online and mobile application options be created to connect youth to resources. The recent public service awareness campaign has been promoting 1-800-RUNAWAY, the National Runaway Safeline. This hotline refers callers to local resources, but is not locally operated. The Working Group recommends that the District ensure that all eligible resources be included in 1-800-RUNAWAY, but also that a local resource be

developed. With supplemental funding, OVSJG could build on its proposed youth sexual assault hotline to create a comprehensive local resource to provide support, information, and referrals to youth.

Recommendation 5: Prevention and Training Programming and Safe After School Spaces

The Working Group discussed prevention broadly, addressing factors that may contribute to youth leaving home as well as those that reduce the likelihood of them leaving or being lured from home again. There are already numerous prevention focused programs that are geared towards youth (e.g. sexual violence, dating violence, bullying prevention and intervention) and towards adults (e.g. identifying and responding to human trafficking) conducted by District agencies and community-based organizations. However, there is not a clear picture of the full scope of these programs and access to them. The Working Group recommends mapping existing prevention and training efforts to identify gaps in programming and opportunities for enhancing existing efforts.

Additionally, the Working Group recommended identifying and increasing safe after school spaces for youth. These spaces could serve to reduce the risk of harm to youth, and also be capitalized on to provide prevention programming to youth.

STATUS: Recommendations submitted

Initiative 5: DMHHS and OVSJG Additional Grant Support for Non-Profits Addressing Runaway Youth

DMHHS and OVSJG have promoted grant funding to both advocacy and community-based organizations. The City Fund Safer, Stronger DC Community Opportunity Grant request for proposal was released on May 5 and will close on June 2. Awards are expected to be announced in mid-July.

STATUS: Grant awards will be announced mid-July

Initiative 6: PSA Announcement to Support Public Education Addressing Missing Youth in DC

The Mayor’s Office of Communications and the Office of Cable Television, Film, Music and Entertainment shot, recorded, and edited PSAs designed to educate young people and the public on preventing children and youth from leaving home. The PSA was shared via Mayor Bowser’s Facebook and Twitter accounts, and was placed in rotation in social media. In addition, a print ad was developed for placement in newspapers and in select Metro stations.

STATUS: Complete

Moving Forward

The Working Group also proposes that implementation of the recommendations and future work around prevention programming be referred to the Interagency Council on Homelessness Youth Subcommittee. This subcommittee includes many of the same participants as those who came together for this ad hoc Working Group and is best situated to continue to monitor the activities of this vulnerable population.