



Projects to support families and friends of missing persons at any stage

The National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC) has commenced the development of projects with national and state based counselling agencies and practitioners to assist them to more effectively identify missing persons and families of missing persons in their practice settings.

The project aims to assist agencies and practitioners to develop effective counselling supports for missing persons and for the families of missing persons. The project assists counsellors from a wide range of backgrounds to understand the missing persons phenomenon and its effects on families.

The first stage of these projects is the development of a pilot project with Relationships Australia (a national counselling service) in the areas serviced by the Queensland and ACT branches of Relationships Australia. Selected counsellors have been trained to provide counselling and support to families and friends of missing persons.

The pilot project commenced in January 2009 and will be reviewed in January 2010. Individuals and families of missing persons can receive counselling and support from

Relationships Australia offices in Qld, Northern NSW, ACT, and the Riverina and South Eastern area of NSW.

The project is based on the evidence that personal, relationship and family dynamics frequently change when someone is missing and can continue till after the person is located. A training needs analysis conducted with families and friends of missing persons emphasised the support they require when someone goes missing in the immediate, medium and long-term stages of someone's disappearance. Counselling and general relationship support is also of benefit to people who were missing and who want to work towards reconnecting and rebuilding with their previous relationships.

Relationships Australia was selected for the pilot (and first stage of the project) as

it is one of Australia's largest community based not-for profit organisations that provides support to people experiencing personal challenges and relationship difficulties.

The counselling support in Relationships Australia is confidential and personal to each unique situation and counsellors are highly qualified to provide both individual and family counselling regardless of circumstances.

Counselling and support provides individuals, couples, families and friends with methods they can apply to help them continue to exist in every day life, while at the same time providing them with the skills to understand how to cope with the experience they are living through.

At the end of the 12 months, the pilot project will be evaluated and information

obtained will assist the development of further services with other agencies and practitioners.

To obtain counselling support

make an appointment by contacting the relevant Relationships Australia service and advise the receptionist that you are a friend or family member of

a missing person, or are a missing person yourself. In most areas callers will be prioritised and seen within a short period of time.

Find out more about the Relationships Australia pilot project by visiting www.missingpersons.gov.au or contact Margi Cunningham by email at missing@afp.gov.au.

Relationships Australia contact numbers

Queensland and Northern NSW
1300 139 703

Canberra
1300 364 277 or 02 6122 7100

Riverina Wagga Wagga, Cootamundra, Leeton, Tumut
1300 364 277 or 02 6921 3597

South Eastern NSW Bega, Cooma, Goulburn
1300 364 277 or 02 6492 2155 (Bega) or
02 6122 7100 (Cooma and Goulburn)

If you are an agency or practitioner interested in training and education on counselling families of missing persons or wish to participate in projects related to supporting missing persons and families of missing persons contact Margi Cunningham by email on margi.cunningham@afp.gov.au or telephone (02) 92864551.

Homelessness Australia and the NMPCC join to ask and answer WHERE DO THEY GO?

For the first time, National Missing Persons Week will join with National Homeless Person's Week in 2009. Both the NMPCC and Homelessness Australia have come together to help make known the plight of those missing and homeless.

Homelessness Australia is the national peak body advocating for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and for those who provide services to them. Its mission is *to create a framework for ending homelessness.*

Every night in Australia, around 105,000 people are homeless. Contrary to popular perception, close to half of all people experiencing homelessness in Australia are under 25, and nearly a quarter are younger than 18. Almost as many women as men are homeless.

Similar to the reasons that people may go missing, the causes of homelessness can include poverty, unemployment

and the shortage of affordable housing. The single largest cause of homelessness is domestic violence, however it can also be triggered by family breakdown, mental illness, sexual assault, addiction, financial difficulty and gambling.

Homelessness creates instability and social isolation, leaving people vulnerable to chronic unemployment and ill health, and with limited opportunities to participate in the social and economic life of their community.

In addition, not all are lucky enough to find a safe place to sleep. Every day, half the people who request immediate accommodation from overstretched

homelessness services are turned away.

Homelessness Australia and the NMPCC have created a strong partnership to highlight the link between missing persons and homelessness. Throughout the year, both organisations will advocate the message through publications with events culminating in the week of Sunday 2 to Saturday 8 August which will mark an official launch.



Above: Aileen Solowiej

For more information on homelessness and Homelessness Australia, visit www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au or contact Aileen Solowiej at media@homelessnessaustralia.org.au or phone 02 6247 7744.

Development of online forums

The NMPCC is in the process of developing secure online forums for families and friends of missing persons, professionals and researchers/academics, police and the Global Missing Children's Network.



The forums will provide these groups with the opportunity to communicate with each other, share ideas and have access to information not available to the general public.

Forums will be password protected and may even include technology such as blogging capabilities.

The first phase of development will involve focus group testing and scoping

workshops to ascertain how the forums will be used and what technology is required to best support audience needs.

If you would like to participate in the scoping workshops or for further information, email missingpersons@afp.gov.au.

Neighbours star goes missing on screen

Matthew Werkmeister, otherwise known as Zeke from Neighbours, was last year's missing persons youth ambassador for National Youth Week (NYW) and the Video Hits live concert.

As a follow on, the AFP contacted Neighbours mid-2008 to suggest a 'missing' story line. It seems that the suggestion did not fall on deaf ears as Matthew's character Zeke, has recently gone missing on screen in 2009.

Zeke was reported missing to police following a rafting accident and his family and friends feared for the worst.

During the stage of not knowing, his family and friends went from thinking he had run away, to being presumed dead to hoping that he

would soon return – the emotions and thoughts that families and friends of missing people may experience.

AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty wrote a letter of thanks to Neighbours Executive Producers commending the team on a job well done in illustrating to a wide

audience, the impact of missing persons both on the community and the families and friends who are left behind.

National Youth Week 2009

The NMPCC aims to raise awareness of issues surrounding young people and missing persons through sponsorship of National Youth Week (NYW) 2009 for the second year running.



Above: Margot interviewed by Video Hits hosts Fuzzy and Hayden about missing persons



Above: Margot and Matthew sign merchandise

National Youth Week (NYW) is Australia's largest celebration for young people. This year the event was held from 28 March to 5 April embracing the theme 'Make a move'.

The week was officially launched on Saturday 28 March with a Video Hits

concert live from Reddcliff Place, a prime location in Brisbane city. AFP attended the launch which started a week of events around Australia aimed at celebrating the talents of young Australians specifically aged between 12 - 25 years.

From 9am to 11am Redacliff Place transformed filling the outdoor venue with hundreds of young people who came along to enjoy a morning of free live entertainment with acts such as Evermore, Bob Evans and Brisbane's local band The Butterfly Effect. As well as enjoying live bands, there was also an opportunity for people to obtain information on a range of youth related issues.

The AFP NMPCC 'missing?' booth was a hit with the crowd. NMPCC successfully secured the attendance of one of Neighbours favourite personalities Matthew Werkmeister. Matthew was very keen to support the AFP at NYW for the second

year. He volunteered his time and spent the duration of the event engaging with the crowd and promoting key missing persons messages such as talk b4u walk. Matthew also signed merchandise from the 'AFP missing?' booth which was flooded by hundreds of fans.

This year the AFP youth Ambassador was Margot Robbie, also a Neighbours star. Margot, who plays Donna Freeman on Neighbours, was interviewed about missing persons issues during the show by Video Hits hosts Hayden and Fuzzy.

During the interview, Margot spoke about the recent storyline from Neighbours which involved Matthew's character 'Zeke' going missing, noting how this storyline highlighted the trauma associated with not knowing what has happened - particularly for families and friends who are left behind.

The positive crowd response to both Neighbours personalities led to the AFP missing booth receiving the highest patronage across the event. In two hours the team distributed over 2,000 'missing?' singlets, along with wristbands, tattoos, and

stress-phones branded with the 'talk b4u walk' message.

In addition to attending the event the NMPCC is also sponsoring RockIT, one of five talent competitions open for entry to youth as part of NYW. Young people are encouraged

to enter by recording an original music piece incorporating the theme of 'Always searching', reflecting the impacts of missing persons on families and friends. Winners of the competition will be announced on 23 June.

The aim of NYW is to

encourage young people to think about their future and get involved in a project that is of interest to them.

During NYW a range of possibilities on offer include community projects, sporting events, festivals and talent competitions.

For more information visit www.missingpersons.gov.au or www.youthweek.com.au

NMPCC working with Reconnect



The NMPCC has collaborated with Reconnect, a Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs program to develop a referral network for young people and missing persons issues.

The primary aim of the Reconnect program is to provide assistance to disadvantaged young people as well as educate homeless young people so they remain in contact with their families.

The NMPCC developed a series of fact sheets to address the ongoing support of young people at risk of going missing, and to help

bridge the gap between police, Reconnect services and other service providers.

Specific fact sheets relevant for young people, police and other agencies include:

- Are you a young person at risk of going missing?
- Are you working with a young person at risk of going missing?

Reconnect provides community-based early intervention services focusing on family reconciliation as well as aiding young people to:

- develop more stable living situations
- increase effectiveness in managing conflict
- improve communications with family

- maintain attendance at school and/or employment.

Further information about Reconnect and young people at risk of going missing can be found at www.missingpersons.gov.au.

Global Missing Children's Network

In November 2008, the NMPCC attended the Global Missing Children's Network (GMCN) in Washington, USA. Now, through the *Missing* e-bulletin, the NMPCC is launching a global network section by featuring and highlighting the GMCN and its member countries.

The International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC) launched the GMCN in August 1998. Belgium, Brazil and Canada were the first countries to join. ICMEC provided them access to a free website and the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) multi-lingual management database to help display photos of missing children. It was hoped that someone would recognise and

assist in the return of a missing child in these countries.

This GMCN enables law enforcement to quickly and easily create and disseminate posters using the information they enter into the missing children management database. There are more than 4,100 missing children featured through this Network today.

The GMCN expanded quickly and today has

17 member countries. Australia joined in 2000, with the NMPCC becoming an active member and taking the responsibility of uploading photos of Australian missing children into the management database.

For more information visit www.icmec.org or www.missingkids.com.

In 1997 NCMEC launched its first website displaying images of missing children in the United States. The focus was to reach as many people as possible so they could assist in finding missing children around the United States. With the help of the public,

NCMEC's recovery rate for missing children went from 62% in 1990 to 96% today. This has been a direct result of people viewing photos and recognising some of the missing children.

Photographs are one of the most effective tools in recovering missing

children. Technology aids law-enforcement during the most critical time in the search for a missing child. Distributing a child's picture rapidly can be the difference between a fast recovery and a prolonged search.

UK Missing Persons Bureau

The United Kingdom Missing Persons Bureau (MPB) has recently developed a relationship with NMPCC along with a host of other global network agencies. The aim of this partnership is for agencies to share ideas, strategies and initiatives that respond to the similarities in the missing persons sector.

The MPB was launched in April 2008 within the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) and is positioned alongside key operational, training and technology services within the NPIA which can offer UK police forces a full range of strategic and tactical support.

As well as serving all UK police forces, the MPB serves all international and overseas police agencies, however

similar to the NMPCC, it does not have responsibility for conducting investigations. It works with the police and related organisations to improve the services provided to missing persons' investigations and to increase the effectiveness of the police response. The MPB acts as the centre for the exchange of information connected with the search for missing

persons nationally and internationally.

The MPB also coordinates its work with other related agencies such as charities and other non-profit organisations that carry out important work relating to the missing persons field.

For more information visit www.npia.police.uk/missingpersons



Above: UK Missing Persons Bureau team

International Missing Children's Day: 25 May

International Missing Children's Day is 25 May - a day where people around the world commemorate the missing children who have found their way home, remember those who have been victims of crime, and continue efforts to find those who are still missing.

The main purpose of International Missing Children's Day is to encourage everyone to think about children who remain missing and to spread a message of hope.

This year, the AFP, along with ICMEC, have proactively reached out to the members of the GMCN to spread the message of missing children. In a

collaborative approach, the same message will be heard in many countries around the world.

This is the first time that the AFP and the NMPCC have participated in this event. To mark International Missing Children's Day 2009, the AFP will be producing and distributing a community service announcement and a

media release to all participating countries. Countries will also release balloons of missing children in front of national attractions such as the Acropolis to signify the day.

Along with ICMEC the AFP is coordinating the global campaign.

For more information contact missingpersons@afp.gov.au

25 May marks the anniversary of when six year old Etan Patz disappeared from a New York street corner on his way to school in 1979. Etan's story received national coverage as his father, a photographer, circulated black and white pictures of his missing son to media outlets.

Etan's father's efforts to inform the public led to a nationwide recognition of the need for new initiatives and a commitment to reunite missing children with their families. Nearly thirty years have passed and the search for Etan continues.

What's new?

Daniel Morcombe \$1 million reward

On 1 December 2008, the reward for information surrounding the disappearance of teenager Daniel Morcombe in Queensland was increased to \$1million. The private sponsored award is only

available for 6 months and police urge anyone with information to come forward before the reward expires on the 31 May 2009. After this time the government award of \$250,000 will remain available.

Contact Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000 or www.qld.crimestoppers.com.au

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army Family Search Service in NSW has launched a new website. The Salvation Army Family Search Service is dedicated

to reuniting families, and the new website helps families begin their search for relatives with information, ideas and support.

For more information visit <http://salvos.org.au/familysearch>

New research: *Living in Limbo* (UK Missing

Missing People is the UK's only charity that works with young runaways, missing and unidentified people, their families and others who care for them.

documenting the experience of, and impacts on families of missing people.

An action plan for young runaways has also been released by the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families.

In December 2008 Missing People published *Living in Limbo* - the first research of its kind in the UK

The findings highlight the devastating impact that going missing can have on left behind family members, including emotional, social, financial, legal and practical difficulties.

Living in Limbo is available to download from www.missingpeople.org.uk/limbo

The *Young Runaways Action Plan* is available to download from <http://www.safeatlast.org.uk/actionplan.htm>