UK MISSING PERSONS BUREAU

Has someone you know gone missing?

How publicity can help

Factsheet 7

After you have reported someone missing, the police may seek your consent for publicity. Raising awareness of your missing friend or family member may help to find them. You can also raise awareness yourself through posters and social networking (for example Facebook), but this should be done in co-ordination with the police.

In most cases, raising awareness that your friend or family member is missing will assist the search. In rare cases, police may advise against publicity and if so, they will tell you the reasons for doing this.

If the police do advise using the media to help locate your missing loved one, they may ask for photographs (preferably recent) of the missing person which could be released to the media with your permission. Carefully consider any requests they make for permission to use details, photos or videos of the missing person. If the police advise releasing material, it will usually be because this is a good way to find people. If you can't find a recent photo, make sure that you advise the police of the year that the photo was taken and what physical differences there are in the person's current appearance, if any.

It will also be helpful for you to provide a full physical description of the missing person, including the clothes and jewellery they were wearing (if known). Details of any scars, tattoos, birth marks or accents are also important to mention.

Be sure to co-ordinate with the police

Always consult with the police officer in charge of the case before launching any of your own publicity activity. The police have communications professionals who will be able to help co-ordinate publicity and offer you practical advice. This will help to make sure that any activity you carry out has the greatest chance of success and fits in with what the police are doing.

You should also discuss what information about the missing person should and should not be given to the media with the police officer investigating the case, as this may affect the investigation.

Types of publicity

Generally, a number of steps can be taken to obtain publicity and these include:

Posters

Creating and putting up a Missing Person poster can be an effective way to raise awareness locally that your loved one is missing. Posters can be put up:

- In the area they went missing
- Near their home address
- Near their work or school
- Places that the missing person is known to visit, for example, their gym
- Anywhere else you think would be appropriate. For example, it may help to put posters up in local churches, hospitals, libraries, shopping centres and any other likely locations where the missing person may have gone or may have been seen.

The poster should include a photograph, a physical description of the missing person – especially any unusual or distinct features such as tattoos or braces – when and where they went missing, and anything else which

may assist members of the public to recognise them.

When creating a poster, please do not include your personal contact details, as this could put you in a vulnerable situation. Instead, include the relevant telephone number for the investigating police force, which you can ask the officer in charge of the investigation for. Alternatively, you can use the charity Missing People's phone number which people can call to report sightings of a missing person: 116 000.

Internet publicity and social networking

A website or social networking page can be created which includes the details of the missing person, to raise awareness that they are missing and to collect information. These sites allow information to be spread very quickly, particularly if that person may be at high risk. You may be able to create a site yourself, or ask a friend or family member to help you. Otherwise, a charity such as Missing People can provide advice on how to do this.

Charity websites which display details of people who are missing may also be able to add the details of your missing loved one to their website. The main UK charity which includes details of missing adults and children on their website, is Missing People.

If the person who is missing is a child, the police may be able to get their details added to the UK Missing Kids website. This means that the case will be publicised on the internet and you will also be able to download and print out posters from the website. If you would like the details of a missing child to be featured on the Missing Kids website, you should speak to the officer dealing with the investigation and advise them that you would like to have details of your child featured on the website. They will ask you to sign a consent form, which will also need to be countersigned by the police officer investigating the case and returned to the relevant police force, who will then add details to the site. The charity Missing People can also assist the police with getting the details of a missing child featured on this website: www.missingkids.co.uk

Engagement with local media

All police forces have a press office and the officer in charge of the missing person investigation will be able to work with them, where appropriate, to issue press releases and organise media events. For example, the police may be able to engage with local papers, radio and TV, provide them with photos and descriptions of the missing person and in some cases, organise media interviews with you or other family members.

Be aware that if the media do become interested in the case, they may approach other people for information about the missing person. They may also run the story in a different way to what you expect.

If you feel that you cannot handle the media yourself, ask a trusted family member or friend to act as a spokesperson. You should also bear in mind that the media sometimes have more news than they can use, so although you may have been interviewed or may have provided information and photographs for a news story, this does not guarantee that they will run the story.

Using the media to appeal for information can be very effective, but this should always be done in co-ordination with the police investigation.

Help with publicity from other organisations

Some advice and assistance with publicity may also be obtained from charitable organisations such as Missing People and Forever Searching, which provide advice and support for families of missing persons. You should ensure that you discuss this with the police before you request publicity via a charitable organisation and ensure that only the details which the police are happy to be shared with the public are included in publicity material.

Helpful organisations include:

Missing People

Missing People provide support and services for family and friends of missing persons. The charity has a website listing details of both adults and children who have been reported missing in the UK and is the largest charity working in this area.

Telephone:	**116 000**
Email:	**info@missingpeople.org.uk**
Website:	**www.missingpeople.org.uk**

Missing-You.net

Missing-You.net is a free and instant online messaging service which allows users to contact missing persons, old friends and distant relatives.

Website: **www.missing-you.net**

Missing Abroad

Missing Abroad provides advice and support for the families of children or adults missing overseas. The charity may also be able to provide practical assistance and help to individuals missing and stranded abroad. Missing Abroad is run by the Lucie Blackman trust.

Telephone: **0207 047 5060**

Email: **operations@missingabroad.org**

Website: **www.missingabroad.org**

Details of more charities and organisations that can help with publicity are available on Factsheet 4 in this series, *Organisations that provide help and support*, which can be downloaded from www.missingpersons.police.uk

What to do when the missing person is located or returns

If your friend or relative returns after you have reported them missing to the police, you must contact the police to let them know. The police can then check that they are safe and well, close the case and remove their details from the police websites and poster displays. If information has been released to the media, the police will advise them that personal details should no longer be used or archived.

Do not forget to let other friends or volunteers who have helped with the search know that the missing person has been located. Also ensure that any charities you have contacted are made aware so that they can remove details from their websites.

For additional copies, to enquire about the content of this document or to request the information in an alternative format, please contact the UK Missing Persons Bureau on **0845 000 5481** or email: **missingpersonsbureau@nca.x.gsi.gov.uk**

The information in this guide is not definitive and should be utilised in conjunction with police guidance and independent legal advice.

For more information, including other factsheets, please visit: **www.missingpersons.police.uk**