Analysis of Children Missing From Care Reported to NCMEC 2013–2022

National Center for Missing
& Exploited Children

In partnership with
Georgetown University McCourt
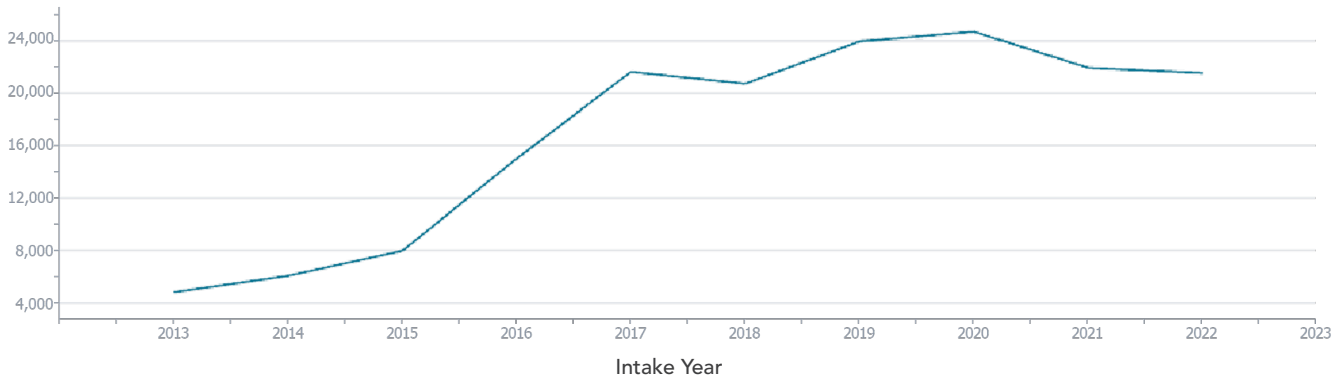School of Public Policy's Center
for Juvenile Justice Reform

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
MISSING &
EXPLOITED
CHILDREN®

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In September 2014, the "Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act" ("Act") was enacted, requiring state social service agencies to report any child under their care who goes missing or is abducted to law enforcement and to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC).[1] States were given two years from the date the Act was passed to comply. This report includes an analysis of children who went missing while in state care and were reported missing to NCMEC between 2013 and 2022.

It is important to note that if a child goes missing more than once and is reported to NCMEC, each instance is counted. Furthermore, despite legislative mandates, NCMEC does not receive all reports of missing children, whether they are missing from care or otherwise. For example, the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) reveals a significantly higher number of reports of missing children annually (see: fbi.gov/file-repository/2022-ncic-missing-person-and-unidentified-person-statistics.pdf/view) than what NCMEC typically receives for reports (see: MissingKids.org/ourwork/impact). In addition, Tribal Nations are not mandated by law to report children missing from care to NCMEC, so we know that we do not get all reports of these missing children. Without all reports, we cannot provide assistance or accurately assess the actual number of this missing child population.

Reports of Missing Children Made To NCMEC

Intake Year

2014 - Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act was signed into law on September 29, 2014.
2016 - State agencies required to report all children missing from care to law enforcement and NCMEC beginning on September 29, 2016.
2017 - A 352% increase from 2013 to 2017.
2020 - The highest number of reports of missing children made to NCMEC, resulting in a 416% increase from 2013 to 2020.
2022 - Reports taper off: 13% decrease from 2020 to 2022.

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1   42 U.S.C. § 671 (a)(35)

Executive Summary

When we analyze data about missing and exploited children, we recognize the unique circumstances that impact children missing from care. Because of this, NCMEC seeks to share the data and trends that we have observed from this population of children, but we also want to add context to the data. This includes lending youth voices, addressing the intersecting issues that exist within the child welfare systems affecting our children, and offering support for child-serving professionals.

NCMEC partnered with the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy's Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) for additional insights and recommendations for the child welfare field to help keep children and youth safe and accounted for. The CJJR supports and educates leaders across systems of care to advance a balanced, multi-system approach to improving outcomes for, and promoting the positive development of, youth at risk of juvenile justice involvement.

The quotes that are included in this publication are those of youth who participated in listening sessions held by CJJR as part of the implementation of their Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) in selected communities throughout the United States. These youth and young adults were selected by case workers based on their willingness to be open about their experiences with child welfare and juvenile justice agencies to help shape practice in those communities and nationwide.

Some of the noteworthy insights from this report include:

- Most children went missing only once, while 40% went missing multiple times.

- The majority of children observed in this report were Endangered Runaways who had been recovered at the time of this analysis.

- Black and White children between the ages of 14 and 17 years old together represent most reports.

- Most children returned to their residence or placement, whether on their own or due to a police investigation.

- Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the children in this report were identified as having at least one of the 11 endangerments mentioned in this report.

- The top three endangerments across both male and female children included having a previous missing incident, drug or alcohol use, or having a mental health diagnosis.

- Children who travel farther while missing tended to have longer missing durations.

- Children were likely recovered in the same state they went missing from, though females were slightly more likely to travel farther than males.

- Most children missing from care were recovered just over a month after they went missing.

- Hispanic children had longer missing durations compared to other racial or ethnic groups, and Pacific Islander children had the shortest missing durations.
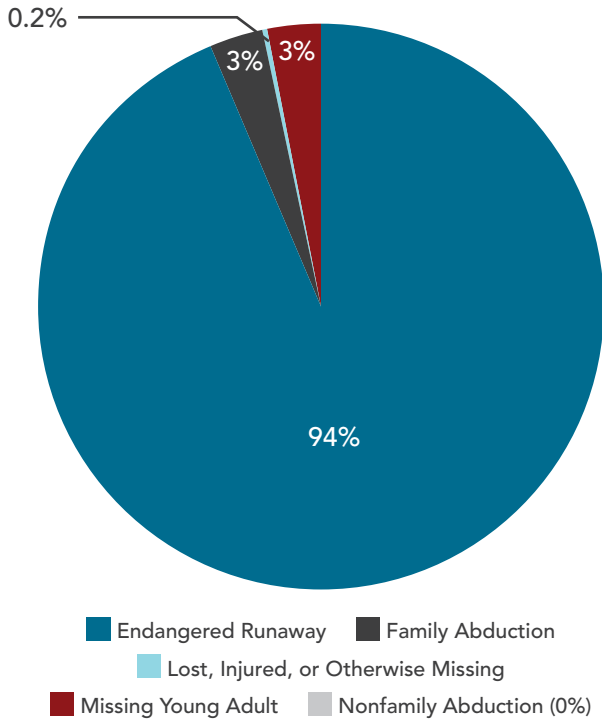
Context for these findings is illustrated through national research on child welfare-involved youth to shed light on issues that contribute to and result from children going missing from care. Social factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual and gender identification are highlighted, as are their respective ties to various endangerments.

Given the large number of NCMEC reports that children missing from care represent, it is important to understand the factors that affect these vulnerable children. Knowing more about the experiences of these children, and the factors that affect their lives, can hopefully improve the response of law enforcement and others working to bring them back safely.
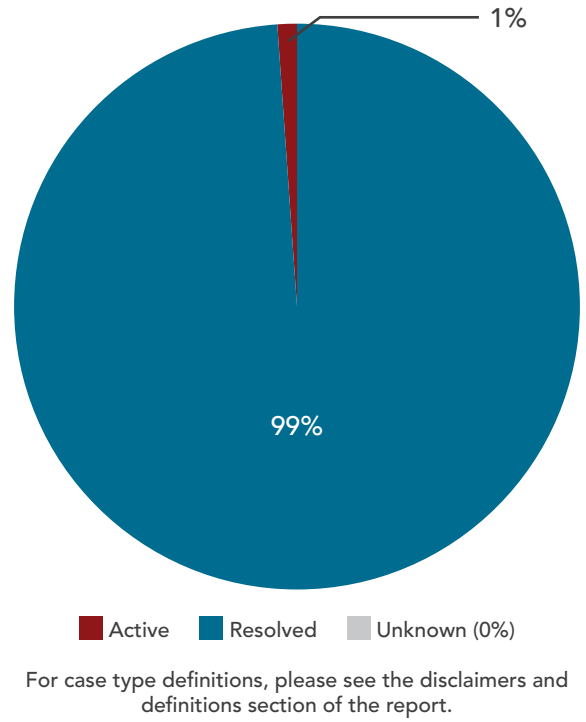
Initial Findings

Our research found that of the reports made of children missing from care, 94% of children were Endangered Runaways. The case status as of the writing of this document shows that 99% of the reports have been resolved. Sixty-six percent (66%) of children missing from care went missing from their foster or group homes.

Case Types of Children Reported Missing

0.2% — 3% 3%

94%

■ Endangered Runaway   ■ Family Abduction

■ Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing

■ Missing Young Adult   ■ Nonfamily Abduction (0%)

Case Status of Children Reported Missing

1%

99%

■ Active   ■ Resolved   ■ Unknown (0%)

For case type definitions, please see the disclaimers and definitions section of the report.

Missing Location

Location	Percent
DCFS/Foster/Group Home	65%
Home	13%
Other/Unknown	7%
School/Daycare	6%
Office/Retail/Recreation	5%
	1%
Medical Facility	1%
Transportation Facility/Vehicle	1%
Hotel/Motel	1%
Police Station	0%

Child's Demographic Information

Child's Race/Ethnicity

Child's Race/Ethnicity and Gender Percentage
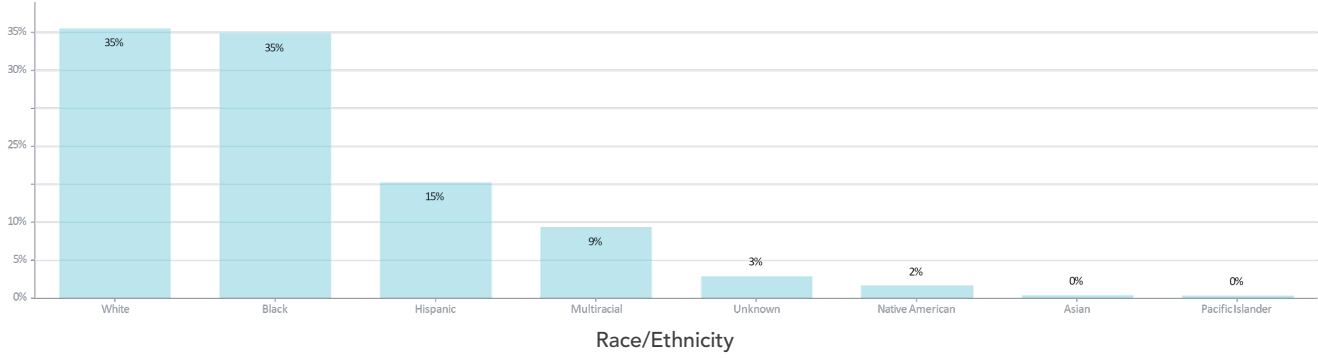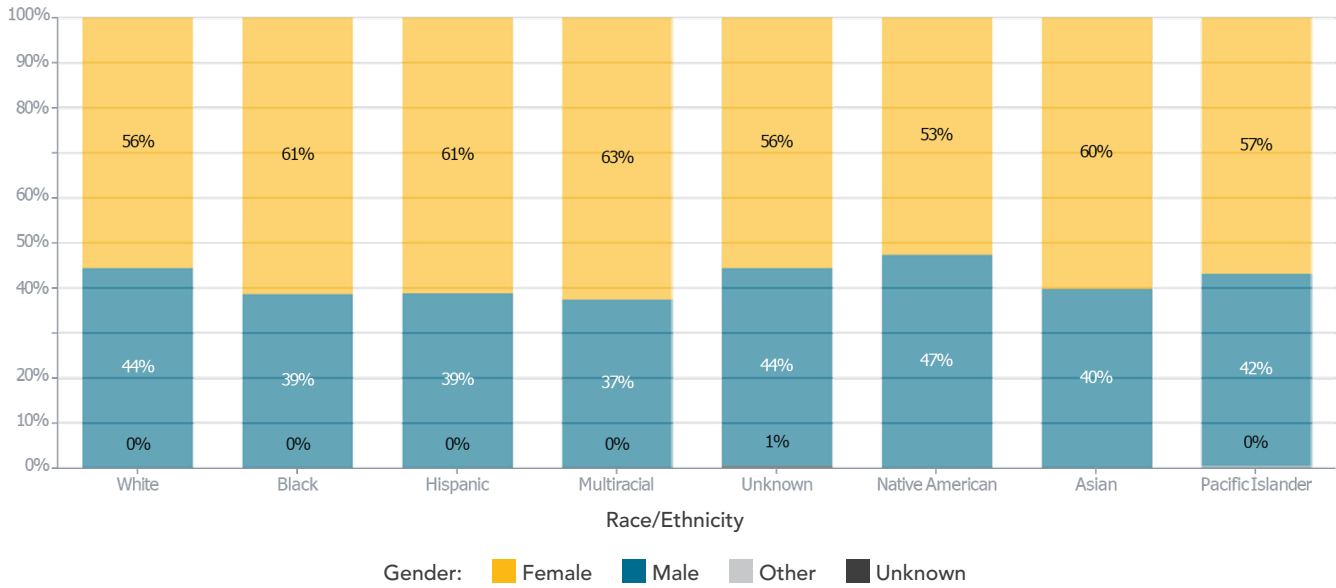

Gender: Female Male Other Unknown

Females represented 59% of reports of children missing from care and males represented 41%. Female children were more frequently reported missing regardless of the child's race or ethnicity, though Native American children had a slightly higher proportion of males reported missing from care when compared to the other racial or ethnic groups. Both female and male children missing from care were typically between the ages of 14 and 17 (85%) with a mean missing age of 15.

Georgetown Center for Juvenile Justice Reform

Context through Research

Despite Black youth representing only 14% of the general youth population, they constituted 20% of children entering the foster care system in 2020. Native American youth are also overrepresented in foster care as they compose 2% of children in the system but only 1% of the total child population (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022). Between 2010 and 2020, trends in disproportionality remained roughly the same for Asian, Hispanic, and White youth – all of whom are underrepresented in foster care when examined nationally. Although disproportionality decreased for Black youth during this time, their Disproportionality Index (DI) remains high at 1.65 (note: 1.0 signifies no disproportionality whereas numbers above 1.0 indicate overrepresentation and values below 1.0 reflect underrepresentation). Likewise, overrepresentation among Native American youth has grown exponentially worse over the last decade, as their DI is 2.78 (Puzzanchera, Taylor, Kang, & Smith, 2022). Black youth in particular are prone to spending more time in foster care and are less likely to undergo reunification with their families or to be adopted (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021; Children's Bureau, 2021).

Involvement in the child welfare system can correspond with a number of adverse outcomes

particularly among certain populations. One of those outcomes is system "crossover," or the phenomenon in which a young person involved with the child welfare system concurrently encounters the juvenile justice system; the reverse pathway is also possible, though less common (Herz et al., 2019). Case in point: Black youth are disproportionately represented in child welfare and juvenile justice system populations, respectively. This disparity grows only more egregious in the crossover or dual system population where Black youth appear up to 84% more than their rate in the child welfare-only population, and up to 43% more in comparison to the juvenile justice-only population (Herz, et al., 2019; Herz, et al., 2021). Girls present a similar example. Although they account for less than 30% of youth arrests, females compose between one-third and one-half of the dual system population (Erhmann et al., 2019; Herz et al., 2019; Herz et al., 2021). When the intersection of race and gender is considered, that disparity widens. For instance, Black girls in Los Angeles were identified as being the most overrepresented group among the dual system population in the city (Herz et al., 2021). Similarly, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, gender non-conforming, or transgender appear disproportionately in the crossover population as well (Herz et al., 2019; Irvine & Canfield, 2017).

"Adultification," or the misidentification and interpretation of children's attributes and behaviors based on racial and cultural stereotypes, is thought to be a prominent contributing factor to crossover among Black youth. For example, non-Black adults are prone to view Black children and youth as older than their peers of the same age (Goff et al., 2014). This, in turn, has implications for how culpable White adults believe Black children to be for their behaviors (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, n.d.).

In Their Own Words

❝ Ninety-five percent (95%) of any charges brought against me were for battery for fighting in a placement. I didn't become a criminal until three-and-a-half years after being treated like a criminal."

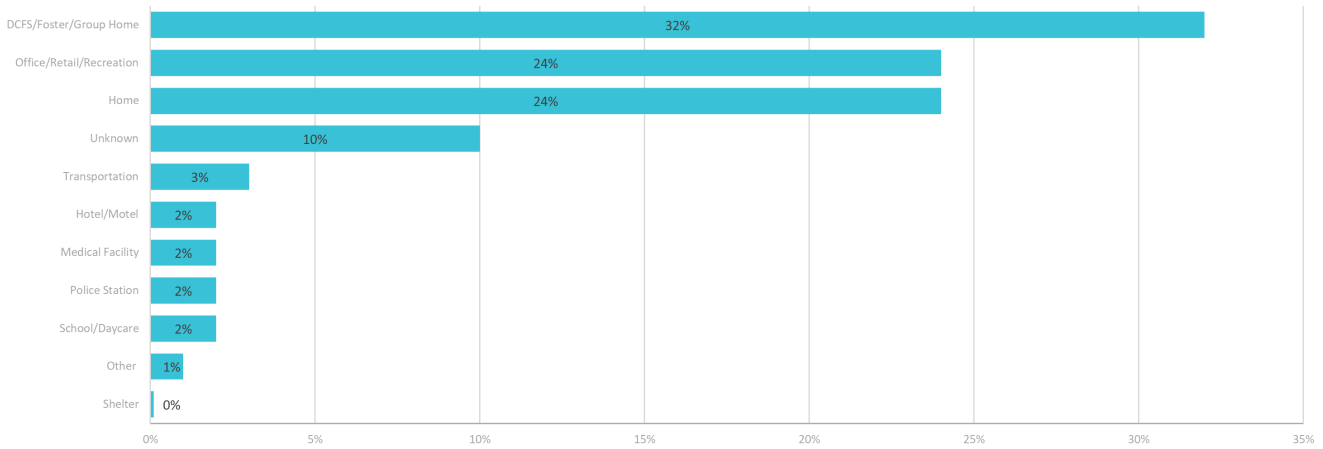❝ Put y'all feet in our shoes and feel how we're feeling."

Tips for the Field from CJJR

- Collect data on local child welfare-related decision points and associated demographic trends. In particular, examine the use of home removals for children of color to understand what additional supports can be offered to families in an effort to prevent excessive and unnecessary placement in out-of-home care.

- Improve recruitment of foster families from diverse backgrounds, such as those identifying with LGBTQ/GNCT, Black, Hispanic, or Tribal communities.

- Expand law enforcement training on implicit bias, cultural responsivity, and understanding adolescent development. Establish regular opportunities for police to engage with youth and communities of color meaningfully and positively.
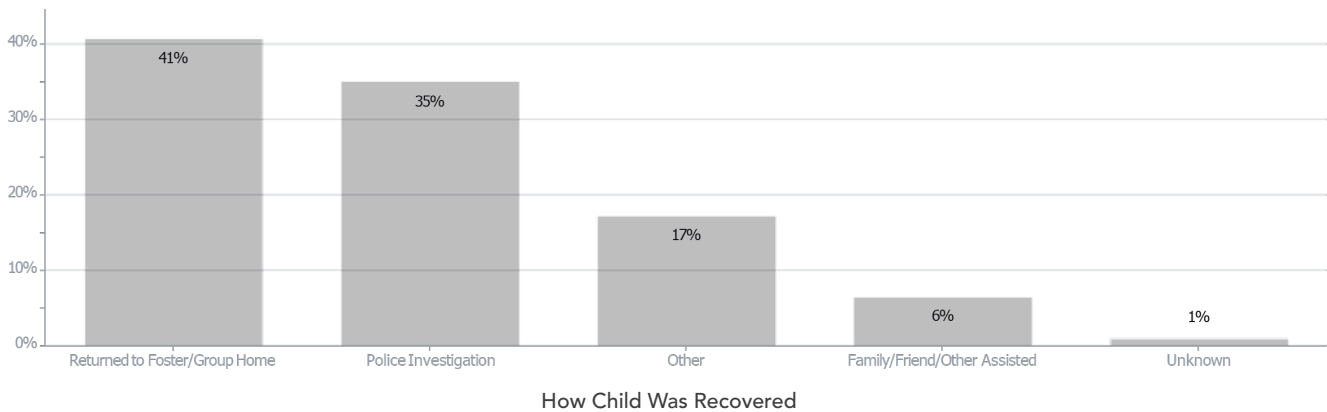
Recovery Information

Recovery Location

Location	Percentage
DCFS/Foster/Group Home	32%
Office/Retail/Recreation	24%
Home	24%
Unknown	10%
Transportation	3%
Hotel/Motel	2%
Medical Facility	2%
Police Station	2%
School/Daycare	2%
Other	1%
Shelter	0%

"Foster home" is defined as the child's placement location by social services whereas "home" could be any residence belonging to the child's biological parents, other family, or any other non-related person.

How Was the Child Recovered?

How Child Was Recovered	Percentage
Returned to Foster/Group Home	41%
Police Investigation	35%
Other	17%
Family/Friend/Other Assisted	6%
Unknown	1%

How Child Was Recovered

Other makes up the following: NCMEC Resources, Posters, Social Media, Social Work Investigation, TV Programs, and Other.

Females voluntarily returned to their foster or group home (42%) more often compared to males (38%), who were just as likely to be recovered due to the police investigation (39%). White and Native American children (both 41%) were more often recovered due to the police investigation, while the remaining children belonging to other racial or ethnic groups more often voluntarily returned to their foster or group home.

Recovered Same State

1%
5%
94%

■ Same State ■ Different State ■ Unknown

Recovered Same City

3%
38%
59%

■ Same City ■ Different City ■ Unknown

Males and females were equally likely to be recovered in the same state from which they went missing. Females, though, were slightly more likely to travel farther within their missing state. Forty percent (40%) of females were recovered in a different city versus 35% of males. Children had a mean distance of 69 miles between their missing and recovery locations, while females had a slightly higher mean distance of 71 miles and males 67 miles.

Multiple Missing Incidents

The number of children missing from care in this report includes each missing incident of every child who was reported missing to NCMEC between 2013 and 2022. The majority of missing children had a single missing incident during this period, but 40% had multiple missing incidents. The highest number of missing incidents an individual child had was 50.

Overall, children missing from care had on average four separate missing incidents, regardless of gender. Black (36%) and White (35%) children were most likely to have multiple missing incidents. However, all racial or ethnic groups had an average of three missing incidents, with the exception of Black and Pacific Islander children each having four, on average.

Georgetown Center for Juvenile Justice Reform

Context through Research

The type and number of foster care placements youth and young people are exposed to matters tremendously. Across the U.S., more than one-third of children in foster care experience more than two placement moves annually. More specifically, 40% of Black youth and 39% of Native American youth, respectively, undergo multiple (i.e., three or more) placement changes per year. On the other hand, 32% of non-Hispanic White children experience this rate of mobility (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022). Every placement change bears implications for a child's capacity to develop trusting and consistent relationships, and to feel welcome in their environment (Huang et al., 2015; Lee & Villagrana, 2015; Ryan et al., 2013). Experiencing multiple placement changes and residing in congregate care settings increase the chances of engagement in delinquent activity among child welfare-involved youth (Citizens for Juvenile Justice, 2015; Herz et al., 2022; Herz et al., 2019). However, research also demonstrates that youth in out-of-home placements are less likely to elope if they are in stable, home-like settings compared to those in larger congregate placements with rotating staff (Dierkhising, Walker Brown, Ackerman-Brimberg, & Newcombe, 2020).
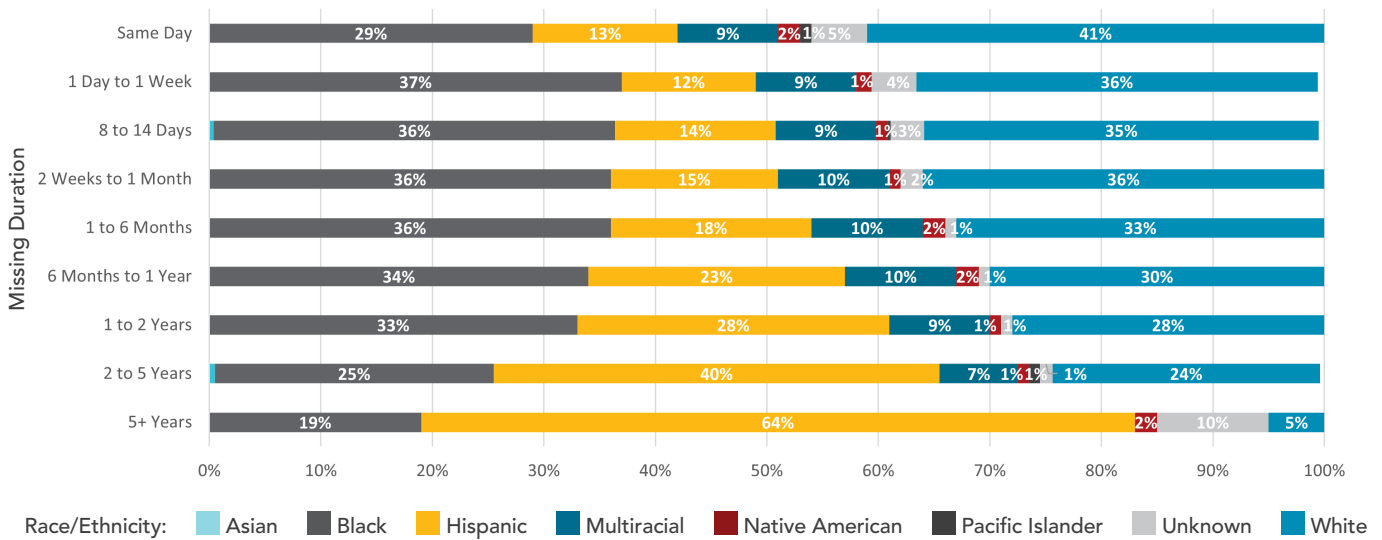
In Their Own Words

" I feel like if there's not a placement I want to be in, detention is the way I'll go."

" I've been in eight foster homes, five or six group homes, and an independent living placement when I turned 18. I had different experiences based on the placement. I spent quite a bit of time in the [detention center] while I was in the child welfare system. Thinking back, I purposely got kicked out of my group placements to go into [detention]."

" If it doesn't feel safe and like it won't be a good environment then I have to ask myself, 'Should I stay or should I leave?' My current placement feels like home, like a place I would never get again. You have this or you have nothing."

" One foster home was very productive, I stayed every night for a month before I was given placement."

Tips for the Field from CJJR

• Prioritize extended family and kinship placements for children facing home removal. In the event family-find efforts are unsuccessful, seek foster homes for children and youth that are reflective of their identities and cultural values. Use congregate placements solely as a last resort.

• When placing youth with extended family or in kinship placements, offer those individuals the same level of support (fiscal and behavioral) offered to foster caregivers.

• Work with group home staff to build rapport and trust with the residents in their care. Establish and encourage participation in group events, such as movie and game nights. Support the development of group homes to function much like a regular home environment.

• In the event a child or youth undergoes a placement change, exhaust efforts to help the young person continue to attend their current school (unless otherwise expressed by the youth). This might include establishing agreements between child welfare and local education agencies to split transportation costs for a student who has been relocated outside of a school's busing zone. Additionally, if the youth is involved in community-based activities in their former placement, identify transportation resources to ensure continuity with those activities.
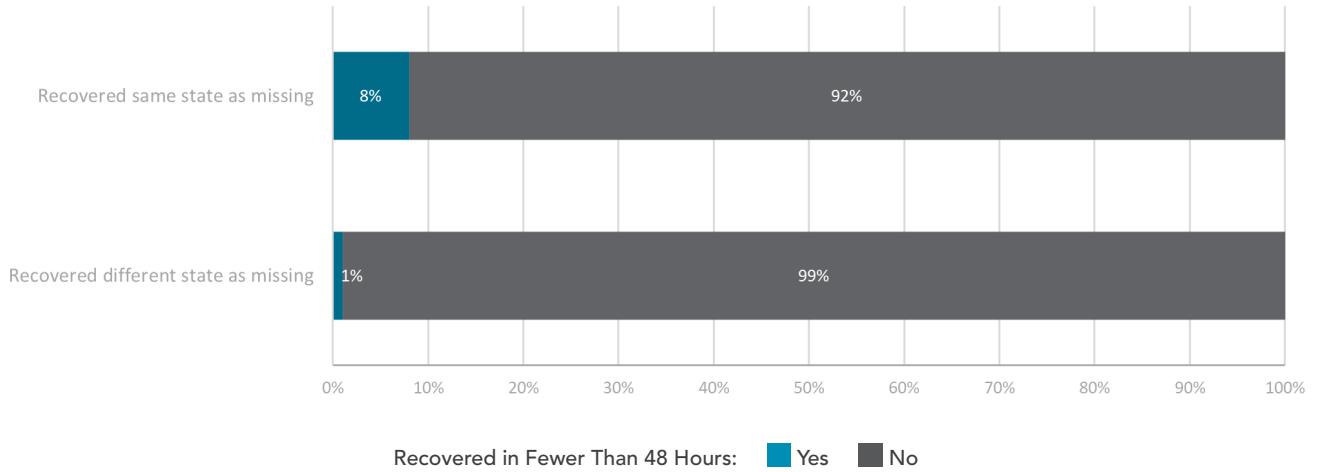
Missing Duration

Missing Duration by Race/Ethnicity

Missing Duration	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial	Native American	Pacific Islander	Unknown	White
Same Day	29%	13%	9%	2%	1%	5%	41%
1 Day to 1 Week	37%	12%	9%	1%		4%	36%
8 to 14 Days	36%	14%	9%	1%		3%	35%
2 Weeks to 1 Month	36%	15%	10%	1%		2%	36%
1 to 6 Months	36%	18%	10%	2%	1%		33%
6 Months to 1 Year	34%	23%	10%	2%	1%		30%
1 to 2 Years	33%	28%	9%	1%		1%	28%
2 to 5 Years	25%	40%	7%	1%	1%	1%	24%
5+ Years	19%	64%		2%		10%	5%

Race/Ethnicity: Asian · Black · Hispanic · Multiracial · Native American · Pacific Islander · Unknown · White
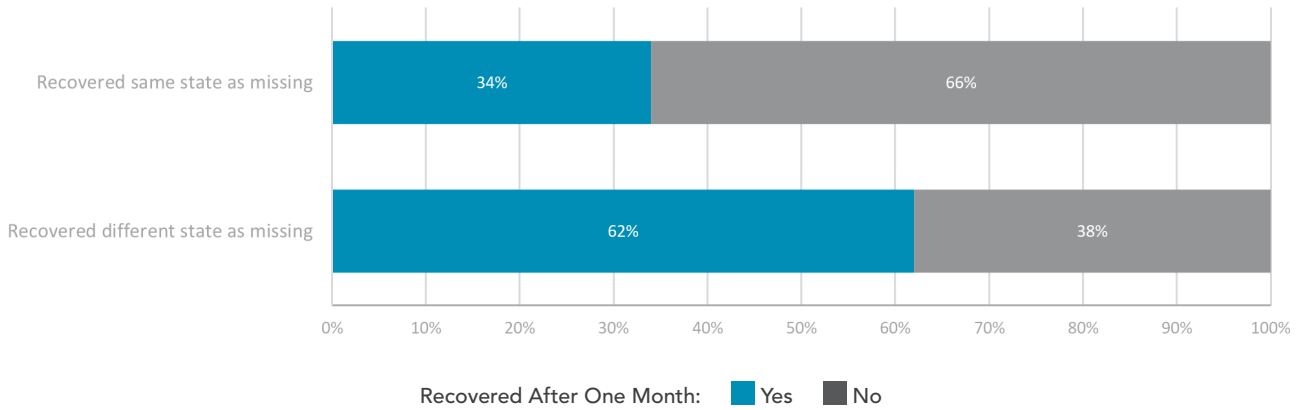
Overall, children missing from care had a mean days missing of 46 with a median days missing of nine. On average, males were recovered sooner than females. Males were missing an average of 44 days (median days missing was nine), compared to 47 days for females (median days missing was 10). Males (10%) were marginally more likely to be recovered in fewer than 48 hours in comparison to females (7%). Both male (41%) and female (40%) children were more commonly recovered within a week.

Hispanic children had the longest average days missing (73 days with a median days missing of 15) and represented the largest proportion (64%) of children missing from care for at least five years. The number of missing children in the five-plus years category was small, averaging around 50 children. Since Hispanic children are more represented in this category, their median days missing was higher than other racial groups. Asian children were the following racial or ethnic group with a longer average days missing, having been missing for 48 days on average (with a median days missing of 12). Pacific Islander children had the shortest average days missing (37 days with a median days missing of seven).

Recovered Same State: Recovered in Fewer Than 48 Hours

Recovered same state as missing: 8% Yes, 92% No

Recovered different state as missing: 1% Yes, 99% No

Recovered in Fewer Than 48 Hours: ■ Yes ■ No

Recovered Same State: Recovered After One Month

Recovered same state as missing: 34% Yes, 66% No

Recovered different state as missing: 62% Yes, 38% No

Recovered After One Month: ■ Yes ■ No

Children who traveled a shorter distance between their missing and recovery locations were recovered faster. Children who were recovered in the same city (15%) were more likely to be recovered within 48 hours, as compared to when they were recovered in a different city (3%).
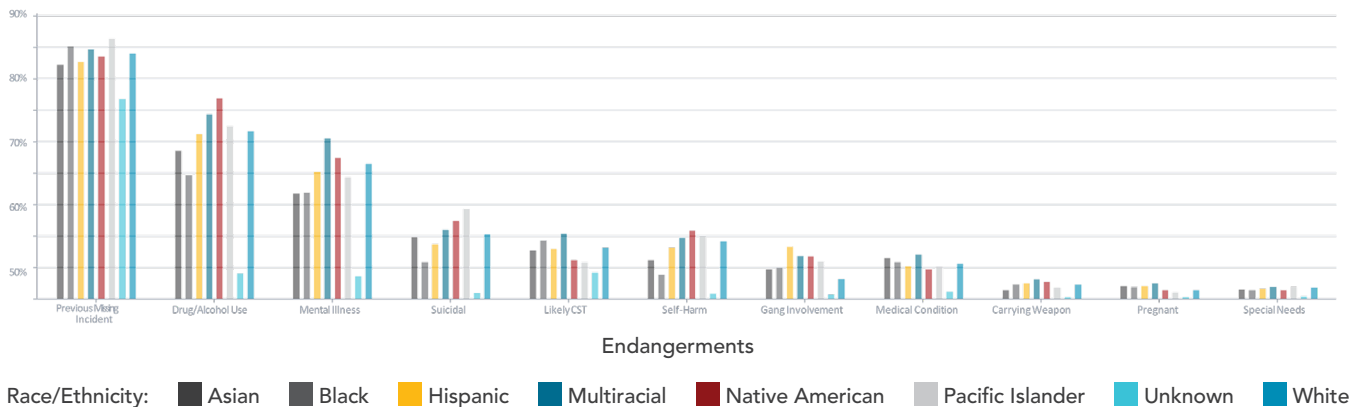
Endangerments

Eleven categories of endangerments reported to NCMEC during a missing child case were analyzed, including previous missing incidents, possessing a weapon, use of alcohol/drugs, possible gang involvement, mental health, pregnancy, self-harm, suicidal tendencies, disabilities, having a medical condition, and likely victimization through child sex trafficking.

For most endangerments, female children had higher frequencies including a previous missing incident (81%), mental health diagnosis (40%), and likely victimization of child sex trafficking (27%). Compared to females, male children had higher instances of drug or alcohol use (49%), gang involvement (14%), carrying a weapon (8%), and having a special need (4%).

For both female and male children, having at least one endangerment made a substantial difference in their mean days missing, though the difference between males and females was relatively small. Females with an endangerment had a mean days missing of 45 (median 10), while males with an endangerment had a mean days missing of 40 (median eight). Male children without an endangerment had a mean days missing of 72 (median 11), while females had 69 (median 10). In addition, males who had at least one endangerment had higher frequencies of recovery within 48 hours compared to female children who had at least one endangerment.

While all racial or ethnic groups had a high likelihood of a known prior missing incident, Pacific Islander children had the highest frequency of all (82%). Almost two-thirds of Native American children (64%) had reportedly used drugs and/or alcohol, with multiracial children following closely at 59%. Multiracial children (51%) also had a higher likelihood of having a mental illness diagnosis than children belonging to other racial or ethnic groups. Even though having suicidal tendencies was a less frequently occurring endangerment, more than a quarter of all Pacific Islander children (29%) had this endangerment. The majority of children were not victims of child sex trafficking, though just over a fifth of multiracial children were likely victims.[2]

Endangerments by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity: Asian | Black | Hispanic | Multiracial | Native American | Pacific Islander | Unknown | White
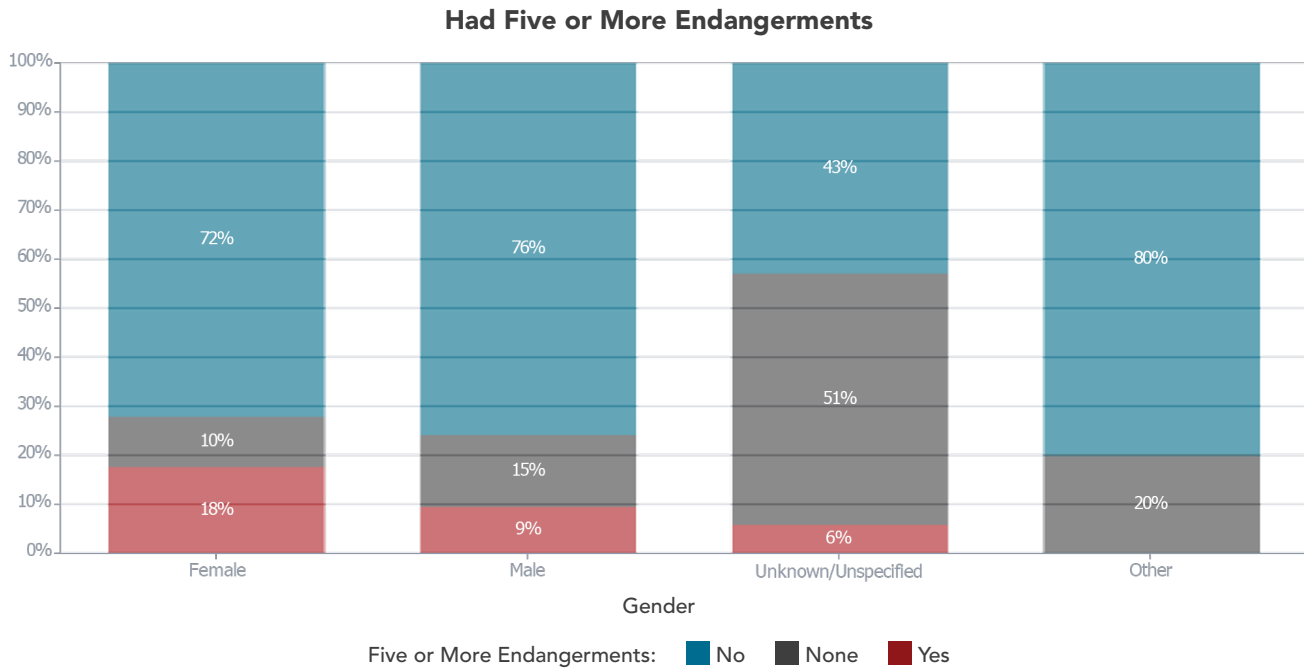
Special Needs includes missing children who have been diagnosed with any of the following: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Blindness, Down Syndrome, Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Intellectual or Developmental Disability, Other Disability, and Unknown.

Female children had a slightly higher mean number of endangerments; females had 2.6 while males had 2.2. Although pregnancy is one of the endangerments, this difference did not affect the mean number of endangerments for female children, as pregnancy was rare (only 7% of females had this endangerment listed).

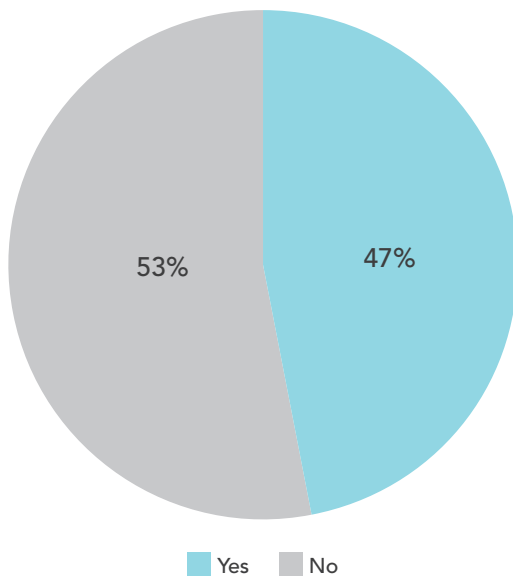2   This distinction is made on information provided by law enforcement and families.

All racial or ethnic groups had an average of three endangerments, with the exception of Asian, Black, and White children, who had two each.

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of children had at least one of the 11 listed endangerments, with females (90%) and males (85%) having similar rates. The highest number of endangerments any male child had was nine, while two female children had all 11 endangerments and 26 had 10 of the endangerments.
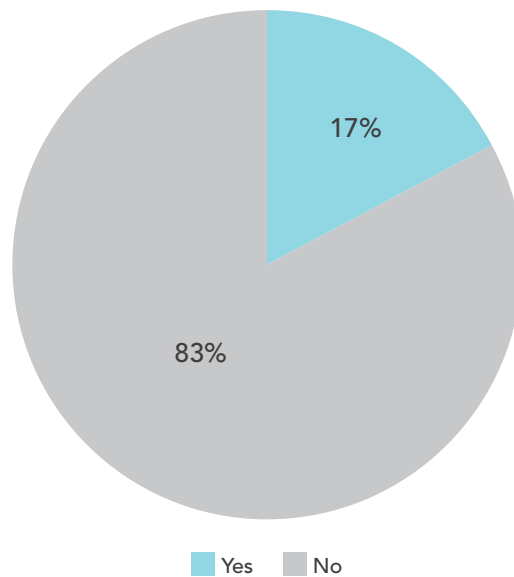
Had Five or More Endangerments

Five or More Endangerments: ■ No ■ None ■ Yes

*For the category "Had Five or more Endangerments," the child had at least five of the 11 endangerments mentioned above.

Drug/Alcohol Involvement

■ Yes ■ No

Likely CST Victimization[3]

■ Yes ■ No

3   A child is determined to be a likely victim of CST if NCMEC is informed by law enforcement, parents, or guardians that they have reason to believe the child is experiencing that form of victimization.

For children missing from care, the most common drugs reportedly used were marijuana (38%) and alcohol (18%). Males had higher reported marijuana use (53%) compared to females (47%), while females (53%) reportedly used alcohol more than males (47%).

Georgetown Center for Juvenile Justice Reform

Context through Research

A statewide study conducted in Florida found that the more foster care settings a missing youth had experienced, the higher their likelihood of falling victim to child sex trafficking (CST). Every placement change notably increased the chance of human trafficking. Further, close to 80% of youth who fled placement were residing in group homes at the time of their elopement (Latzman et al., 2019). Similarly, child welfare-involved females in Los Angeles who experienced child sex endangerment/exploitation (CSE) were more than four times more likely to have been placed in group homes than their peers who did not experience CSE (Dierkhising et al., 2022). This population is also more likely than their non-CSE counterparts to undergo subsequent maltreatment after becoming system-involved (Dierkhising et al., 2022). Black girls in particular have relatively high vulnerability to CSE. Through the lens of adultification, this population is perceived to be less in need of support and nurturing by adults and more capable of being independent and knowledgeable about adult topics (i.e., sex) than White girls (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, n.d.). In other words, they are viewed as being older than they are. Children and youth victimized by sex trafficking often resort to engaging in survival mechanisms, such as committing assault or property damage, that may be viewed

by police and the legal system as willful participation in illicit activities. Assault and property damage are also the two most prominent reasons Black girls become involved in the juvenile justice system overall. (Dierkhising et al., 2022; Ehrmann et al., 2019).

The abuse and neglect experiences that lead children into the child welfare system compounded by home removal, placement instability, and additional mistreatment can result in complex trauma (Anderson & Walerych, 2019). Trauma can manifest in a multitude of ways, including through mental and behavioral health challenges (Fehrenbach et al., 2022). Relatedly, child welfare-involved youth and those involved in multiple systems (i.e., crossover) are prone to experiencing above average rates of suicidal ideation; substance use; and mood, psychotic, conduct, and attention disorders (Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence, 2015; Dierkhising et al., 2019).

In Their Own Words

" They left me alone in foster care, and it was around that age that I tried to commit suicide. I really felt alone and worthless. Most of my time in foster care I felt like that and I tried to bury it and cover it with drugs. [I looked] for love from relationships and was not getting it."

" Help them [child welfare workers] get out of that statistic that most of our foster children are in gangs, in prison, early pregnancy, and falling into things like that. Don't view [foster youth] like that. Like they're going to be failures or they're broken… Help them overcome that. As I grew up, I remember having the mentality of being a gangster and a drug addict. This is what my parents are and I'm going to be worse; I didn't have hope for myself. But say that I do have a value and a purpose. Help them overcome that. Let them know there's a way out."

Tips for the Field from CJJR

- Establish parent education, childcare, and other early childhood supports for expectant or parenting child welfare-involved youth.

- Minimize mental health and substance use treatment provider changes. In the event a young person moves placements, prioritize their maintaining these established supports.

- Train law enforcement to detect signs of trauma and various forms of victimization, such as learning to identify certain behaviors (i.e., stealing, assault) as survival crimes in an effort to protect rather than criminalize maltreated and exploited children and youth.

- Work with law enforcement to identify and have accessible social workers or other helping professionals to support victims (i.e., CSE, domestic, abuse, or otherwise) they encounter in a timely manner.

Located Deceased

Most children reported missing from care were recovered alive, with less than 1% (n=150) of children missing from care being recovered deceased. Children located deceased were more often males (55%) compared to females (45%). Thirty-eight percent (38%) were Black children and 33% were White. Children ranging in age from less than one to 20 years old were located deceased, but the most common age was 15. The mean age missing and located deceased was 14.

Children who were missing from care and located deceased were missing longer than children who were recovered alive. Children located deceased had mean days missing of 133 with a median days missing of 47, while children recovered alive had a mean days missing of 46 with a median of nine days.

Located Deceased by Missing Duration

Missing Duration

*There were no children recovered deceased between one and seven days.

NCMEC's 2023 Children Missing from Care Report & Georgetown Center for Juvenile Justice Reform

About Us: Programs and Services

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children has published data reports on Children Missing from Care since 2017, one year after the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act mandated child serving state agencies to report children missing from their care to NCMEC and law enforcement. With this publication, we are including how NCMEC can directly support child serving organizations and recommendations on ways professionals and community stakeholders can help support these children.

NCMEC provides an array of free resources, including case management, poster distribution, law enforcement technical assistance, child sex trafficking recovery services, and analytical support. NCMEC's case management staff coordinates directly with all case workers, social workers, and/or law enforcement agencies to provide resources to help safely locate the missing child. Reporting all children missing from care to NCMEC is not just a legal requirement for social services, but a best practice. NCMEC can assist state agencies in fulfilling the legal requirements of the law and help provide a supportive response to the missing child case.

Below are some of the resources which the parent/legal guardian, including the child welfare agency that has legal authority over the child, can access through their NCMEC case manager.

Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Planning & Services

The Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Services Team (RST) provides specialized resources to child welfare professionals who have reported a youth missing from care to NCMEC when a concern for child sex trafficking has been identified. Resource specialists on this team are available to assist child welfare professionals in the development of intentional, trauma-informed, and victim-centered plans for when the youth returns to the placement or is recovered by law enforcement. Case consultation and expert guidance is provided around effective strategies for youth engagement and safety planning, promising practices to address running behavior, and understanding the experiences and needs of youth who have experienced child sex trafficking. Resource specialists are regionally assigned to provide state-specific guidance and connection to statewide and local specialized child sex trafficking resources. If you have an active missing child case assigned to a NCMEC case manager, they will help coordinate these resources. If you are otherwise interested in resources or assistance, please email **recoveryservices@ncmec.org**.

Forensic Services

Biometrics (DNA, dentals, and fingerprints) can play a vital role in bringing a child home safely, developing leads, and, if needed, forensically confirm identification if the child is recovered deceased, whether it be days, weeks, months, or years after they went missing. For example, fingerprints can help confirm a child who comes into contact with law enforcement was reported missing from a different state but is actively using an alias. DNA can confirm identification if skeletal remains are recovered and suspected to be the missing child. Proactive efforts should be made to secure biometrics shortly after the child goes missing, before dental offices purge records and biological family members cannot be located.

NCMEC can help facilitate the collection of dental records, fingerprints, and DNA samples from next-of-kin by providing technical assistance and analytical support to matters involving child welfare agencies. NCMEC can also help ensure the records are uploaded into the appropriate national law enforcement databases, where proactive searches for leads and associations help aid in a resolution to a missing child's case. If you have an active missing child case assigned to a NCMEC case manager, they will help coordinate these resources. If you would otherwise like assistance from our forensic services team, please send an email to **forensics@ncmec.org**.

Victims & Family Support

NCMEC provides a wide range of support services for victims and their caregivers, including crisis intervention, mental health support, referrals to appropriate community agencies and mental health professionals, peer connection, and reunification assistance. The Family Advocacy Outreach Network (FAON) is a membership network connecting victims and families with mental health service providers and other organizations within their communities. FAON seeks the expertise of experienced treatment professionals and service organizations that are willing to provide therapeutic services pro bono or at a low sliding-scale fee to the individuals NCMEC serves. If you provide direct services to people in need, please consider applying to be part of our network. In addition, Team HOPE offers peer-based emotional support services to family members, including foster family members, upon request. If you have an active missing child case assigned to a NCMEC case manager, they will help coordinate these resources. If you would otherwise like assistance from our support team or would like to learn more about mental health and peer support services, you can send an email to gethelp@ncmec.org.

Utilizing the Media

NCMEC's media and communications team can support child welfare professionals on how to increase the opportunities for media coverage for missing child cases. This team can help:

- Write statements for caregivers of the missing child

- Help handle incoming media requests

- Assist with strategy and media planning for long-term missing cases

- Assist with breaking news for critically missing children by holding press conferences and alerting media to new information

If you have an active missing child case assigned to a NCMEC case manager, they will help coordinate these resources. If you are otherwise seeking media assistance, please email media@ncmec.org.

Disclaimers and Definitions

The information provided in this report does not reflect all cases of missing or abducted children, only those reported to NCMEC. As the national clearinghouse for missing and exploited children, NCMEC encourages agencies and families to report any missing child case to receive assistance and resources.

Case Status:

Active – Cases are categorized as active when a child is still missing and law enforcement has an active police report on the child's disappearance or alternatively for certain international cases if a Hague application is on file the U.S. State Department.

Resolved – Cases are categorized as resolved when any of the following criteria are met: the child returns home to their parent or legal guardian; the child will remain in the custody of law enforcement; or the child is in contact with their parent or legal guardian but will not be returning home and the parents/legal guardian and law enforcement are satisfied with the situation. A child's case can only be labeled recovered/deceased if their remains have been found and they have been positively identified.

Case Types:

Endangered runaway or ERU – Any missing child between 11 and 17 years of age who is missing of his or her own accord and whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her parent(s) or legal guardian.

Family Abduction or FA – A family abduction is defined as the taking, retention, or concealment of a child, younger than 18 years of age, by a parent, other person with a family relationship to the child, or his or her agent, in violation of the custody rights, including visitation rights of a parent or legal guardian.

Lost, injured or otherwise missing or LIM – Lost, injured, or otherwise missing is defined as any missing child younger than the age of 18 where there are insufficient facts to determine the cause of the child's disappearance, or any child 10 years of age or younger who is missing on his or her own accord.

Missing Young Adult – A missing person 18 years of age or older but younger than the age of 21. This category is derived from Suzanne's Law, a provision in the PROTECT Act of 2003 (codified at 34 U.S.C. § 41307), which extends to missing young adults the same reporting and law enforcement response requirements already provided for children younger than 18 years of age.

Nonfamily abduction or NFA – A nonfamily abduction is defined as the unauthorized taking, retention, luring, confinement, or concealment of a child younger than the age of 18 by someone other than a family member.

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