

Operation Satin – early intervention partnership approach to reduce missing episodes of young people

Using early intervention workers from the Northamptonshire Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) to support young people who are reported as repeated missing persons.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Intelligence and investigation Operational policing
Organisation	Northamptonshire Police
HMICFRS report	National child protection inspections: Northamptonshire Police 27 January–7 February 2025
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Partners	Police

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	November 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

The aim of Operation Satin is to address the need for earlier support to reduce further missing person episodes of young people.

The initiative also aims to build trust with parents to enable them to share and report concerns for their child at the earliest opportunity.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- reduce the number of child missing person episodes
- optimise safeguarding opportunities
- reduce the risk of child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation
- reduce the operational demand on missing person cases on the force

Description

In January 2023, the Northamptonshire Police Missing Persons Investigation Unit (MPIU) identified a pattern of behaviour with a sudden increase in the number of children reported missing for the first time. This surge highlighted an absence of any targeted intervention processes in place to

support children on a first (or early) missing episode.

A trial was launched from August to November 2023, which evidenced further the need for a dedicated team to work alongside the MPIU to offer early intervention. During the trial, 73 young people were visited and the top three issues associated with missing episodes were identified as:

- parenting/family relationships
- mental health
- child exploitation

Following the trial, a partnership was put in place between the MPIU and the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) early intervention team. A dedicated early intervention worker was assigned to visit any child who had been reported missing between one to three times. Early intervention can result in support being offered for 12 weeks, which focuses on working with the child and parent/carers to reduce the risk of them going missing again, or becoming involved in child exploitation.

MPIU hold weekly triage meetings to identify children who meet the threshold. Once referred, the early intervention worker will visit and provide a write up to the MPIU co-ordinator within five days. Each case can receive one of the following outcomes:

- the early intervention worker can hold cases and complete direct interventions
- referrals for further support can be made to the youth violence intervention unit, community initiative to reduce violence, NGAGE (drug and alcohol service for young people aged 10-25 in Northamptonshire), counselling services, and schools
- the case can be closed if the appropriate support is in place

After the trial, Northamptonshire OPFCC agreed to provide long-term support to the MPIU. The team grew from one dedicated worker, to four within the first year, funded by the OPFCC. The MPIU also has a dedicated police community support officer (PCSO) responsible for supporting missing person cases of looked after children (LAC).

Recognising child exploitation webinar

A review of Operation Satin revealed a need for a targeted approach towards care providers who are responsible for LAC. The review identified that there was an increase in young people who

were frequent missing persons being placed within Northamptonshire from other areas.

A webinar was created and delivered by the early intervention officers and the PCSO who is the single point of contact (SPOC) for care homes from the MPIU.

The content of the webinar includes:

- understanding and explaining the different types of exploitation
- showing the links between going missing, adverse childhood experiences, and child exploitation
- identifying the signs of when a young person is at risk or is involved in child exploitation
- understanding their role to keep a child safe and to reduce the risk of harm
- awareness of the support offered by local services

Overall impact

Operation Satin has seen a decrease in the number of children who repeatedly go missing and the in the number of hours spent looking for missing children.

During the period of January 2024 to January 2025:

- Children within the Operation Satin cohort went missing less frequently and there were fewer total missing episodes. A total of 32.8% (89 out of 271) of the cohort had missing episodes, compared to 45.5% (51 out of 112) of those not in the cohort. This data also covers the six-month period following engagement with Operation Satin.
- If a child within the Operation Satin cohort did go missing, their total missing episodes were fewer. The average number of missing episodes for children in the Operation Satin cohort was 3.3, in comparison to 7.5 for those not in the cohort.

To date, 115 care staff have attended and engaged with the webinar.

Operation Satin leads have presented at the National Missing Person Conference and in March 2025, Operation Satin was awarded 'Winner of Prevention Work' from The Missing People Charity.

Learning

- The long-term benefits of Operation Satin will become more apparent when the initial cohort of young people transition into adulthood. It is essential that staff engage with young people to work

towards preventing frequent missing person episodes in the future.

- Collaborative working between Northamptonshire Police and the OPCCC has been essential to the success of Operation Satin.
- It is important to conduct regular reviews to identify any gaps in knowledge or where groups would benefit from awareness sessions. By delivering a webinar to care providers for LAC, the initiative was able to provide tailored support to prevent further missing person episodes.
- It is important to share knowledge and skills with other forces. The force have supported the Northumbria Police missing person team with advice and guidance to create their own early intervention project for young people reported missing.

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