**Practitioner Fellowships**

Looked After and Accommodated Children: Evaluating the Impact of a National Partnership Agreement in Dundee

**DC Richard Grieve** Police Scotland, Dundee

* Partner Universities: University of Dundee and Abertay University
* Academic Supervisors: Professor Nick Fyfe and Dr Penny Woolnough
* Contact: richard.grieve@scotland.pnn.police.uk

**Introduction:**

In 2015/2016 over 350,000 missing person incidents were reported to Police within the United Kingdom. This equates to a missing person being reported every 90 seconds and upwards of 370 each day (National Crime Agency, 2017)

Within Scotland over 40,000 missing person incidents are reported to Police Scotland each year and Looked After and Accommodated Children make up around 12,000 of these incidents (Police Scotland, 2017).

Looked After and Accommodated Children are amongst the most vulnerable members of society and the 'majority go missing because of abuse, neglect or conflict at home, and many also have serious mental health issues. While missing, 1 in 6 children sleep rough or stay with someone they have just met, and 1 in 8 report being physically harmed' (Missing People, 2016).

In December 2015, Police Scotland commenced piloting The Looked After Children who go missing from Residential Care in Scotland, National Partnership Agreement across 3 pilot areas.

**Aims and Objectives :**

The primary aim will be to evaluate the National Partnership Agreement, in its implementation in Dundee local authority against the following framework of competencies. Particular focus will be given to the impact of the implementation of the absent category.

* Safeguarding: Evaluating the implications of the absent category with regards to the safeguarding of Looked After and Accommodated Children.
* Legitimacy: Exploring how professionals and young people viewed the partnership agreement and implementation of the absent category.
* Efficiency: Examining the impact with regards to Police and social work resources. Did the absent category result in less 'missing' episodes involving the Police.
* Interagency Working: Exploring positive or negative effects of the partnership agreement in terms of how agencies worked together, communicated and perceived one another.

**Methodology :**

It is envisaged that mixed methods research will be undertaken, whereby qualitative research methodology will be combined with existing data from Dundee City Council and Tayside Division of Police Scotland.

* Survey of LAC Children: LAC Children within 5 Dundee City Council residential houses will be invited to complete a survey that will seek to capture their understanding of the NPA and provide them with an opportunity to voice their views around incidents whereby they have been reported absent or missing. The competencies listed in the framework will be explored using terminology that relates to the LAC children's perspective.
* Survey of Key professionals: Residential staff, social workers, third sector support workers and police officers will be provided with an electronic survey, which they can complete anonymously. The survey will aim to explore their understanding of the NPA and their views on how it has impacted the competencies listed in the framework. As there was no survey or evaluation conducted prior the NPA being introduced, and therefore no comparative baseline data, participants will be encouraged to reflect on how they perceived issues relating to these competencies have evolved in the last 3 years.
* Semi structured Interviews: Key informants such as senior residential staff, social work department management and police community team managers will be invited to participate in semi structured interviews. As these individuals have a current working relationship with the researcher, an individual independent to the NPA, Dundee City Council and Police Scotland will be trained to carry out these interviews.

**Outputs and Benefits :**

A paper will be produced and available through the SIPR website. The findings of the paper will be shared with Police Scotland, Dundee City Council and any other interested local authorities or parties.

It is hoped that the findings will assist in continuing to improve this National Partnership Agreement and provide evidenced good practice.

This research should also contribute to the growing field of academic literature around safe guarding vulnerable children.