



Member Going Missing

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Introduction

This document should be read within the context of the wider policies and procedures. In particular, reference should be made to policies and procedures relating to duty of care and members risk assessment.

Principles of good practice

Where a member is dependent on staff or volunteers whilst using a Kingston Mencap provided service, to be safe for most of the time it is essential that staff and volunteers are aware of where the member is.

A needs assessment conducted by a social services care manager and/or a Kingston Mencap group should identify known safety issues and indicate those situations where a person may be at risk. The support plan should address any specific risks associated with a member being on their own going missing, how to minimise that possibility and what the service user and the member of staff/volunteer should do in such circumstances.

Where a risk assessment does indicate safety issues adult members, who live independently, do not need “permission” to go out but they should be asked to say when they are going and accept the support of employees and volunteers. Even when there are not specific risks that are identified members shall be encouraged to give “information” about where they are going and when they will be likely to return.

Precautions

It is the responsibility of employees and volunteers supporting adults:

- to obtain as much information as is reasonably possible about where members are going and when they are likely to return – this information should be recorded
- to encourage members to carry some kind of identification (name, address, telephone number), sufficient money for personal needs and transport, and any travel passes they may hold
- to encourage members to be dressed appropriately with regard to what is generally socially acceptable and to the particular weather conditions
- to establish, as far as possible, that people going out have a clear understanding of where they are going, how to get there, how to return, and what to do if they are lost

- to be aware, as far as reasonably possible, of the whereabouts of each member.

Definition of a missing member

What is meant by “a member going missing” is not easily defined and the point at which a member is regarded as having gone missing is not easily determined. Concern should be expressed when a member:

- is not at present at the usual time the service is provided
- has been out much longer than they indicated before leaving
- has been away from the service for significantly longer than usual without having indicated prolonged absence
- has gone out with a companion but has not returned with them and there is no apparent explanation
- has not returned at a time that is consistent with their normal pattern of behaviour.

Procedure to be followed

Concern should then lead to an initial investigation including:

- checking the premises and grounds to ensure that the particular member has not arrived back unannounced, or is not trapped somewhere
- discussing possibilities with other employees or volunteers
- ensuring that a message left in the recording systems of the particular service has not been overlooked
- asking other members, in a way that does not generate anxiety, if they have any knowledge of the person’s plans or whereabouts.

When concern has become serious, advice may be sought from the club leader or a Kingston Mencap Trustee.

If the circumstances suggest that the member may be in difficulty or danger, local hospitals may need to be contacted and/or the local police notified. The precise timing of this will be a matter of discretion, with regard to the person’s age, competency and level of vulnerability.

It will help to have:

- a clear description of the person. A recent photograph would be useful, as this may be required by the police;
- as much detail as possible about where the person intended to go or might be located, and when they left the service
- some indication of the person’s relevant competencies – e.g. physical mobility, communication skills

- information about any particular behaviour patterns that may be relevant to their absence or their reaction to feeling lost and needing to seek and/or receive help.

If appropriate, contact the member's closest relative or 'contact in an emergency' – in a way that does not cause undue anxiety.

When it has been established with reasonable certainty that a member is a "missing person", the following people must be informed:

- the police (they will advise on procedures)
- in the case of a child (under the age of 18), the parents or the person with parental responsibility
- The members family or carer, or 'contact in an emergency'
- The members place of residence if not with the above. The place of residence has a responsibility to follow its local policies.

Once the member has been located or has returned, ensure that all parties who were advised of the situation are contacted again and informed of the outcome.

Throughout the process it is important to maintain personal calm and to cause as little anxiety as possible amongst other service users.

A full report of the incident, and action taken, must be made without delay.