



- Home
- News
- Sport
- Travel
- Weather
- What's On
- E-edition
- Blogs & Opinion
- Columns
- Features
- Fun & Games
- Buy & Sell
  - > Suffolk jobs
  - > Suffolk homes
  - > Suffolk motors
  - > Classifieds
  - > Equestrian
  - > Photo Sales
  - > Reader Travel
  - > Special offers
- Community
  - > Forums
  - > Finding Friends
  - > Personal notices
- Eduzone
- Search
- Contact Info
  - > Subscriptions
  - > Advertising
  - > Contact Us

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## Tune in to Missing People

20 August 2007 | 12:00

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### TRACEY SPARLING

AS local youngster Luke Durbin remains missing today, features editor TRACEY SPARLING finds out how a charity tries to track people down and help their desperate families. In today's high tech world Missing People is today turning to the internet, to appeal for information.



Luke Durbin

FROM the 1980s, Americans used to see pictures of missing children printed on their milk cartons.

The static smiles and faces of strangers, stared out at families over the breakfast table as they chewed pancakes, safe in their own kitchens.

The idea came to Britain, where the sides of lorries have also been plastered with the images of missing children in recent years. Now the wheels of technology are driving people desperate to find the today's generation of missing people to move with the times.

The internet is providing a new moving element to such appeals. The UK charity Missing People is embracing the internet, by launching Missing People TV today - an area within its existing website [www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk) to bring together contributed content into one place, like the multimedia channel YouTube does.

It will broadcast messages from the families of missing people, video appeals and video podcasts.

There will also be the first ever online 'missing map' of the UK.

It is also tuning into the web's 'social networking' phenomenon, by launching its own pages on websites such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo and YouTube to try to track people down.

Paul Tuohy, chief executive of Missing People, said: "We are delighted to announce that we will be able to produce missing appeals as video podcasts, to reach supporters and potentially vulnerable groups via social networking sites and to offer families of the missing opportunities to post their own special appeals".

The video appeals will be used to mark significant anniversaries of a person's disappearance.

Suffolk's Luke Durbin went missing during a night out in Ipswich in May 2006, and his mum Nicki from Hollesley spoke at Missing People's re-launch earlier

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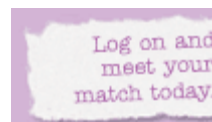
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this year, alongside Madeleine McCann's uncle John McCann and others.

Nicki said: "I had a two-minute slot and wrote my speech on the train to London that morning, as the night before the blackness set in. On the day I said: 'On the 12th of May 2006, without any warning my family became part of an exclusive group that we do not want to be part of. That day our lives irreversibly changed, we were thrown into the waking nightmare of 'the missing.'

"For my daughter and me, for my family and all our friends a huge gaping hole has been left in our lives. There is no closure for any of us and no knowing whether there ever will be.

"I do not know whether Luke is 20 or will forever be 19. I do not know which tense to talk about Luke.

"I wake everyday wondering if today will bring the knock at the door...the knock I dread, but the knock I so desperately want."

She added: "Over the last year I have had contact with other parents of missing young people. Our coping strategies may differ but we are all desperate for the same information, 'what has happened to our children?'"

Nicki has also advised the charity on what help families need, and is hoping to be a speaker for it again at an event in September.

Meanwhile Missing People kicks off its Get Together Week today - to raise awareness of the plight of missing people and their families - with the results of a survey into the nation's habits about keeping in contact with friends and family online.

Families are organising Get Together events around the country to raise money for the charity, including barbeques, camping parties, coffee mornings and garden parties.

Ross Miller from Missing People said the charity could help assist the search in many ways - from publicity, enquiries, collating sightings and offering family support.

He said: "When a loved goes missing it can impact the whole family and the charity provides a 24-hour service offering advice and support over the phone. In the case of vulnerable missing people, police will often assign a family liaison officer who can support the family hands on."

Most missing people are found safe and well within 72 hours. Many others are not, and Missing People will not close its enquiries until a person is found or their family has asked them to do so.

Ross said: "We use a network of contacts and 'third parties' and where possible get letters or messages passed to the missing people.

We work with the police where appropriate and they share information with us about cases registered with them, and often request our help. The National Protocol Agreement between the charity and the police sets the standard for this exchange of data which ensures a more complete record and understanding of missing people."

For vulnerable missing people, publicity can be used to generate sightings so the charity produces posters and issues more than 200 appeals every month to newspapers.

The charity cannot produce age-enhanced images for every missing person, as the person must be registered with the police and there must be photos of other members of the family.

Of course some people do not want to be found.

Ross said: "We realise that there are usually two sides to the story and we would never coerce anyone into contacting their family unless that was their wish. Nor would we divulge any details regarding the missing person's whereabouts without their consent.

"The exceptions to this are children or those subject to section under the mental health act.

"Some people go missing for a day, some for years; some return and sadly, some never do. Some people want to be found, some do not. Some only know they want to be found when they hear that someone is looking for them."

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To make a donation visit  
'[www.missingpeople.org.uk/donate](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/donate). cut>

See also [www.findluke.com](http://www.findluke.com)

The [helpingtofindmadeleine](http://helpingtofindmadeleine) group is an internet-based group of parents who got together when Madeleine McCann went missing, to increase awareness of missing children. They campaign for the American 'amber' system to be adopted here.

The AMBER Alert System began in 1996 when Dallas-Fort Worth broadcasters teamed up with local police to develop an early warning system to help find abducted children - involving police, broadcasters and others to immediately involve the public, especially motorists, in the search for an abducted child.

AMBER stands for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response and was created as a legacy to nine-year old Amber Hagerman, who was kidnapped while riding her bicycle in Texas, and then brutally murdered. Other states and communities soon started similar plans as the idea was adopted across the States.

Luke Durbin, age at disappearance 19 - missing 15 months. From Hollesley, Suffolk.

Marty Kelly, age at disappearance 21 - missing 17 months. From holywood, South Belfast.

Damien Nettles, age at disappearance 16 - missing 2 years. From Cowes, Isle of Wight.

Nicola Payne, age at disappearance 18 - missing 2 years. From Coventry, Warwickshire.

Craig Hetherington, age at disappearance 22 - missing 4 years. From Guisborough, Cleveland.

Carmel Fenech, age at disappearance 16 - missing 9 years. From Crawley, West Sussex

Each year, there are 210,000 incidences of people reported missing in the UK, including around 100,000 children aged under 16 who run away from home or

care overnight, often fleeing family conflict, abuse or neglect. 70 pc of people are found.

42,000 calls were received by MP's Runaways Helpline for young people in 2006. The charity's Message Home facility (for missing adults) received 37,000 calls.

18,500 enquiries were opened on missing people in 2006 - an increase of over 170 per cent on 2005, fuelled by a new protocol with police forces. 44pc of cases now opened by Missing People come from the police.

4,500 young people went missing from care and were reported to a dedicated team.

1,800 families were supported by Missing People in 2006.

1,550 cases were resolved in 2006. In nine out of ten cases, the missing person was found alive.

150 cases of unidentified people, or human remains, who have been found in the UK are held on record by Missing People.

Ten missing people are found every week on average, directly through the work of Missing People.

One case or more every month is resolved as a result of publicity by the charity.

### YOUR VIEW

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It is important to keep figures and facts accurate. A high percentage of cases reported to missing people are lost contact cases ie 56% whilst 44% are police missing person cases. In police cases approx 90% return/ are located by police within 48 hours and 95% in under a week. There is already a child recue alert system in place in the UK, see [www.missingpersons.police.uk](http://www.missingpersons.police.uk)  
***Davinia, London***

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