

MISSING CHILDREN SWITZERLAND
APPLICATION FOR SUPPORT
2024

AREA OF EXPERTISE

Missing Children Switzerland is a non-profit organization based in Pully and Zurich, Switzerland. Its commitment is to protect children and advocate for children's rights in the context of missing children in Switzerland. Its framework is aligned with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. The organization is recognized as an expert in this field; therefore, it operates the official hotline 116 000, dedicated to missing children in Switzerland, through its **EMERGENCY HOTLINE** — a professional service provided free of charge to the Swiss population. The organization's work and actions are centered around the best interests of children.

NEEDS

Emergency professional work demands both time and human resources. We are reaching out to you because it constitutes a vital aspect of the support we provide to families in Switzerland. To effectively manage the current surge of requests through the 116 000 emergency hotline, a team of a minimum of four employees and four volunteers is required.

This year, our management is taking significant steps to seek grants from public funds that will gradually complement the efforts already made by our private donors for over 12 years. Concurrently, we continue to seek the participation of private and institutional donors to fund our first emergency responders' cell that operates 24/7 in the three linguistic regions of Switzerland — free of charge!

So today, we are excited to explore the possibility of establishing a strategic partnership with you to sustain our support to the most promising members of our community — our children.

Specifically, we are seeking an annual fee to fund the positions of our emergency hotline counsellors according to your possibilities in 2024.

Please note that as of December 28, 2023, our funding covers operational costs up to the end of March 2024. Thank you in advance for the time you will devote to stepping into our core mission.

CONTEXT

Factually, the disappearance of a child is the consequence of a complex problem that cannot be solved by a single actor. It is a societal issue that is crucial to address proactively to make a difference.

While a "small" runaway incident may go smoothly, long-term runaways often have severe consequences on the health of minors who are exposed to dangers such as sexual exploitation, drug trafficking networks, organized crime, or even worse, suicide.

Any parent can understand the pain that comes with the disappearance of a child. Today, this affects more and more families across Europe, and Switzerland is no exception. When parents find themselves in an unbearable situation — such as when a former partner becomes unreachable when they should be returning with their young child or when their own child suddenly doesn't come home — that parent needs to be heard, supported, informed, and directed immediately.

While we appreciate the responsiveness of the Swiss child protection system when responding to cases of violence against children, administrative procedures for non-violence-related demands may extend from few days to several months, depending on the child's canton of residence. During this awaiting period, difficulties often become unmanageable for families. It's essential to bear in mind that these challenges frequently originate from relatively small problems that can emerge within any family.

Equally significant is the promotion of effective prevention of parental abduction, which entails expertise in conflict resolution through a mediation-based approach. Time is of essence when a parent seeks assistance.

We take pride on proactive prevention that goes beyond immediate emergency response. Our unique value lies in our ability to prevent further problems from developing by providing specialized assistance and guidance to families.

In our country, child disappearance mobilizes the police, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Federal Office of Justice, the courts, social actors, Missing Children Switzerland and its European 116 000 network.

We all work together to ensure that every child regains a stable and safe situation as quickly as possible.

"I was really struggling, and honestly, I didn't know who to talk to — couldn't even tell my friend or mom. I just had to go. Thanks a ton for everything; you guys are amazing!"

Jade, first runaway

UGO* 13 YEARS OLD

Ugo is not a victim of violence in his family, but he is being bullied at school. The school does not acknowledge the existence of the problem, and his transfer to another school has been denied.

After 9 and a half months of struggle, Ugo runs away by himself to Italy for 10 days. The Swiss and Italian police had to be mobilized to search for Ugo.

On the 3rd day, his mom calls our emergency hotline to seek help.

Ugo agrees to communicate with Alice, our emergency counselor. He keeps her informed about his safety and talks about his distress throughout his runaway. Meanwhile Alice is making herself available to Ugo's mother, offering guidance upon request.

Ugo was intercepted by the police while returning to Switzerland.

At his mother's request, we wrote to the school's management to advocate for the rights of her child.

Ugo's request to change school kept being denied but he has not run away again. He is now well-supported by professionals and still cherished by his family.

This situation was successfully resolved by several actors through immediate support and orientation through our social network.

*Pseudonyms.

EMMA* 12 YEARS OLD

Emma is not a victim of violence in her family but is often in conflicts with her parents and siblings. The parents sought help from child protection services because Emma runs away repeatedly.

To find Emma, the police were called out eight times the first year. The judicial authorities had to be involved on several occasions to allow emergency measures. These measures were unsuccessful, and two years later, Emma* was placed in a home.

There, her runaways were even more marked with the consequence of a low school attendance of only two months over a four year period.

During her runaways, Emma was 'sheltered' by an adult 33 years her senior, who provided her with a roof over her head, but also alcohol and drugs, and finally abused her over time. Thanks to her testimony, along with the testimonies of 15 other underage runaway girls with whom he lived, the man was sentenced to five years of imprisonment.

Our support reached Emma's mom four years after Emma's initial runaway, primarily because she was unaware of the 116 000 service. Emma sought our support during the trial she endured, and we were there for her, in person.

POST-DEPARTURE CONTEXT

When communication between parents breaks down, parental abduction may occur, and the reasons for such extreme action can vary. Sometimes, it may be a last resort action due to family violence, but often, a parent leaves for personal reasons without fully understanding the devastating impact on their child.

CONCRETE POST-DEPARTURE ACTIONS

To address a parental abduction case, the first step is to assist the left-behind parent in coping with feelings such as abandonment and isolation. Given the often devastated emotional state of the parent, it is often necessary to simultaneously redirect them toward other professionals for therapeutic assistance.

Parental abduction cases fall into two categories:

1. Despite following the legal procedures, the parent remains unaware of the child's whereabouts.
2. The parent is aware of his/her child's location.

In both scenarios, once contact with the departed parent is established, the counselor's role is to delicately encourage the abductor parent to facilitate contacts between their child and the left-behind parent in Switzerland. Given that abducted children are typically very young and that the reunification procedures may extend from 1 to 10 years or more, reinstating the connection becomes a vital step for the child's emotional development and psychological well-being.

In the first category, the counselor initiates a search through our established network and channels, including reaching out to family members, to locate the child. Only then can the counselor advocate for the rights of the child with the left-behind parent and attempt to steer the abductor parent away from further illegal actions by exploring alternative solutions.

“I am so grateful that I was listened to...thank you for continuing to search for my daughter”

Olivier father of six-year-old Julie* abducted in 2019

3 PILLARS FOR AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

- 1.** The emotional balance and well-being of the child are placed at the forefront of priorities. The parent-child bond is maintained despite the distance.
- 2.** Parents are informed and aware of the rights of their child.
- 3.** The search work is carried out free of charge by our network in 56 countries across 5 continents.

CONTEXT OF THE RUNAWAY ATTEMPT

When a minor decides to run away, it might be a way to create some distance from problems and take a moment to pause and reflect. If the episode is short, it could even be helpful. However we can't afford to assume without knowing and ensuring the safety of the runaway child is crucial. In this timeframe the parents often also need someone to share their worries and manage the wait. In these situations, a counselor steps in to assist the child and the parents. The goal is then to grasp what is preventing the child to comeback home and to offer a non judgmental support help reach a new family consensus.

It's important to remember that when children are on the street for an extended period, they become more vulnerable to violence, exploitation, or trafficking, especially when lacking financial resources. Acting early, such as during the first runaway, is crucial to prevent it from becoming a recurring pattern. The counselor's role is to step in and disrupt the chain reaction from bad to worse.

CONCRETE ACTIONS ON A RUNAWAY ATTEMPT

TO ENSURE IT HAPPENS ONLY ONCE We must act swiftly to help a runaway regain a stable and secure situation. Leveraging a neutral position, the counselor provides a platform for communication and takes everybody's perspective into account when proposing actions. When there are siblings involved, the parents need to stay functional despite their anxieties. The counselor takes the time to listen, inform, address their concerns, and guide them to other professionals if necessary. Unfortunately, it is not always possible for a child to return home due to mistreatment. The counselor then establishes connections with child protection services to assist the child.

"Thank you for writing this letter in support of my son who was being bullied at school."

Mother of Alain, the 16-year-old first runaway.

THE 3 PILLARS OF A SUCCESSFUL SUPPORT

1. The counselor focuses on safety through ongoing contact during a runaway. **2.** A trustful connection is established between the counselor and every family member. **3.** There is no judgment, and ample time is dedicated to analyzing, actively listening, and guiding both the child and their parents toward the recovery of the family balance.

A UNIQUE SKILL SET

From **December 25, 2017, to December 31, 2023**, the 116 000 Switzerland hotline remained active non-stop for **2,204 days**, equivalent to **52,896 hours**, and received/issued **16,886 calls/mails**, addressing more than **561** prevention/missing situations and involving over **1,683 direct beneficiaries**. The majority of these situations were successfully managed and resolved. Unfortunately, within this timeframe, 35 children who were victims of parental abduction and one young runaway remain unaccounted for, and regrettably, three young runaways have taken their own lives. Missing Children Switzerland took the initiative and funded the first quantitative study, estimating **25,000 runaway** cases per year in our country. The combined figures from the Federal Office of Justice and the Swiss Foreign Affairs Department indicate a total of **150 open parental abduction** cases in 2023.

ELSEWHERE

Emulating its European counterparts in the 116 000 network across 32 countries, Missing Children Switzerland follows the example of organizations such as Child Focus in Belgium. Operating the 116 000 emergency number successfully for over 15 years, Child Focus managed 1,532 cases in 2022, covering various scenarios like runaway cases (1,138), parental abductions (148), unaccompanied minors (136), third-party abductions (14), and other disappearances (136). With a budget of 2.5 million euros dedicated to preventing and managing missing children through the Belgian 116 000 hotline, they engaged in 88 outreach efforts to the general public during the same year to locate missing children. Notably, in Switzerland, which has a smaller population (about -3 mio. less compared to Belgium) and a cultural inclination towards discretion, there were 12 publications, with eight originating from our emergency hotline. This demographic difference not only makes the issue harder to acknowledge but also poses challenges in resolving it.

"I didn't know who to talk to; something serious was happening with my 18-month-old daughter. Thank you for making time for me and for helping bring her back."

Roxane, mom left behind

IN CONCLUSION

As we persist in our efforts, it's crucial to acknowledge that inaction becomes the silent accomplice of persistent problems, hindering progress toward effective solutions. To fortify and expand this crucial work, we are asking our public authorities to reflect their recognition with a financial contribution.

Your role is pivotal in sustaining our mission. By becoming a sponsor and contributing within your means, you directly fund a first responder position at our hotline. This support enables us to better serve the community, providing quick and targeted assistance 24/7, with a unique ability to respond within 15 minutes.

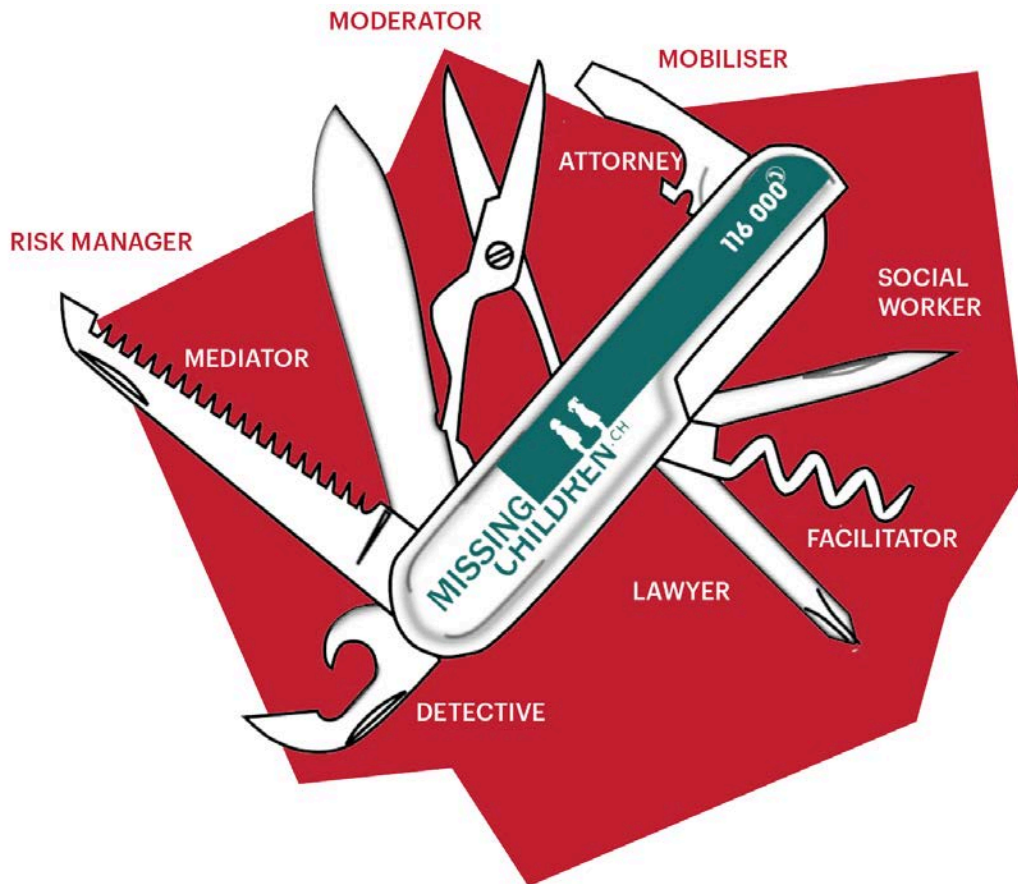
We extend our invitation to you, encouraging your thoughtful consideration, and hope to welcome you as one of our valued supporters.

A SWEET WORD FOR HEROES

The Missing Children Switzerland Foundation was established in 2011 by a mother who experienced the heart-wrenching ordeal of "losing" her two 6-year-old children forever. Thanks to her extraordinary resilience, today, every parent and child in Switzerland can benefit from professional, immediate, and free assistance when facing a runaway or parental abduction. None of this would have been possible without the invaluable support of generous private donors—over 3 million CHF in total—, as well as few contributions from municipalities, the dedication of our team, the efforts of volunteers, and the support of our online community.

We want to express our immense gratitude to all of you.

Missing Children first responders



<https://www.facebook.com/MissingChildrenSwitzerland>

<https://twitter.com/MissingKidsCH>

<https://www.instagram.com/missingchildrench/>

<https://missingchildren.ch/>

<https://116000.missingchildren.ch/>

Pully, December 2023

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Point de dépôt

Section paiement



Monnaie	Montant
CHF	

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