

OUR CIRCULATION CONTINUES TO GROW - CALL 01865 391725

WEEKEND RETURN HELPS YOUTHS TO GET A LIFE AND KEEP IT.

A unique new scheme addressing the safety of children and teenagers is about to be launched in the South East of the UK. Weekend Return is a subscription funded telephone helpline focussed on taking teenagers and older children out of dangerous situations when they arise and getting them home or to safety.

The concept is born from a realisation that youths often place themselves into danger, generally without their parents' permission or knowledge and driven by peer pressure, poor judgement or simply by their own will. There is an almost endless list of examples such as attending raves or nightclubs, arranging sexual encounters, meeting strangers off the internet, or simply by getting lost, losing their money or missing a last bus or train. In this day and age, any of these situations could easily develop to become far more dangerous, even leading to serious physical attacks and fatalities.

Conflicts between children, who strive to be treated as adults and their parents desperately trying to keep their siblings safe have become an accepted part of family life. However if we also accept that youths will rebel against authority another approach must be developed that meets each party half way, leaving the youth with a feeling of independence, and the parent with peace of mind.

Members of the scheme receive a plastic membership card carrying their account number and the Weekend Return free-phone helpline number, through which members can gain access to the call centre. There the call centre team are armed with local knowledge, up to date public transport information and emergency contact names and numbers

supplied by parents. The membership card also serves as a valuable identification tool for the emergency services.

Through arrangements with local taxi firms, parents have the option of leaving instructions for Weekend Return to arrange taxis to collect their children if no other safe means of transport is available. Additionally parents have the option of giving their children Distress Fare vouchers, which can be exchanged in place of fares with participating Rail and Bus companies should a member find himself or herself with no money.

Matthew Bonner, spokesperson for the scheme says 'We recognised early on that the solution lay in developing a scheme that both parents and their children would benefit from and welcome. Any solution that restricted the movements of children and teenagers would only serve to alienate them. Only one with the potential to increase their freedom would be successfully embraced.'

'The whole ethos of Weekend Return is to recognise that youths will inevitably endanger themselves, often more so when they are told they cannot go somewhere or do something. By offering them a means to get out of trouble when and where they decide they need us, we gain and maintain their trust and are therefore called upon again and again.'

Annual membership to Weekend Return costs £29.99 per child and a percentage of any profits are available to relevant charities. A number of free memberships have been made available for underprivileged families. Application forms are available from Secondary Schools, online at <http://www.weekendreturn.co.uk> or by calling the 24 hour application hotline on 01235 522483. The Weekend Return scheme is managed by Une, a not for profit organisation.