

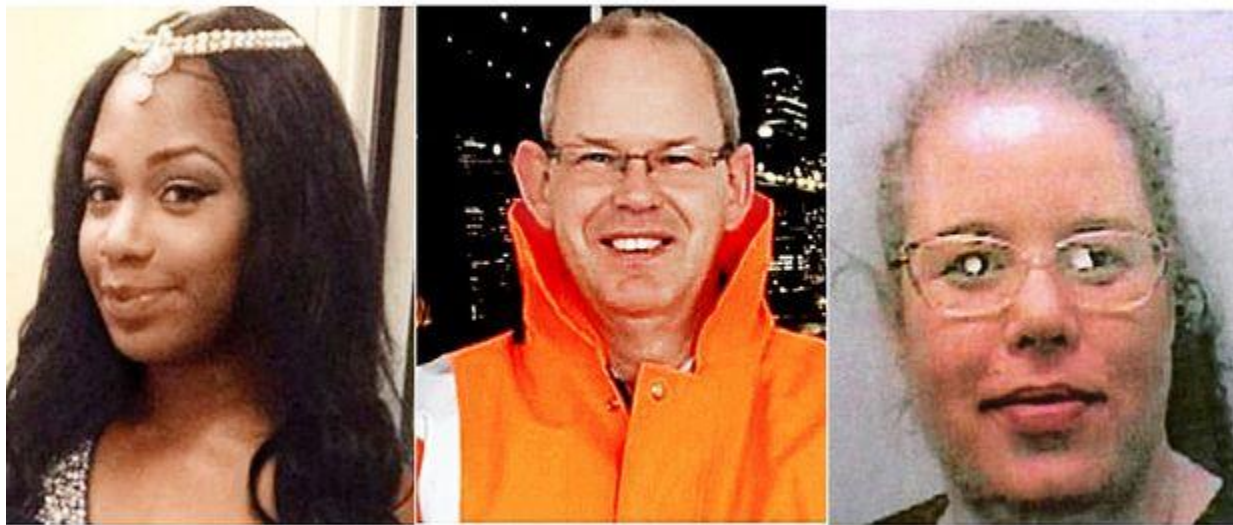
# One person goes missing in the UK every 2 minutes: Meet woman who helps to solve cold cases

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- **BY** EMMA JONES

**Della Williams, 43, spends her free time offering her services to an agency dedicated to finding missing people – and solves the cold cases the police have given up on**

Missing People UK

**MISSING MISSING MISSING**



**Rayana Dawkins**  
Romford, Essex

**Robert Taylor**  
Sleaford, Lincolnshire

**Lori Pompan**  
Oxford, Oxfordshire

The missing people pictured here are just a tiny percentage of those listed on [Missingpeople.org](http://Missingpeople.org)

Most people are asleep in the early hours of the morning, but a few years back, one night I was glued to my laptop.

A disembodied torso of a woman had been found a few miles from my house, dumped by the side of the motorway.

The majority had forgotten about it. Not me. I wondered who the poor woman was, and refused to believe that no one had a clue who she was or what had happened to her.

My curiosity led me to stumble across a website, The Doe Network, a volunteer-run agency which aims to solve 'cold cases' – ones that are 10 years old or more and no longer being investigated by the police.

I signed up to help, got to work on the torso case and got some great leads immediately.

For example, I identified a faint C-section scar and stretchmarks, which meant it was possible she had a surviving child. The feeling of finding clues was electric. I was hooked.

I have always agonised over the belief that somebody has to know something in missing person cases and people don't just vanish into thin air.

Crime investigation was always my passion so no one was surprised when I took on a job as an emergency services operator 17 years ago.

It's an intense job with long hours, but that doesn't stop me offering up my evenings and free time to volunteer.

It can be annoying sometimes working for the law, as I have access to so many different websites and files, which, if I could utilise them would help solve so many of the cases that I work on in my spare time. But that would be a breach of my job.

Two years ago, the chief at my police station asked me to come to his office. A cold case was sitting in a box with dust on it and after hearing about my hobby, he asked if I'd be interested in opening it back up.

It was regarding a male body that had been found in some wasteland 19 years ago. He had been decapitated, so the police never had dental records, and his hands had also been removed, so fingerprints couldn't be taken.

No one ever came forward to identify him, despite distinct clothing and possessions being found on him, and this had always baffled the police.

Eventually we were allowed to extract DNA and this was the first exhumation I attended. It was very exciting. The DNA is still under investigation, but it looks likely we now have a match.

Often, the reason people don't get identified for so long is because they lead what I call 'high risk' lifestyles. This can include sleeping rough, drug taking, or prostitution. These people live isolated lives.



Della dedicates her time to help solve cold cases involving missing people

I don't have kids and I'm single, so it's easy to get carried away in an investigation. There are times when cases like this get to me and I have to switch off and take a break for a few weeks. When I find myself getting too bogged down I'll fill my mind with happy stuff to cheer myself up...

A case that really upset me was when I worked with a lady called Martha whose two-year-old sister was snatched from their garden in front of her eyes, in 1965. She is convinced she was kidnapped by gypsies.

The elderly mother, Elizabeth, to this day can't move on. Every time she goes out she is looking for a little girl. She can't accept she would now be an adult.

Unfortunately in this case, the girl was so young when she was snatched she may not remember her former life. It's unlikely we would be able to trace her... but it feels good to be able to offer some hope.

To volunteer, all you need is a computer and the ability to trawl the internet. Google is my main search method, or I look at old newspaper records in the library. Here, I can find names related to

the missing and track them down for questioning. This can go both ways. Some people never give up on their missing loved ones, while others have to just walk away.

It's hard to describe the excitement I feel when I find a new nugget of information. Often, I will call law enforcement to inform them, but they laugh.

Unfortunately, and I know this first-hand, there is too much current crime to justify reopening every case that was abandoned 15 to 20 years ago. They don't have the time or resources.

## **Successful solving**

It's unlikely someone who's been missing for an extended period of time will turn up alive and be ready to be reunited with family. But it has happened.

The most iconic for me was that of Denise Bloser, who had been missing for 17 years. She faked her own kidnap, leaving a note at her then husband's house that said, "We've got your wife" and her car was found abandoned. Her husband eventually divorced her in absentia, but her parents continued to search.

A few years after her disappearance, the company Denise used to work for came under legal investigation. It transpired she and a co-worker had stolen £70,000 and after fearing she may get found out, she vanished. Her parents, convinced she was alive, asked us to help.

Knowing she despised the cold, we searched warm climates and years later, after hundreds of search hours, we found a Denise in Florida with the same birth date. It was her. They were reunited and all charges against her were dropped. It was emotional, even the policemen were crying.

One lady had a husband walk out on her and he wasn't heard from for four years. She registered him missing then one day he turned up, let himself in, and said he wanted a divorce. He'd vanished because he was too scared to discuss his marriage.

One young man was listed on the network for a long time but then came home out of the blue. It turned out he had been sent to prison and was too ashamed to tell anyone. To say his mother was stunned is an understatement.

I don't think I'll ever stop. Although I have no free time to get out there and meet a potential husband, I'm OK with that and I've accepted I'll never have kids now.

Even when I'm up all night searching through files and all my friends are settled with their families, I want to bring these missing people home, and I refuse to give up on them when everyone else has...

## Missing persons: The facts

- It is estimated 140,000 under 18s go missing in the UK each year. About 360,000 people, including adults, were reported missing last year. That accounts for one person every two minutes.
- After 24 hours, a person can be officially reported as missing. Last year, 97% of cases were found safe and returned home shortly after this time.
- The Doe Network started in the US but also has an EU office and is recruiting new volunteers. Contact [doenetwork.com/casesUK](http://doenetwork.com/casesUK) to find out more. (note from DN: this is an incorrect link. The correct link is <http://www.doenetwork.org/volunteer.php>)
- If you have concerns about a missing person, or know information about someone who is listed as missing, contact Missing People UK on 116000.

***The film *Dark Places* - about a woman who re-opens the cold case of her murdered mother and sisters - is available on Blu-ray and DVD from 22 February, courtesy of Entertainment One.***

Source: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/one-person-goes-missing-uk-7385451>