

November is National Runaway Prevention Month

Once again, November is recognized as National Runaway Prevention Month. For the third year, the National Runaway Switchboard and the National Network for Youth are urging organizations and individuals to join together in building awareness of the challenges facing youth today. Today's youth have pressures from family, peers, school, and jobs, or lack of jobs. Like young people before them, they are being physically and sexually abused—sometimes by the person they trust most. They are experimenting with drugs and alcohol and are targets actively recruited by gangs. A tumultuous world climate leaves youth even more vulnerable to an uncertain future.



Photo by Ray Reiss

According to the *American Journal of Public Health* (1999), 1 in 7 youth will run away before the age of eighteen. Within this large group of runaways, 41% of females seeking shelter report being pregnant¹, 75% have or will drop out of school², and 32% have attempted suicide³. Youth in 2004 are experiencing a scary and dangerous passage into adulthood.

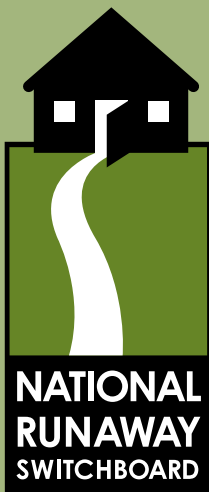
National Runaway Prevention Month is an opportunity to focus on the problems confronting youth and promote services available to them, such as the National Runaway Switchboard. By beginning to address and alleviate some of these issues being wrestled with by youth, we will help them to troubleshoot problems, resolve conflict, and enjoy their childhood. Keeping young people off the streets today will ultimately help them develop into productive citizens tomorrow.

Use November to connect with youth: as a parent, volunteer, donor, or friend... reach out! To find a list of possible activities, visit www.nrscrisisline.org, click on the November is Runaway Prevention Month banner, then click on the Prevention Month Toolkit. Do what you can to prevent youth from running, and you'll help strengthen our most precious resource for the future.

¹ J. Green et al., *American Journal of Public Health*, 1999 as reported in *Virginia Child Protection Newsletter*, VA Department of Social Services, J. Grayson, ed., 2002.

² National Network for Runaway and Homeless Youth, as reported in *Virginia Child Protection Newsletter*, VA Department of Social Services, J. Grayson, ed., 2002.

³ Westat, Inc. 1997. *National Evaluation of Runaway and Homeless Youth*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children and Families.



What's Inside:

- Letter from the Board Chair & Executive Director
- Girls Rock!
- Thanks To Our Supporters
- Anthony's Journey
- 10,000 Home Free Rides
- NRS Charity Grand Slam
- Questions & Answers
- Prevention Tips for Parents

From the National Runaway Switchboard

It is not “business as usual” at the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS)! In the past few months, NRS has unleashed its creative energies as it strives to be the leading voice for at-risk youth and families. Our focus continues to be keeping youth safe and off the streets. To serve as a cutting edge resource, NRS has completed two major processes to more precisely hone our mission and to develop our road map to future success.

Combining forces, the NRS Board of Directors, staff and volunteers have developed a three-year strategic plan. The comprehensive plan prioritizes internal needs which will help us achieve the results we desire in the broader community. One of our seven major goals is the implementation of an information technology plan. This plan will allow us to build the technological and physical resources necessary to support day-to-day operations, while maximizing efficiency and service quality. Another priority is to extend our outreach to youth by expanding strategic and collaborative partnerships. A third goal is to generate greater awareness of our services. A major catalyst propelling the accomplishment of this goal is our recent acquisition of the number 1-800-RUNAWAY. NRS will launch the 1-800-RUNAWAY number in 2005 through a new television public service announcement. Our other priorities center around building and strengthening our existing and very valuable resources: volunteers, staff, Board of Directors, and financial revenue streams.

NRS has also entered into the second year of the “Best Year Yet” process. Clearspace LLC, strategic consultants specializing in the “Best Year Yet” model, have donated their time to helping NRS staff establish their top ten agency-wide goals for 2004/2005. Through an annual two-day in-service, monthly meetings and continuous access to Clearspace’s web-site tutorial, the staff is working together and individually to produce positive outcomes. NRS staff’s new team vision for 2004/2005 is, “Our commitment to quality makes a difference for youth and their families.”

Through both our three year strategic plan and “Best Year Yet” processes, NRS is setting the pace in our journey to success. For nearly 35 years, the National Runaway Switchboard has responded to the needs of youth and their families, seven days a week, 24 hours a day. It continues to be our goal to keep America’s runaways and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. Thank you for your continued support in this endeavor.



MATT FELDMAN
Board Chair



MAUREEN BLAHA
Executive Director

Pass the Turkey to Chicago Youth

Turkey, sweet potatoes, pumpkin pie, and everyone’s favorite eating holiday is fast approaching!

On Tuesday, November 23rd, the National Runaway Switchboard will host a holiday dinner for runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth in Chicago. Last year, NRS served sixty youth a hearty holiday dinner. Please consider making a contribution to NRS to support this event and other vital programming to keep America’s runaway and at-risk youth safe and off the streets by using the NRS addressed envelope accompanying this newsletter.

On behalf of runaway and at-risk youth, NRS gives thanks on Thanksgiving and every day of the year for the support of our volunteers and donors...Thank you!

Catch Thirty-Five Hosts NRS Charity Grand Slam: *Step Up to the Plate*

The Taste America Restaurant Group's flagship eatery, Catch Thirty-Five Chicago, hosted a charity event for the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) on June 21st. Done in collaboration with the Chicago Hotel Concierge Association and the National Concierge Association – Chicago, many other local businesses participated in this great night out including Concierge Preferred Magazine, the League of Chicago Theaters, Key Magazine and Nobel Fool Theater.

Step Up to the Plate! benefited NRS and our crisis hotline by donating 40 percent of all food and beverage sales at their Chicago Loop restaurant. NRS friends and supporters turned out in record numbers to boost the evening's proceeds to \$4364.00.



(l-r), Bonnie Gendel, Director of Concierge Relations for Concierge Preferred Magazine, Maureen Blaha, NRS Executive Director, and Ken Karlson, Catch 35 Business Manager relax before dinner during the Step Up to the Plate charity fundraiser.

Catch Thirty-Five is no stranger to the act of corporate giving. "Throughout the years, we've always tried to remain conscious of community and lend support to those who need it most," said Catch Thirty-Five partner Sam Bergard.

The National Runaway Switchboard is a lifeline for many teens. NRS is grateful that Catch Thirty-Five is bringing attention to what can be done to help keep youth safe and off the streets and extends its appreciation to the many other organizations that have followed Catch Thirty-Five's lead by co-sponsoring the dinner.

The business community's willingness to Step Up to the Plate! supports NRS' goal of keeping families intact and youth out of harm's way.

Girls Rock!



What happens when you gather more than 3,000 girls at the Girl Scouts, Girls Rock Conference? For the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS), it meant hearing about their opinions on the most important issues facing girls today.

As a community organization partner for the event, NRS staff and student interns spent the day talking with girls ages 11-16 on issues facing them in their daily lives. NRS was invited to participate in the conference to share its expertise and knowledge in runaway education and prevention methods. Answering the question, "What challenges are girls facing today," participants at the Girls Rock conference in Chicago provided an array of information that shed light on what it means to be a teenage girl in today's society.

Girls Rock Conference reported bullying, teasing and being picked on for one's differences are a major concern for girls. Peer pressure is still a problem. Beyond the desire to fit in, girls feel the stress of school, the dilemma of boy/girl relationships and the prevalence of rape.

NRS was proud to provide representation at such a well-attended event that focused solely on girls and young women. Females make up, on average, 75 percent of callers to NRS annually. Based on NRS statistics, peer and social pressures are among the biggest concerns of youth contemplating running away. Collaborative events between community-based organizations provides a forum for youth, not only to share their perspective on adolescent issues, but also equips youth with tools for dealing with their problems.

Anthony's Journey

Anthony didn't consider himself a bad kid; it just seemed as if everybody else did. According to Anthony, there are things you do because you're bored. There are things that happen when somebody you don't like pushes your buttons and things you do when you have to prove yourself.

Anthony had just turned 16 and was being sent to the principal's office for disrupting his classes.

This was his second trip. Anthony had also recently been in a fight over the outcome of a basketball game. He had to admit that was stupid. And he knew he should not sneak out of the house the way he had been doing. It didn't help that the police caught him out after curfew on a school night. Despite his troubles, Anthony did not think of himself as very different from most teenagers in Allentown. He knew where to draw the line.

One thing nagged at Anthony. He didn't really talk about what was bothering him; except to his friends. In Anthony's mind there were just too many rules. Anthony believed his parents, especially his father, didn't understand. Using his poor behavior in school as justification, his parents insisted on more rules. Big arguments developed. Anthony and his parents started arguing so much that Anthony's sister, Mia, volunteered to have Anthony live with her and her husband. That went OK for about a month. Mia respected Anthony's space and her husband, Shawn, was teaching Anthony how to change a head gasket. Even though things seemed to be going well, one day Mia told Anthony, "You're going to have to work this out with Mom and Dad, Anthony. You can't hide from your problems, forever." She told him it was time for him to go back home.

Because he didn't believe his difficulties with his father could improve, Anthony knew he did not want to return home. He did not know what to do. Anthony



had heard a lot about Raleigh. He checked the secret compartment in his backpack. \$90. Anthony ran away to North Carolina the night before he was scheduled to return home to Allentown. When he took his first step in Raleigh, Anthony realized what it meant not to know a single person there.

Anthony had been in Raleigh a week when he called the National Runaway Switchboard. He

had been sleeping in parks and alleys, eating out of garbage cans and been conned out of his money.

"The whole world is against me," he told Janet, the NRS front line team member on the phone. "Everyone watches me like a hawk now. I admit I got into trouble before, but it was nothing bad. Now my cousins call me 'dirtbag' and my family treats me like I'm a huge disappointment to them." At that point, Anthony cried.

Janet listened and talked to Anthony about his options. Anthony agreed to have Janet conference his parents onto the line. Because Anthony's parents were not home, the call went to voice mail. Anthony still needed help right now. He was hungry and homeless. Janet found a shelter that Anthony could go to in a city bus displaying the yellow Safe Place triangle or by calling 911 and having the local police transport him. Anthony decided to call 911. Janet promised Anthony that the National Runaway Switchboard would attempt to reach Anthony's family with him on a conference call again when he called back.

Several hours passed before Anthony was able to call NRS. When he did call, Anthony asked to speak to Janet. Janet's shift had ended and she had gone home. Brett, the NRS front line team member answering the call, told Anthony he would be able to help him. Brett set up a conference call between Anthony and his parents. Anthony agreed to attend school regularly with-

(Continued on page 5)

Questions & Answers

Q:

Why do articles always say kids run away because they are abused? My 15 year-old daughter ran away. She wasn't abused. She's never been spanked or hit in her life. And I don't verbally abuse her.

—*E-mail from a concerned mother*

A:

Thank you for taking time to contact us. When a youth runs from home, not only is the individual impacted, but so are his/her family, neighbors, the community and all of society. Youth run from home for a variety of reasons, from issues related to family dynamics to peer pressure to problems in school, and those reasons are often difficult to understand or accept. We do know that kids that run from home are not bad kids, they are often fleeing as a way to cope and most have not thought about the consequences of their running.

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) prides itself on being a resource for statistical information on run-aways. In addition to the statistics we gather from callers to our 24-hour hotline, we also capture information based on the research of many sources, including; the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Children's Defense Fund. Among the statistics, these sources report...

1. Callers to the NRS crisis line indicate that family dynamics (37%), peer social pressures (13%), and seeking youth services (11%) are what prompted their call.
2. Parental substance abuse is the largest predictor of runaway behavior in youth.
3. Prior to leaving home, nearly one-half (43%) of youth reported being beaten by a caretaker.
4. A little over a quarter of youth, who've run from home, have had parents or caretakers request sexual activity, and 32% have been forced to participate in sexual activity against their will.

As you stated in your message, most young people who make the decision to run are not prepared for the realities of the street. Often in need of both food and shelter, they are vulnerable to those who will prey on their youth and innocence. NRS serves as a resource and advocate for at-risk youth through our 24/7 crisis line. We also maintain a database of 17,000 referral agencies and organizations across the United States who provide crisis intervention and support services to runaway and homeless youth.

Understanding the realities of running away is an important factor in preventing youth from running away. The National Runaway Switchboard strives to educate both youth and adults on the harsh difficulties youth face when they run away from home.

Thank you again for taking time to contact us...especially with the good news of your daughter's return home!

—*Maureen Blaha, Executive Director.*

(Continued from page 4)

out getting into trouble, adhere to his curfew and to get a job. As part of his parents' agreement to give Anthony his space, they agreed to allow him to live with his sister, Mia.

Brett then made arrangements for Anthony to return to his parents in Allentown through the Home Free Program, a collaboration between the National Runaway

Switchboard and Greyhound Lines, Inc. The following morning, Anthony was on his way home to Pennsylvania.

Brett remembers the last thing Anthony told him. "I never thought my Dad would let me live with my sister. And, I never thought I'd ever hear him tell me he loved me."

(The names have been changed to protect confidentiality.)

Motorcycle Rally for Kids



The third annual Motorcycle Rally was a roaring success! Special thanks to Rick Barkan, the riders, and volunteers for their support.

National Runaway Switchboard Acknowledges Ray Reiss

The National Runaway Switchboard is proud of the contributions of all of our volunteers. Many NRS volunteers extend themselves well beyond the call of duty in order to further the goals and mission of NRS. NRS' management and staff would like to take this time to acknowledge a volunteer who has repeatedly gone that extra mile to make a difference. Ray Reiss has volunteered on the lines for two and a half years; donating hundreds of hours (over 300) while managing the demands of his successful photography studio. Using his skills and talents as an accomplished photographer, Ray has conducted photo shoots that resulted in the images found in NRS' 2002 and 2003 annual reports. He has also produced the professional head shots of a number of NRS staff and board members for use in NRS' growing image library.

NRS expresses regret to Ray for not crediting him for the photograph on the front of the Summer 2004 newsletter. Any such oversight does not diminish the high regard in which NRS holds the quality of Ray's craft and his generosity to NRS.

Runaway Prevention Tips for Parents

PAY ATTENTION:

- Listen when your child is talking with you. Don't pretend to listen while you're watching television, reading the paper, or using the computer. Children know the difference.

GIVE RESPECT:

- Acknowledge your child's struggle to grow and mature.

UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD:

- Try to sympathize with what your child is going through. Look at life from their point of view. Remember that when you were their age some of your ideas may have lacked maturity, too.

DISCUSS FEELINGS:

- Talk about what it feels like to be a parent. Share with your child the things you need from him or her. Encourage him or her to talk about their feelings. When parents share their feelings, children know it's safe to share their own.

CREATE RESPONSIBILITY:

- Give your child choices, not orders. Help him or her to understand the consequences of their actions. When punishments need to be enforced, try asking what they think would be appropriate. Make sure the punishment fits the "crime" and be consistent with other actions you've taken.

ADMINISTER POSITIVE PRAISE:

- Describe your child's positive and negative behavior and how it affects others. Be specific and give praise to reward good behavior. Positive behavior acknowledged is positive behavior repeated.

DON'T ALWAYS GIVE THE ANSWERS:

- If you want your children to be able to find their own answers or solutions to problems, you can help them do so by not giving them the answers all the time. Instead, discuss options. Play "what if" to help them develop problem-solving skills.

Get Youth Off the Streets

More than 1,200 youth run away each day! This fall, the National Runaway Switchboard is celebrating two major collaborative efforts to help runaway youth return home and at risk youth stay off the streets: Home Free and National Runaway Prevention Month.



HOME FREE

“Ready to go home?” is the subtle inquiry on materials marketing the Home Free program sponsored by Greyhounds Lines, Inc. and the National Runaway Switchboard. Since 1995, over 10,000 youth have returned home through this successful program. Home Free reunites youth with their families. For older youth, Home Free provides an opportunity to go to a transitional living program in their community.

The program is comprehensive and much more than just a ride home. As part of the Home Free program, the National Runaway Switchboard offers referrals to local resources to provide support to help keep families intact once the youth has returned home. Youth and parents are encouraged to call the National Runaway Switchboard 24 hour hotline once the youth returns home if talking to one of the front line team would be helpful.

“The partnership means safe, reliable transportation home and a viable option for runaway youth,” said Stephen Gorman, president and chief executive officer of Greyhound Lines, Inc. “Home Free continues to be a successful intervention to reunite families.”

Thank You to Our Supporters

We wish to acknowledge the following individuals, foundations, corporations and government agencies for their generosity and support from June 24, 2004 through August 31, 2004.

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Family and Youth Services Bureau in the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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IN KIND

ICM Properties

We apologize for any omissions. If an error has occurred, please report it to Katy Walsh, Director of Development & Communications at 773.880.9860, ext. 223.

Spirit of Youth Benefit

The National Runaway Switchboard invites you to celebrate youth at its upcoming benefit

Spirit of Youth

Thursday, November 4th
6:00pm to 10:00pm
Chicago Cultural Center
77 E. Randolph Street



To date, the following auction and raffle items have been received: United Airlines round-trip tickets to Europe, a Weber Grill, exciting get-away packages, certificates from some of Chicago's best restaurants and much more.

Last year's successful event SOLD OUT! Don't miss out on this celebration of youth. Purchase your tickets today! For more information

contact Kathy Chuckas at 773.880.9860, extension 255.

November is National Runaway Prevention Month. By attending the *Spirit of Youth*, you are supporting efforts to keep America's runaway and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. During the evening, the 2004 Spirit of Youth Awards will be presented to Greyhound Lines, Inc. and Julian & Rhona Frazin.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

- Commit to Gold, Silver, or Bronze sponsorship.
- Become a Table Sponsor for 10 guests.
- Attend the Benefit, \$90/guest.
- Donate an auction or raffle item by October 31st.

FRONTLINE IS A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL RUNAWAY SWITCHBOARD

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