The filming of NRS’ newest PSA featuring Chris “Ludacris” Bridges shows the expanding partnership between The Ludacris Foundation and NRS since 2007 and the release of the award-winning single Runaway Love.

NRS Launches LIVE CHAT with Ludacris Public Service Announcement

By Lashawnda M. Carter

According to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS)’s 2010 Why They Run report, about 50% of youth on the street have access to a cell phone at least some of the time, and 72% have access to email. In an effort to stay innovative when connecting with youth, as well as staying abreast with the growing popularity in instant messaging, NRS launched a new live chat service in March 2011. The service gives callers another option to make the connection with NRS’ front line team and resources.

Currently, NRS has an online bulletin board, where youth in crisis can post messages that a crisis intervention specialist responds to within two hours. The new live chat, accessible during peak hours, allows an immediate response followed by an uninterrupted dialogue with a crisis intervention specialist. Help is still available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-800-RUNAWAY, sending an email to info@1800RUNAWAY.org, or posting a message to NRS’ bulletin board.

To promote the new live chat, NRS teamed up with award-winning entertainer and NRS ambassador, Chris “Ludacris” Bridges to film a new public service announcement (PSA). This is NRS’ third PSA featuring Bridges. All three can be viewed by visiting www.1800RUNAWAY.org.

The PSA promoting NRS’ new live chat service gives callers another option to get connected to a crisis intervention specialist, with access to over 13,000 resources.
These are snippets from bulletin board postings at www.1800RUNAWAY.org. In the past week, these three teenagers reached out to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) with serious problems of depression, safety, and addiction. They are all anonymous people in pain trying to find relief. They reached out for comfort and NRS reached back. We don’t usually know what happens to a caller, chatter or poster. NRS just knows when youth in crisis needs help, we are here for them!

Everybody has a crappy day! For teenagers, it could be crappy months or even years. Not quite an adult, no longer a child, a teenager faces a myriad of challenges in coming of age. Externally, school, family, and friends pressure a teen to act in a certain way. Internally, a youth battles identity issues in their ever-changing bodies and emotions. It can be overwhelming. For forty years, NRS has provided a listening ear to youth in crisis. Using solution-focused interventions, NRS handles the call, and now the chat, with sensitivity to each individual situation. NRS offers non-judgmental support everyday of every year. This winter, during the worst Chicago blizzard in twenty years, NRS’ dedicated staff and volunteers ensured the crisis call center stayed opened and accessible to families in crisis around the country.

NRS doesn’t know the end of the story for any of these three teenagers that recently posted desperate messages on our bulletin board. We just know the world is a scary place and these kids are out there in it. And now they know 1-800-RUNAWAY or www.1800RUNAWAY.org is available 24/7 to help.
Volunteers are the HEART of NRS!

Our volunteers continue to make a difference on the lines and in their communities.

Volunteer of the Year 2011
Brian Meister, Miss Illinois Whitney Thorpe-Klinsky, and NRS Executive Director Maureen Blaha - photo courtesy of Amy Dondanville

Over 100 volunteers and community members celebrated their service and support of NRS’ mission at the 40th Anniversary Volunteer & Community Recognition Event, held April 11, 2011 at ZED451 in Chicago. The Volunteer of the Year award for 2011 was presented to Brian Meister by Miss Illinois Whitney Thorpe-Klinsky. Meister has been with NRS for just over a year and has already served over 500 hours on the lines! Miss Illinois was a popular guest, with numerous attendees taking their pictures with her and thanking her for visiting and supporting NRS through her work in schools across the state.

Cubs Care Foundation
Cubs Care Foundation volunteers at the 11th Annual Thanksgiving Dinner to feed homeless youth - photo courtesy of Nathan Luecking

NRS hosted the 11th Annual Thanksgiving Dinner, sponsored by Cubs Care Foundation, at St. Luke’s Church in Chicago. Local homeless youth were served a traditional Thanksgiving meal. The youth also received backpacks including essential supplies and clothes. Activities for the evening included entertainment by Spoken Word group Kuumba Lynx and special appearances by Rep. Mike Quigley (D-IL), Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), and Alderman Thomas Tunney.

Lemonade Crew donate proceeds to NRS
The lemonade crew included Paul Ingersoll (10), Lukas Blume (9), Julian Ingersoll (7) and Sebastian Ingersoll (9). – photo courtesy of Mariana Ingersoll

Front Line Team Member Mariana Ingersoll turned her children’s lemonade stand into a service learning opportunity! Her sons and their friends opened a lemonade stand in their neighborhood. But instead of keeping all the profits, they donated 25% of their lemonade stand proceeds to NRS! The young men also had NRS bookmarks on the table to pass out to thirsty customers.

Teen organizes a runaway awareness event
Brielle wearing a shirt from Holey Jeans Day – photo courtesy of Brielle Corriente

High school freshman Brielle Corriente raised over $1,600 for NRS by organizing an awareness fundraiser in her community in Pennsylvania. She got a jumpstart on her senior graduation project by organizing a dress down/donation day at the school. She set up displays about runaway awareness through the elementary, junior, and high school buildings, and showed video clips weekly. The schools in Corriente’s community ban jeans with holes in them. But, on November 18, 2010, students in all three buildings were permitted to wear holey jeans for a day if they donated a dollar to NRS. Teachers were also allowed to dress down and wear the holey jeans for a donation of three dollars. She also sold t-shirts to the middle school students. Corriente plans to continue this activity every November for National Runaway Prevention Month.
After spending nearly a year away from home, 18-year-old Sonya began to think that maybe it was time to find help in getting home. She had two children under the age of two, no job, no money, no place to stay, and was running out of options. She heard about 1-800-RUNAWAY from one of her former co-workers and decided to call.

“National Runaway Switchboard,” frontline team member, Jeremy, answered.

“Hi, I got your number from a former co-worker. Can you help me get back home to my mom or even find a place for my kids and me to go?” Sonya asked. “I really could use your help right now because I’m all out of options.”

“I’m glad you called, tell me what’s going on and then we’ll discuss your options,” Jeremy said.

Sonya explained to Jeremy that she ran away from her mother’s home in Louisville, KY, to be with her children’s father, Jason, in Milwaukee, WI. She said that she was 15 and he was 21 when they met. Because of the age difference, her mother never approved of their relationship, but eventually agreed to let the young couple live with her because of the children.

During this time Jason had become abusive to Sonya and disrespectful to Sonya’s mom. Sonya’s mom told her Jason could no longer live in her house. Jason asked Sonya to move to Milwaukee with him. He said things would be different because he had family there and had already secured a job. Sonya and the children moved to Wisconsin to be with Jason. After only five months, Jason abandoned Sonya and the children.

“I had a job and was renting a room from one of my co-workers, but I had to quit my job because daycare cost too much,” Sonya explained. “Now I have no money to pay for the room I’m renting and my landlord said I have until Friday to pay or get out. I want to go back to my mom’s home but I left on bad terms. I don’t know if she’ll be willing to take my kids and me back.”

“I should’ve just listened to my mom and left Jason a long time ago. I wish I could just tell my mom that I’m sorry,” Sonya said.

“Well it looks like you’ve been through a lot,” Jeremy said. “Fortunately, there are options available to you. Let me look in our database to see what shelters are available for you and your children. I could also call your mom so that the two of you could talk to sort through your issues.”

“Okay, thank you.” Sonya said.

First, Jeremy looked in the database for a local shelter for Sonya and her children. He gave Sonya a list of transitional living programs for young mothers and children. Finally, he set up a call for Sonya and her mother to talk about their issues while he stayed on the line to help mediate the conversation. Once the lines of communication were open, Sonya realized that her mother never wanted her to leave and had been wishing for her to come home ever since. She told Sonya that she missed her and her grandkids so much and just wanted them to come back home. She was even willing to help Sonya with the children while she went to school and work.

Sonya and her mother agreed that it was best for her and her children to return home. Jeremy secured a free bus ticket from Greyhound for her and her children. He also provided her with a list of resources for young mothers, including counseling for victims of domestic violence. He reassured Sonya that she could always call 1-800-RUNAWAY for help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. “We are here,” Jeremy said.

“Thank you so much for helping me. I am so glad that I called because now I know that me and my kids will be safe,” replied Sonya.
Are You Keeping up with 1-800-RUNAWAY Online?

NRS is launching a redesigned website in the coming weeks! The new site will be easy to navigate, information will be organized in a way that’s easy to find. Most importantly, the site will be optimized to enable a teen in crisis to easily find NRS when searching the internet for resources.

It’s easy to stay in touch with NRS year-round. Simply follow NRS on Facebook or Twitter. Both are updated regularly with the latest research, facts, events, and goings-on at NRS! NRS has grown to over 1,000 followers on both Facebook and Twitter, and hopes to hit 2,000 in the next year. Don’t miss out!

NRS & True Colors Fund Partner To Raise Awareness

NRS and the True Colors Fund have teamed up to raise awareness of runaway and homeless youth. Co-founded by artist and civil rights activist Cyndi Lauper, the True Colors Fund is a vehicle to encourage everyone to become active participants in the advancement of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) equality and bring an end to GLBT homelessness.

In March, the True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund visited NRS to meet with staff and learn more about NRS. In addition, they attended a panel of frontline team members who explained what they do and who they help every day.
On November 12, 2010, NRS held its 8th Annual Spirit of Youth benefit at the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. The event raised more than $100,000 for NRS and included sponsorships from United Airlines (Platinum level), Chicago Tribune, Radio Flyer and Greyhound, a FirstGroup of America company (Gold Level). Guests in attendance had the opportunity to partake in a tour of the Merchandise Mart's Dream Home while indulging in dishes from ten premier Chicago restaurant partners, including Top Chef Stephanie Izard's Girl & The Goat, Vanille Patisserie, Sushi Wabi, Blue 13, Chef Fredy Cuisine, Mexique, Whimsical Candy, Nacional 27, Zed 451, and Opera Restaurant. In addition, wine stations were hosted by Fortino Winery, Eno, Midwest Real Estate Data, and Jodi Cohen & David Schwartz.

Bill Keller is an Emmy award winning reporter and anchor at KMSP-TV FOX 9 News in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is also the producer of NRS’ upcoming Radio Media Tour. Formerly a runaway, Keller is now a married father of two daughters, ages 17 and 20.

How did you overcome the challenges you faced as a runaway?
Mine was not a very difficult experience. I drove to California to stay with a high school friend who graduated a year before me. The biggest challenge was coming to terms with the realization that I needed my family to accomplish my goals. Surviving your teenage years is not easy. High school can be one of the most difficult social experiences. I had been knocking heads with my parents for a year and a half. After being grounded for months, I couldn't take it any longer and decided to split. But you soon realize that while you're struggling to be independent, you're not as self-sufficient as you think.

As the father of two daughters, what steps could be taken by parents to prevent their children from running away from home?
LISTEN TO YOUR KIDS. Take the time to not just hear but LISTEN. Know they are young, and their brains are not fully developed. I think one of the biggest challenges for kids between the ages of 15-20 is that they want to be independent and make their own mistakes. It's their job to rebel. They've outgrown the idea of listening to their parents tell them what to do. And as parents, we're not willing to let our kids make those mistakes for fear they will get hurt.

How does the radio media tour you are producing connect to the National Runaway Switchboard?
It's a series of live radio interviews with the National Runaway Switchboard's Executive Director Maureen Blaha. The idea is to let adults and youth know there is a resource that can help them. Kids may run away for a lot of personal reasons. But at the end of the day, Maureen lets people know their experience is not all that uncommon. And with all this talk about new media, the online chat offered by NRS is a tremendous resource. It allows NRS to reach out in a way young people are very comfortable with.
Because our donors, partners and sponsors have been there for NRS, we have been there to handle over 100,000 calls in 2010!
Tour the dreamHOME with wine and hors d’oeuvres and support keeping youth safe and off the streets.

November 18, 2011
6pm to 9pm

Merchandise Mart
222 Merchandise Mart Plaza, North Hall
Chicago, IL

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Sponsorship levels are from $2,500 through $25,000, contact Katy Walsh at kwalsh@1800RUNAWAY.org for more information.

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