



Frontline

Keeping America's runaway and at-risk youth safe and off the streets.

WINTER
2008
NEWSLETTER

NRS Logs on for Youth

By: Lashawnda M. Carter

More than ever, the internet and various technologies play a dominant role in the way that youth connect with each other and with what is going on in the world. Youth meet one another and gather information through email, web-blogs, e-commerce, online magazines and newspapers, and online communities such as YOUTUBE, MYSPACE, and FACEBOOK.

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) has adopted the use of youth-centric web presences into its program initiatives in an effort to connect with youth. NRS recently reinstated two youth-oriented web initiatives that have proven to be effective means of reaching youth nationally: NRS' online web magazine, Switched-On, and an NRS MYSPACE page.

NRS' Switched-On is an entertaining and dynamic, bi-weekly youth-centric website, used as a vehicle to educate visitors about runaway prevention. Each issue has four components related to a bi-weekly topic: a feature article, three letters with responses, a list of related internet resources, and a poll. NRS encourages any high school based entities, youth-based newspaper staffs, graphic design classes, youth groups or sports teams to submit an issue. As a reward, the creator of the chosen entry will receive a \$500 stipend and the issue will be featured on www.SWITCHEDONMAG.org.

MYSPACE is one of the most popular online communities used by youth. Many organizations use MYSPACE to promote their mission and to raise awareness of their services among youth.

www.SWITCHEDONMAG.org

As of October 2007, NRS stepped up its presence on MYSPACE by revamping its page. NRS' 1-800-RUNAWAY banner, bulletins about National Runaway Prevention Month and various blogs have been posted on NRS' MYSPACE page to raise awareness among runaway and at-risk youth who may be seeking help.

Be an E-Friend to NRS!

- Tell everyone about www.1800RUNAWAY.org
- Add NRS as a "friend" on a MYSPACE page
- Promote www.SWITCHEDONMAG.org to youth

INSIDE

- Favorite moments in 2007
- Children Having Children
- Spirit of Youth 2008
- Meet the 2007 Running for Runaways Team

To welcome 2008,
NRS invites you to reflect on some of our
Favorite moments in 2007...

JANUARY

NRS celebrated 35 years of service by producing a retro-designed Annual Report reflecting on services from 1971 through 2006.

FEBRUARY

Rapper Ludacris' performance of *Runaway Love* on the Grammy's promoted www.1800RUNAWAY.org leading to over 10,000 monthly visitors.

MARCH

The NRS Board of Directors' annual retreat provided an opportunity for directors to continue to develop their skills as NRS ambassadors.

APRIL

A public service announcement featuring Ludacris promoting 1-800-RUNAWAY was distributed to over 800 television stations across the country.

MAY

NRS received a five-year contract from the Family and Youth Services Bureau in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to continue as the national communication system for runaway and homeless youth. NRS is the *only* organization to ever have held this distinction.

JUNE

NRS was the national co-sponsor of UCAN's Teen Report Card grading adults on their performance on youth issues including runaway prevention, keeping youth safe and understanding why teens run.

JULY

NRS was featured in both *Vanity Fair* and *Seventeen* magazines, national publications with a combined circulation of over 3 million.

AUGUST

NRS' newest program, *Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum*, launched during press conferences in Chicago and Washington, DC.

SEPTEMBER

The Green Light Project promoting National Runaway Prevention Month expanded its outreach from coast to coast with organizational commitments in New York, Ohio, Illinois, Texas, California, and Hawaii.

OCTOBER

NRS provided a briefing for the Caucus on Missing, Exploited and Runaway Youth at the U.S. House of Representatives.

NOVEMBER

NRS' Spirit of Youth benefit was a huge success as award-winning entertainer Chris "Ludacris" Bridges and his foundation were honored with the Spirit of Youth Award for promoting 1-800-RUNAWAY.

DECEMBER

NRS handled 176,609 calls from January - December 2007; a 55% increase over the same period last year!

The National Runaway Switchboard embraces the new year and all the opportunities it presents to continue to reach out to youth in crisis. Please join us in our continued mission to keep America's runaway and at-risk youth safe and off the streets.



Stephen C. Mack
Board Chair

Maureen Blaha
Executive Director

**NRS' Running For Runaways
Marathon Team Crosses
the Finish Line!**

Despite record-setting heat and an early end to the race, the members of NRS' 2007 *Running for Runaways* marathon team *safely* crossed the LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon finish line on October 7 – and raised more than \$18,000 for the National Runaway Switchboard at the same time!

Runners signed up in the spring to run in support of NRS' mission and raise up to \$1,000 each. Along the way, they received weekly motivational emails from "Coach Jasleen," NRS Development and Communications Associate, as well as support from Marathon Buddies within the NRS community.

On race day, team members were given access to the private Trophy Tent, where they were provided with luxuries, such as pre and post race catered meals, massage therapists, and the highly-coveted private gear check.

NRS thanks our twenty runners for their commitment to keeping America's runaway and at-risk youth safe and off the streets – and is looking forward to facilitating our Fourth Annual *Running for Runaways* Team for the Chicago Marathon on October 12, 2008! Team members will enjoy access to the Trophy Tent, a perk available to fewer than 1,000 runners. In addition, NRS supports its runners with weekly motivational emails, tips on meeting fundraising goals, and an annual pasta dinner and tour of NRS the evening before the race, hosted by Executive Director Maureen Blaha and her husband Joe Morris.

For more information on registering for the 2008 marathon, contact Coach Jasleen at jjaswal@1800RUNAWAY.org.

Top Right: Running For Runaways teammates Brad Rumsky, Adolfo Sotil, and Rich Malone. This is the second marathon Rich has run for NRS – and he's a board member too!

Bottom Right: Running For Runaways teammates Kim McKernan and Adolfo Sotil relax in the Trophy Tent after the race.



2007 Annual Meeting

NRS Board of Directors and new Board alumni gather together at the 2007 Annual Meeting.



Board of Directors September 2007 – September 2008

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Maureen Blaha, *Executive Director*



Children Having Children: *Teen Pregnancy on the Line*

By Nicole Sutton, Public Ally

"My mom will freak out if she finds out that I'm pregnant." Elizabeth, 14. A week ago, Elizabeth left home because her pregnancy was harder and harder to conceal from her mother. Elizabeth wasn't allowed to date boys until she was sixteen. Elizabeth had been staying at Jenna's home but now Jenna's mom was asking too many questions.

An overwhelming proportion of callers to the 1-800-RUNAWAY crisis hotline are young, female and facing the streets alone. When a young girl has no money, no place to sleep, and it's cold outside, her level of stress rises. Recently, a pattern has emerged in the NRS call center that puts this demographic at an even higher risk – being young, female and pregnant.

There were 724 calls taken during 2006 where the issue of pregnancy was mentioned. A study of runaways found that 48.2% of youth living on the street and 33.2% of youth living in a shelter have ever been pregnant.¹ No matter what stage of pregnancy a caller is in, frontline team members, staff and volunteer "liners," are prepared to assist the youth every step of the way.

"My boyfriend and I had sex without a condom. Is there a way to make sure I'm not pregnant?" Marisa, 17

To young callers who are unsure if their sexual decisions will result in an unplanned pregnancy or STD, liners refer the caller to a national resource such as the Emergency Contraceptive Hotline or a local clinic that can perform a requested test.

When a young woman finds out that she is going to be a parent she is often overwhelmed with questions and anxiety. NRS provides services such as message relay and three way conference calling as tools for parents and youth to start a dialogue about how they feel about the situation and brainstorm what action should take place.

"I just want to make sure that the baby is OK." Amanda, 16

NRS hears from pregnant youth or teenage mothers who are no longer welcome at home. And runaway teens who want to keep their babies reach out to NRS. Because NRS handles all types of scenarios with young girls and pregnancy, frontline team members are prepared to provide assistance in various ways such as contacting a shelter specializing in pregnant teens or offering the number to a local Planned Parenthood for prenatal care.

When a young girl or her partner is dealing with pregnancy, they do not have to carry the responsibility alone. NRS frontline team members provide referrals, nonjudgmental suggestions, and communication tools. Often, a caller is searching for simply someone to confide in. NRS is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, all year round, as young girls navigate the journey of motherhood.

¹Greene, J., & Ringwalt, C. (1998). Pregnancy Among Three National Samples of Runaway and Homeless Youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 23; 6; pp. 370-377. From the NRS website under Research and Third Party Statistics

INNOCENCE LOST: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

By Nicole Sutton, Public Ally

The topic of commercial sexual exploitation of children has been in America's collective consciousness recently because of international headlines, documentaries and the nightly news. In reality, the issue is closer to home because it's happening in your state, your neighborhood and possibly your own home.

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) receives calls from across the country regarding the dangerous combination of sex trades and young people on a regular basis.

From urban cities to rural towns, children from all demographics are vulnerable to becoming involved in the sex industry. At least 100,000 to 300,000 youth are at risk for commercial sexual exploitation annually in the United States², especially in hotspots such as Washington D.C., Atlanta and Chicago, where the average age of entry into the commercial sex industry is twelve years old.³

²Estes, R., & Weiner, N. Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, University of Pennsylvania, 2001

³United States Department of Justice, Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section

⁴Freeman (1994) National Institute of Justice Report

⁵NISMART (National Institute for Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Throwaway Children)

⁶Estes, R., & Weiner, N. Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, University of Pennsylvania, 2001

Many factors fuel the victimization of youth including: the belief that 'younger is better,' the availability of child pornography, the lack of consequences for consumers, and the link between sexual abuse and violence. Sexually abused children are twenty-eight times more likely to be arrested for prostitution at some point in their lives than peers who did not suffer abuse.⁴ Also one out of every three teens will be lured toward the sex industry within forty-eight hours of leaving home.⁵

Victims tend to be female but a significant number of young boys and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth are also in danger. Approximately 25-35% of prostituted boys self identify as gay, bisexual, or transgendered/transsexual and at least 95% of all sexual exploitation engaged in by boys is provided to adult men.⁶ All youth need protection and access to resources.

FOX Chicago visits NRS

Mark Suppelsa from WFLD-TV Fox Chicago visits NRS' call center to produce a news segment on the runaway crisis.



2007 Spirit of Youth Honors Runaway Love

By Lashawnda M. Carter

The fifth Annual Spirit of Youth benefit was held at the Chicago Drake Hotel on November 1, 2007. The festive occasion celebrated award-winning entertainer Chris "Ludacris" Bridges for his tremendous efforts in raising awareness of the plight of at-risk and runaway youth and the help available at the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS). Ludacris and The Ludacris Foundation were honored with 2007 Spirit of Youth awards.

Since The Ludacris Foundation's partnership with the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS), NRS has experienced a 50 percent increase in calls to its hotline, and more than 60 percent increase in visitors to its website.

Sponsors for NRS' 2007 Spirit of Youth benefit included:

Platinum Sponsors:
Piaget and United Airlines

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Carlton Technologies, Greyhound Lines, Inc. and Radio Flyer

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Area Erectors, Ernst & Young, Fairfield Manufacturing, Susan Daniel Calligrapher, LaSalle Bank, Stephen and Rosemary Mack, McCormick Tribune, Rick Stoneham, Sybase, Inc. and United Letter Service.

Top: TLF President, Roberta Shields, Chris "Ludacris" Bridges, and NRS Executive Director, Maureen Blaha.

Middle Left: NRS Board Member Rich Malone thanks Ludacris and Gold Sponsor Carlton Technologies' Sam Farnsworth and Ryan Bracken for their commitments to NRS.

Middle Right: Jim Gutierrez and Jim McGreevy with W. J. Deutsch & Sons, LTD, the event wine sponsors, meet Ludacris during the V.I.P. reception.

Bottom: Spirit of Youth 2007 guests circulate the room looking for items to bid on for the silent auction.



Crazy Hat Bar Crawl Supports NRS

More than 100 hat-wearing Chicagoans participated in the third annual Crazy Hat Bar Crawl. This year, group organizers chose NRS to receive the \$500 raised by party guests making their way through seven neighborhood bars! Love those hats!

Because our donors, partners and sponsors have been there for NRS, we have been there to handle over 175,000 calls in 2007!

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CALL US. WE CAN HELP. 1-800-RUNAWAY

OUR SERVICES ARE FREE, CONFIDENTIAL, AND AVAILABLE 24 HOURS A DAY 365 DAYS A YEAR.



Spirit of Youth 2008

Friday, November 7th
The Drake Hotel; 6PM–11PM

Co-Chairs: Jim Criner and Michele Lehman

The National Runaway Switchboard's annual benefit aims to raise \$150,000 to help keep America's runaway and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. Please consider becoming a Spirit of Youth 2008 sponsor. Sponsorship levels range from \$2,000 to \$25,000. Contact Katy Walsh, Director of Development & Communications for more information at 773.289.1727 or kwalsh@1800RUNAWAY.org.

Frontline is a publication of the National Runaway Switchboard

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