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.

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.
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 Runaway Love 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 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 Variety 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 received a five-year contract from the National Association of Child Welfare Organizations to continue as the only organization to ever have held this distinction.

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 McKerman 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.

Maree Bullock, Vice-Chair
Greg Buseman
Akeshia Craven
James Griner
Eva Feldman
Yale Gordon, Secretary
Peter Gottlieb
Stephan C. Mack, Chair
Rich Malone
Crystal Marchigiani
Kelly Meado
Luke Palese
Ron Richter, Treasurer
John Roy
Joan M. Steltmann, Vice-Chair
Rick Stoneham
Frank Tortorella
Bonnie Wheeler
Maureen Blaha, Executive Director

Board of Directors September 2007 – September 2008

OUR SERVICES ARE FREE, CONFIDENTIAL, AND AVAILABLE 24 HOURS A DAY 365 DAYS A YEAR.
Children Having Children: Teen Pregnancy on the Line

By Nicole Sutton, Public Ally

“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, and 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 shelters have ever been pregnant. 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, 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 someone to confide in. NRS 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 States, 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.

Jenna’s home but now Jenna’s mom was asking too many questions.

“I just want to make sure that the baby is OK.” Ananda, 16

NRS provides tools. Often, a caller is searching for simply someone to confide in. NRS is available twenty-four hours a day, thirty-sixty-four days a year, as young girls navigate the journey of motherhood.

“Does anyone have a local clinic that can perform a requested test?”

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. Also one out of every three teens will be lured toward the sex industry within forty-eight hours of leaving home. 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. All youth need protection and access to resources.
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 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

Gold Sponsors:
- Carlton Technologies, Greyhound Lines, Inc. and Radio Flyer

Silver Sponsor:
- Coldwell Banker

Bronze Sponsors:

Top:
- TLP 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 Fattahworth and Bryn Brancke for their commitments to NRS.

Middle Right:

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

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

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