This spring, a delegation from the United Kingdom visited the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) to further learn about the United States’ systematic approach to helping youth remain safe and off the streets.

Paul Burstow, Member of United Kingdom Parliament, representatives from the UK’s The Children’s Society, and Scotland Yard officials were among the delegation who were on a fact-finding visit as part of The Children’s Society’s national Safe & Sound campaign to help runaway children in England. Three days of meetings served as an opportunity for the delegation to tap into NRS’ 35 years of experience in helping runaway and homeless youth.

Between 1.3 and 2.8 million runaway and homeless youth on the streets of America each year have access to a network of resources, including: youth shelters and healthcare by calling 1-800-RUNAWAY. A network like this doesn’t currently exist in the UK. The delegation wanted to learn how NRS successfully links youth to those resources and how government funding and private donations enable NRS to help thousands of youth each year in the U.S.

MP Burstow reported back to parliamentarians at a meeting in May about his visit to the U.S. “This trip provided us with an opportunity to see first hand how services and support are provided in the U.S. for runaway children,” said MP Burstow. “We plan to take what we learned here in the U.S. to influence the debate and policy in the UK.”

The visit included a tour of the NRS call center, a youth panel discussion with teen call center volunteers, a question and answer session between the delegation and representatives from NRS, meetings with representatives from the Family Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), Administration on Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a discussion with FBI officials, an evening reception hosted by LaSalle Bank and attended by U.S. Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL), and dinner hosted by Catch35 restaurant in Chicago.

Besides MP Paul Burstow, NRS facilitated the three day summit with representatives from The Children’s Society of England - Policy Advisor Martin Houghton-Brown, Senior Media Officer Petra Coveney, Campaign Officer Sarah Spinney, and Senior Researcher Myfanwy Franks; representatives from Scotland Yard - Detective Chief Inspector Sandra Looby and Detective Inspector Ann Simpson; representatives from FYSB - Youth Development Division Director Curtis Porter and NRS grant officer Deborah Yatsko, U.K. reporter for the Statesman - Kira Cochrane, and former UK runaway – Carl Hillier. In addition, MP Helen Southworth joined discussions via teleconference.
With an increasing number of Americans using the internet to obtain information, communicate with family and friends, shop, read news, and play games, the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) recognized the importance of updating our online presence.

In March, we launched a web initiative which includes a more user-friendly and easy-to-navigate 1800RUNAWAY.org website; the creation of switched-onmag.org, a youth-centric website; and the development of www.home-base.tv, an e-game to educate youth in conflict resolution, communication and negotiating skills.

The redesign of the NRS website includes a number of new and improved features making it easier for visitors to locate and download information. Our new site includes links for youth to switched-onmag.org and home-base.tv, it offers bi-weekly Parent Chat sessions for adults to discuss and share solutions to challenges they may be facing with their child, and it includes a message board section where visitors of all ages may post questions and obtain answers from experienced NRS front line team members. And there's a wealth of educational material, research and statistical information, and resources.

Both switched-onmag.org and home-base.tv will directly reach youth through online communities such as Myspace, Orkut and Friendster. We will be offering games and newsletters, and post banners to help direct youth to switched-onmag.org and home-base.tv. We also plan to use the site as a way to gather information from young people, which will ultimately help us serve youth more effectively and help give young people access to NRS resources.

Since the newly designed site went live in March, we've noted a 40% increase in visitors to the site. We hope that trend continues as we build our internet presence with youth, parents, educators, the media and other individuals interested in keeping youth safe and off the streets. Be sure to visit 1800RUNAWAY.org and check us out soon!

The youth web initiative helps NRS effectively be where young people are, and communicates to youth in their own language and in their own way. Overall these programs will increase the number of youth who have access to the incredible resources at NRS.

-Jim Marcus
NRS Front Line Team Member
Creator of switched-onmag.org
and home-base.tv

FBI & NRS Take On Child Prostitution

By Froilan Landeros

NRS has been active in forming relationships with several social service agencies around the nation to promote awareness about issues concerning runaway and homeless youth. The most recent partnership was with law enforcement officials. This year, the FBI held the Victims of Child Prostitution roundtable forum in Alexandria, Virginia about the interviewing processes when dealing with children in prostitution. NRS was invited to attend and the Director of Programs Gordon Vance, participated in the roundtable discussion. The twenty-one participants represented diverse professions from across the country, including; lawyers, pediatricians, university professors and agency staff from youth service organizations.

The FBI specifically wanted NRS to be a part of developing the legal doctrine to support some of their ideas and findings about victims, victim typology and social work services. A large part of the roundtable dialogue centered on Vance’s collaboration on a manual called Investigative Interviews of Adolescent Victims: a handbook mirroring NRS’ philosophy, services and crisis model intervention. This booklet, published by the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI, will be used all over the country by thousands of law enforcement agencies.

Throughout the forum, the FBI received input on methods to interview children and adolescents. NRS’ input was particularly critical on specific information regarding youth homelessness, substance abuse, educational assessment/options, family care and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) services. NRS also provided insight on evaluation procedures that would be in the best interest of the youth victim.

This is NRS’ second presentation with the FBI. Last year, NRS executive director Maureen Blaha was a featured speaker at the FBI’s Annual Victim Specialist Conference in Utah. In a closed session, NRS met with 112 FBI victim specialists and their agent supervisors who provide victim assistance to the 56 field offices throughout the United States. In addition, this spring NRS facilitated a meeting between representatives of the FBI and Scotland Yard.

UK delegation address questions to a panel of American high school students regarding youth in crisis.
Terese’s Plan

By Froilan Landeros

On a particularly crisp fall evening, Beth left her class, stopped by a Runaway Switchboard (NRS). Beth sipped her latte unaware of a young girl. Beth reassured the caller to take her time and that “My name is Terese. I don’t know what to do anymore. Could you help me?”

First, Beth asked Terese about her immediate safety. Terese explained that she wasn’t in danger and was calling from her mother’s house while the family was out. As the conversation continued, Beth built a rapport with Terese. Eventually, Terese blurted out the purpose of her call.

“Is there a way to move out of my house and take my sister without getting my mom into trouble?”

“I’m going to tell my aunt the plan,” Terese whispered in excitement.

“Goodbye and thank you so much.”

That night Beth fell asleep smiling as she thought of those last few words, “Goodbye and thank you so much.”

Terese immediately hung up, ending the call. Beth was amazed at how Terese had developed a viable plan, even though Beth was overwhelmed with a sudden rush of sadness. Beth used skills from her NRS training to help Terese.

“Does anyone else know about this?” asked Beth.

“No. My aunt might know but I try to keep stuff to myself.”

“Terese, you said that your mom makes you do things you don’t like to do. What does she make you do?”

“My mother makes me do things I don’t want to do and she makes me do things I enjoy doing,” mumbled Terese. “All I want to do is go to school and make sure my brothers and sister do the same. I know my mom cares, but she cares more about her drugs. I like school and I like learning, but my mom thinks that school is a waste and she feels that I should get a job to help her get money for her boyfriend and their drugs.”

Beth was overwhelmed with a sudden rush of sadness. She used skills from her NRS training to help Terese.

Terrified that she should get a job to help her get money for her boyfriend and their drugs.

“Mom, you said your aunt might be helpful. Have you talked to her?”

“Terese, you said your aunt might be helpful. Help me to stay safe.”

Terese hesitated and then responded, “I just don’t want her to get involved because she could tell the police and my family would be split apart. I don’t want that.”

Beth was overwhelmed with a sudden rush of sadness. She used skills from her NRS training to help Terese.

“Do you think your aunt could help you with this issue?”

“Terese, you said your aunt might be helpful. Help me to stay safe.”

“Y ou said your aunt might be helpful. Help me to stay safe.”

“T erese, you said your aunt might be helpful. Help me to stay safe.”

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) has become increasingly aware of the growing issue of “cutting.” Cutting is the intentional infliction of self-injury by making scratches or cuts on the body. Cutting is performed with sharp objects on the skin to result in bleeding and is more common with youth. SAFFIE-Alternatives, a nationally recognized resource, states that “self-injuries represent nearly one percent of the population, with a higher proportion of females than males. The typical onset of self-harming acts is in puberty. The behaviors often last for five to ten years but can persist much longer without appropriate treatment.”

An increasing number of NRS’ youth callers are reporting cutting as part of their issues. André Matlock has been a volunteer on the NRS front line team on and off for the past 25 years. He is also a psychiatric rehabilitation director at a residential home on Chicago’s northeast side. He provides NRS callers with his extensive experimen
tal knowledge of cutters. Matlock describes cutting as “an emotional release that is not a suicidal behavior.” The residential home, where he works, has 216 residents and 1/3 of them are women. He has noted that about 90% of the women residents are self-injurers. Many people still consider cutting to be part of a personality disorder indicating violent or suicidal behavior. Others consider it a problem that needs to be ended and discouraged. Parents that detect and discourage this act in their son or daughter without providing an alternative outlet may be causing more harm than help to the mental health of their child. Cutting is a coping mechanism. Taking it away doesn’t resolve the underlying issue.

NRS training and education staff have been working diligently to enhance training and available resources to provide frontline team members with the tools to assist callers that report being a cutter. NRS is approaching the issue with information and role playing examples on dealing with this delicate topic. The training manual was recently revised for the inclusion of cutting information. In addition, the training and education staff have attended several conferences and workshops, including: The National Association of School Psychologists’ Assessment of Individuals Who Self-Injure and Women’s Counseling Center of Evanston’s Cutting and Other Self-Injury: A Discussion for Professionals. NRS incorporates information gathered at workshops into on-going training for front line team members.

By Froilan Landeros

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) has become increasingly aware of the growing issue of “cutting.” Cutting is the intentional infliction of self-injury by making scratches or cuts on the body. Cutting is performed with sharp objects on the skin to result in bleeding and is more common with youth. The National Association of School Psychologists’ Assessment of Individuals Who Self-Injure and Women’s Counseling Center of Evanston’s Cutting and Other Self-Injury: A Discussion for Professionals. NRS incorporates information gathered at workshops into on-going training for front line team members. To learn more about self-injury please visit Safe Alternatives at www.safelifealternatives.org or NRS website at www.runaway.org for further readings.
2005 NRS Statistics

Reported age identified by the caller:
67 percent of youth callers were between 14 and 17 years old
NRS handled calls with youth as young as 10 years old

Youth’s situation at the time of the call:
55 percent were on the street as a runaway, throwaway or homeless youth
45 percent were dealing with a crisis situation or contemplating running from home

Time the youth has been away from home before calling NRS (on the street, with a friend, at a youth shelter):
70 percent were on the street 1-7 days
13 percent were on the street 1-4 weeks
12 percent were gone 1-6 months
Nearly 5 percent were away from home more than six months

The longer a youth is away from home, the chances of reunification with his or her family decrease considerably.

Top five states where NRS handled crisis calls in 2005:
Texas – 10,376 calls
Illinois – 17,045 calls
California – 15,764 calls
New York – 4,802 calls
Texas – 10,376 calls

45 percent were dealing with a crisis situation

NRS handled calls with youth as young as 10 years old
67 percent of youth callers were between 14 and 17 years old

For a complete list of 2005 statistics visit www.1800RUNAWAY.org

Former Runaway Gives Back to NRS!

Jesse Durham, 24, of Kapolei, Hawaii, recently made a generous financial contribution to NRS as a thank you to the organization for helping him return home to his mother ten years ago.

At age 15, Jesse’s mother, who was divorced, sent Jesse from their home in Redlands, California, to live with his father in Fairfax, Virginia. Soon after, a rebellious Jesse ran away to New York City. He spent two weeks on his own as a runaway. One night, Jesse was attacked by a man and had his arm badly cut. He quickly realized being on his own wasn’t his only option and he understood how fortunate he was to have loving parents who cared for him. He called his mother and talked through his situation, their relationship and how Jesse wanted to return home to his mother. Enter NRS. Jesse heard about NRS from his mother and called the hotline to arrange for a free ride home through NRS’ Home Free program, done in collaboration with Greyhound Lines, Inc.

Once home, Jesse and his mother received counseling. Jesse finished high school and served in the military for five years. Currently, Jesse is married and he and his wife are expecting their first child at the end of this month.

Government Partners

Family & Youth Services Bureau in the Administration for Children, Youth & Families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services); Illinois Department on Aging

NRS wishes to acknowledge the following foundations, corporations, and individuals for their generosity. The donors listed below provided gifts between March 1, 2006 and April 30, 2006.

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John Stance
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Joan Stelmanna
Dale Stephenson
Rick Stoneham

Thank you

NRS Board of Directors welcomed U.K. visitors!

Chicago Hotel Concierge Association (CHCA) wanted to support more local organizations. We knew with our support NRS would be able to reach out to more youth in Chicago and throughout the nation. I enjoyed my two year term as CHCA President and our teamwork with NRS. Hopefully, we will find ways to continue to work together as I start a new position as the Chef Concierge of the Palmer House Hilton.

-Kathy McClanathan

The Chicago Hotel Concierge Association, in conjunction with National Concierge Association-Chicago and Concierge Preferred Magazine, has donated over $25,000 in the last two years.

Our Services are Free, Confidential, and Available 24 Hours a Day 365 Days a Year.

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