Celebrate National Runaway Prevention Month and Spirit of Youth in November

By: Jasleen Jaswal, Development and Communications Associate

This year’s National Runaway Switchboard’s (NRS) Spirit of Youth has a new look and feel, designed to last the entire month of November in conjunction with National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM). The activities include:

- an online silent auction from October 15th-November 30th. The bidding will be fierce as participants bid for a chance to win exciting prizes, including trips to Paris, New York, and Los Angeles; behind the scenes tours at Charlie Trotter’s, Nordstrom, and Saks Fifth Avenue flagship store in New York; and much, much more.

- a raffle with a grand prize of $10,000. Only 500 tickets will be sold for $100 from October 1st - November 30th.

- a cocktail reception honoring Chef Charlie Trotter for his support of NRS and his longtime commitment to improving the lives of at-risk and disadvantaged youth through The Charlie Trotter Culinary Education Foundation. On November 13, 2009, at The Four Seasons Chicago, the seventh annual event will include an award presentation with a cocktail reception and live auction. Only 150 tickets are available for $200.

- a wrap party on November 30th at Witt's in Chicago’s Lakeview neighborhood. The event will include the drawing for the winner of the $10,000 raffle prize, the close of the online auction, and a small silent auction exclusive to this party. Only 200 tickets are available for $30 in advance or $40 at the door.

As in years past, Spirit of Youth serves two purposes - to raise $100,000 for NRS, and to raise awareness of NRPM. NRPM is a month long public awareness campaign that brings attention to the issues facing runaways and educates the public about the solutions and the role they can play in preventing youth from running away.

To buy event and/or raffle tickets, or to participate in the online auction, visit www.1800RUNAWAY.org and click on Spirit of Youth.
Questions Every Donor Asks

The importance of making good philanthropic decisions—based on values important to donors and the charities they support—is addressed in the book entitled, The 11 Questions Every Donor Asks—The Answers All Donors Crave. We picked five of these questions to answer on behalf of the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS).

Why me? Where do I fit? Am I valued beyond being just a donor?

Since between 1.6 and 2.5 million kids run away each year, chances are good that you will know someone dealing with a runaway episode. By choosing NRS as one of your charities, you are ensuring that someone will be there to answer the call from your daughter, neighbor, colleague or you. Even with a federal grant, NRS relies heavily on you, as a donor, for 18% of its operating budget and any new initiatives, such as Spanish translation of the Let’s Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum. Street Team outreach and youth-centric research. Each donation NRS receives represents someone’s decision and personal sacrifice to help a child get home or to a safe alternative. Last year, NRS handled over 144,000 calls, and each caller may have spoken to only one person in our call center, but the call was “answered” by many supporters...including you!

How much do you want? How much do you expect me to give?

We’ve had individual donations ranging anywhere from $10 to $100,000. Some supporters have been able to raise money for NRS beyond their personal donation by participating in our Running for Runaways team or hosting parties in their homes as a fundraising opportunity to educate their friends and family about NRS. Each gift, regardless of size, is significant to ensuring the excellence of the services we provide.

Why your organization? What sets you apart from other charities?

The National Runaway Switchboard utilizes a cost-effective model to ensure we are accessible 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. NRS uses the talents and passionate energies of over 100 volunteers to handle calls on the crisis hotline. By providing 40 hours of extensive training for each volunteer, NRS ensures each youth caller receives quality crisis intervention. Our commitment to always being available and our efficient model means that we have been able to take crisis calls forwarded from other crisis hotlines when they’ve had to reduce services due to budget pressures. For example, Covenant House Nineline has cut service hours and forwards youth crisis calls from 11pm to 1pm CST to NRS. Also, NRS handles the overflow calls for the California Youth Crisis Hotline.

Will my gift make a difference? Do my gifts really matter?

Every dollar helps NRS’ mission to keep America’s runaway and at-risk safe and off the streets. Last year, your gift was a part of our record-breaking year with over $450,000 raised. Whether you gave $25, $100, $1,000 or $5,000, your gift made a difference in the life of a kid in crisis. Because you were there for us, we were there for them!

Is it easy to give? Are your methods of getting user friendly?

NRS makes it easy for you to donate. On the home page at www.1800RUNAWAY.org, you can click on Donate to NRS and donate online. Also available on the site, a person may join the Birthday Club and sponsor a day in the call center. This fall everyone is invited to participate in the Spirit of Youth online auction and cash raffle. NRS also accepts checks and credit card donations in the mail. NRS encourages you to choose the National Runaway Switchboard in your employer’s United Way and Combined Federal Campaign and matching gift programs. You could also include National Runaway Switchboard as a charity beneficiary in your estate planning.

Call us. We can help. 1-800-RUNAWAY

Let’s Talk! Si, Hablemos en Español

By: Lashawnda M. Carter

Two years after the release of the Let’s Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum (RPC), the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) will release a Spanish version of the curriculum in fall, 2009. NRS continued its partnership with the Center for Community and Organizational Development (CCOD) to develop this version of the curriculum. Both the English and Spanish RPC versions were made possible by funding from the Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust.

While translating the 14-module curriculum into Spanish, NRS employed the services of Spanish Horizons, a Chicago organization with experience specializing in English to Spanish and Spanish to English translation. The Spanish curriculum was then reviewed by an independent consultant from CCOD. By involving a variety of diverse Latino cultures in the RPC translation and adaption, it allowed for a broader discussion in selecting the most appropriate terminology that would transcend the variety of Spanish dialects within the United States.

In addition, NRS also tested the modules with two focus groups of 16 primarily Spanish speaking youth between the ages of 13 to 18. Sixty-three percent of the participants were young women and thirty-seven percent were young men. They were recruited from a Chicago community-based organization and high school. The focus groups included activities from the Spanish version curriculum and pre and post tests. The majority of the participants were Mexican/Mexican American (94%) and Ecuadorian (6%).

For more information, or to order the Spanish version of the Let’s Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum visit www.1800RUNAWAY.org or contact NRS’ prevention specialist at prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org.
“Live Through This”

By: Joel Kesel

When Debra Gwartney’s two oldest daughters—Amanda and Stephanie—ran from home at the ages of 13 and 15, she felt like most parents whose child had just run—alone. “I thought I was the only person going through this,” she says.

Recently divorced, Gwartney had moved her four daughters from Tucson, Arizona, to Eugene, Oregon, to start a new job and new life as a single parent. Soon after settling, the family dynamics caught up and Amanda and Stephanie began a torturous routine of running from home, each episode longer than the last.

Fast forward nearly 15 years and the bond of mother and daughter is strong. Today, Gwartney is letting other parents in similar situations know that they are not alone. She has written a new book entitled, Live Through This, about her ordeal and the challenges of reunification.

Gwartney, who teaches nonprofit writing at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon, admits that writing a book was never the intent when she sat down and began putting her thoughts down on paper. “I was sort of a thing myself,” she says. “How do you get into this mess?” she asked. “I needed to understand the dynamic better, and help me figure things out.”

Because of Live Through This Gwartney has had the opportunity to raise awareness about the runaway issue and the help available through 1-800-RUNAWAY. She discusses NRS and the 1-800-RUNAWAY number in media interviews, makes flyers and NRS bookmarks available at readings and book signing events, and talks about NRS at conferences and during presentations.

Gwartney hopes people who read the book feel less alone in any kind of dilemma with teenagers and that it raises awareness of the runaway phenomenon. Some of the feedback she has received is that people don’t want to believe there is a runaway problem in today’s society.

“There is an entire subculture with a false sense of family and runaways being manipulated,” she explains. “It’s so tempting (for parents) to say, ‘This would never happen to us.’”

She continued that the reality is a multilayered world with so much going on out there.

“I wish I had known about the National Runaway Switchboard. At the time it would have helped. It’s easy for parents to go into denial, but being able to call NRS and have someone say, ‘Take it seriously,’ would have been good.”

More than 20,000 copies have been sold since February of this year. The paperback version is due out in February 2010 followed by another nationwide book signing tour and opportunities to continue raising awareness about the runaway crisis and 1-800-RUNAWAY.

Live Through This, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, can be purchased at amazon.com, Powell’s Books (www.powells.com), Barnes and Noble (www.barnesandnoble.com) and J. Michaels Books in Eugene, Oregon.

Cristina’s Story

By: Lashawnda M. Carter

When Mike, a frontline team member, began his shift on a cold rainy afternoon at the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS), his first call was from Minnesota.

“National Runaway Switchboard,” he answered.

On the other end of the call was 15-year-old Cristina, who sounded as if she had been crying. “I want to run away,” she stated. “Everything has changed so much here.”

“I’m sorry that you feel this way,” Mike said empathetically. “Can you tell me what has changed?”

Cristina talked about what made her feel like she needed to run away. She lived at home with her mother and younger sister, and her mother had lost her job. “We used to have a really nice house. I used to go shopping and stuff, now we live in this little apartment because we lost the other one,” she explained.

She went on to tell Mike that she was forced to change schools because her family had moved out of the school district. Therefore, she felt isolated and unhappy in her new environment. As a result of the relocation that Cristina and her family had to endure, the relationship between her and her mother had become strained.

“All we do is fight because she’s so stressed out about us surviving,” Cristina stated. “I just want to go stay with one of my friends.”

After Mike listened to Cristina’s situation he talked about some options that were available for her through NRS. He mentioned a conference call that she and her mother could have so that she could discuss how she had been feeling and why. He also discussed local resources in her area that she could use to help her from feeling isolated and stressed out. He asked her if she had thought about doing some after-school activities to help keep your mind off the stress at home? It may even help you to meet new friends. If that wouldn’t be isolated, he suggested.

Cristina listened to all the options that Mike gave her and decided that she would first sit down with her mother and talk about what was bothering her.

“Thank you for this,” she said. “I’m going to try talking with my mom first because I would like for us to be close like we used to be.”

Mike ended his first call of his shift knowing he was able to help a youth consider all of the options. He felt Cristina previously thought her only option was to run.

* Names and locations have been changed to protect anonymity.
Because our donors, partners and sponsors have for NRS, we have been there to handle over 114,000 calls in 2008!

**National Runaway Switchboard**

2000-2009

University of Illinois-Chicago PhD student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (standing) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffer Jennifer Bonetti-Bryan (seated) presents to staff, in recognition of the University of Illinois-Chicago MEd student and former NRS staffers.
NRPM Activity List:

This November, join the National Runaway Switchboard and other national organizations to keep America’s runaway and at-risk youth safe and off the streets during National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM) as we “Answer the Call”.

Some activities you can participate in to help raise awareness in your community include:

- **Participate in the Green Light Project:** Show your support for runaway youth as easy as lighting your porch light green for the entire month of November by purchasing a green light bulb at the local hardware store. To purchase green light bulbs in bulk visit www.1800RUNAWAY.org/rpm/GreenLight.html.

- **Get local and state representatives involved:** Have a proclamation signed for your city and/or state to declare November as National Runaway Prevention Month. Download the Community Action Toolkit for a sample proclamation at www.1800RUNAWAY.org/rpm/media.html.

- **Pursue media coverage:** Encourage your local media representatives to report your event or activity. Send press releases and press advisories for events that you are doing for NRPM to media representatives. Samples of press releases can be found on pages 15-16 of the Community Action Toolkit.

- **Develop an online campaign:** Link your website to the NRPM page on NRS’ website. Write a blog about NRPM and post to your e-newsletter, LISTSERV, social media networks, and blogs. Also include a sentence about NRPM to be included in your electronic signature for e-mails.

- **Enter the NRPM Community Contest:** Tell NRS about your NRPM activities, goals, successes, and results by entering the community contest at www.1800RUNAWAY.org/rpm/promo_form.asp.

For more information on how to get involved in National Runaway Prevention Month download the Community Action Toolkit or contact NRS outreach coordinator at lcarter@1800RUNAWAY.org.