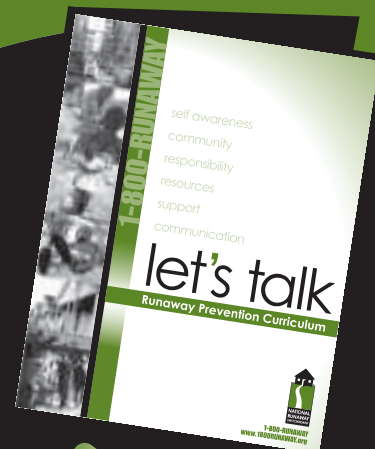




# Frontline

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

SPRING/SUMMER  
2007  
NEWSLETTER



## NRS EXPANDS PREVENTION EFFORTS: Introducing the **NEW** Runaway Prevention Curriculum

by Jennifer Benoit-Bryan

Between 1.6 and 2.8 million youth run away in a year. To battle this silent crisis in the United States, the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) has expanded its prevention efforts to incorporate a NEW Runaway Prevention Curriculum. Prevention is a delicate balance of awareness, resources, communication, stress management and support.

In response to the expressed needs of teachers, social service providers and community members, NRS has worked collaboratively with DePaul University's Center for Community and Organization Development (CCOD), youth and the community on a three year process to develop a one of a kind runaway prevention curriculum. This collaboration was made possible by the Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust. NRS and the Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust share interest in promoting the well-being of families and integrating change in communities. Likewise, the CCOD was a natural partner because they provide consulting and research services related to clinical, community, and organizational psychology to not-for-profit service oriented community-based organizations.

*Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum* provides easy to use lessons on various topics as well as interactive, youth approved activities. *Let's Talk* is a 14 module curriculum intended to build life skills; increase knowledge about runaway resources and prevention; educate about alternatives to running away; and encourage youth to access and seek help from trusted community members. This program is designed for schools and community groups to use

in its entirety, as individual modules, or to supplement current prevention strategies.

### Runaway Prevention Curriculum Modules include:

- Communication and Listening
- Adolescent Development
- Personal Influences
- Peers
- Families: Roles and Responsibilities
- Runaway Reality
- National Safe Connections
- Community Response and Responsibility
- Anger Management
- Stress Reduction
- Drugs and Alcohol
- Sexuality and Sexual Orientation
- Internet Safety and Fun
- Future Life Planning

*Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum* will be available this summer. For more information on technical assistance and train the trainer opportunities for the curriculum, please contact NRS' Prevention Specialist, Lee Osipchak, at 773-289-1723 or via email at [prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org](mailto:prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org).



## INSIDE

- Ludacris' video connects youth with hotline
- Spirit of Youth 2007
- Reasons youth don't call hotlines: Shame
- Volunteer of the Year: Andre' Matlock
- Summer Activities for the Family

# From the National Runaway Switchboard

National Runaway Switchboard is in its final year of a strategic plan that started in 2005. The #1 focus of the plan was to **make the National Runaway Switchboard a household name**. In the past few years, NRS has experienced enhanced media exposure, including; being featured in premier national publications, such as; *USA Today* (twice as the Snapshot on the front page), *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Chicago Sun-Times*. And even though NRS had been featured in the Lifetime movie *Augusta, Gone* and music videos by Cowboy Troy and Stereofuse, nothing could prepare us for the tremendous exposure we would receive from a duet by Ludacris and Mary J. Blige.

Last winter, NRS teamed up with Grammy-Award Winning Rap Artist and Award-Winning Actor, Chris "Ludacris" Bridges and the Ludacris Foundation to encourage youth in crisis to call 1-800-RUNAWAY. Since the December 2006 release of Ludacris' music video for the song "Runaway Love", NRS has experienced a surge in call volume and web-site visitors. At the end of the fiscal year over 151,000 calls were reported handled in the NRS Call Center, an almost 50% increase from the previous year. In addition, a record number, 10,620, visitors visited [www.1800RUNAWAY.org](http://www.1800RUNAWAY.org) in February 2007.

In June, the Board of Directors, staff and other key stakeholders will gather to begin developing a strategic plan for 2008 through

2010. Although "making the National Runaway Switchboard a household name" will certainly be a priority, our current successes indicate the **National Runaway Switchboard** is gaining recognition as the expert resource for runaway and at-risk youth. Recently, the Family & Youth Services Bureau; Administration for Children, Youth & Families; U.S. Department Health and Human Services awarded NRS with a renewed five year contract to continue to serve as **the national communication system for homeless and runaway youth** - a distinction that NRS, alone, has held since 1974.



*Maureen Blaha*  
Executive Director

*Stephen C. Mack*  
Board Chair

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# RESEARCH ZONE: Reasons Kids Don't Call Hotlines

By Jennifer Benoit-Bryan

**SHAME** is a big reason youth don't call a hotline for help according to a research study published in the *Journal of Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*. The study addresses the usage of hotlines by teenagers and offers a number of interesting insights as to how often youth call hotlines and where they turn to for help. The study surveyed high school students in New York and found that only 2.1% of youth surveyed had ever used a hotline and 1.7% had used a hotline in the last year. This rate of hotline usage places hotlines at the bottom of the list of seven formal help sources for teenagers.

Help Source	Ever Used	Last Year Used
Mental health professional	29.8%	21.1%
School counselor	29.5%	22.3%
Internet	18.4%	18.2%
Clergy	5.1%	4.1%
Other health professional	3.3%	3.1%
Substance program	2.9%	2.3%
Hotline	2.1%	1.7%

Next, the study turned to the reasons why youth do not use hotlines. The study found that negative attitudes among teenagers were stronger toward hotlines than they were for other formal

sources of help. Ten to thirty-five percent of youth cited self reliance as a reason for not using hotlines. Five to fifteen percent of youth cited shame as an impediment to seeking support through hotlines. Interestingly, awareness of hotlines was high, 87% of youth surveyed indicated they knew where to call and over 98% had heard of a crisis hotline.

The authors of the study recommend that hotline providers work to promote a specific function that can be communicated to adolescents in a way that fits with the youth's sense of their needs and is compatible with the youth's lifestyle. NRS follows this recommendation by serving as a resource center for youth and by providing information and services online where youth can easily access them.

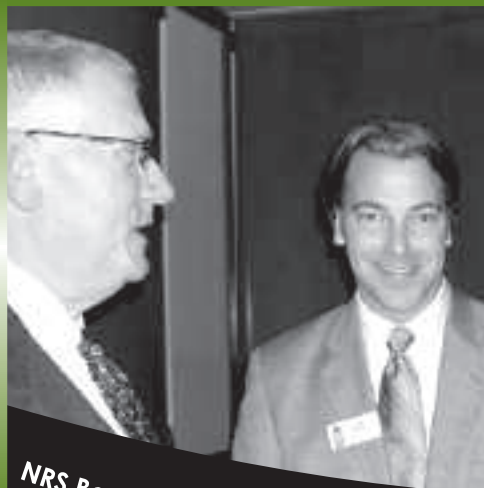
To continually serve as an expert resource in youth-related issues, the National Runaway Switchboard is compiling a sourcebook of relevant research and statistics on runaway and homeless youth. The sourcebook will serve as a reference source for the media, teachers, other youth serving organizations, as well as anyone interested in youth issues. The sourcebook will include a collection of research summaries for articles relating to runaway and homeless youth. The media is the primary targeted audience for the new resource in an effort to bring more media attention to the problems of runaway youth. The sourcebook will be available this summer at [www.1800RUNAWAY.org](http://www.1800RUNAWAY.org).

Source: Gould, M., Greenberg, T., Munfakh, J., Kleinman, M., & Lubell, K. (2006). Teenagers' Attitudes about Seeking Help from Telephone Crisis Services (Hotlines). *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*. Vol. 36, Iss. 6, pp. 601-613.

## The Spirit of Youth 2007 Launch Party and Board Reception kicked off fundraising efforts for the benefit.



NRS Board Member Rich Malone thanks Dale Stephenson for his role as a donor.



NRS Board Members Rick Stoneham and Luke Palese enjoy the evenings' festivities.



The Ludacris Foundation representatives Diane Robinson-Avery and Jennifer Robinson were on hand for NRS Executive Director Maureen Blaha's announcement that Ludacris and his foundation will be the Spirit of Youth 2007 Award Recipients.

Photographs by Shari Bryan.

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

# Why are U.S. Children More At-Risk?

by Jasleen Jaswal

The United States is considered one of the wealthiest nations in the world, but a new study by the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) implies that for some children, living in the land of plenty does not ensure their safety.

UNICEF's *Innocenti Report Card 7* reviewed child well-being in rich countries, primarily in Europe and North America. Out of 21 countries, the U.S. ranked 20th overall. In the category of safety, the U.S. ranked second to last, with 22 deaths from accident or injury for every 100,000 children in the 0-19 age group<sup>1</sup>. Sweden, which ranked first in this category, counted 7.5 deaths for every 100,000. Across all countries surveyed in this category, 75% had 15 deaths per 100,000 or less. These numbers imply a marked difference in child safety between the U.S. and other wealthy countries. UNICEF has found that the likelihood of a child being injured or killed is associated with factors like poverty, single-parenthood, and weak family ties – and the U.S. ranks poorly in each.

- In a comparison of relative income poverty – households with an equivalent income less than 50% of country's median income – the U.S. came in dead last, with more than 20% of children age 0-17 living in relative poverty, compared to the next highest, New Zealand, at 16%. Nearly 40% of countries reviewed reported less than 10% of youth in relative poverty.<sup>2</sup>
- One-fifth of U.S. kids 11, 13, and 15 years old live in single parent homes. In 75% of countries reviewed, fewer than 15% of kids in the same age groups lived in single-parent homes.

- Sixty-five percent of 15-year-olds in the U.S. eat the main meal of the day with their parents several times a week. While the number is encouraging, it pales in comparison to the showing from other nations – in almost half of the countries reviewed, at least 85% of 15-year-olds reported having said meal with their families several times per week.
- In encouraging news, the U.S. ranked 8th in the percentage of 15-year-olds whose parents spend time just talking to them several times a week, at 67%.

How can the National Runaway Switchboard reduce safety risks for children? NRS strives to keep at-risk and runaway youth safe and off the street by implementing a new runaway prevention curriculum in classrooms and community organizations, advocating for youth with social service agencies, and opening up the lines of communication between runaway youth and their parents. The more youth who know that NRS is available to them as a resource in a time of need, the less likely that child is to end up in an unsafe situation.

1. UNICEF assessed safety by measuring the rate of deaths among children and young people caused by accidents, murder, suicide, and violence.

2. It may be helpful to think of these numbers as a reflection of wealth distribution – countries with fewer children in relative poverty have closer to even distribution of wealth.

SOURCE:

UNICEF, *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries, Innocenti Report Card 7*, 2007. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.

# UNICEF

Photograph by Jennifer Benoit-Bryan

A Russian delegation, through Heartland International's educational exchange programs, visit with NRS staff to learn more about its services and comprehensive volunteer program.



# LUDACRIS "RUNAWAY LOVE"



Recently, public service announcements featuring Ludacris were distributed to television stations across the country to promote 1-800-RUNAWAY.

## Ludacris Video Connects Youth in Crisis to NRS

By Jasleen Jaswal

Thanks to a partnership with award-winning entertainer Chris "Ludacris" Bridges, NRS' call volume and website traffic climbed to record numbers – and the exposure is helping youth in crisis get the help they need.

### TIMOTHY'S STORY

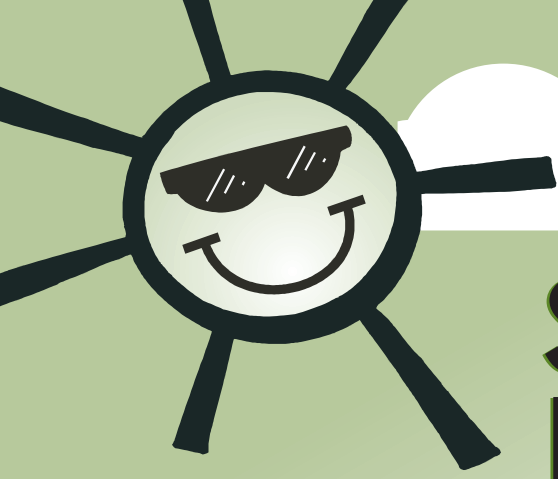
Timothy, a 16-year old, tried calling the hotline after seeing the number in the "Runaway Love" video. He was so surprised that someone actually answered that he didn't say anything. The female front line team member who answered his call told him that NRS is completely confidential and available 24/7, and that he could call back when he was ready to talk. Timothy hung up without saying a word, but remembered the number.

A few weeks later, Timothy needed help. When Ivan, NRS front-line team member, answered his call, Timothy was hesitant to talk, saying he was angry and frustrated, and not sure if NRS could help. Ivan assured him that he was ready to listen. Eventually Ivan gained Timothy's trust by using a supportive tone and allowing Timothy to lead the call.

Timothy revealed a tumultuous home life. His paternal grandmother, with whom he was very close, had died 13 months earlier. At the

same time, he moved from his mother's home to his father's. The change proved to be difficult; where Timothy's mother was carefree and let Timothy do what he wanted, his father was strict and required Timothy to go to school and participate in extracurricular activities. Waking up in the morning was too hard – Timothy had few friends at school and still felt great pain at the loss of his grandmother. He felt abandoned by his mother, who still had custody of his brother but didn't visit Timothy very often. The few times he tried to contact her, his father found out and yelled at him for disobeying his orders to not contact her. The day Timothy called NRS, his father told him that if he didn't start going to school regularly, Timothy would be kicked out of the house.

Ivan helped Timothy explore his options – going to school or not, talking to a teacher about his depression, or talking to his dad. It was a tough conversation – Timothy genuinely felt nothing could help his situation. But by reiterating Timothy's positive qualities and acknowledging the difficulty of his situation, Ivan helped Timothy focus on the best choice for him. Ultimately, Timothy decided to take school and the extracurricular activities day by day and talk to a teacher about his concerns. Through his mass market promotion of 1-800-RUNAWAY, Ludacris is helping youth, like Timothy, know where to call for help.



# Summer Means Family Time!

By Rey Zambrano

Summer is the best time to do activities with your child! The weather is warm, the days are long, and there's always something going on. Selecting the best activities to do together can be challenging. Start by asking your kids what they want to do. By asking for their input, you can choose activities that will be enjoyable and not viewed as boring.

Some other tips for having a good time with your family include inviting their friends along for activities and being spontaneous. At times kids may feel weird by solely hanging out with parents. Bringing friends along may ease that tension. Secondly, spontaneity means that it is fine that you develop plans for your activity, but do not set them in stone. In other words, in a world dictated by schedules and 24/7 accessibility, often times some of the best experiences emerge in the moment!

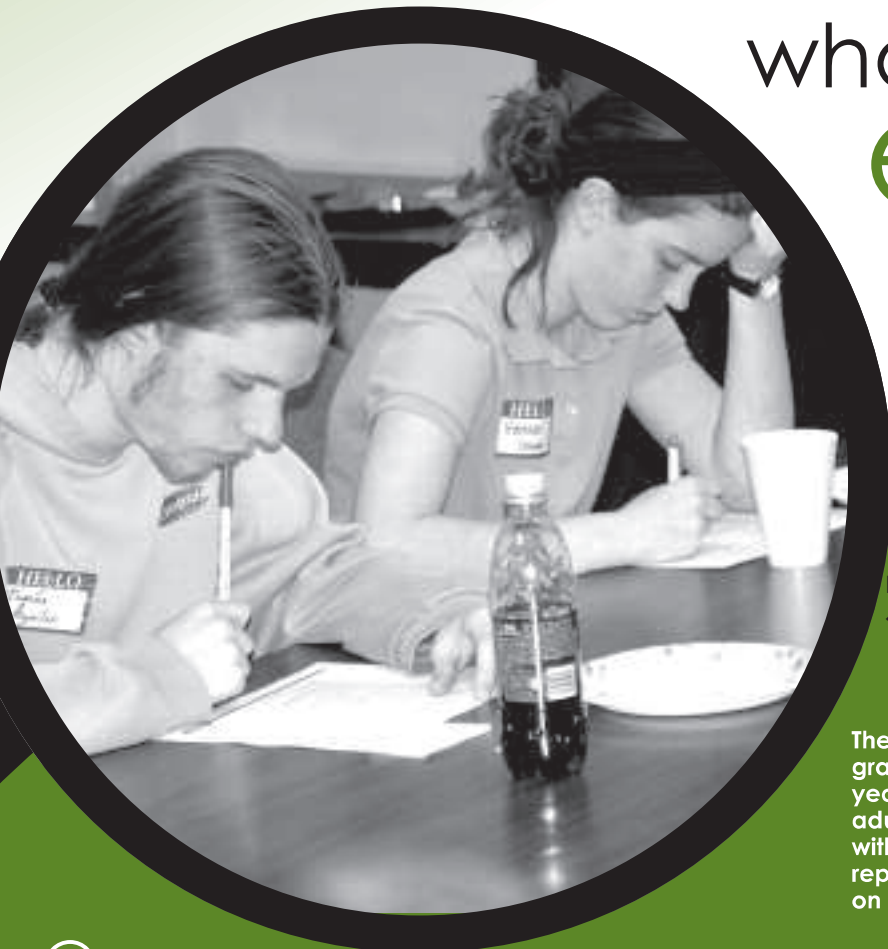


Here are some summer activity ideas to consider:

- Schedule your vacation during your child's summer vacation. Or allow your child to go on a vacation with a friend's family
- See if your town has a summer jobs program or recreational center
- Take part in activities that are mutually interesting, whether it be a tea party or playing soccer
- Do something outdoors, like hiking, swimming, or cycling
- If you can't find time, ask an aunt or grandpa to plan something special for your child
- Learn new skills, or further develop existing ones, together, such as; cooking or arts and crafts
- Volunteer at a local agency together where the youth has particular passion in the cause

Whatever you do, enjoy the time together!

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**enjoy**  
the time  
**together!**



Photograph by  
Jennifer Benoit-Bryan

The tables turn as youth across the country grade adults on their performance over the past year. Tomas Aguilar and Hannah Chaskin score adults. UCAN's Teen Report Card, in partnership with the National Runaway Switchboard, will report the grades at a national press conference on June 12th.

# VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: André Matlock

By Rey Zambrano

On April 18th, at the National Runaway Switchboard's Annual Volunteer & Community Recognition Event, André Matlock was honored as the 2006 Volunteer of the Year.

André's first tenure with the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) was from 1981 to 1997. He began at the organization because he was contemplating a career in psychology. During his 16-year stint, André served as a volunteer front line team member, an overnight call center supervisor, and board member.

In 1997, he left the organization because he and his wife adopted a baby, Anthony. The dedication he showed to the organization was now to be concentrated on the new member of his family. "I knew that I wanted to be available for him at all times," said André.

In the aftermath of the Hurricane Katrina disaster, André returned to NRS in 2006. Inspired by his wife volunteering in the Gulf Coast for two weeks as a nurse to help in the relief effort, André felt the natural urge to come back to NRS.

In response to being named Volunteer of the Year, André not only remains humble, but mentions how much NRS means to him: "In this case it's like being rewarded for breathing or doing something for a family member."

The National Runaway Switchboard relies on André and over 150 volunteers to serve as front line team members to answer the call for help, 24-hours a day, 365 days a year.



Photograph by John Paul

André Matlock receives the 2006 Volunteer of the Year Award from Executive Director Maureen Blaha for over twenty years of volunteerism as an NRS front line team member, former staff, event supporter, and Board Alumni.



Photograph by Sharri Bryan

NRS Board Chair Stephen Mack presents NRS Board Vice-Chair Maree Bullock with a plaque for her family's gift of a multi-year \$25,000 scholarship fund for interns and staff development.

**Because our donors, partners and sponsors have been there for NRS, we have been there to handle over 150,000 calls in Fiscal Year 2007!**

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Photographed from a recent visit to NRS

Chris "Ludacris" Bridges and his mother Roberta Shields, President of the Ludacris Foundation, will be honored for their work with runaway and at-risk youth.

**Frontline  
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3080 North Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60657

Tel: 773.880.9860 • Fax: 773.929.5150 • TDD: 800.621.0394

Website: [www.1800RUNAWAY.org](http://www.1800RUNAWAY.org)

Maureen Blaha • Executive Director



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