

Fall
2005

Runaway Prevention Month Survey Earns Information Bounty

Through direct personal contact, agencies and organizations serving runaway and homeless youth hold matchless knowledge. Their immediate access to youth and families in crisis allows them to forecast trends and anticipate needs. That's why the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS), in preparation for National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM), developed a survey asking runaway and homeless youth providers (RHY) how NRS can best help them in their outreach service to at-risk youth. Established to increase awareness of issues facing runaways and to educate the public about solutions and the role they can play in preventing youth from running away, 2005 marks the fourth year NRPM has been held. NRS' NRPM co-sponsor, the National Network for Youth (NN4Y), provided tremendous assistance by announcing the on-line survey through its member base.

With 24% of those notified of the survey responding, NRS is elated so many in the provider community took the time to offer feedback. Typically on-line surveys consider themselves successful if they garner even a 10% response rate. Not only did an impressive percentage of providers answer the survey's questions, respondents representing the full spectrum of social service professionals, many in executive leadership capacities offered input. From New York to Honolulu, RHY providers shared crucial information that will help NRS support them in their communities.

Those who answered the July survey confirmed the imperative need to raise public awareness about the reality and plight of runaway and homeless youth. They were clear on how an initiative to raise awareness might best be achieved: message saturation through the electronic media, working collaboratively with schools and forging alliances with both government agencies and business communities. Fully understanding the need for a TV presence as well as exposure over radio waves, NRS' latest television public service announcement (PSA) released in the Spring is enjoying extensive airing on TV outlets across the country. NRS will also distribute PSA's tailored to radio highlighting National Runaway Prevention Month and at-risk youth.

Survey respondents were specific regarding the type of tools they could use most immediately and effectively to reach youth in their areas. According to feedback NRS received, posters, flyers and wallet cards are the best street level aids RHY providers can use to broadcast the availability of youth focused resources to at-risk youth. A new catalog of promotional and educational materials produced by NRS will be available in October; making it easier for service providers to choose the NRS tools most suitable to their outreach objectives.

The NRPM survey revealed that the National Runaway Switchboard is essentially the only national resource to whom respondents refer runaway and homeless youth. The survey confirmed that respondents view National Runaway Prevention Month as a useful and worthwhile initiative. Just over one third have participated in NRPM activities in the past. Given the strong benefit collaborative support offers those who work on behalf of at-risk youth and their families, NRS will be making it easier for more agencies and organizations to participate in 2005 NRPM activities. Visit www.1800RUNAWAY.org to see what you can do to keep America's at-risk youth safe and off the streets.

FRONTLINE



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From the National Runaway Switchboard

The National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) strives to ensure every youth knows 1-800-RUNAWAY is a call to help! Every moment of every day, a caring, trained front line team member answers the call prepared to provide solution-focused interventions.

How do we get 1-800-RUNAWAY to youth across the country? This is a question NRS continues to answer with deliberate thoughtful strategies. Distributing radio and TV public service announcements, enhancing our web-site to feature a youth interactive e-game, and forging partnerships with national organizations are all examples of how NRS is canvassing the country with 1-800-RUNAWAY. The following are two recent examples of cultivating relationships with national organizations and in turn helping NRS extend its outreach and impact to vulnerable youth.

First, NRS was invited to present at the 2005 F.B.I.'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. This plenary session on *What Resources are Available to Juvenile Victims in Federal Cases* focused on the services available at NRS by calling 1-800-RUNAWAY. We highlighted the Home Free program, a collaboration with Greyhound Lines, Inc., as one of our services available so youth can be safely reunited with their families.

Second, NRS combined forces with the National Network for Youth, the National Assembly on School-based Health Care, the National Association of School Psychologists, School of Social Workers Association of America and the National Safe Places to send out a physical and electronic mailing to each organizations' membership promoting National Runaway Prevention Month, the Home Free program, and NRS publications available for distribution. This effort reached out to over 25,000 professionals who work directly with youth in every part of the country.

NRS won't rest until we are sure every youth knows 1-800-RUNAWAY is an anonymous, confidential call for help. We encourage you to help NRS build awareness in reaching out to youth. Today, commit to telling 3 people that 1-800-RUNAWAY is a resource for youth and families in crisis.



MAREE BULLOCK
Board Chair



MAUREEN BLAHA
Executive Director

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Pitfalls of Running Away Evident in Country Western Hit

Cowboy Troy Uses Music to Deliver Cautionary Message

RAYBAW/Warner Bros. recording artist, Cowboy Troy, brought national attention to the plight of runaways in his new music video, "If You Don't Wanna Love Me" July 20th. Premiering on Yahoo! Music before being debuted on the nation's Country Western music video channels across the country, the video depicts a young girl facing some of the harsh decisions the street sometimes demands. By the video's conclusion, the youth gets into the car of an older man, with the clear implication of an unhappy ending.

Warner Bros. Nashville reached out to the National Runaway Switchboard prior to releasing the video in an effort to ensure the video might be used to help other youth in jeopardy of finding themselves in similar circumstances. Cowboy Troy, a hick-hop sensation on the Warner Bros. label remarked "I think that the video itself will help to bring to light a serious issue that is quite prevalent in our society today, and that is the fact that there is a segment of teens that feel like they can't talk to anyone. Instead of reaching out, they feel their only solution is to run away."



NRS' 1-800-RUNAWAY and www.1800RUNAWAY.org are listed as trailers to the video.

NRS MESSAGE ON THE MOVE

- June 26 -28th** **AMERICAN SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, ORLANDO, FL.**
 "Safe Places, Safe Youth" presented in conjunction with National Safe Place to ASCA workshops. NRS materials exhibited to 1500 conference attendees - Natalie Smith, NRS Training & Education Coordinator, Speaker
- June 28th** **REGION V RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH PROVIDER CONFERENCE, CHICAGO, IL**
 Runaway Prevention and Education Presentation Module presented to Midwest providers – Scott Smith, Training Assistant, Speaker
- July 28th** **FBI ANNUAL VICTIM SPECIALIST CONFERENCE – PARK CITY, UTAH**
 NRS services outlined to plenary session – Maureen Blaha, NRS Executive Director, Speaker
- October 12th** **PARLIAMENTARY FORUM - LONDON, ENGLAND**
 NRS' role as national communications system for runaway and homeless youth presented to British Parliament at the invitation of the Children's Society of the United Kingdom – Maureen Blaha, NRS Executive Director, Speaker

Community Outreach

NRS Continues to Reach Across the Rainbow in Support of GLBT Youth



Drenched in pride during the early summer months, cities large and small across the United States witness America's gay community march in affirmation of themselves. From New York City's massive turnout of 750,000 parade revelers and San Francisco's one of a kind celebration to tropical Miami and northland Minneapolis, cities across the country joined in the collective spirit gay pride and unity.

In solidarity with youth who often don't receive positive recognition and support for who they are, the National Runaway Switchboard also took its advocacy for gay youth to the streets June 27th. Marching in Chicago's 36th annual Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade, 21 NRS staff, volunteers, board members and friends wearing wildly popular "Call Me" T-shirts snaked through a parade route choked with 400,000 exuberant parade goers. Passing out candy and thousands of emergency wallet cards emblazoned with NRS' message of outreach met an enthusiastic reception along the three mile wall of smiles and goodwill.

Gay youth are often forced to leave home because of their sexual orientation.

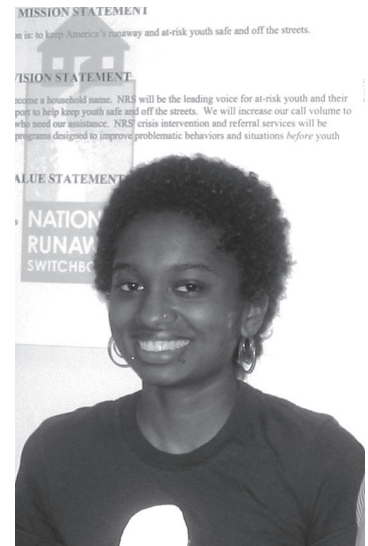
NRS a Co-Sponsor of NYAC Youth Award

The National Runaway Switchboard, in conjunction with the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC), an organization focused on promoting the well-being of GLBT youth, sponsored the NYAC Youth Activism Impact Award. The award, given to Phillip Andrew Walensa, honors local youth whose efforts express personal resolve and advance the rights of GLBT youth.



Biggest Issue of Runaway and Homeless Gay Youth: Safety

Maya Keyes, daughter of syndicated radio personality and past presidential candidate Alan Keyes, knows the realities of life on the street. Turned away by her family on the basis of her sexual orientation, Ms. Keyes experienced an unforgettable period of homelessness before securing housing and educational opportunities through a generous foundation and supporters. Currently serving on the NYAC board of directors and with an offer to attend Brown University, Ms. Keyes devotes much of her time to speaking out on the rights of GLBT youth. Recalling her days alone trying to survive on the streets of the nation's capital, Keyes said "safety is the biggest concern of homeless youth. You could be raped, assaulted, and you always have a sense of fear about what's waiting for you just around the corner."



NRS THANKS...

Lee Capp, Rick Costa, Monica Loeden, Rich Malone, Steven Mitchell, Elizabeth Montalvo, Steven Oliver, Elian Shin and Frank Tortorella ...for running 26.2 miles in the LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon on October 9th to raise money to keep youth safe and off the streets. Special thanks to all the marathon donors, Universal Sole and Sue James for supporting our Running for Runaways Team 2005!

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

'Is There Any Way You Can Help Me?'

Fifteen years ago, as he was making himself comfortable for his midnight shift, Bill received a call that at first sounded completely empty. He wasn't sure if anyone was on the other end until he detected someone faintly sobbing. Bill encouraged the caller to speak and reassured her that whatever she needed to say, their words would be safe. There was still hesitation and it seemed minutes passed, before suddenly he heard, "It's my life and I don't even have the right to do what I want."



but still tense.

Despite her desperation, Kathy was adamant against returning home. Bill told her if she wanted, NRS would relay a message to her parents. "Can you just help me find somewhere to go tonight?" was her only response. After calling two Los Angeles shelters, Bill found one that had a bed for Kathy that night. After conferencing Kathy onto the call he made to the shelter, they made arrangements for Kathy to get there. When the shelter hung up, Bill reminded

Kathy that she could call NRS whenever she needed somewhere to turn or someone to talk to.

The voice was Kathy's, who said she had run away from home two weeks ago. Bill immediately inquired about her current safety and Kathy responded that she was OK. She said she was calling from a payphone outside a 7-Eleven. Someone had etched NRS' 800 number in the Plexiglas surrounding the phone followed by the words "they help." Kathy simply said she decided to call the number because she was scared and more tired than she had ever been before.

When Bill asked her why she left home, Kathy answered quickly and with a trace of anger in her words. "My parents don't like me. I get good grades but I'm not popular. I baby sit for pay but my mom keeps all of my money. I only have a few friends, but my mother hates them. I thought they'd finally be happy with me if I just left."

Bill asked Kathy if she had ever discussed her feelings with her mother. Kathy said, "No." He then asked her if she had talked to any adults at all about her resentment about the rules her parents had instituted or about her feelings of rejection. Kathy gave the same reply. As they continued to talk, Bill learned that Kathy had turned 16 two days ago. It came up when Kathy was recounting how her purse was stolen when she had fallen asleep behind an abandoned house used by street kids. "Now I don't have any money or any way to prove I'm 16," she said. Her baby sitting money had gotten her from her home in Omaha to West Hollywood. "Is there any way you can help me?" Her voice was stronger when Kathy asked the question,

It's not unusual for NRS crisis calls to end here with Bill wondering what happened to Kathy. Sometimes time answers the question like this.....

This is a strange e-mail for me to send. I am a 31 year old female who was a runaway at age 16. I called you hotline when I was desperate and I will never forget the man on the other line who helped me. His name was Paul. He did a 3-way call with me to a shelter and arranged for them to come get me. Most importantly, Paul listened to me when no one else would. I was able to rattle the courage to pull it back together, finish school, graduate from college, get married and now I am the mom of two beautiful sons. It has taken me a long time...15 years to be exact....but I just wanted to say thank you from the very bottom of my heart. Had Paul not been on the other line the night I called, I honestly do not know if I would be here today. I was in a very dark, low place and I was having a really hard time seeing out. Thank you to all of your volunteers and staff. I owe you my life. If, by some slim chance, Paul is still around, please thank him from the very bottom of my heart. Keep up the phenomenal work..... Barbara

Names and other aspects of this narrative have been changed to protect the anonymity of actual people.

NRS in Global Spotlight

Spurred by the priority the United States has placed on the needs of runaway and homeless youth, The Children's Society of England has invited the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) to speak to members of the British Parliament in October. The Children's Society is calling on the British Government to set up a national network of refuges for runaway children – similar to the hotline and referral model used in the United States.

The Children Society's statistics indicate 100,000 children run away from home and 1 in 7 are physically or sexually assaulted while they are away. The Children's Society's Safe and Sound campaign goal for runaways on the street is to "have somewhere safe to turn and someone sound to talk to".

The charity has arranged for NRS Executive Director, Maureen Blaha, to speak at a forum held at the houses of Parliament about services the NRS offers America's runaway and homeless youth.

British media coverage of the National Runaway Switchboard

and its services took place in September when reporters and a camera crew from Granada TV arrived at NRS headquarters in Chicago. The interview will be broadcast on England's 60 Minutes equivalent and highly regarded TV Program *Tonight with Trevor MacDonald* scheduled for October 10th. The British public will see and hear the kind of positive difference NRS makes for over 100,000 callers every year.

Granada Media presented a \$500 donation to NRS in support of the work the agency performs on behalf of runaway, homeless and at-risk youth in the United States.



UK's Granada Broadcasting filming in Chicago park. Reporter Linda Duberley interviews NRS Executive Director, Maureen Blaha (bench, l to r)

POWERED BY PASSION



Nothing about NRS volunteer, Jim Marcus, suggests average. Since joining the ranks of NRS Call Center crisisline volunteers in March of 2004, Jim has racked up over 247 hours taking hotline calls, was chosen Volunteer of the Month in November and was voted 2004 Volunteer of the Year. Jim's knowledge and empathy for at-risk youth fuel an uncommon passion to reach out and help young people facing challenging circumstances.

A former teacher, Jim is co-founder and creative director of Safety Net, a rape prevention advocacy organization. Jim was also one of the key creative forces behind the highly lauded and successful anti-smoking *truth* campaign in 2000.

Last year Jim conceived and developed a series of four (4) "You have a right to..." posters for National Runaway Prevention Month. The posters, whose message to youth is that they have a right to be listened to, to be themselves, to be home and to be safe are still among the most downloaded items on NRS' website.

This year Jim is working with NRS to roll out **HomeBase TV**, a web based electronic game geared toward making youth aware of NRS services. As an outreach and awareness tool, **Homebase TV** holds tremendous potential for introducing NRS' crisis intervention option to thousands of youth who may need or know someone who needs the services NRS offers. **Homebase TV** will be available this holiday season.

Jim's talent, imagination and energy have enlivened the avenues of NRS' outreach to youth and help the agency better serve runaway and homeless youth.

Thank You to Our Supporters

We wish to acknowledge the following individuals, foundations, corporations and government agencies for their generosity and support from May, 2005 through August 15, 2005.

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Maree Bullock and
Jimmie Alford*

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If an error has occurred, please
report it to Katy Walsh, Director
of Development & Communica-
tions at 773.880.9860 x223.*

Save these Dates!

Spirit of Youth 2005

The goal is to raise \$75,000 to keep youth safe and off the streets.

November 3, 2005 • 6-10 p.m. • Chicago Cultural Center

Spirit of Youth 2005 promises to be the **biggest and best event yet!** **Christie Hefner**, CEO of Playboy will present the Spirit of Youth 2005 Award to **Alex Kotlowitz**, author of several books including *There Are No Children Here*, for his commitment to disadvantaged youth. CBS' **Steve Baskerville** will once again be the Master of Ceremonies of the evening festivities.

Sponsored by: **United Airline, LaSalle Bank, Radio Flyer, Inc.**

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