

KEY STATISTICS FROM THE NATIONAL RUNAWAY SWITCHBOARD'S HOME FREE PROGRAM

The National Runaway Switchboard's Home Free program is a partnership with Greyhound Lines, Inc. that helps runaway and homeless youth return home. The program has reunited over 14,000 youth with a family member through a free bus ticket home. The statistics provided in this report are gathered from 11 years of data on the runaway youth who have participated in the Home Free program through the National Runaway Switchboard. The report was written by Jennifer Benoit-Bryan at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

FINDINGS

2011 Home Free Statistics

- In 2011, 58 percent of participants in the Home Free program were female and 42 percent were male. While females do use the Home Free program more than males, the split is not as wide as the overall crisis caller split of 71 percent female and 29 percent male in 2011.
- Of the youth who used the Home Free program in 2011, females were less likely to have crossed state lines (85 percent) compared to males (91 percent).
- In 2011, the average age of Home Free users was 17 and-a-half. The average age did not vary by gender.
- The average length of a runaway episode for youth who used the Home Free program in 2011 was one to two months. Youth who did not cross state lines called NRS sooner than those who did, after an average of one to four weeks.
- Youth who participate in the Home Free program also report about significant problems in their lives prior to their runaway episode. The most commonly reported problem in 2011 was family conflict with approximately two thirds of youth (65 percent) identifying this area as a significant issue.

Trends in Home Free Statistics

- Over the past 10 years, the gap between male and female callers has decreased significantly. In 2001, 64 percent of the youth using the Home Free program were female and only 36 percent were male, leaving a gap of 28 percent. In contrast, the gender gap in 2011 calls has decreased to 16 percent

- Over the past six years, NRS has received more Home Free requests from youth who have crossed state lines, 91 percent of Home Free callers in 2011 compared to 88 percent in 2005.
- Over the past five years, the average age of Home Free users has increased by one year for both male and female callers, from 16 and-a-half to 17 and-a-half.
- The length of time a youth is a runaway before participating in the Home Free program has increased over the past ten years. In 2011, youth were less than half as likely to call NRS within the first week of a runaway episode (9 percent) than they were in 2001 (19 percent). In addition, in 2011 compared to 2001, youth were more than twice as likely to wait two to six months (22 percent versus 10 percent), six to 12 months (16 percent versus 7 percent), and more than a year (10 percent versus 4 percent) to participate in the home free program.
- There has also been an increase in the most commonly reported significant problem in the lives of Home Free users, conflict with parents or guardians. Reports of family conflict as a significant problem have increased 8 percent over the past six years, from 57 percent of Home Free users in 2006 to 65 percent in 2011, which is also a 14 percent rate increase over the 2006 baseline. While still a small proportion of Home Free users, the percent of children who report bullying as a significant problem in their lives has increased by 2 percent over the past year.