

# National Runaway Safeline 2016 Crisis Connection Trend Report Fact Sheet



The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) makes more than 250,000 connections to help and hope through its hotline, online, and offline services. The “National Trends on Youth in Crisis in the United States” report is an analysis of trends in connections to its 1-800-RUNAWAY hotline and 1800RUNAWAY.org online services when NRS specifically provided crisis intervention services. In 2015, NRS handled 12,120 hotline crisis connections and 8,624 crisis email, chat and forum connections for a total of 20,744 crisis connections.

The report summarizes the types of individuals in crisis and the key characteristics associated with why they contacted NRS for help through its hotline and online services in 2015. In addition, this report places those numbers in context by comparing them to individual types and characteristics from the previous year (2014), three years ago (2012) and 10 years ago (2005). These two perspectives – the current picture of individuals in crisis and the trends in characteristics of these connections – give a nuanced understanding of the youth that NRS assists through its programs.

## Key Findings

### **Status of Youth in Crisis (*NRS defines youth as young people up to 21-years-old; NRS serves individuals up to 24 years of age*)**

- Youth who are contemplating running away from home (37 percent of crisis connections) have surpassed general youth in crisis (30 percent of crisis connections) and runaways (21 percent of crisis connections) as the largest group of individuals in crisis to contact the National Runaway Safeline (NRS).
- Last year there was a 20 percent increase in connections from youth who are contemplating running away, and that trend has continued to escalate over the past year with an additional increase of 46 percent. This is an indication that NRS is helping more youth before they run away from home.
- Indeed, the proportion of connections that NRS handles from youth who are “on the street” is down across all categories (8 percent decline for runaways, 22 percent for throwaways, and 29 percent for homeless) over the past year. This decrease is a continuation of a downward trend in connections from individuals who have already left home, which is apparent in the three year decline across these categories.

### **Age of Youth in Crisis**

- One third of crisis connections to NRS are from or about youth aged seventeen—this is the most common age of crisis connectors.
- Over the past year, NRS saw an increase in crisis connections from youth up to age 17 and a decrease in crisis connections from youth ages 18-21. This is a continuation of trends over the last three years towards a younger group of connectors. This increase in younger connections also closely matches the upward trajectory of the use of digital services.
- Youth aged 13 have had the largest single year gain in crisis connections with a 44 percent increase over the past year. Again, it is probable that this large increase in connections is associated with the increased awareness and utilization of digital methods of connecting to NRS.

### **Means of Survival for Youth in Crisis**

- Seven in ten (70 percent) of youth in crisis connecting to the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) in 2015 relied on friends or relatives for survival resources including housing, food, and funds.
- More youth in crisis are using employment or personal funds to support themselves than in the past, with increases of 46 percent and 55 percent, respectively over the past year.
- There’s a clear decrease in the extent to which youth use shelters or soup kitchens to assist with their survival with a drop of 14 percent in the past year and 52 percent over the past three years.

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### **Length of Time on the Street for Youth in Crisis Before Contacting NRS**

- Most (46 percent) youth in crisis reach out to NRS within the first few days of being on the street, and an additional seven percent reach out by the end of the first week.
- Because NRS is serving a much greater proportion of youth who have not yet run away from home, the trends for time on the street are down across all categories of time.
- However, NRS is still serving more long-time runaways (three months or more) than they did ten years ago.

### **Whereabouts of Youth in Crisis at Time of Connection**

- Most crisis connectors that NRS serves reach out from home (57 percent), and there's been a significant increase in connections from home over the past year (18 percent), three years (44 percent), and ten years (46 percent). The large proportion of connectors who are at home is another indication of the extent to which NRS is now serving youth before they run away from home.
- There has been a smaller, but consistent, increase in connections from youth at work, with an increase of 7 percent over the past year, 24 percent over the past three years, and 55 percent over the past decade.
- The decline in shelters or soup kitchens as a means of survival is also reflected in the whereabouts of youth connectors. There were 31 percent fewer connections from youth in shelters this year compared to last year, and a drop of 67 percent over the past three years.

### **Issues Raised by Youth in Crisis**

- On average, three issues are raised during each crisis connection.
- Family dynamics remains the most commonly raised issue for youth in crisis connecting to the National Runaway Safeline (NRS), with 35 percent connecting to talk about this issue in 2015. Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal) and neglect is the second most common issue raised by youth in crisis in 2015 at 18 percent. These issues are broken down individually in the charts below.
- Connections about emotional or verbal abuse rose the most over the past year at 32 percent. This rise continues an upward trend of 50 percent over the past three years and 59 percent over the past decade.
- Economics was a rising issue for crisis connectors in 2008-2012, but it began to decrease in 2014 and continued its downward trajectory over the past year with a drop of 31 percent.
- LGBTQ issues have been a focus of more crisis connections than in the past with a consistent rise of 16 percent over the past year, 35 percent over the past three years, and 55 percent over the past decade. NRS has provided outreach efforts for the LGBTQ community with targeted informational materials which may be contributing to the growth in connections around these issues.

### **Relationship to Youth in Crisis**

- Almost three-quarters of crisis connections to the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) in 2015 came from the youth who is in crisis (72 percent).
- Other people who care about a youth in crisis also connect to NRS, including parents (17 percent), other adults (5 percent), relatives (5 percent), friends (4 percent) and agencies (2 percent).
- Youth are much more likely to reach out to NRS themselves than in the past. We've seen an increase of 28 percent over the past year, 26 percent over the past three years, and 60 percent over the past decade in connections directly from youth.

### **Gender of Youth in Crisis**

- Females are still more likely to reach out to NRS for assistance than males at 72 percent compared to 27 percent in 2015.
- Connections from transgender youth have more than doubled (54 percent increase) in the past year. Connections from or about transgender youth now make up just over one percent of all NRS crisis connections.

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The National Runaway Safeline (NRS), formerly known as the National Runaway Switchboard, established in 1971, serves as the federally designated national communication system for runaway, homeless and at-risk youth. NRS, with the support of more than 130 volunteers, makes more than 250,000 connections to help and hope through hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY), online (1800RUNAWAY.org), texting (66008) and offline resources. NRS provides crisis intervention, referrals to local resources, and education and prevention services to youth, families and community members throughout the country 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. More than 15,000 youth have been reunited with their families through NRS' Home Free program done in collaboration with Greyhound Lines, Inc. For more information, visit [1800RUNAWAY.org](http://1800RUNAWAY.org).

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