



Executive Summary

The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) works to build and maintain an effective and coordinated response to youth in crisis across the United States. NRS is designated as the national communication system for runaway, homeless and at-risk youth in the United States. Each year, NRS makes more than 250,000 connections to help and hope through their hotline, online, and offline services. This report summarizes a wide range of characteristics of the individuals in crisis who contacted NRS for help in 2015. In addition, this report places those numbers in the context of past crisis connectors by comparing them to the same 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.**

A number of important trends emerged through analysis of the past decade of crisis data from NRS. One of the most important trends that is apparent in a number of connector characteristics is **a shift toward runaway prevention by helping more youth before they leave home.** This trend can be seen in the large increases in crisis connections from two groups: a jump of 46 percent in connections from youth contemplating running away from home and a 15 percent increase from youth in crisis. This shift is also apparent in the fact that more youth are reaching out to NRS themselves for assistance (an increase of 28 percent). In addition, youth are 18 percent more likely to be reaching out to NRS from home than they did last year. **It is probable that the increase in digital connections as a method of reaching out to NRS is coming largely from this group of youth—they may feel more comfortable reaching out to NRS earlier through digital methods.**

NRS is handling more connections from younger youth than in the past; connections from each age category of youth up to age 18 have increased over the past year, with the **largest one-year jump of 44 percent for youth age 13.** It is likely that the increase in connections from younger youth is linked to the rise in digital connections that NRS experienced in the past 12 months. At the same time, connections from older youth have decreased over the past year with a drop of 18 percent for 19-year-olds, 24 percent for 20-year-olds, and 30 percent for 21-year-olds. This drop in connections from older youth may be tied to the drop in youth relying on shelter for survival and contacting NRS from shelter situations.

The upward trend in crisis connections about abuse and neglect that was reported last year has continued to increase at an alarming rate. There has been a 21 percent increase over the past year, 38 percent over the past three years, and 40 percent over the last decade in connections about abuse or neglect. Among the categories of abuse and neglect, the **largest increase was in emotional or verbal abuse** with a rise of 32 percent over the past year, 50 percent over the past three years, and 59 percent over the last decade.

The economic situation of individuals in crisis has continued to improve over the past year. Economic issues were commonly reported by youth in previous years, but reports of this have decreased over the past year by 31 percent. In addition, more youth are able to rely upon personal funds (55 percent increase) and employment (46 percent increase) as a means of survival over the past year.

This report provides insight into the characteristics of and issues faced by youth in crisis in 2015. NRS closely monitors the changes occurring among youth in crisis in order to provide the best possible services to these youth. **Understanding both who these youth in crisis are, and how the connector group as a whole is changing, are key to designing programs to keep youth safe and off the streets across the country.**

The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) has partnered with Benoit-Bryan Consulting, a research consulting firm specializing in youth issues, to analyze records of crisis connections to 1-800-RUNAWAY and 1800RUNAWAY.org for the last 11 years, 2005-2015, providing a 10-year trend horizon. The data for this report was compiled by Jennifer DiNicola, Crisis Services Manager, National Runaway Safeline.