



EVALUATION OF NATIONAL RUNAWAY SWITCHBOARD'S HOME FREE PROGRAM

Home Free Program Evaluation Overview

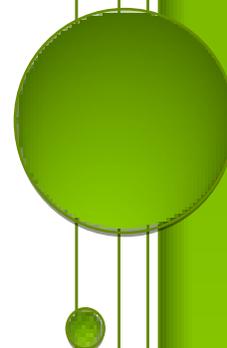
“Established in 1995 as a partnership between Greyhound Lines, Inc. and the National Runaway Switchboard, the Home Free program provides crisis intervention with the goal of reuniting runaway youth with their parent/legal guardian. Youth 18-20 also qualify for transportation to a transitional or independent living program through Home Free. Since the inception of the Home Free program, over 14,000 youth have been reunited with their families.

The Home Free program aims to help youth rebuild relationships with family and friends and develop connections with positive and caring adults. In addition to working with youth and guardians to develop a plan before returning home, the National Runaway Switchboard also provides resources in the youth's community that can help with ongoing support once home. Furthermore, the National Runaway Switchboard follows-up to ensure the youth has arrived home safely and provides additional resources if necessary.”

--Jennifer Di Nicola, Call Center Manager, National Runaway Switchboard

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Home Free Program Evaluation Overview

Evaluation Team

The Evaluation Team for this project included a doctoral-level Principal Evaluator with expertise in program evaluation and runaway/homeless youth, a doctoral-level Project Director, a master's-level Senior Evaluation Associate, and a team of 5 Evaluation Associates. All Evaluation Associates were trained in the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) Home Free Program Evaluation methodologies and procedures prior to participation in the evaluation. After an initial planning meeting in December 2011, the Evaluation Team worked in collaboration with Gordon Vance (Director of Programs) and Jennifer DiNicola (Call Center Manager) from NRS during January and February 2012 to develop the program evaluation goals, objectives, methodologies, and procedures. A Procedures Manual was created to assure procedural consistency throughout the evaluation, and all Evaluation Team members received training on the manual.

Evaluation Participants

The target populations for this evaluation included (a) youth between the ages of 12-20 who had received a Greyhound bus ticket from NRS' Home Free program during 2011, and (b) parents/guardians who were involved in the youth's return home and who had been contacted for follow up after their son/daughter received a Greyhound bus ticket from the Home Free program. In some cases, the youth and parent/guardian agreed that the youth would be placed with an extended family member in an Alternative Living Arrangement (ALA) and in those situations the person identified as the ALA was administered the parent/guardian survey.

Evaluation Methods/Procedures

Data for this evaluation were collected from participants through phone-based individual interviews. All potential participants were read an Introductory Script at the beginning of the interview to describe the evaluation and to detail expectations of participation. Following this introduction, potential participants were asked to give their verbal consent to participate and also to be recorded during sections of the interview. Those who agreed to participate were then administered the structured interview guide, which typically took 15-20 minutes to complete. Procedures were put in place for transferring any participants who experienced distress during the interview to the NRS' Crisis Hotline, but no phone calls were transferred throughout the evaluation. All interviews were conducted at the NRS offices/call center.

"[without Home Free] I would probably be sleeping on the streets...cause I wouldn't have had a way home" –Youth

"They [NRS] were helpful to talk to. They were polite and they tried to do everything they could to help me." –Youth

"I appreciate you guys [NRS] so much and thank you so much for doing what you did. I don't know what I would've done without you guys!" –Parent

"It's just a blessing to have something like that [Home Free]. This is something in place that can help save a child's life and lift the burden off a parent's heart...that's a blessing." –Parent



Youth who participated were eligible to be entered in a raffle to receive a \$75 gift card (3 youth gift cards were awarded), and parents/guardians were eligible to be entered in a raffle to receive a \$100 gift card (3 parent/guardian gift cards were awarded). Since all initial contact information provided by NRS for Home Free clients was for parents/ guardians, parent/guardian participants were asked to provide a phone number for the youth who had received Home Free services at the end of the interview so they could be contacted for an interview. All phone interviews were conducted between February 2012 and June 2012.

In order to increase the likelihood of reaching potential participants, the Evaluation Team and NRS Professional Staff set a standard of making a minimum of 5 phone call attempts to reach a parent/guardian or youth. If the phone number on the NRS Home Free Data 2011 Form was no longer correct, five attempts to contact an individual were counted after the correct phone number was obtained. Each attempt to contact a potential participant was documented in a Participant Call Log, noting the date, time, outcome, and notes.

Evaluation Instrument

The structured interview guide included a mix of both close-ended quantitative survey questions, as well as open-ended qualitative interview questions. This mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) interview guide was created in a collaborative manner between the Evaluation Team and NRS Professional Staff members (Gordon Vance and Jennifer DiNicola). The final evaluation instrument included the following content areas: a) demographics, b) family reunification following Home Free, c) utilization of resources provided by Home Free/NRS, d) family dynamics following Home Free, e) family functioning following HF, f) youth health/risk outcomes following Home Free, g) satisfaction with Home Free services and NRS staff members. Responses to quantitative items were recorded manually on an interview guide response form, and responses to qualitative response were digitally recorded via a phone-based digital recorder. Quantitative responses were entered into an SPSS database for statistical analysis and digital recordings were transcribed verbatim for content and thematic analyses.

Home Free Program Evaluation Overview of Initial Findings

Participation Rates

A total of 432 youth/families received services through the Home Free program during 2011. The existing NRS database included working telephone numbers for 313 (72.5% of 432) of the parents/guardians whose youth had received a Greyhound bus ticket through the Home Free program. All 313 of these numbers were called up to 5 times, and 172 (55.0% of 313) parents/guardians were not able to be reached for a phone interview after reaching the 5 call threshold. Of the 141 parents/guardians who were reached, 25 (17.7% of 141) refused to participate in the interview, and 2 (1.4% of 141) did not speak English and thus could not complete the interview. A total of 107 parents/guardians (75.9% of 141) completed the full interview, with an additional 2 parents/guardians (1.4% of 141) completing only part of the interview due to call interruptions.

The number of youth who participated in the interviews was much lower since the evaluators were dependent upon the parents/guardians to obtain the best telephone number to reach the youth. Of the 110 parents/guardians who were reached and did not refuse to participate, 36 (32.7% of 110) indicated that their youth could not be reached due to the following reasons: ran away, incarcerated, in residential treatment, or no phone. The remaining 74 youth of these 110 parents/guardians were called up to 5 times, and 40 (54.0% of 74) youth were not able to be reached for a phone interview after reaching the 5 call threshold. Of the 34 youth who were reached, 2 (5.9% of 34) refused to participate in the interview. A total of 28 youth (82.4% of 34) completed the full interview, with an additional 4 youth (11.8% of 34) completing only part of the interview due to call interruptions.

Initial Analyses

Initial quantitative analyses of the data will focus on frequency counts of the various individual quantitative items and scales found in the following content sections of the interview guide: a) demographics, b) family reunification following Home Free, c) utilization of resources provided by Home Free/NRS, d) family functioning following HF, and e) youth health/risk outcomes following Home Free.

The family reunification items will focus on where the youth is currently living, whether or not the original plan for family reunification discussed during the Home Free phone conference is currently in place, and historical and current episodes of running away. The resource items will focus on the services that were and were not used by the family, and the reasons for nonuse. The family functioning section includes two subscales representing dimensions of family functioning based on Bloom (1985) and Bloom & Naar's (1999) fifteen dimensions of family functioning, including Expressiveness and Conflict. Information regarding how the family was functioning in these two areas one month before the youth ran away and one month after the youth returned home will be reported. The final quantitative section will focus on the youth's school attendance and participation in the following health risk behaviors after returning home: alcohol and other substance use, tobacco use, sexual activity, physical fights, breaking the law, and leaving home because of a crisis.

Initial qualitative analysis of the data will focus on both content and thematic analyses of the interview transcripts, with a focus on information found in the following content sections of the interview guide: a) family dynamics after Home Free, and b) satisfaction with Home Free services and NRS staff members.

The family dynamics data will be related to family relationships prior to the youth running away, critical events that contributed to the youth running away, family relationships one month after the youth returned home, and current family relationships and dynamics. In addition, this section will explore how the Home Free program has helped to improve family relationships and dynamics. The data related to satisfaction with Home Free services and NRS staff members will focus on participants' overall experiences with the Home Free program, their experiences with the 3-way conference call, and their specific experiences with NRS staff members while receiving services. Information from participants with regard to how NRS can improve their services will also be explored.

Initial Quantitative Data Highlights

- 99.1% of youth returned home as expected after using Home Free.
- 62.3% of youth are currently living with parents, guardians, or other family members.
- 77.4% of youth did not leave home again after Home Free—65% of youth who left home again after Home Free had a history of leaving home prior to receiving services.
- 84.5% of parents reported that the issues that lead the youth to running away were either somewhat, mostly or completely resolved one month after Home Free—90.3% reported the same level of resolution at the time of the evaluation interview which was up to 18 months after receiving Home Free services.
- 68.3% of parents reported that their youth used alcohol or other substances less after Home Free
- 60.0% of parents reported that their youth engaged in unprotected sex less after Home Free
- 64.1% of parents reported that their youth engaged in physical fights less after Home Free
- 65.8% of parents reported that their youth broke the law less after Home Free
- 82.6% of parents reported that their youth left home because of a crisis less after Home Free