



Frontline

Keeping America's runaway and at-risk youth safe and off the streets.

RUNAWAY YOUTH MORE LIKELY TO BE SUICIDAL, USE DRUGS AS ADULTS

By Jasleen Jaswal Vines

In September, the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) released results from a research study* that included interviews with adults who identified as former runaways.

The results are astounding.

When compared to those who didn't run, former runaways are:

- **51%** more likely to have suicidal thoughts as an adult.
- **Over twice** as likely to be smokers.
- **67%** more likely to use marijuana as an adult.
- **50%** more likely not to have a high school degree or GED.
- **Over two and a half** times more likely to be arrested as adults.
- **99%** more likely to sell drugs.

The data further underscores the need to reach out to youth before they run from home.

Fortunately, NRS is there to make the connection with youth. Frontline team members are trained to listen to each caller's unique situation and support their creating an action plan that is safe and manageable for the long-term. In addition, runaway youth who want to go home can utilize NRS' Home Free program (see page 5 for more information) for a free Greyhound bus ticket home.

Services are available over the phone at 1-800-RUNAWAY, and online at www.1800RUNAWAY.org, where youth can email, post to a confidential bulletin board, or chat online with a member of NRS' frontline team.

*The analyzed data is from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a nationally representative sample of over 15,000 adolescents who were followed in to adulthood over the course of four interviews between the ages of 13 and 32. This allowed researchers to track individuals across 15 years and examine how behaviors and characteristics of adolescence are connected to the outcomes of health, education, and economics for the same individuals in adulthood.

FALL/WINTER
2011
NEWSLETTER

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NRS Ready to Help!

A hurricane in New York. An earthquake in Virginia. Tornadoes in Alabama. A blizzard in Chicago. 2011 will be a year remembered for its alarming weather. Each violent, natural disaster made national news for its devastating impact. The New York's subway shut down. Chicago's Lake Shore Drive closed. Life halted as Mother Nature unleashed her unprecedented fury.

Every year, 1.6 million youth run away from home. Mom and dad are fighting. Kids are bullying at school. They messed up on a test, in a job, or with a friend. Their life is a disaster! They leave home because resolving the conflict seems insurmountable. They just go! They leave the safety of home. They travel down the streets of the unknown. These kids leave their disaster and find themselves faced with an even bigger one. Are they sleeping in a park when the hurricane, earthquake, tornado, blizzard hits? Where do they run to escape disaster now?

When disaster strikes, the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) is ready to help! At 1-800-RUNAWAY and www.1800RUNAWAY.org, NRS provides crisis intervention through the hotline and online services. Youth and their families are available to access help 24-hours a day. NRS handles calls from across the country from its Chicago-based headquarters. When the blizzard immobilized the city, NRS stayed open! Our committed staff and volunteers braved the freezing snowstorm to ensure we were there for a kid facing her own disaster.

For 40 years, the National Runaway Switchboard has worked to help keep America's runaway, homeless and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. We are here when disaster strikes!



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Scrapbooking Boutique Raises Funds for Runaways

By Lashawnda M. Carter

On July 30, 2011, scrapbooking and paper crafts store *Defining Moments* hosted a fundraising event and presentation to educate its customers and the community about National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) and to raise funds to help keep America's runaway, homeless and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. Jocelyn Tobias, proprietor, learned of NRS after attending the Concierge Preferred Trade Show in Chicago, was immediately taken with NRS' mission and wanted to help. The event featured

a brief presentation about organization and time management for children's learning and a raffle benefitting NRS.

From left to right: Local speaker and educational consultant "Mrs. Pattie" Bross; NRS Executive Director, Maureen Blaha with event attendees Alisa Levine, Susan Gore, Cindy Krizman and Defining Moments owner and event hostess Jocelyn Tobias – photo courtesy of Maggie Felish



Shelton Garage Sale

Pam Graney and Barb Shelton pictured with NRS Call Center Supervisor Lindsey Shelton hosted their annual garage sale to raise money for a Chicagoland charity. This year \$1,000 was raised to benefit NRS. – photo courtesy of Sharri Bryan

Wrigley Start Early Run and Pledge Walk

This past spring, NRS' *Running for Runaways* team participated in the 2011 Wrigley Start Early Run and Pledge Walk. With the help of over forty-five participants running and walking for runaway, homeless and at-risk youth, NRS was able to raise over \$13,000 to keep kids safe and off the streets.

Top: From left to right: Jeannie Gourguechon, Joe Morris, Chris Kadow Dougherty, Denise Gulotta, and Diana Gourguechon – photo courtesy of Jasleen Jaswal Vines

Bottom: From left to right: Joseph Zambrano, Rich Malone, Jim Cridlin, Omar Muniz, Sloane Luckie – photo courtesy of Jasleen Jaswal Vines





Conner's Story

By Lashawnda M. Carter

One evening while working a shift at the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS), frontline team member, Patrick, received an incoming message from the live chat (instant message) service on www.1800RUNAWAY.org. His first chat conversation of the night began intensely as the chatter immediately responded.

CONNER: *Hey...wondering if you can help. I wanna run away from home.*

The chatter, 15-year old Conner, was connecting with NRS from Portland, Oregon. Before Patrick could even respond, Conner had already sent another message.

CONNER: *I've only been back to school for two weeks and I'm already getting picked on again. I'm sick of it. I have no friends. No one to talk to.*

NRS: *I'm sorry to hear that. No one deserves to be picked on.*

CONNER: *All they do is laugh at me or try to trip me when I'm walking down the hall at school. They call me names because I'm overweight. They even block the entrance to the cafeteria during lunch time and tell me that I'm so fat I don't need to eat for two weeks. I gotta run away. It's just gonna get worse. I can't go the entire school year getting bullied...*

NRS: *I can understand why this is a tough situation for you. Have you thought about any other options besides running away? Have you talked with your parents about what's going on at school?*

CONNER: *That's the thing, my parents and I don't get along too well. They're always on my case about EVERYTHING! They're always telling me that I'm lazy but they don't understand that I'm not, I'm just not motivated to do anything because I have no friends and no one at school likes me.*

NRS: *Have you told your parents that? Do you have anyone else outside of school that you can talk to or hangout with? I know it may not seem that way right now, but things won't be this way forever. What are some things that you're good at? What do you like to do?*

Over the next thirty minutes, Patrick chatted with Conner about his favorite books, movies, music and other things that he enjoys. Conner mentioned that he likes drawing and writing. He also talked about his favorite classes at school. Patrick made sure to point out all the things that he was good at without being directive. He also encouraged Conner to try talking to his parents again and gave him different options for opening up to them and ways to express his feelings. By the end of the chat, Conner stated that he felt better about his situation and thanked Patrick for his help.

Patrick didn't know what the future held for Conner—maybe tomorrow would be just as hard as other days had been. But he felt good knowing that Conner had a plan of action and several options available the next time he felt bullied. One of the options is to call 1-800-RUNAWAY or visit www.1800RUNAWAY.org to chat about it.

**The name and location have been changed to protect anonymity of the caller.*

Home Free Program Expanded

By Jasleen Jaswal Vines

Since 1995, the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) has reunited more than 14,000 youth and their families using the Home Free program, in collaboration with Greyhound Lines, Inc.

As the modern family continues to evolve, more youth find themselves in living situations where their primary caregiver is not their legal guardian, but a member of the extended family network.

As a result, the Home Free program has been expanded so that runaway and homeless youth can go home to siblings age twenty-one or older or an extended family member, such as an aunt or uncle. These homes are referred to as alternative living arrangements (ALA). Prior to the expansion, youth could only return to legal guardians.

For a child to utilize an ALA Home Free ticket, the adult must be over 21 years old and a relative of the youth, with documents verifying the relationship. As with all Home Free calls, the next step is a series of conference calls between the family member and the youth to establish a plan of action to help ensure the youth won't run away again.

NRS thanks Greyhound Lines, Inc., for its continued support of the program, in addition to continued sponsorship of Spirit of Youth, NRS' annual benefit (see page 8). Thanks to their support, NRS continues to keep America's runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth safe and off the streets.



NRS Board Members at the September 2011 Annual Meeting

(l to r) Rich Malone, Kelly Mead, Brian Zboril, David Wells, Ben Gastevich, Michele Lehman, Jodi Cohen, Jim Criner, Brianne Gruszka, David Dean, Christina Van Pelt, Ron Richter, NRS Executive Director Maureen Blaha, Randall Royer, Kandace Lenti, Ex Officio member Michael Grierson, Anne Schankin All pictured are current and former board members unless otherwise noted. Board members not in picture: Akeshia Craven, Dr. Gary Harper, Luke Palese, Jack Philbin, Will Schreiber-Stainthorp, Joan Steltmann, Bonnie Wheeler, Jim Williams

Tri City Professional Exchange Visits NRS

By Lashawnda M. Carter

Social workers from Hamburg, Germany, and Birmingham, England spent two weeks this summer studying both urban and rural social services in Illinois. Joined by U.S. professionals, the group visited eighteen organizations, including the National Runaway Switchboard. The study focused on the current global economic conditions in which governments were withdrawing from providing and/or funding social services. The Tri City Professional exchange set out to learn and share how to optimize meager resources.

During the visit to NRS, the group was able to meet with staff to learn about NRS' services, followed by a youth panel of frontline team members who shared their experiences of answering the call to 1-800-RUNAWAY.

— photo courtesy of Sharri Bryan



National Runaway Prevention Month

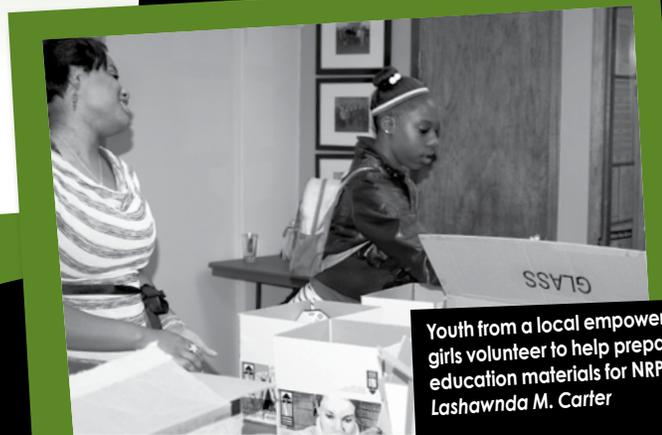
In November 2011, the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS), in partnership with several other prominent organizations, will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM). This year's theme is *Making the Connection*.

The goals for NRPM are two-fold, 1) increase the awareness of the issues facing runaways; and 2) educate the public about the solutions and the role they can play in preventing youth from running away. To help reach these goals and to continue to make the connection with youth, families and communities across the country, NRS has planned an array of fun and educational activities for the month. Activities include NRPM Day of Action, "Green Sock Day", NRS Spirit of Youth benefit, a green light ceremony at the Chicago icon, Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs, and NRS' annual Thanksgiving dinner to feed homeless youth.



Encourage a group of co-workers at work or classmates at your school to purchase a pair of green socks and designate a day to wear the socks for Green Sock Day. Take a group photo and send it to NRS! — photo courtesy of Jasleen Jaswal Vines

NRS' volunteers help prepare for National Runaway Prevention Month by assembling NRPM toolkits — photo courtesy of Lashawnda M. Carter



Youth from a local empowerment group for teenage girls volunteer to help prepare promotional and education materials for NRPM — photo courtesy of Lashawnda M. Carter

Because our donors, partners and sponsors have been there for NRS, we have been there to handle over 100,000 calls in 2010!

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Spirit of Youth ²⁰¹¹

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November 18, 2011
6pm to 9pm

Merchandise Mart
222 Merchandise Mart Plaza, North Hall
Chicago, IL

2011 Spirit Of Youth Award Recipient
Cyndi Lauper's True Colors Fund

ONLINE AUCTION: Paris trip, Chicago Bears tickets, Marc Jacobs bags and much more! Bid to win at www.1800RUNAWAY.org from October 15th through November 30th.

RAFFLE SALE: NRS is giving away three pairs of United Airlines tickets. \$20 a ticket or 6 tickets for \$100 from October 1st through November 18th.

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