



Frontline

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

SPRING/SUMMER
2011
NEWSLETTER

NRS Launches **LIVE CHAT** with Ludacris Public Service Announcement

By Lashawnda M. Carter

According to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS)'s 2010 *Why They Run* report, about 50% of youth on the street have access to a cell phone at least some of the time, and 72% have access to email. In an effort to stay innovative when connecting with youth, as well as staying abreast with the growing popularity in instant messaging, NRS launched a new live chat service in March 2011. The service gives callers another option to make the connection with NRS' front line team and resources.

Currently, NRS has an online bulletin board, where youth in crisis can post messages that a crisis intervention specialist responds to within two hours. The new live chat, accessible during peak hours, allows an immediate response followed by an uninterrupted dialogue with a crisis intervention specialist. Help is still available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-800-RUNAWAY, sending an email to info@1800RUNAWAY.org, or posting a message to NRS' bulletin board.

To promote the new live chat, NRS teamed up with award-winning entertainer and NRS ambassador, Chris "Ludacris" Bridges to film a new public service announcement (PSA). This is NRS' third PSA featuring Bridges. All three can be viewed by visiting www.1800RUNAWAY.org.

The PSA promoting NRS' new live chat service gives callers another option to get connected to a crisis intervention specialist, with access to over 13,000 resources.



The filming of NRS' newest PSA featuring Chris "Ludacris" Bridges shows the expanding partnership between The Ludacris Foundation and NRS since 2007 and the release of the award-winning single *Runaway Love*.

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NRS Reaches Back!

"...I got really depressed ever since September and I haven't been able to come out of it..."

"...my girlfriend (17 ½) needs help she doesn't feel safe at home..."

"...When I was 15 I started drinking and smoking marijuana..."

These are snippets from bulletin board postings at www.1800RUNAWAY.org. In the past week, these three teenagers reached out to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) with serious problems of depression, safety, and addiction. They are all anonymous people in pain trying to find relief. They reached out for comfort and NRS reached back. We don't usually know what happens to a caller, chatter or poster. NRS just knows when youth in crisis needs help, we are here for them!

Everybody has a crappy day! For teenagers, it could be crappy months or even years. Not quite an adult, no longer a child, a teenager faces a myriad of challenges in coming of age. Externally, school, family, and friends pressure a teen to act in a certain way. Internally, a youth battles identity issues in their ever-changing bodies and emotions. It can be overwhelming. For forty years, NRS has provided a listening ear to youth in crisis. Using solution-focused interventions, NRS handles the call, and now the chat, with sensitivity to each individual situation. NRS offers non-judgmental support everyday of every year. This winter, during the worst Chicago blizzard in twenty years, NRS' dedicated staff and volunteers ensured the crisis call center stayed opened and accessible to families in crisis around the country.

NRS doesn't know the end of the story for any of these three teenagers that recently posted desperate messages on our bulletin board. We just know the world is a scary place and these kids are out there in it. And now they know 1-800-RUNAWAY or www.1800RUNAWAY.org is available 24/7 to help.



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Volunteers are the HEART of NRS!

Our volunteers continue to make a difference on the lines and in their communities.

Volunteer of the Year 2011

Brian Meister, Miss Illinois Whitney Thorpe-Klinsky, and NRS Executive Director Maureen Blaha - *photo courtesy of Amy Dondanville*

Over 100 volunteers and community members celebrated their service and support of NRS' mission at the 40th Anniversary Volunteer & Community Recognition Event, held April 11, 2011 at ZED451 in Chicago. The Volunteer of the Year award for 2011 was presented to Brian Meister by Miss Illinois Whitney Thorpe-Klinsky. Meister has been with NRS for just over a year and has already served over 500 hours on the lines! Miss Illinois was a popular guest, with numerous attendees taking their pictures with her and thanking her for visiting and supporting NRS through her work in schools across the state.



Cubs Care Foundation

Cubs Care Foundation volunteers at the 11th Annual Thanksgiving Dinner to feed homeless youth - *photo courtesy of Nathan Luecking*

NRS hosted the 11th Annual Thanksgiving Dinner, sponsored by Cubs Care Foundation, at St. Luke's Church in Chicago. Local homeless youth were served a traditional Thanksgiving meal. The youth also received backpacks including essential supplies and clothes. Activities for the evening included entertainment by Spoken Word group Kuumba Lynx and special appearances by Rep. Mike Quigley (D-IL), Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), and Alderman Thomas Tunney.

Lemonade Crew donate proceeds to NRS

The lemonade crew included Paul Ingersoll (10), Lukas Blume (9), Julian Ingersoll (7) and Sebastian Ingersoll (9). - *photo courtesy of Mariana Ingersoll*

Front Line Team Member Mariana Ingersoll turned her children's lemonade stand into a service learning opportunity! Her sons and their friends opened a lemonade stand in their neighborhood. But instead of keeping all the profits, they donated 25% of their lemonade stand proceeds to NRS! The young men also had NRS bookmarks on the table to pass out to thirsty customers.



Teen organizes a runaway awareness event

Brielle wearing a shirt from Holey Jeans Day - *photo courtesy of Brielle Corriente*

High school freshman Brielle Corriente raised over \$1,600 for NRS by organizing an awareness fundraiser in her community in Pennsylvania. She got a jumpstart on her senior graduation project by organizing a dress down/donation day at the school. She set up displays about runaway awareness through the elementary, junior, and high school buildings, and showed video clips weekly. The schools in Corriente's community ban jeans with holes in them. But, on November 18, 2010, students in all three buildings were permitted to wear holey jeans for a day if they donated a dollar to NRS. Teachers were also allowed to dress down and wear the holey jeans for a donation of three dollars. She also sold t-shirts to the middle school students. Corriente plans to continue this activity every November for National Runaway Prevention Month.

Sonya's Story

By Lashawnda M. Carter

After spending nearly a year away from home, 18-year-old Sonya began to think that maybe it was time to find help in getting home. She had two children under the age of two, no job, no money, no place to stay, and was running out of options. She heard about 1-800-RUNAWAY from one of her former co-workers and decided to call.

"National Runaway Switchboard," frontline team member, Jeremy, answered.

"Hi, I got your number from a former co-worker. Can you help me get back home to my mom or even find a place for my kids and me to go?" Sonya asked. "I really could use your help right now because I'm all out of options."

"I'm glad you called, tell me what's going on and then we'll discuss your options," Jeremy said.

Sonya explained to Jeremy that she ran away from her mother's home in Louisville, KY, to be with her children's father, Jason, in Milwaukee, WI. She said that she was 15 and he was 21 when they met. Because of the age difference, her mother never approved of their relationship, but eventually agreed to let the young couple live with her because of the children.

During this time Jason had become abusive to Sonya and disrespectful to Sonya's mom. Sonya's mom told her Jason could no longer live in her house. Jason asked Sonya to move to Milwaukee with him. He said things would be different because he had family there and had already secured a job. Sonya and the children moved to Wisconsin to be with Jason. After only five months, Jason abandoned Sonya and the children.

"I had a job and was renting a room from one of my co-workers, but I had to quit my job because daycare cost too much," Sonya explained. "Now I have no money to pay for the room I'm renting and my landlady said I have until Friday to pay or get out. I want to go back to my mom's home but I left on bad terms. I don't know if she'll be willing to take my kids and me back."

"I should've just listened to my mom and left Jason a long time ago. I wish I could just tell my mom that I'm sorry," Sonya said.

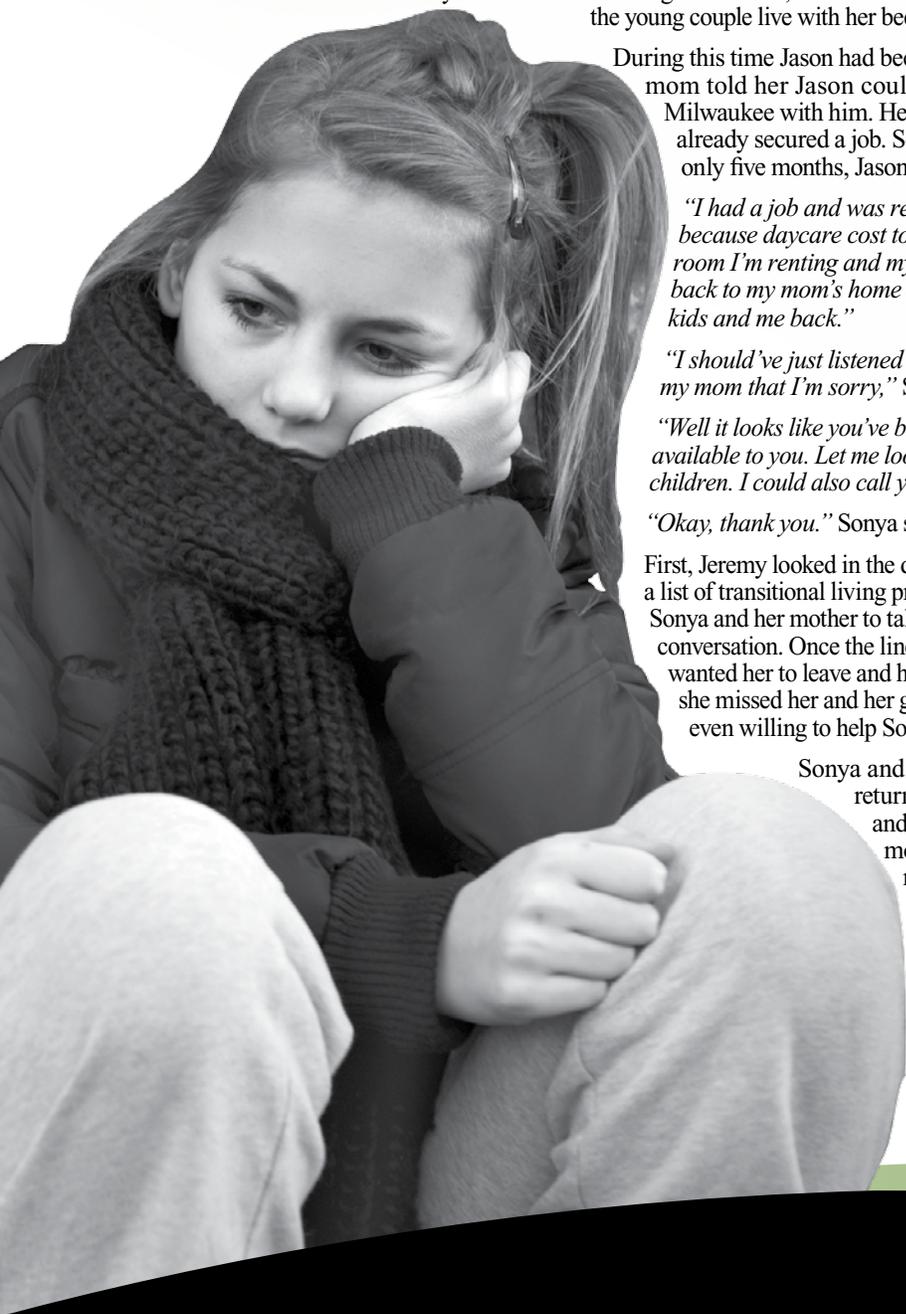
"Well it looks like you've been through a lot," Jeremy said. "Fortunately, there are options available to you. Let me look in our database to see what shelters are available for you and your children. I could also call your mom so that the two of you could talk to sort through your issues."

"Okay, thank you." Sonya said.

First, Jeremy looked in the database for a local shelter for Sonya and her children. He gave Sonya a list of transitional living programs for young mothers and children. Finally, he set up a call for Sonya and her mother to talk about their issues while he stayed on the line to help mediate the conversation. Once the lines of communication were open, Sonya realized that her mother never wanted her to leave and had been wishing for her to come home ever since. She told Sonya that she missed her and her grandkids so much and just wanted them to come back home. She was even willing to help Sonya with the children while she went to school and work.

Sonya and her mother agreed that it was best for her and her children to return home. Jeremy secured a free bus ticket from Greyhound for her and her children. He also provided her with a list of resources for young mothers, including counseling for victims of domestic violence. He reassured Sonya that she could always call 1-800-RUNAWAY for help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. "We are here," Jeremy said.

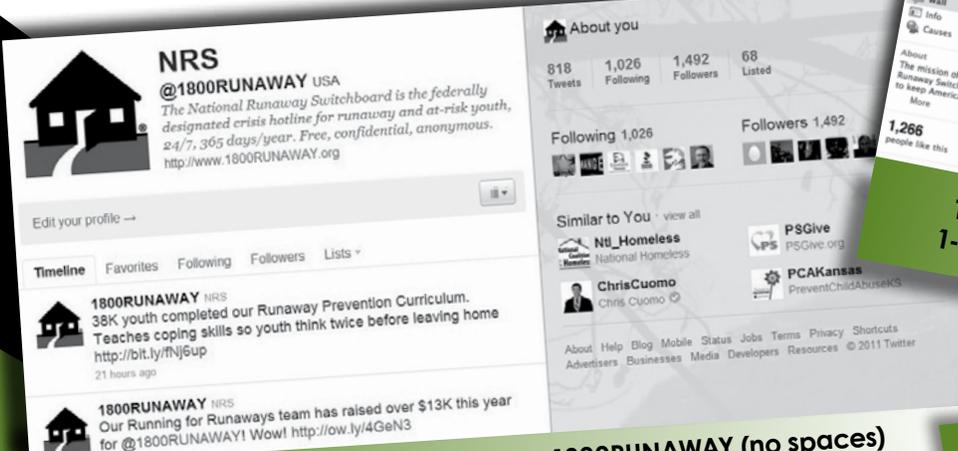
"Thank you so much for helping me. I am so glad that I called because now I know that me and my kids will be safe," replied Sonya.



Are You Keeping up with 1-800-RUNAWAY Online?

NRS is launching a redesigned website in the coming weeks! The new site will be easy to navigate, information will be organized in a way that's easy to find. Most importantly, the site will be optimized to enable a teen in crisis to easily find NRS when searching the internet for resources.

It's easy to stay in touch with NRS year-round. Simply follow NRS on Facebook or Twitter. Both are updated regularly with the latest research, facts, events, and goings-on at NRS! NRS has grown to over 1,000 followers on both Facebook and Twitter, and hopes to hit 2,000 in the next year. Don't miss out!



To like NRS on Facebook: search for 1-800-RUNAWAY (include the dashes)

To follow NRS on Twitter: search for 1800RUNAWAY (no spaces)

NRS & True Colors Fund Partner To Raise Awareness

NRS and the True Colors Fund have teamed up to raise awareness of runaway and homeless youth. Co-founded by artist and civil rights activist Cyndi Lauper, the True Colors Fund is a vehicle to encourage everyone to become active participants in the advancement of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) equality and bring an end to GLBT homelessness.

In November, Cyndi Lauper flipped the switch to turn the Empire State Building green for National Runaway Prevention Month. She also recorded an impromptu public service announcement promoting NRS' services.

In March, the True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund visited NRS to meet with staff and learn more about NRS. In addition, they attended a panel of frontline team members who explained what they do and who they help every day.



NRS Frontline Team members Liz Grossmann, Natasha Douglas, Katerina Rios, Will Schreiber-Stainthorp, and Emily Roberts speak about their experience on the lines - photo courtesy of Jasleen Jaswal Vines



Nancy Mahon, Executive Director, MAC Aids Fund; Cyndi Lauper, artist and civil rights activist; Maureen Blaha, Executive Director, NRS; and Commissioner Jeanne B. Mullgrave for the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development

(above) Gregory Lewis, True Colors Fund; Maureen Blaha, NRS; Terrence Meck, The Palette Fund - photo courtesy of Jasleen Jaswal Vines

2010 Spirit of Youth

On November 12, 2010, NRS held its 8th Annual Spirit of Youth benefit at the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. The event raised more than \$100,000 for NRS and included sponsorships from United Airlines (Platinum level), Chicago Tribune, Radio Flyer and Greyhound, a FirstGroup of America company (Gold Level). Guests in attendance had the opportunity to partake in a tour of the Merchandise Mart's Dream Home while indulging in dishes from ten premier Chicago restaurant partners, including *Top Chef* Stephanie Izard's Girl & The Goat, Vanille Patisserie, Sushi Wabi, Blue 13, Chef Fredy Cuisine, Mexique, Whimsical Candy, Nacional 27, Zed 451, and Opera Restaurant. In addition, wine stations were hosted by Fortino Winery, Eno, Midwest Real Estate Data, and Jodi Cohen & David Schwartz.

(Left to Right) Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage President/COO Fran Broude accepts the 2010 Spirit of Youth award on behalf of Coldwell Banker Charitable Foundation from NRS Executive Director Maureen Blaha.



Chef Gayton of Mexique puts the finishing touches on his appetizer before guests arrive.



(Left to Right) 2010 Spirit of Youth co-chairs and board members Michele Lehman and Christina Van Pelt.



(Left to Right) Guests Ethan Allen and Jackie Statum take time to enjoy the program.

FORMER RUNAWAY PRODUCES NRS' RADIO MEDIA TOUR

By Natasha Douglas

Bill Keller is an Emmy award winning reporter and anchor at KMSP-TV FOX 9 News in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is also the producer of NRS' upcoming Radio Media Tour. Formerly a runaway, Keller is now a married father of two daughters, ages 17 and 20.

How did you overcome the challenges you faced as a runaway?

Mine was not a very difficult experience. I drove to California to stay with a high school friend who graduated a year before me. The biggest challenge was coming to terms with the realization that I needed my family to accomplish my goals. Surviving your teenage years is not easy. High school can be one of the most difficult social experiences. I had been knocking heads with my parents for a year and a half. After being grounded for months, I couldn't take it any longer and decided to split. But you soon realize that while you're struggling to be independent, you're not as self-sufficient as you think.

As the father of two daughters, what steps could be taken by parents to prevent their children from running away from home?

LISTEN TO YOUR KIDS. Take the time to not just hear but LISTEN. Know they are young, and their brains are not fully developed. I think one of the biggest challenges for kids between the ages of 15-20 is that they want to be independent and make their own mistakes. It's their job to rebel. They've outgrown the idea of listening to their parents tell them what to do. And as parents, we're not willing to let our kids make those mistakes for fear they will get hurt.

How does the radio media tour you are producing connect to the National Runaway Switchboard?

It's a series of live radio interviews with the National Runaway Switchboard's Executive Director Maureen Blaha. The idea is to let adults and youth know there is a resource that can help them. Kids may run away for a lot of personal reasons. But at the end of the day, Maureen lets people know their experience is not all that uncommon. And with all this talk about new media, the online chat offered by NRS is a tremendous resource. It allows NRS to reach out in a way young people are very comfortable with.



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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Ronald and Jean Richter
In Honor of Tom and Sarah Galica
Ronald and Jean Richter
In Honor of Ray and Carrie Hicks
Ronald and Jean Richter
In Honor of Caroline McDonald
Ronald and Jean Richter
In Honor of Elizabeth Montalvo
Ahmad Yilmaz
In Honor of Lee Osipchak
Chris Tews
In Honor of Jeremy Perlin and Susan Frankel
Margo Krstein
In Honor of the Raible-Clark, Raible-Brand, and Raible-Bryant families
Robert and Palmer Raible
In Honor of Blanche Richter
Ronald and Jean Richter
In Memory of Gayle Schiegg and Jasmine Nave
Cooper University Hospital-Social Work Department
In Memory of Yvonne Srenaski
John Roy
In Honor of Matthew Tremper
Benjamin and Natalie Phillips
In Honor of Gordon Vance
Deborah Hinde
In Memory of Steven Weiss
Mitch and Abra Zaveduk

spirit of youth

2011



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