ALONE WITHOUT A HOME

Resources for homeless and runaway youth vary greatly from state to state.

In September 2012, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) and the National Network for Youth (NN4Y) released “Alone Without A Home,” a comprehensive review of current law in areas that affect unaccompanied youth in all the United States and its territories. The report sheds light on the legal barriers that often complicate youth’s attempts to meet the basic necessities of life on their own and prevent them from reaching out for assistance to state agencies and service providers that could otherwise help them.

Among their findings:
• Out of the 56 jurisdictions reviewed, only 12 include a definition of the term “youth” to differentiate between the needs of older youth and those of younger children.
• Seventeen jurisdictions allow minors to enter into binding contracts for basic necessities, such as housing.
• Thirty-four jurisdictions allow unaccompanied youth under 18 to apply for health insurance coverage without the need for parental consent, but not in all situations.
• Thanks to the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, youth have the right to access education regardless of their housing situation. Youth can enroll in school on their own, receive transportation from wherever they are staying, even if they are couch surfing, and move multiple times throughout their homelessness, get free school meals so they at least have one meal a day, and receive a surrogate if they need one to help them get special education services.
• In a majority of jurisdictions, helping a runaway or homeless youth puts one at risk for criminal or civil liability. In sixteen states, it is illegal to harbor a runaway, and in fifteen states it is considered contributing to delinquency.

The report also provides recommendations for policy change, with a view towards strengthening the supports available to unaccompanied youth. These recommendations include writing non-judgmental definitions of unaccompanied youth; eliminating the punishment of these youth because of their status and prioritizing support and assistance; and removing barriers allowing youth to act on their own behalf.

NRS made “Alone Without A Home” available as a legal resource to its crisis line volunteers and staff so they may help youth who call 1-800-RUNAWAY in navigating statutes based on their jurisdiction and situation.
NEW NAME “NATIONAL RUNAWAY SAFELINE”

As the go-to resource for America’s runaway, homeless and at-risk youth and their families, why would we change our name?

Simply put, we want to be relevant to youth today as we were 42 years ago. The word “switchboard” no longer resonates with today’s youth. When we were founded over 40 years ago as Metro-Help, operating out of a tiny storefront in Chicago, it wasn’t uncommon for telephone operators to manually connect calls using switchboards.

However, when we asked today’s teens what they thought a switchboard was, the responses varied, from “DJ board” to “1920s telephones” to “outdated.” The word loses its meaning in a world where technology allows humans to connect with others around the globe with the press of a button.

In addition, “switchboard” no longer reflects the various ways youth in crisis can connect with our services. Since our founding, we grew into a national organization and expanded our crisis intervention offerings to include bulletin boards, crisis emails, and live chat. After a comprehensive evaluation, including discussions with stakeholders and focus groups with youth, we chose to adopt a new name that expresses our growing ability to make a connection and make a difference for the population we serve-National Runaway Safeline.

Our mission continues to help keep America’s runaway, homeless and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. We still offer a proprietary, holistic and expert crisis intervention model focused on addressing at-risk issues immediately.

Our services, including, Home Free, done in collaboration with Greyhound Lines, Inc., remain confidential, anonymous, and available 24/7, providing a comprehensive connection to over 10,000 different organizations and resources for at-risk youth and their families.

The National Runaway Safeline continues its distinction of being the only federally designated national communication system for runaway and homeless youth. It has held that role since 1974.

Please consider investing in helping us build the depth and breadth of National Runaway Safeline’s relevance as a frontline first responder, dedicated to providing immediate hope and the ability to make empowered decisions to anyone, anytime.

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On January 15th, the National Runaway Switchboard began doing business as the National Runaway Safeline. The change was commemorated by a daylong celebration, with events taking place on the 42nd minute of each hour in honor of NRS’ 42 years of service.
**NUMBERS TELL THE STORY**

**National Runaway Prevention Month**

Jessie, a 15 year old, called 1-800-RUN-AWAY from a shelter in Atlanta seeking help getting back home. She ran away from her Indianapolis home after a fight with her mom.

“National Runaway Safeline,” answered frontline team member Kandie.

“Hi. The caseworker here told me to call your hotline for help getting back home,” Jessie said. “Can you help me?”

“I would be happy to help. Can you tell me why you left home?” Kandie asked.

“I had a fight with my mom because I got a piercing. The fight escalated from there; she started yelling at me for everything else I did wrong,” Jessie explained. “It’s like I can’t do anything right anymore.”

“I’m sorry that you feel that way. Let’s see what options are available for you,” Kandie said.

Kandie told Jessie about NRS’ three-way conference call and Home Free services. She explained to Jessie that by having a three-way call with her mother, she could begin to open up the lines of communication regarding their issues. In addition, through the partnership NRS has with Greyhound Lines, Inc., she could secure a free bus ticket back home.

Jessie agreed to use the three-way call service to talk with her mom. She told Kandie that during the time she has been away from home she has only talked with her mom three times—each time was unsuccessful.

“Every time I called home my mom would start yelling...so I hung up on her,” Jessie said. “I just want her to listen to what I have to say and give me a little more freedom.”

Kandie was able to get Jessie and her mother on the phone to talk. During the call, Jessie’s mom expressed that she was upset that Jessie ran away, but happy that her daughter was safe. She shared that Jessie has run away before but never this long. She said that she wanted Jessie to come back home, but also to follow the rules at home, finish school on time, and focus on her future.

After Jessie and her mother finished discussing their issues, she agreed to follow the rules at home and focus on school. She said that she wanted to be able to graduate high school in two years and eventually go to college.

Kandie booked Jessie’s Home Free ticket and gave her referrals for services in her community.

“Please feel free to call us back...even if you just want someone to talk to. We’re always here 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.”

“I’m glad I called you guys. I feel much better being able to talk with my mom,” Jessie said. “Thank you for all your help.”

*The names and locations have been changed to protect the anonymity of the caller.*
In 2012, a woman reached out to NRS by sending us a letter. The letter outlined the struggles that she battled as a young person 30 years ago, and the different ways NRS helped her. This person’s life is a true success story and shows just how important NRS’ services are.

Below, we have shared her letter. Successes like this speak to the homeless, and at-risk youth. Further, people like Anonymous always have somewhere to turn. Without the National Runaway Hotline I may not be alive to say thanks! I was 12 when my mother moved us to Boston from New York. I did not want to leave and I would ride the train from Boston back to NYC. One night I missed the last train back to the city so I decided to hitchhike because if my mother knew I was leaving the city she would have killed me. I was picked up by a guy who lived in South Boston and my new home was over 10 miles away. It was night time and he said he would give me a ride home if I had sex with him. I said no and he said then I could walk. Afraid of being caught by the police I stayed in the shadows. A man was walking toward me; I crossed the street and so did he. Then he grabbed me and dragged me into a small park and raped me. When he finished he let me go. I was devastated and afraid to go home. My mother and I didn’t have a good relationship and I thought she would blame me. I was ashamed and too scared to return home so I left the safe place, a warm bed and food!

When I turned 17 I was emancipated by the state of Georgia and put on a bus back to Boston. I obtained my GED and joined the military. Eventually I went to college and became a high school teacher. I consider myself extremely fortunate as I just ended as a child. I know that this organization had a hand at keeping me alive and for that I am thankful. I was ashamed and too scared to return home so I left the runaways. Without the National Runaway Hotline I may not be alive to say thanks!

*The names and location have been changed to protect the anonymity of the caller.*
NRS invites “YOU” to be a part of an historic moment; 107 people will help NRS raise $250,000. NRS has a multi-faceted plan to publicize and promote the name change. NRS rolled out the new name and logo on traditional media, social media, promotional materials and educational materials. NRS is kicking off a major gift initiative to help fund expanding the depth and breadth of our services to connect with youth, and their families. Please invest in this initiative and put your name on our name. In return, NRS will put your name, literally, on our call center. The outside window of our call center will serve as a donor recognition wall. This is an opportunity to list your name as an investor in the good work of the National Runaway Safeline. Here to listen. Here to help.

**National Runaway Safeline (NRS)** has identified multiple projects to continue its service to youth and families in crisis...

- Incorporate texting as a crisis intervention vehicle
- Update the call management system
- Public Service Announcement with new name
- New educational and promotional materials
- Optimize online resources for immediate access in crisis situation
- Build outreach efforts through NRS’ Street Team and National Runaway Prevention Month

For more information, contact Katy Walsh at kwalsh@1800RUNAWAY.org or 773.289.1727.
BECAUSE OUR DONORS, PARTNERS, AND SPONSORS HAVE BEEN THERE FOR NRS, WE WERE THERE TO HANDLE OVER 100,000 CALLS IN 2012

In December, the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) lost long-time friend and supporter, Jimmie Alford (pictured right). Jimmie, who worked for the Boys and Girls Club of Chicago before starting his own consulting group for nonprofits, the Alford Group, devoted his life to helping the lives of others. Though he left his mark across the nonprofit sector, Jimmie’s presence was particularly felt here at NRS. Jimmie and his wife, Maree Bullock (pictured left) have been long-time advocates for and supporters of NRS. For Jimmie and Maree’s longevity of time, energy, and financial resources to NRS, they received our “Spirit of Youth” award at our 2012 Spirit of Youth event. Jimmie was consistently a positive force at NRS; someone everyone loved to see at the office. He has left an incredible legacy and is missed tremendously.

Photo taken by Anthony Lapenna.

VOLUNTEERS serve dinner to runaway and homeless youth from Chicago shelters at NRS’ 11th Annual Thanksgiving Dinner. The 2012 Thanksgiving dinner was once again sponsored by the Chicago Cubs Charities.

Photo taken by Sabrina Hampton.

NATIONAL RUNAWAY SAFELINE ON THE GO!

Spirit of Youth attendee James Julian (pictured, right) with Roger Ward, organizing his raffle tickets before the Fishbowl raffle at Spirit of Youth 2012.

Photo taken by Anthony Lapenna.

NRS Board Secretary Dave Dean (left) and NRS Board Member David Wells (right) share a laugh at Spirit of Youth, NRS’ annual cocktail reception. The event, which took place at the Palmer House Hilton, honored Jimmie Alford and Maree Bullock and raised nearly $120,000 for NRS. Photo taken by Anthony Lapenna.

NRS Board Member Sofia Kataggees (second from left) receives an award from the Chicago Police Department, honoring her for her work with NRS. Sofia was presented with the award by Alfonso Wysinger of the CPD (second from right) and accompanied by her mother Sally Kataggees and NRS Executive Director Maureen Blaha.

Photo courtesy of CPD.

NRS new awning up at night; showcasing our new name and our new look. Lighting was provided by Jeremy Scott of Sound Investment, at the Day of Celebration on January 15th.

Photo courtesy of CPD.

In Honor of Gordon Vance (left) and NRS Board Member David Wells (right) share a laugh at Spirit of Youth, NRS’ annual cocktail reception. The event, which took place at the Palmer House Hilton, honored Jimmie Alford and Maree Bullock and raised nearly $120,000 for NRS. Photo taken by Anthony Lapenna.

NRS Director of Programs Gordon Vance (right) with Kids Help Phone VT of Counseling and Program Services Alisia Simon (left) and Kids Help Phone President and CEO Sharon Wood (center). Kids Help Phone operates a crisis and counseling hotline for youth in Canada.

Photo courtesy of Kids Help Phone.