



National Runaway Safeline
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FRONTLINE

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KEEPING AMERICA'S RUNAWAY, HOMELESS AND AT-RISK YOUTH SAFE AND OFF THE STREETS.

Ending Youth Homelessness

By Josh Gryniewicz

"It's time to ramp up our work on homelessness among youth," Steve Berg, Vice President for Programs and Policy at the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) announced at the 2014 National Conference on Ending Family and Youth Homelessness. *"Interest and commitment are high, and it's time to move from theorizing about frameworks, to articulating and implementing concrete policy and practice changes that are going to impact the lives of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness."*

This call to action comes on the heels of a documented increase in homeless and runaway youth nationwide and a need for more comprehensive solutions to serve this population. As Aimee Hendrigan, Senior Program Officer for the Melville Charitable Trust put it in a recent guest post for the National Runaway Safeline (NRS), *"The specific increase in youth homelessness is often compounded by the fragmented and frequently underfunded service delivery response to this highly at-risk population. Youth may cross several service delivery systems within a state - education, juvenile justice, child welfare and law enforcement - but often no agency 'owns' them."*

In their Framework to End Youth Homelessness by 2020, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) focuses on two strategies for ending this epidemic. First, by placing an emphasis on data collection to get better numbers and characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness thus defining the extent of the problem. Second, establishing a capacity strategy to strengthen and

coordinate the Federal, State, and local systems to act effectively and efficiently toward ending youth homelessness. We are already seeing progress on both fronts.

This year, cities and regions across the country included youth homelessness in their "Point-in-Time" (PIT) counts, an annual homeless survey organized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that brought together volunteers and service providers for a 24-hour capture of homelessness data. One night in January 2013, the compiled PIT counted 610,042 people as homeless, a third of whom had no shelter at all.

For many young people living on the street, like teens everywhere, they do their best to fit in with others. They may not consider themselves homeless, believing that crashing at a friend's house, couch surfing, or even sleeping in a car provides a young person the illusion of stability. They may be ashamed of a stigma around the issue and intentionally conceal their circumstance. The result, youth have traditionally been left out of official counts.

Since officials use the data to allocate funding, provide resources, and gauge progress that result can have devastating consequences. It can mean too few beds for runaway youth, too few resources to keep a homeless youth in school, or too few support services.

Further, a statewide initiative in Connecticut called the "No Wrong Door" project provides a template for the kind of coordinated, comprehensive solutions required to address the problem. Funded in part by the Melville Charitable Trust and following the USICH framework takes a comprehensive

approach to addressing youth homelessness by providing a dynamic blend of advocacy and service planning to increase services and supports available to unaccompanied homeless youth from pre-adolescence up to age 24.

As America's go to resource for runaway, homeless, throwaway and at-risk youth and their families, the National Runaway Safeline is invigorated by this new direction and excited to play a role in helping to end youth homelessness.



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2014 BRINGS SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

Already this year, the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) has experienced significant changes. We've added staff and upgraded equipment to better serve youth and families in need. The crisis call center has been modernized with a new telephone system, new computers and the addition of dual monitors.

First, NRS' phone system was six years old. Not only was the system no longer insurable, the system was ineffective at interfacing with our computerized data collection system. NRS was able to purchase and install a new telephone system through the generosity of our Major Gift Initiative (MGI) donors. The MGI has raised \$185,500 of the \$250,000 of the three-year campaign. The funds will be designated to specific projects to build the depth and breadth of NRS' services. United Airlines generously donated a \$25,000 grant toward the MGI campaign and targeted it for the telephone system. The United gift along with other MGI donations allowed NRS to install the new telephone system in March.

Next, NRS continues to explore ways to best communicate with youth.

In 2011, NRS added live chat to its hotline and online services. A youth can connect with NRS through live chat, crisis email or a bulletin board posting. Being able to offer online crisis intervention service options have elevated NRS' connections to 250,000 annually. Currently, NRS is investigating adding a 'texting' opportunity. To build the infrastructure for texting, NRS received a \$10,000 grant from the Ream Foundation to match MGI donations. The funds allowed NRS to furnish each of the eight crisis call stations with a new computer and a new server for the system. The frontline team members now use dual monitors to manage accessing resource information during live chat sessions. Vibes, a premier mobile platform company, is donating the technology software to incorporate texting as yet another means of connecting to NRS.

Lastly, NRS has been contracted by ParentPowerChicago (PPC) to handle their calls. PPC is an independent, non-profit public service organization completely committed to

helping parents ensure their children get a better education. PPC connects parents with information and preparation, effective resources and meaningful, ongoing support. NRS will handle PPC calls for 16-hours a day. In preparation, NRS has added hotline staff members to help parents access the resources they want and the relationships they need.

2014 has barely begun and the National Runaway Safeline is already making huge strides to keep America's runaway, homeless and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. Thank you for your support in our critical work.



Maureen Blaha
Executive Director



Anne Schankin
Board Chair

Recently, NRS was invited to speak at the Saudi Child Helpline Regional Conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Director of Programs Gordon Vance is pictured here with Princess Adila bint Abdullah. The princess, the daughter of King Abdullah, is one of the few Saudi princesses with a semi-public role. She is an advocate of women issues, including; right to drive, health awareness and legal rights. She spoke out against domestic violence and supported women's groups and organizations.

Photo courtesy of Child Helpline International.



Illinois Senator Dick Durbin toured NRS offices in Chicago to learn more about hotline and online crisis services. (left to right) NRS Board Members Katya Mazon and Randall Royer, Senator Durbin and Executive Director Maureen Blaha. *Photo courtesy of Sharri Bryan.*

NRS is going electronic! To receive our monthly electronic newsletter, please email skessel@1800RUNAWAY.org.

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NRS Board of Directors celebrates successfully raising over \$120,000 at Spirit of Youth 2013. (left to right, first row) Emily Lohse-Busch, Jodi Cohen, Kandace Lenti, Katya Mazon, Brian Zboril, Executive Director Maureen Blaha, Vice Chair Christina Van Pelt, Chair Anne Schankin. (left to right, back row) Treasurer Randall Royer, Jim Criner, Tom Lawler, Jack Philbin, Secretary Dave Dean, John Stotts, Gary Harper, Troy McDonald Kane and Suzi Schelewitz. (Not pictured: Michele Lehman, Kelly Mead, Norweeta Milburn, Jennifer Riley.) *Photo courtesy of Anthony LaPenna.*