



Frontline

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

WINTER
2012
NEWSLETTER

Sex-Trafficked Youth: Invisible In America

By Jasleen Jaswal Vines

The phrase “sex trafficking” may bring to mind a smoky brothel in a distant land.

In reality, young people are being sex trafficked in the United States. Whether it's through an online ad or at a truck stop—right now, someone is exchanging cash for the opportunity to engage in sexual activity with an exploited underage youth.

“In our work, we've found one of the biggest misconceptions about this issue to be that people commonly think it's not happening here in the United States,” says Bradley Myles, Executive Director of the anti-sex trafficking advocacy group Polaris Project. “When they hear the words ‘child sex trafficking,’ people often assume it's happening in far-away places, like Cambodia, Thailand, or India.”

“The youth caught in this industry are targeted because they are a vulnerable population to begin with,” says Maureen Blaha, Executive Director of the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS). “They've found themselves on the streets, or been kicked out of their homes, and have no food, no money and need access to help.”

Dr. Lois Lee, founder and president of child prostitution hotline and rescue organization Children of the Night, agrees. “Anyone working with this population knows that these children were often raised in crack houses, their parents are on drugs or in prison, they have been sexually molested at the hands of their first caregivers and life with a pimp was better than home. Those circumstances should not make them any less worthy of social services or help.”

Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) is defined as sexual abuse by an adult for profit. Youth in these situations are treated as sexual and commercial objects. Not only is it difficult to identify these youth, it is difficult to track exactly how many youth are being trafficked. They are moved frequently, may not come into contact with the resources that can help them, or if they do, don't trust that the resources will help.

“Counting a largely hidden population within an underground economy has been a challenge,” says Myles, “especially when many people still don't fully understand the legal definitions of human trafficking, and many haven't yet been trained to recognize the signs.”

What's being done to help these youth?

Visit www.1800RUNAWAY.org/Frontline to learn what organizations across the United States are doing right now to stop this crisis, including NRS partnering with Children of the Night's WithOut Walls (WOW) program.

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Technology Expands Capacity, Visibility & Accessibility!

Over forty years ago, a small hotline began answering calls from Chicago youth in crisis. Three years later, it became the federally designated national communication system for runaway and homeless youth, the only organization to ever hold that distinction. Today, the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) looks much different than its younger self. Technology has expanded our capacity, our visibility, and our accessibility.

Today, NRS operates both hotline and online services to provide crisis intervention. The hotline utilizes a state-of-the-art telephone system to ensure quality conversations. Despite having the capability, NRS chooses not to utilize the *caller ID* option. This decision allows NRS to stay true to its commitment to anonymous and confidential service. In March 2011, NRS added a live chat option to expand online access beyond crisis emails and message board posting. Youth may now choose to seek help by live chatting with a trained crisis intervention specialist. For callers and chatters, NRS is able to connect youth to local resources with a comprehensive, web-based database of 13,000 listings.

The Internet provides limitless opportunities to build visibility and accessibility. Recently, NRS dedicated additional staff resources to manage digital media efforts. In June, we launched a newly designed website with search engine optimization. In the first seven months since the relaunch, NRS is experiencing a steady increase in visitors. In addition, NRS manages Twitter and Facebook profiles to build support, educate the public, and promote 1-800-RUNAWAY and 1800RUNAWAY.org. NRS is working to produce an interactive and innovative youth-centric section on the website. NRS is also exploring cell phone apps and texting options to continue to efficiently and effectively communicate with youth by their preferred contact method.

Technology has empowered NRS! We not only continue to handle over 100,000 calls a year, NRS also provides crisis intervention services on the Internet. Online outreach efforts continue to canvass the country. Street Team members, media, educators and NRS ambassadors utilize our website and social media presence to connect youth to services. Now in our 40's, the National Runaway Switchboard doesn't look like its younger self, but our objective is the same. We strive to be here for youth and their families in crisis 365 days a year, 24-hours a day.

Thank you for supporting our mission to keep America's runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth safe and off the streets.



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Street Team: A Modest Profile

By Colin Packard

From the start, Terrence showed his initiative and passion for the mission of the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) by offering up the lessons of his own experiences to improve the efforts of the NRS Street Team. January marked the beginning of his involvement with the Street Team and it didn't take long for him to contact NRS with ideas for carrying out his duties as a Street Team member.

When he was a youth, he walked the path of a runaway. He grew up in a relatively small town in the Midwest with one sister and, at 13, he left his home thinking he'd be better off on his own. And, for a short while, it seemed like he was. He felt a freedom he wasn't used to, but that freedom became overwhelming. And that freedom did not come without a price. He had imagined wandering the train tracks, coming to new places, finding new friends, talking to people who liked the things he liked—circuit boards and tinkering with old-fashioned radios—but the tracks were not what he expected. To him, days felt like weeks, fear was dulled and walking the tracks at night to find a decent spot to sleep became routine. His bed was gravel. He had no shower. He had no kitchen table at which to sit and talk with his sister over a bowl of cereal. His life was in a backpack and he didn't know where to go. That was an adjustment he had not been ready to make.

Once Terrence became a Street Team member, he recruited his sister, who now lives in Idaho, to join him as well. He recognizes the importance of casting a wide net of awareness; the plight of a runaway is one that is close to his heart and one that he understands from a perspective that many in the position to help do not

have. In a thoughtful email to NRS's Volunteer Coordinator Michelle Vos, Terrence wrote, "We need to make everyone aware that these things do occur and should not be overlooked or ignored. The community as a whole has a responsibility to protect our future generations."

While Terrence's passion for providing support for runaway youth and spreading awareness is apparent, it is his modesty which is most noticeable. He works with an acute understanding of his own ego, knowing that to be an effective advocate for runaways he must not allow his own agenda to take him off course. He respectfully requested that he be kept anonymous. "I don't want to distract myself from why I am really doing this. I don't want my little pieces of early success to go to my head I suppose," Terrence wrote. "I just want to help, for the sake of helping." Per that request, specifics of his story have been changed, but the heart remains. Terrence has since put NRS in contact with several new organizations and outreach teams local to him, matching his actions to his inspiring words.



Coldwell Banker Foundation Raises Over \$20,000 for NRS!

From left to right: Molly Johnson, Terry Phillips, Maureen Blaha, Stephanie Englund-Siegel, Kelly Mead, Linda Goldman and Shannon Raglin-Cecola

The Lost Boys

"In Peter Pan, we find out about the lost boys, the runaways, the kidnaps. Just about every person on this planet, has thought about running away at some point, some more serious than others. However, they don't always think the plan through, they run away, some seek adventure, some seek help. But most of the time, they end up on the streets, or in foster homes. Sometimes, the child runs away with siblings, they must care for themselves, and learn to survive on the streets...it's a hard life out there. Kids need help sometimes, and we need to reach out." Photographer Daniela Brown has created the Fractured Fairytales series to draw attention to social issues.



Erica's Story



By Colin Packard

“National Runaway Switchboard, how can I help you today?” Edgar had just begun his shift on the lines in the call center. With no hesitation, a voice on the other end responded.

“My name’s Erica. I think I need a shelter.” Erica was a 17 year-old from—according to her—The-Middle-of-Nowhere, Kentucky.

“Just so you know, we are confidential and anonymous, so don’t feel like you have to give me your name or tell me anything you’re not comfortable talking about,” said Edgar.

“Oh, okay. Well, I just left my mom’s house and I can’t go back.”

Before Erica continued, Edgar made sure to check her safety; she assured him that she was okay for the time being, calling from her friend’s house. She told Edgar that it was a fight with her stepfather that prompted her to leave her house, but now she wasn’t sure about her decision because she was worried about her little brother.

“I know my stepdad doesn’t like me. He throws my stuff everywhere and tears apart my room when I’m at school. Whenever I tell my mom this, she doesn’t believe me though,” said Erica. “I mean, I don’t know how to make her believe me.”

“That must be a really difficult situation to be in, but you’re very courageous for talking about it,” Edgar assured her. He continued to explore Erica’s predicament and discovered that this was not the first time Erica had run away from home. She had left home another time for the same reason—her stepfather was disrespecting her things. When that happened, she stayed with her friend for a night, but decided to go back home the next day after talking with her mom. However, that didn’t seem like an option this time. She said her mom told her that if she left, she shouldn’t come back.

“Are you afraid to talk to your mom now?” asked Edgar.

“Well, kind of. I just don’t think I want to go home anymore... I want to be there for my brother though...,” said Erica.

After some discussion about options including shelters, it became apparent that Erica really wanted to go home. She had left feeling pretty certain that anything would be better than having to deal with her stepfather, but she was overwhelmed by not having any sort of plan. Edgar suggested the idea of a conference call, in which he would be able to mediate a conversation between Erica and her mother and be there to offer his support if she needed it. Erica liked that idea, though she wasn’t convinced it would work. The beginning of the call was difficult.

“That’s ridiculous. I’ve never seen him do it,” said Erica’s mother, challenging the accusation against Erica’s stepfather. Edgar stepped in to bring the arguing to a halt, and he encouraged Erica to voice her concerns for her brother. Hearing that her daughter was not just worried about herself seemed to flip her mother’s position; she agreed to talk to her husband for Erica. Although nothing had been distinctly resolved, Erica told Edgar that she felt like she was moving in the right direction. That was the first time her mother agreed to talk to her stepfather. Erica decided she would stay at her friend’s house for the night and consider returning home the next day after school, in hopes that her mom would have discussed the situation with her stepfather by then.

“Thank you. I don’t know if I would’ve talked to my mom if you hadn’t called with me,” said Erica.

“Well, we’re glad you called. Remember that you can call back, anytime, we’re always here. If something else comes up and you need a new plan, our lines are open 24/7,” Edgar concluded.

“I definitely will, thank you.”

**Names and locations have been changed to respect anonymity.*

Volunteer Profiles:

VOLUNTEERS OF THE MONTH



"I like that I'm able to get hands-on experience working directly with callers and learning about the different resources available to people in crisis."
—Heather Simms, June 2011



"As soon as I heard about NRS I knew it was what I was looking for. I really like the non-directive non-sectarian philosophy, and the mission is great."
—Justin Snodgrass, February 2012



"One of my friends was volunteering here at the time and she told me how amazing it was, and so I had to come and check it out." —Ingrid Haugaard, August 2011



"Being empathetic and willing to listen; I think when it's truly genuine, that comes across to the caller."
—Seema Bajaj, July 2011

To find out how to get involved with NRS as a volunteer, donor, or street team member visit www.1800RUNAWAY.org/volunteer-match-and-opportunities.



"My strongest skill as a liner is my ability to empathize with the caller, and to let them know that they are truly supported."
—Heather Mann, October 2011



"After training I was offered a work-study position, which I kept until I graduated in May of 2011. Now I kick it volunteer-style with the Friday night crew." —Jon Newgren, January 2012



"I was really impressed by the training and supervision that NRS provided to new liners."
—Caitlin Bergh, December 2011



"I'm continually awed by the situations in which they find themselves and the resilience with which they respond to these situations. I feel honored to be with them in their decision-making process and response." —Shelley Milosevich, September 2011



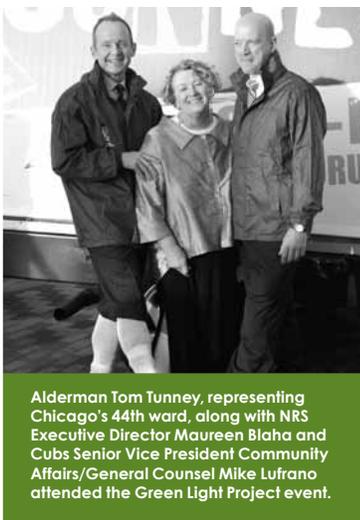
"My strongest skill is my ability to stay calm under pressure and to calm others."
—Ashley Molin, May 2011



"The friendly, interpersonal atmosphere of the call center keeps me coming back." —Amanda Grittmann, November 2011



Forty staff members at Children's Home Society of Florida WaveCREST shelter in Fort Pierce, Florida put a twist on Green Sock Day as they participated in Green Flip Flop Day.



Alderman Tom Tunney, representing Chicago's 44th ward, along with NRS Executive Director Maureen Blaha and Cubs Senior Vice President Community Affairs/General Counsel Mike Lufrano attended the Green Light Project event.



Staff at Epworth Community Services in St. Louis, Missouri designated November 21st as Green Sock Day and tagged 1-800-RUNAWAY in their picture on Facebook.

National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM) 2011



NRS Prevention Specialist and street team member, Katrina Wyss, distributed green socks to public transit riders.



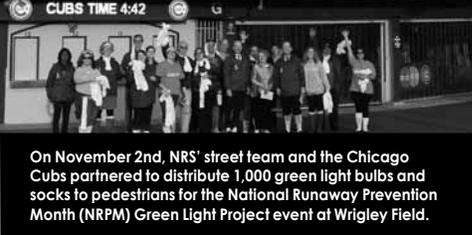
2011 Spirit of Youth Bronze Sponsor and NRPM national partner Financial Services Centers Cooperative, Inc. designated November 18th as Green Sock Day for staff.



A mobile billboard circled a local neighborhood with a message encouraging residents to help make the connection for NRPM.



The Chicago Cub's Wrigley Field Marquee displayed an NRPM message throughout the day.



On November 2nd, NRS' street team and the Chicago Cubs partnered to distribute 1,000 green light bulbs and socks to pedestrians for the National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM) Green Light Project event at Wrigley Field.



Many organizations, including the National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth (NCFY), designated a day in November as Green Sock Day to help raise awareness.



November is National Runaway Prevention Month - www.1800RUNAWAY.org



Medgar Evers Elementary in Ford Heights, Illinois designated every Tuesday in November as Green Sock Day for its kindergarten class.



Donor Profile: Ryan Bracken, Carlton Technologies

by Charlotte Cahill

Carlton Technologies began sponsoring the National Runaway Switchboard's Spirit of Youth event in 2005. Over the last seven years, the company, based in Holland, Michigan, has continued to be an incredibly generous and valuable supporter. Ryan Bracken, President and CEO of Carlton Technologies, explained his company's support for NRS' work.

Why do you support the National Runaway Switchboard's mission?
It's heartbreaking to think of children who don't have a place to go, often for reasons that are beyond their control. When that happens, NRS is there to give them hope.

What keeps you involved with the organization?

The need for the services NRS offers is as strong as ever. And in the seven years that I've been involved with the organization, NRS has continued to grow and evolve its offerings. It's been great to see that growth, and that's definitely something that keeps me committed. The staff at NRS is a great group of people who I've seen working hard day in and day out.

What do you tell people who are interested in learning more about NRS?

Supporting NRS is definitely something worth pursuing if you want to help at-risk youth. This is a great opportunity to help with either time or resources.

Because our donors, partners and sponsors have been there for NRS, we have been there to handle over 100,000 calls in 2011!

FUNDING PARTNERS

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Wrigley Start Early 5K/10K Run and Walk

Saturday, April 21 at 9am

Grant Park, Upper Hutchinson Field

Registration deadline: April 17

Please join NRS for a day of fundraising, awareness building, and—of course—fun at the 15th Annual Wrigley Start Early Run and Pledge Walk! Last year, nearly fifty NRS supporters like you participated in this event and raised over \$13,000 to help keep runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth safe and off the streets.

This year, we've set an ambitious new goal: we want to double the number of people participating in this event. That's a total of 100 runners and walkers raising money to support our programs. But we can't do that without your help!

This is a great opportunity to raise the funds we need to keep our programs going and make sure youth are getting the services and support they need. Join us at this year's Wrigley Start Early Run and Walk, and encourage your friends and family members to do the same!

Joining us is easy:

1. Fill out the registration form available at www.1800RUNAWAY.org
2. After you register, you will receive a link to your personalized fundraising page. Visit your page and share your story telling your friends and family why you've chosen to support NRS.
3. Ask your friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, and the people whom you meet on the bus to visit your page and make a donation.
4. Join us on April 21st for a day of fun in Grant Park! In addition to the Run and Walk, there will be plenty of family activities, including a Kids' Dash with prizes for all participants.

All NRS participants will receive a Running for Runaways t-shirt and a special gift on the day of the event. In addition, we have lots of prizes for our fundraisers! If you have any questions about how to register or get started fundraising, please contact Charlotte Cahill, NRS Development Associate, at ccahill@1800RUNAWAY.org or at 773-289-1731.

Thank you for everything you do to support the National Runaway Switchboard!

Frontline is a publication of the National Runaway Switchboard

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Maureen Blaha • Executive Director

SAVE THE DATE:

Spirit of Youth 2012 is November 2, 2012!