Youth Toolkit
1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM
Did you know that 4.2 million young people experience homelessness every year? In order to highlight the resources available to youth in crisis in the United States, the National Runaway Safeline and partnering organizations have designated November as National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM). This public awareness campaign is designed to “Shine a Light” on the experiences of runaway and homeless young people that too often remain invisible.

Add your voice to the many individuals, organizations and communities working together to prevent youth homelessness during NRPM and throughout the year. By taking action and raising awareness about these issues, YOU can make a difference!
What does it mean to be a “runaway” or “homeless” youth?

Anyone under the age of 18 who is living apart from their guardians without their permission is considered to be a runaway youth.

Youth who do not have a safe living environment with relatives or another stable living arrangement are considered homeless. Youth experiencing homelessness may couch surf, bounce between relatives and friends, live in shelters or stay on the streets.

How many young people are affected?

It is estimated that 4.2 million people between the ages of 13 and 25 experience some form of homelessness every year.¹

Think about it this way: in a classroom of 30 students, at least one of them will experience homelessness this year. These numbers are unacceptable, and we plan to do everything we can to address this crisis and prevent youth homelessness.

Who is at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness?

- LGBTQ+ youth ²
- Youth of color (specifically African American, Hispanic, and Native American youth) ³
- Pregnant and parenting youth ³
- Youth involved in multiple public systems (juvenile justice, child welfare, etc.) ²

What are some of the common reasons youth run away or experience homelessness?

- Family conflict ⁴
- Asked to leave home or kicked out by their guardian ⁴
- Verbal, emotional, and/or physical abuse in their home ²
- Neglect ⁵
- Peer/social issues ⁵
- Problems at school ⁶

What happens after leaving home?

After making the difficult decision to leave home, living on the streets creates a new set of challenges. Homelessness can lead to struggles finding consistent food and shelter, caring for mental and physical health, attending and finishing high school, and avoiding potentially dangerous and violent situations.
How does NRS help?

**National Runaway Safeline (NRS)** - NRS is a nonprofit organization committed to keeping runaway, homeless and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. NRS provides critical crisis intervention and resources for youth and families 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Each year, NRS makes approximately 100,000 connections to help and hope through hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY), online ([1800RUNAWAY.org](http://1800RUNAWAY.org)) and prevention services.

When a young person reaches out to NRS out for help, a caring front-line crisis team member offers a safe and confidential space to talk. NRS team members listen non-judgmentally, provide support, and assist in accessing resources and developing a safe plan of action.

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We are here to support you, listen to you, and connect you with necessary services. If you or a friend needs help or wants someone to talk to, please contact us at 1-800-786-2929 or online at [1800RUNAWAY.org](http://1800RUNAWAY.org).

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All information is kept 100% confidential. We are here to support you, listen to you, and connect you with necessary services.

CONNECT WITH US @1800RUNAWAY
National Hotline Resources

- **Love is Respect** aims to engage, educate and empower young people to prevent and end abusive relationships. One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner. Love is Respect offers support, information and advocacy to young people who have questions or concerns about their dating relationships via chat, text, or phone. Click [here](#) to learn more.

- The **National Human Trafficking Hotline** provides assistance to survivors of sex and labor trafficking through safety planning, emotional support and/or immediate connections to emergency services through their network of trained service provider and law enforcement partners. Click [here](#) to learn more.

- The **National Domestic Violence Hotline** provides lifesaving tools and immediate support to empower victims and survivors to find safety and live free of abuse. They also provide support to friends and family members who are concerned about a loved one. Resources and help can be found by calling 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). Click [here](#) to learn more.

Additional Resources

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
Available 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255.
Live chat is available [here](#).

**Trevor Project (TrevorLifeline)**
Available 24/7 at 1-866-488-7386.
Also available through chat and text, find out more [here](#).

**RAINN (Sexual Violence)**
Available 24/7 at 1-800-656-4673.
Live chat is available [here](#).

**SAMHSA National Helpline**  
(Substance Abuse & Mental Health)
Referral service, available 24/7 at 1-800-662-4357.
History of NRPM

In October 2002, national leaders across the country met at the White House Conference on Exploited and Runaway Children to discuss issues and challenges impacting runaway and homeless youth and youth in crisis. In connection with this conference, they recognized National Runaway Prevention Week, which has since been expanded into a month-long campaign.

Over the years, members of Congress from both the House and Senate have supported NRPM. In 2019, the Senate passed the bipartisan Senate Resolution 442, which designated November as National Runaway Prevention Month.

NRPM is spearheaded by the National Runaway Safeline with the support of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and hundreds of community partners.

Get Involved

You can become an NRPM Ambassador

National Runaway Prevention Month is successful because incredible people like you are passionate about these issues and commit to increasing awareness! We need many voices, especially youth voices, to help support the effort. We invite you to become an official NRPM Ambassador, to help “Shine a Light” and make an impact on the lives of runaway and homeless youth.

National Runaway Prevention Month Youth Ambassadors will receive:

• Information about NRPM, to share, and resources to help you spread the word;

• Social media graphics to share through your accounts; and

• Support from our staff to answer your questions and help you build awareness in your community.

Join the cause today by filling out our partnership form at 1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM-youth.
Here’s What You Can Do

Each year during National Runaway Prevention Month, ambassadors host and participate in a range of events that engage their communities, raise awareness, and build support. Bring your creative energy to events and activities in your community and spotlight the issues and resources available for young people struggling with homelessness.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

A community engagement project builds support for young people experiencing homelessness. There are many ways to make it fun and interesting! Here are some simple steps to get friends, family, teachers and others involved:

STEP 1
Get a group together! It can be friends from school, sports team, religious institution – or anywhere. Give them some information about youth homelessness and why it is important to raise awareness.

STEP 2
Talk about the issue. Put yourselves in the shoes of a young person who may have been asked to leave home, be living on the street or couch surfing. Then, set goals for your group, such as secure a story about your efforts and the issue of youth homelessness in your local newspaper.

STEP 3
Brainstorm ways to improve your community, while keeping in mind the goal that you set, what makes your community unique, and the strengths and talents of your group members! What are some special skills that you can contribute?

STEP 4
Take action! Decide on an activity that will promote awareness of or help runaway and homeless youth in your area. We’ve provided some suggested ideas on the following page, but there so many ways you can engage your community.

STEP 5
Cover all of your bases. Is your project going to involve public property (a park, for example)? Make sure you have permission from your local city government.

STEP 6
Share in person and on social media! The more the word gets out, the more people your project can help.

STEP 7
Share your community engagement project with NRS! We would love to show our community how hard your working to support NRPM.
SAMPLE PROJECTS

MOVIE NIGHT

Watching a movie that highlights youth homelessness can be a powerful way to understand the realities of this issue. Here are some tips for hosting a successful movie night:

STEP 1
Form a small “planning committee”: the group should discuss potential movies, possible dates and times, how you will spread the word and recruit attendees, and event logistics, such as where you will host the screening/discussion.

STEP 2
After your group has confirmed the event details, consider spreading the word by posting flyers in your community, at school and other places where young people tend to hang out.

STEP 3
Post about the movie night on social media and create a Facebook event.

STEP 4
Create discussion questions ahead of time and determine who will lead this part of the program.

SOME SUGGESTED MOVIES
• “The Homestretch” follows three homeless teens as they fight to stay in school, graduate, and create a new life.
• “Lost in America” profiles several homeless youth while exploring the issues that have contributed to the crisis.
• “Shelter” tells the compelling stories of youth at an emergency shelter.

OPEN MIC NIGHT

Open mic nights allow people to showcase their talents. People may take to the stage to entertain through music, a spoken word performance, comedy routine or some other creative skill.

STEP 1
Get a group together and figure out the amazing talents among you that you can share during an Open Mic Night. In addition to the common musical or dance performances, consider having someone do a makeup tutorial or showcase digital skits.

STEP 2
Once you’ve determined a potential line-up of performers, spread the word about your event and recruit any additional acts you need to round out the event. Post on social media with an all-call for performers, and include some of our wording around NRPM.

STEP 3
Figure out where you want to host the event. If the event will be virtual, consider Facebook and Instagram Live – these platforms are great options, and Twitch may be a good place to let newcomers perform. Share your event with NRS so we can help promote it.

STEP 4
Host the event! Include time during the program to talk about NRPM and youth homelessness. Write what you want to say ahead of time and keep it brief but powerful. Information in this toolkit may inspire you!
CARE PACKAGES

It can be difficult for those experiencing homelessness to access basic toiletries, money for public transportation, and other necessary items. Putting care packages together to give to a shelter or leave in your school counselor’s office will make a huge difference in a person’s life.

STEP 1
Determine which items you want to include in your care packages and research the costs. If donating to a shelter, reach out to them to find out what they need most.

STEP 2
Raise money to purchase the care package items. Contact your sports team, local religious organization, or a nearby business to see if they would like to help in the fundraising. Alternatively, you could host a supply drive where members of your community donate items for the packages.

STEP 3
Assemble the care packages. Consider including items to raise the spirits of the person receiving it, like a handwritten note or sheet of stickers. Once the packages are complete, deliver them.

STEP 4
Share a picture of your completed packages on social media! These packages demonstrate the fact that some people don’t have access to basic items we may take for granted, like shampoo or toothpaste.
Commitment cards show your support for ending youth homelessness and make this cause your own! We’ve provided printable templates that you can share with friends, family and classmates.

**STEP 1**
Print blank commitment cards, which can be found here.

**STEP 2**
Gather friends, classmates, teammates, fellow club members, cousins and others to complete commitment cards, or distribute the printed cards to these people for them to fill out on their own.

**STEP 3**
Consider displaying your commitment cards on a wall in a highly visible location, but get approval beforehand. For example, if you’d like to post the cards in hallway at school, make sure your school’s administration is OK with this first.

**STEP 4**
Hang the cards where they can be seen! A window, school hallway, and the front of a building are great places for commitment walls.

**STEP 5**
Show your social media followers how you’re supporting runaway and homeless youth by posting a picture of your card and using the following hashtags: #NRPM2020, #youthactivism, #youthhomelessness, #stopthestigma.

**STEP 6**
Share your commitment cards with NRS! We may highlight your creativity on our website or in next year’s Youth Toolkit!

**SHARE YOUR STRENGTHS**
Volunteer your time, energy and ideas with a local organization, and support their work in fighting youth homelessness.

**HOST A PANEL DISCUSSION**
Have an open discussion about runaway and homeless youth issues with members of your community. Invite students, teachers, community leaders, service providers, etc.
Participate in a November 2020 National Event

NOVEMBER 1

FACEBOOK PROFILE PICTURE DAY

Kick off National Runaway Prevention Month by adding the NRPM2020 frame to your Facebook profile picture, and by creating visual messages on other social media platforms.

STEP 1
Visit facebook.com/profilepicframes

STEP 2
Search for NRPM

STEP 3
Upload the frame to your profile picture and post a comment about why you have joined NRS as an NRPM Youth Ambassador.

STEP 4
Encourage your family and friends to change their profile picture, too!

NOVEMBER 2–6

EDUCATION WEEK

Throughout the week, NRS will lead an online educational series to inform people about runaway and homeless youth issues. We’ll provide current statistics, explore what RHY means and what RHY can look like for individuals, and discuss the challenges of navigating different systems, such as the juvenile justice system, child protection system, and foster care system.

STEP 1
Connect with us on social media:
   f facebook.com/1800RUNAWAY
   t twitter.com/1800runaway
   i instagram.com/1800runaway

STEP 2
Join the conversation! Like, share, and retweet our posts, especially the ones that may benefit members of your community.

STEP 3
Share resources in your community, such as youth shelters or youth-focused social service agencies. Sharing these resources is important to show those in need what kind of help is available and how to access it. NRS may even highlight what you share with a like or a retweet!
Participate in a November 2020 National Event

**NOVEMBER 10**

**WEAR GREEN DAY**

Dress in green – the more shades of green, and the more green clothing items, the better! For added impact, post the picture with a message about your commitment to supporting runaway and homeless youth.

Don’t forget the hashtags! #NRPM2020, #youthhomelessness, #ShineALight

**NOVEMBER 17**

**LIGHT THE NIGHT COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Youth service agencies, community groups, and individuals across the country will host events to “Shine a Light” on RHY issues and show solidarity with young people in crisis. Participate in a Light the Night Community Event in your area or organize your own. Previous events have included resource fairs, sleep outs, open mic nights, walks, art contests, and more. The possibilities are endless!

References


