



The mission of the **National Runaway Safeline (NRS)** is to keep America's runaway, homeless and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. NRS aims to decrease the amount of time youth spend on the streets and prevent youth from homelessness to help minimize the impact of homelessness.

Experiences of unaccompanied homelessness have been linked with greater risk of exposure to violence, trauma, substance use, and mental health problems, as well as premature mortality. NRS has seen a rise in callers experiencing mental health concerns regardless of status of in crisis, at risk of running away, or already homeless. It is critical that young people in crisis or experiencing homelessness and the people who care about them can access a broad range of supports.

OUR SERVICES

- **Crisis Intervention:** NRS operates 3 crisis information, referral and services hotline and online services:
 - National Communication System for Runaway & Homeless Youth: 1-800-RUNAWAY/1800Runaway.org
 - Illinois Comprehensive Community Based Youth Services (CCBYS): 1-877-870-2663
 - MOCA, a Teen Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-888-504-MOCA
- **Information & Referrals:** NRS' resource database of over 6000 national and local service providers and programs contains countless options for youth and families to access services, such as counseling, shelter, alcohol/ drug treatment, and child protective services.
- **Conference Calls:** When youth request assistance with contacting their family or an agency that can help, NRS facilitates a conference call. The crisis services team remains on the line with the youth, advocating on their behalf as needed.
- **Message Service:** NRS will relay a message from youth to their parent/guardian. NRS' message service is a less intimidating means for youth to reestablish contact with their parent/guardian and often serves as the first step toward reunification. In addition, concerned adults may access the service to leave a message for the child in their life.
- **Home Free Program:** In partnership with Greyhound Lines, Inc., NRS helps reunite young people with their families, or find an alternate living arrangement through a free bus ticket. More than 19,000 youth have benefited from the Home Free since 1995. This process is initiated by calling 1-800-RUNAWAY (800-786-2929).
- **Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum:** NRS offers a free, interactive prevention curriculum available in English and Spanish. This evidence-based tool builds life skills; increases knowledge about available resources; educates youth about alternatives to running away; and empowers youth to access and seek help from trusted community members.
- **Prevention and Educational Materials:** NRS provides free prevention and educational materials to individuals, schools, and organizations to distribute within their community. All prevention and education materials are available to order or download at 1800RUNAWAY.org.
- **Training:** As experts in our field, NRS provides comprehensive trainings on a variety of topics to organizations, service providers, and schools and presents at national conferences.



HISTORY

Founded by a group of Chicago agencies and originally named **Metro Help**, a hotline was established in 1971 to fill a need for comprehensive 24-hour crisis intervention for young people and an information clearinghouse for all youth related issues. In 1974, **National Runaway Switchboard** received a federal grant to establish a national runaway hotline. NRS received 11,000 calls at that time, demonstrating the need. **National Runaway Safeline** continues to operate this National Communication System 1-800-RUNAWAY for runaway and homeless youth, through funding by the Family and Youth Services Bureau in the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, US Department of Health, and Human Services. NRS' capabilities and services continue to grow.

Annually, through nearly 125,000 contacts, NRS makes more than 25,000 connections to help and hope through three hotlines, online and offline services. NRS is the administrator of a second information, referral, and crisis hotline in Illinois in collaboration with and funding from the Illinois Council on Youth (ICOY). In 2025, with a SAMSHA grant NRS launched a third hotline in Illinois, the Teen Suicide Prevention Line (MOCA). The plan is to sustain this hotline with private contributions and expand to utilization in no less than 5 states by December 2025.

NRS VOLUNTEERS and INTERNS

Volunteers and Interns are integral to the operations of the Crisis Information, Referral and Services Hotlines. Crisis Support Staff, volunteers and interns receive 40 hours of training to operate the hotline and online services to provide crisis intervention 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

STATEMENT OF NEED

About 4.2 million young people ages 13 to 25 experience homelessness every year.

- The number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness has risen post-pandemic.
- Among young people experiencing homelessness, nearly half experience it for the first time
- 1 in 10 young people, 18 to 25 and 1 in 30 youth, ages 13 to 17 will experience homelessness each year.
- 73% of young people, age 13 to 25, experiencing homelessness are unhoused for longer than a month.
- U.S Surgeon General declared the increase in of mental health issues among youth a public health crisis.

2024 NRS STATISTICS & TRENDS

- 75% of contacts were youth with 84% rely on friends and family to survive, 10% utilizing shelters
- 72% of contact indicated family dynamics as a reason for seeking crisis intervention. This includes conflict with rules, problems with parents or siblings, blended family, divorce or custody issues, death of a family member, and teen parenting.
- 23% of youth were willing to discuss the impact of their stressors on their Mental Health
- 13% of those who reached out to NRS were between the ages of 10 and 14 years old. With the majority of the youth (35%) being between the ages of 15 and 17. 28% were 18 to 21 years old.
- 67% of NRS contacts discussed options for referrals and follow-up support, including referrals to youth shelters and alternative housing, and connection to supportive adults.
- Through our Home Free program, in partnership with Greyhound Lines, Inc., 629 youth received a free bus ticket home or to a safe alternative living environment.