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# A Model for Runaway Outreach

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A Model For Runaway Outreach

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A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

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## Abstract

Various types of runaway outreach methods and practices were investigated. A proposed model of runaway outreach was suggested based on the results of other documented and practiced methods of outreach. The sources used were from published literature, and a training manual devised by a runaway services program. The suggested model is congruent with other successful teen runaway outreach programs and it supports the position that adolescents and their families must be reached and supported before, during and after a runaway episode.

## A Model For Runaway Outreach

### Introduction

Over the years, American adolescents have been among the growing number of runaways and throwaways that make up a significant portion of the United States population. However, according to Schaffner (1999), most runaways do not want to leave their homes. To help us see and understand the trends of youth in crisis, I sought out statistics from the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS). The NRS is a national communications system designed to assist youth who have run away, or are considering running away, and their families. The NRS links youth and their families to crisis counseling, programs, and resources, and each other, as appropriate. The goal of the system is to ensure that young people in crisis have a single source of information on the help available to them. The NRS established a web site <http://www.nrscrisisline.org> that promotes NRS services and highlights its collaborations and partnerships. The site also features demographic information on youth callers nationally and by state, and links to other Web sites. The NRS offers a confidential, toll-free hotline. Hotline staff and volunteers provide crisis intervention counseling to runaway and homeless youth, young people who are thinking of running away or are in crisis, and their family members.

According to the NRS web site, the top five issues cited by hotline callers were: Family Dynamics 42%, Peer/Social (rejection) 14%, Abuse 8%, Youth Services (failure to provide adequate services) 8%, and School/Education (failure to provide assistance) 7%. As

a result of these problems, more and more youth are turning to the streets. According to the NRS, in 2002 1.3 million runaway and homeless youth live on the streets of America.

As parents, professionals, and concerned individuals, we want to understand why youth run away and are thrown away from families. All one has to do is read the newspapers, or listen to the news to realize that younger and younger kids use drugs and alcohol, and the drugs kids use today are more potent, varied, and virulent than even a decade ago (Maxym & York, 2000). Teens try to fit in by spending \$122 billion annually on “badge items” such as designer clothing, shoes, and sunglasses (Maxym & York, 2000). Furthermore, some kids begin to be sexually active when they have barely entered their teens (Maxym & York, 2000). When these tactics fail to achieve their desired effect, the youth often try to remove themselves from the environment that rejects them. Oftentimes, knowingly or unknowingly, parents and families add to the multiples of stressors that kids face. Kids and parents are frightened and they often don’t know what to do or where to turn for help. As a result, some kids run away from home or, as in some families, the parents encourage the kids to leave.

Runaways are defined as youths under the age of eighteen who absent themselves from home or place of legal residence at least overnight without permission of parents or legal guardians (Schaffner, 1999). Throwaway youth are those who leave home with parental approval. Adams, Gulotta, and Clancy’s study (as cited in Burt, Resnick, & Novick, 1998) states that some studies have estimated that anywhere from 10-50% of runaways are actually throwaways. Where has the American culture gone wrong? How did we get ourselves in this predicament?

In this paper I address these questions by providing information about 1) contributing risk factors and demographic statistics about at-risk, runaway, and homeless youth; 2) the role of family dynamics in the lives of these youth; 3) how outreach models have been used to combat runaway tendencies; 4) methods that the Runaway Emergency Services Program uses to improve the trends of outreach to reverse this unsettling phenomenon; and 5) my proposed model of outreach for counselors and outreach workers to gain a better understanding of the youth we serve and more effective ways of reducing the desire to runaway. The solutions presented in this project will attempt to shore up and strengthen national, state, local and community efforts.

#### Literature Review

Before a plan can be devised to combat and reverse this trend, we must first take a look at the factors that may cause youth to be at-risk of running away or being thrown away. However, the processes leading to problems in adolescence are not completely predictable. A child may arrive at the cusp of adolescence already handicapped by familial neglect or abuse. In cases where parents are incarcerated or mentally ill, these parents may be incapable of offering needed support and guidance (Burt, Resnick & Novick, 1998).

My husband's history provides a striking example of the effect that parents' mental illness can have on children. My mother-in-law suffered from schizophrenia. She had never married, but as a result of extramarital relations, had given birth to one child, a son. A year after her son was born, she was institutionalized due to her mental illness. Over the years she was in and out of hospitals as she suffered with schizophrenia while her son was taken care of by his maternal grandparents. If not for the love and care of his grandparents, my husband may not have grown into the successful man that he is today. He has two college degrees



and a satisfying career. Unfortunately, many at-risk youths do not have these kinds of opportunities for success.

Many youth end up leaving home for a last chance at survival. But on the streets, these youth are subject to crime, prostitution, drug abuse and death. Although the youth face these dangers, many express the sentiment that “at least it is better than being at home,” where the abuse and neglect is perceived as far worse than living on the streets (Schaffer, 1999).

The epidemic of runaway youth has reached such proportions that it is estimated that 1 out of every 7 children will run away sometime between the ages of 10 and 18 (National Runaway Switchboard, 2002). For some youth, life on the streets is often dreamed of as glamorous and a place of freedom. For others, it is a place where they go after they have been thrown out of their homes and kicked out of their families with no place left to go. To survive in the streets, these youth sell their bodies, sell drugs, hustle and steal. Many contract HIV/AIDS and other diseases. The NRS estimates that every year approximately 5,000 runaway and homeless youth die from assault, illness and suicide. Many of these youth also suffer from mental illness. Two point five percent of children and 8.3% of adolescents in the U.S. suffer from depression, and 4.9% of 9- to 17- year-olds suffer from major depression (National Institute of Mental Health, 2000)

Adolescent depression also can co-occur with other mental disorders, most commonly, anxiety, disruptive behavior, or substance abuse disorders. Anxiety is one of the most common disorders comorbid with depression. According to Koplewicz (2002), approximately half of teenagers diagnosed with clinical depression will also have an accompanying anxiety disorder such as social phobia (pathological self-consciousness), or

generalized anxiety disorder (a fear of the future and constant worries about one's performance).

At the state level, many authorities find it difficult to successfully treat the problem of youth homelessness and runaways. Col. W. Gerald Massengill, Virginia State Superintendent in 2001, stated that "there are currently 551 missing and homeless youth" in the state of Virginia. Runaways comprise the largest category of missing children according to the Virginia State Police in 2000.

Many Virginia youth turn to the streets when life at home is unbearable and peer and social pressures abound. Oftentimes, runaway youth find temporary lodging with friends, and once they have overstayed their welcome, then they find hidden places to stay through the network of the street subculture. Most of the services that identify the needs of youth do not have sufficient resources to keep the youth off the streets and in safe environments. For far too long, our communities have not been able to adequately address the needs of these young people.

The problems clearly manifest themselves in Central Virginia. There are close to 34,000 youth between the ages of 10 and 17 years in Central Virginia. According to the Charlottesville Police Department, from September 2000 to August 2001, 167 youth reported as missing or on the run in Charlottesville. The Albemarle County Police Department stated that between July 2000 and June 2001 in Albemarle County, 147 youth reported missing or on the run. Most runaway youth are girls 15-17 years old, have a runaway history, and are on the streets up to 4 weeks before calling for help (Children, Youth, & Family Services, Inc. grant report, 2002).

## Family Dynamics

According to the National Runaway Switchboard, one of the top five reasons callers cited for running away was Family Dynamics. Forty-two percent of the callers stated that they left because of family problems. This means that, nationally, family issues create the majority of the reasons why youth runaway or consider running away. When families have a difficult time expressing or handling their problems, the issues become exacerbated,- which can lead to unresolved conflicts and chaotic behaviors among the family members.

According to Maxym & York (2000), families sometimes feel as though their lives are structured only by chaos. Maxym & York state that chaos is wild and full of energy, but it is an energy that just scatters in the wind like leaves in a late autumn storm. In the whirlwind of chaos, emotional numbness seems protective, feelings hardly exist, and that seems better. Because it is so powerful and self-propelling, chaos helps parents and teens avoid noticing how bad things are. Chaos becomes a metaphor for the way many adolescents feel about life. It's more than they can handle, it hurts, it betrays, it's menacing, yet its energy is seductive. Chaos and all that it brings can become a sort of addiction unto itself and can take on a rhythm and momentum of its own. Often the ultimate and final distraction before a youth runs away or is thrown away, chaos makes it easier to squash the feelings of hopelessness, depression, despair, guilt, shame, anger, failure, and loneliness (Maxym & York, 2000). Rothman (1991) also cites conflict with parents as the primary reason for leaving home. According to Blood & D'Angelo's study (as cited in Rothman, 1991), although all teenagers perceive conflicts as dichotomized into major or minor issues, status offenders (those whose acts may be considered illegal due to their age, usually under sixteen

in most states), such as runaways, identified more issues as major and reported more conflict with their parents than nonstatus offenders.

When youth decide to runaway, according to Schaffner (1999), the nature and severity of the reasons that adolescents cite for running away vary in range from youths who complain about “having to be home on time” (Palenski and Launer’s study as cited in Schaffner, 1999) to youths who are being severely beaten and repeatedly sexually abused (Powers and Jaklitsch’s study as cited in Rothman, 1991). These youth come from highly disorganized families in varied geographic regions, at all social levels, and, in many cases, their behavior results from physical or sexual abuse (Rothman, 1991).

Brennan, Huizinga, and Elliot’s study (as cited in Rothman, 1991) propose two models to account for runaway behavior. One model, the “strain” perspective, suggests that running away is a response to real or anticipated problems at home that the youth perceives are a result of his or her personal failure. Such adolescents have emotional bonds with, and commitment to, their families, but the relationship is threatened by some crisis or stressful situation. For these adolescents, fleeing can be viewed as an attempt to draw attention to the home situation with the hope that it will precipitate some resolution of the problems. These youth usually stay away for a short time only and then voluntarily return home.

The second model, the “control” perspective, is a model that explains running away from home as deviant behavior. It describes behavior that also originates with the family, but here the youth do not have strong bonds with, or commitment to, their families. There can be many reasons for this, but the general point is that early social mechanisms were absent or weak. According to Schaffner (1999), control is really more about conformity than about deviance. Schaffner (1999) claimed that it is formed upon a Hobbesian premise that people

need to be constrained in order to conform to society because living in antisocial lawlessness is a natural state for human beings. For example, control theories would not question, “Why do runaways run away?” but would ask, instead, “Why don’t all teenagers run away?” Therefore, this theory asserts that “most delinquent behavior is the result of insufficient social control, broadly defined” (Nye’s study, as cited in Schaffner, 1999, p. 40). The youth in this model feel minimal attachment to the family and are attracted to external groups and environments. These kids just want to go to a place where they can hang out and be appreciated for who they are (Taffel & Blau, 2001). They transfer their loyalties to a peer group on whom they depend for the satisfaction of their personal and social needs. Usually involved in multiple and long-term episodes of running away, such adolescents do not want to return home, often exhibit delinquent behavior, and have frequent contact with police.

To further illustrate the problems that family dynamics play in the lives of runaways, five difficulties involving families of runaways have been identified, according to Rothman, (1991):

1. Parents are separated, divorced, in trouble with the law, or abusing alcohol.
2. The structure of the family may be problematic.
3. Runaways perceive themselves as unloved or unwanted by their families.
4. Sexual and physical abuse can be occurring or may have occurred.
5. The adolescent may become a scapegoat and divert attention away from other problems in the family.

Many of the high-risk behaviors that runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth engage in stem from violence. These youth are victims of violence and they also become perpetrators of violence against others. In one study, escaping physical and sexual abuse was

such a frequent reason for fleeing the family that a recent national update on runaway and homeless shelter residents reported that “between 60 percent and 70 percent of youths in shelters and transitional living facilities nationwide were physically or sexually abused by parents” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], as cited in Schaffner, 1999).

It is reported by scholars (Powers and Jaklitsch, as cited in Schaffner, 1999) that it is imperative not to underestimate the psychological, emotional, and behavioral effects that incestuous rape and physical beatings within the family have on runaways.

These difficulties span across the nation and are also cited in individual states’ statistics. The Virginia State Police’s study (as cited in the Children, Youth, & Family Services RESP grant report, 2002) cite that 45% of the juvenile violent crimes reported in Virginia occurred in the home.

The rates of child abuse and neglect are significant in Central Virginia. There were 836 cases of suspected abuse and neglect in 2001 in Albemarle County, with 19% of these cases founded; in Charlottesville 30% of cases were founded.

It is not surprising that many of these youth turn to the streets for survival. According to Schaffner (1999) growing up and leaving home is difficult for a “normal” family to manage and for teenagers to survive intact. But, homeless and runaway youths who have experienced incest or been physically assaulted face special separation problems. They have not resolved the issues with their parents, so they repeatedly re-experience the stress of earlier losses in many of their post-runaway situations (Powers and Jaklitsch, as cited in Schaffner, 1999). There are many implications that result from these numbers.

### Implications for Runaway Youth

The prevalence of runaways reporting physical and sexual abuse in the family has forced a shift in social service agents' perspective from seeing runaways as all "bad" and "delinquent" to seeing some of them as victims who are justified in running away from home (Janus et al. as cited in Schaffner, 1999). According to Schaffner (1999), adolescent runaways who have been forced to run away from sexual assault and physical brutality in the family have special emotional needs that set them apart from youths who have run away from overly strict parents or for other reasons. The after effects of abuse are brutal. One scholar lists suicidal feelings, anger, inability to achieve intimacy and trust, anxiety, participation in delinquent and criminal activity, low self-esteem, difficulties with social contacts, inability to trust adult men, more physical ailments, fear of sex, more likely to engage in physical and verbal fights, withdrawal, seeming to be haunted, dissatisfied, depressed, lonely, and fear of being alone as some of the psychological and behavioral effects on abuse survivors that are seen in runaways (Burgess as cited in Schaffner, 1999).

Many youth that suffer these kinds of abuses are often the ones that leave home for good. The longer a youth stays away from home, the more likely she is to become homeless. According to Rothman (1991), research shows a trend toward long-term homelessness for runaway adolescents. Schaffner (1999) states that long-term runaways' stays outside of the home can be measured in months or years and represent young people whose family ties may have been severed beyond repair. This could mean a pattern of family breakdown with corresponding rejection, physical abuse, and sexual abuse of young people (Rothman, 1991).

It is important to realize that a significant number of runaway and homeless youth leave home because of circumstances beyond their control. For these youth, leaving home is

a matter of survival. Many of the youth that intend to stay away from home, the “splitters,” those who intend to leave home permanently and the “hard-road freaks,” those who are the most streetwise and making the streets their life (Rothman, 1991), are living on the streets and are in desperate need of runaway housing facilities. The study, *Homelessness in America: Unabated and Increasing A Ten Year Perspective*, reveals that children make up a large and growing percentage of the homeless population. Over the past decade, the number of children sheltered in the state of Virginia increased over 258%, from 3,912 in 1985 to 14,000 in 1996.

One way that homeless youth find a place to lay their heads is to become involved in prostitution. As unthinkable as it seems, teenage prostitution is reported to be at an enormous high. One study of runaway and homeless youth in New York City suggests that more than 20% of these youth have been involved in prostitution (Bradley, 1997). Between 10% and 30% report trading sex for food or shelter (Rotheram-Borus, Robertson, as cited in Bradley, 1997).

In a literature review, the American Medical Association (as cited in Bradley, 1997), concluded that one out of three homeless males engage in prostitution. In one account by a 15 year-old youth in shelter, she started selling her body to help her mother who needed the money real bad to supply her crack habit (Stavasky & Mozeson, 1990).

Pregnancy and teen motherhood is more common among homeless youth than non-homeless populations (Bradley, 1997). One researcher (Robertson, 1989) found that half of the runaway girls in his study reported that they were pregnant. Runaway and homeless youth start having sexual intercourse at an average age of 12.5, which is a significantly earlier age than other adolescents (Yates et al.; Rotheram-Borus; Zelnick and Shah, as cited



in Bradley, 1997). Along with having sex at earlier ages, runaway youth also do not use condoms consistently. According to Bradley (1997), between 50% and 71% of street youth have sexually transmitted diseases.

The rates of HIV infection found among runaway populations further demonstrates the high frequency of risky behaviors among this population (Bradley, 1997). Not only does this population have high rates of HIV infection, they also are confronted with contracting other sexually transmitted diseases. In addition to being sexually active and being subject to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, high rates of substance abuse have been reported among runaway and homeless youth. Yates et al.'s study (as cited in Bradley, 1997) found that more than 80% of homeless youth in an outpatient clinic reported drug use. In a survey by Bradley (1997) of runaway service providers it was reported that an estimated half of the youth were abusing drugs. Alcohol use also appears prevalent among runaways, with rates reported as high as 60% using regularly (Bradley, 1991).

As stated earlier, poor mental health is common among runaways, throwaways, and the homeless. Shaffer and Caton's study (as cited in Bradley, 1997) has emphasized that runaways have extremely high rates of psychopathology. Psychiatric disorders of childhood and adolescence have been found to relate to many patterns in these youth's lives, including problems with parents, numerous changes of placements, and high rates of risk behaviors (Rothman-Borus, Koopman, and Ehrhardt's study as cited in Bradley, 1997).

After they are on their own, the kids said, they try to live with people they think they can trust, like friends, or people they meet on the streets. The people on the streets turn out to be pimps, pushers, or pornographers (Rothman, 1991). Once runaways are on the streets and dependent upon these kinds of people, it is very difficult for them to break free of their

clutches. Many runaways resign themselves to a life of prostitution, drugs, and crime because they have lost hope that their lives can change for the better.

The hopelessness, anger, depression and risk-taking among runaways causes many of us who work with youth much concern. Do our mental health agencies and mentoring programs really reach kids on the street? Many outreach workers and youth counselors have tried to meet the needs of the youth, but to our chagrin we found that runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth are very mobile. They blend in and mask their needs among other youth. Also, with the removal or lack of responsibility for runaway and homeless youth from the court, meaning that at one time running away was considered a status offense and illegal for anyone under the age of 16, a void has been left (Rothman, 1991).

In summary, the number of runaway, throwaway, and push-out youth is growing at an alarming rate. The factors that contribute to this problem are disturbing. With family dynamics as the largest contributing factor to the runaway problem, it is imperative that youth-serving workers address the needs of the youth and their families systemically. Also, the dangers of living on the streets are tremendous, with youth surviving by selling anything they can, including their own bodies. These activities result in various physical and mental health problems that are difficult to resolve. The next section proposes an outreach model to address and combat these problems.

#### Suggested Model

I have worked with troubled youth in Central Virginia for a number of years and, according to statistics, youth under the age of 18 comprise 23% of Central Virginia's total population. The overwhelming theme for most of them is a disturbed family life. To better

understand the impact, a cursory analysis of Albemarle County statistics on runaway and missing youth is presented in table 1.

Table 1

Percentage of runaway and missing youth in Albemarle County

Age	Percent
17	23%
16	20%
15	24%
14	12%
10 – 13	9%

Many youth are getting a mixed message expressing the sentiment that their parents think of them and treat them like they are “three years old” instead of an “almost adult.” In many cases, the adults in their lives are struggling with substance abuse and other vices, but they tell the kids “do as I say, not as I do.” The messages are conflicting and difficult for an adolescent to decipher. The teenage brain is still maturing, so it is not able to reason and process information like an adult brain, however; adults are constantly expecting for teens to think like adults when they are making many difficult decisions that even adults have a hard time with making. Many adults do not allow adolescents to have a margin of error, when they themselves frequently make mistakes.

I have heard numerous youth lament over the fact that their parents do not listen to them. They feel as if they are living in the margins of their families, as well as in the margins of society. Too many times, our youth are brushed aside, made to feel as if they and their

opinions don't matter. It is no wonder that many gravitate towards life on the streets where they can be accepted by others living out a marginal existence just like themselves.

Many of the systems that are in place to address the problem of runaway youth are working. However, adequate outreach to adolescents must be done to find out what their needs are and how to properly address those needs. Due to the large rates of abuse, neglect, and foster care that are reported, it is clear that intervention and prevention are needed.

As an outreach counselor, I realize how important it is for youth-serving workers to identify youth at risk of running away. It has been reported that the majority of runaway and homeless youth have mental health problems. According to Rothman (1991), research indicates that runaways exhibit stress and other psychological disabilities far in excess of that experienced by non-runaways. Therefore, it is vitally important for these youth to be reached and treated before they become runaways, throwaways, or push-outs. As the old saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Meeting the needs of these youth before they end up on the streets or in runaway shelters is the focus of this model.

The Runaway Emergency Services Program (RESP) has found that its use of a 24-hour hotline, individual and family counseling, and shelter services are effective in reducing high-risk behaviors that lead to runaway youth.

Also, a method of assessment is needed to understand the causes and consequences of being a runaway or homeless youth. Bradley (1997) cites the development of instruments and piloting of a method used with adolescents in a runaway shelter. First, focus groups were held with youth in runaway shelters to determine the best way to conduct baseline interviews and to ask about key factors that contribute to homelessness. These groups focused on logistical issues, such as when and where to do the interviews, how to involve

interviewers on site so they could best establish trust in a population of adolescents who were anticipated to be distrustful, and how long an interview could be done at one time. Focus groups also examined youths' relationships with family, with peers, types of behaviors which were typical on "the street," and particularly on attitudes and behaviors related to risk-taking with sex and drugs.

In addition to talking to runaway youth, staff in runaway shelters were interviewed in order to take advantage of the clinical and experimental knowledge of social workers and paraprofessionals who work with runaway and homeless youth (see appendix A).

I have developed a prevention model based on methods used by RESP and on Bradley's research. The model examines the primary, secondary, and tertiary phases of prevention. The motto for the suggested model is "Find Out, Reach Out, Learn About, and Carry Out". This model can be viewed as an approach symbolized by an hourglass. The hourglass holds the entire body of sand at the top, then, as it narrows, the sand is forced through the small passage almost as individual grains, then at the bottom, the sand flows into the entire body again. Like the hourglass, as outreach workers and counselors, in the primary phase, we must first find out who is in need of services by examining entire communities. Then we must reach out to those communities. Next, as we reach out, we must narrow our focus and learn about the high-risk populations within the communities and their needs. Finally, in the secondary and tertiary phases, we must carry out our purpose, which is to offer services and resources to youths and their families to prevent some high-risk and runaway behaviors, and reduce the effects of the consequences of those behaviors. We can then help them to re-enter the communities as healthy, productive individuals. In order to intervene

effectively, counselors must be adequately trained regarding runaway issues. A sample outreach survey and a training manual are included in Appendix B.

To find out who is need of mental health services, it is important to examine families. Rothman (1991) states that runaway youth come from highly disorganized families in varied geographic regions, at all social levels, and, in many cases, their behavior results from past physical or sexual abuse. To reverse the runaway trend, it is imperative for families to communicate and commune effectively together. Adolescents crave connections. These connections include parents, siblings, friends, and teachers to name a few. When these connections are broken, especially with parents and siblings, youth become troubled.

Some teens direct their inner conflicts and their frustration about the world as they perceive it outward, and some direct these feelings inward. This acting out or acting in manifests in three general ways: anger, wild behavior, and/or depression (Maxym and York, 2000). Most teens display aspects of each, but the trouble starts when the anger, outrageous behavior, and/or the depression take over the teen's personality, until parents, teachers, and even friends feel they don't know her anymore.

According to Maxym and York (2000), some common behaviors and attitudes of teens in turmoil are:

1. They don't like themselves.
2. They feel like failures.
3. They are demoralized and react with an I-don't-care or "fuck you" attitude toward school as well as other things.
4. They are frightened and resentful.
5. They are self-absorbed, self-centered, and self-indulgent.

6. They lie.
7. They manipulate.
8. They test the limits.
9. They are struggling with profound existential questions.
10. They are sabotaging themselves, their future, and their family.
11. They are self-destructive.

In many cases, school personnel are the first to “discover” these attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, one way for outreach workers to “find out” is have regular contact with the administration and staff at local schools. Through the schools, outreach workers can make their prevention and intervention services known to the school staff, the students, and indirectly, to the families. Brochures and informational and educational materials can be displayed and given out at the schools to reach youth and their families. To prevent the downward spiral and high risk or runaway behavior, outreach workers and counselors can frequently conduct educational and counseling groups with teens, one-on-one counseling with teens and their families, and informational and educational presentations on many topics that concern teens and their families. The Runaway Emergency Services Program encourages, cultivates, and relies on its relationship with the local schools in its planning district.

Fifty percent of RESP referrals come from strong relationships with middle and high school guidance counselors, teachers and school psychologists. RESP staff is often in the schools providing individual, group and crisis counseling to youth as well as informing youth and school staff of the services that RESP offers. In past years, the RESP staff has offered and facilitated a girls speak-out group in a local high school in Charlottesville, VA. Also,

other similar groups have been offered at other high schools and middle schools in the region ten planning district. In order to be effective, outreach workers and counselors must not be afraid to ask questions. The baseline interview (appendix A) is an excellent way to “find out” what the needs and problems are that youth face. Although RESP has not used this baseline interview, it could be incorporated into the initial intake session as a means of finding out what intervention services are needed. RESP currently uses a survey questionnaire that is focused on prevention (appendix B).

Another way to “find out” is to correspond with departments of social services, health departments, and other community groups, agencies, and organizations that provide services to youth and their families. RESP seeks the support of other organizations and resources for professional collaboration and, if needed, financial assistance.

Outreach workers can reach youth that may be in need of these services by leaving information cards and pamphlets about their agencies’ services available. They may also make presentations about their services to these groups. In this way, others are informed about the services offered and can make referrals to those in need of them.

Outreach workers and counselors “reach out” by distributing information, making presentations, following up with referrals, and seeking out those who are in need of mental health services. RESP has established a youth advisory council that consists of youth of middle school and high school age. This council advises the RESP staff of what the youth want and need in regard to mental health services. We must be willing to go where the adolescents in need are. Many times, those who are truly in need are the least to be sought out or seek help.



Some ways that RESP has attempted to “reach out” are by using the media and making public service announcements about their services. RESP reaches out with prevention services which include educating the schools and communities about mental health services that are available to youth and families. Their intervention services include offering counseling to individuals, families, and groups; providing hotline services, and short-term shelter services. The purpose of “reaching out” to the youth is to reestablish positive connections for the youth with adults they can trust.

Once contact is made with a youth in crisis, those in outreach work “learn about” what the youth needs. Their problems may range from mental health issues, to physical abuse issues, to sexual issues, to needing a place to live. Oftentimes those with good intentions of helping offer services that they think youth need without actually finding out or “learning about” what youth really need. It takes extensive community and school involvement to “learn about” these youth. Learning about is not only finding out who the youth are, but actually learning about their struggles and their plights. Learning about includes focusing on the strengths that these youth have. The counselor and other youth-serving workers must provide non-judgmental acceptance to these youth. As a counselor, I find that this acceptance along with Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) really helps these at-risk youth to think about their thoughts, feelings, and actions and gives them control to effect positive change.

Another aspect of “learning about” the youth in crisis is RESP correspondence with departments of social service, juvenile detention centers, and juvenile courts. By working with these entities, RESP can “learn about” the history of the youth that enter “the system.” This knowledge helps RESP staff provide the best possible services to these youth.

Once the needs are assessed, the outreach workers can “carry out” a plan of action. Whether the plan is to provide the needed services for or to refer the youth to other appropriate resources, each step must help to facilitate change. Ways to effect change can include mentoring relationships for the youth provided by adult youth companions, servicing youth and their families through a 24-hour crisis and information hotline, counseling, street outreach, and shelter services. The effectiveness of these services can be measured by evaluations completed by the youth, their families, and the outreach staff. RESP continues to evaluate the services they offer. Relationships with the youth advisory council and the adult advisory board help the RESP staff provide all of the above services and consider implementing additional services to increase effectiveness among youth and their families. With these evaluative measures, RESP is positive that youth are being helped and change does occur.

In conclusion, this model suggests that successful outreach must be done by adhering to the “find out, reach out, learn about, and carry out” method of outreach. Only when outreach workers are determined to really seek those youth in need and make a commitment and dedication to helping them, can the runaway crisis can be reversed.

Even with outreach workers doing all that is possible to identify and help adolescents in need, there are limitations. If the community and other youth-serving sources are not willing to collaborate or offer the services that youth need, then many of these youth will fall through the cracks. It takes a community (those with a “common unity”) to make this method work. Unfortunately, many who can help are unwilling to help. For them, it is easier to look away than to take responsibility for the plight of these young lives.

Taking responsibility means counselors, youth workers, outreach workers and entire communities must be dedicated to finding solutions to the runaway problem. We must continue exploring ways to make connections to family. According to Bradley (1997), it is critical that better intervention be done while children are still with parents. One way to bring about this intervention is by providing relevant parenting training. Another, is by helping social services agencies advocate for children's rights in family work. Other preventive services such as drug prevention, educational support, and skill building for these children and their families are necessary. A network of service providers can be a means of meeting the challenges of runaways. Linkages with providers of mental health services, drug treatment, health care, family treatment, and educational assessment and services exist but need to be built into both the model and funding of runaway programs (Bradley, 1997).

## Appendix A

### Baseline Interview

#### Demographics And Home History

Several questions are used to assess degree of stability and the youth's perception of their current status. This information will inform counselors and outreach workers for prevention and intervention.

#### Homeless vs. Not Homeless

Where do you think of as home right now?

1. Has no home
2. With parents
3. With mother
4. With other relative
5. With friends
6. With foster family
7. In group setting (e.g. group home)
8. At this shelter
9. Other (specify)

#### Number of runaway episodes

1. How many times have you run away or left home? By running away or leaving home I mean at the time you left home you did not plan on

coming back, and you stayed away at least overnight without your parents' permission or without their knowing where you were? (If youth was thrown away, proceed to b.)

2. Have there been times that you were forced or asked to leave by your Parents/guardians? If yes, how many times did this happen?
  - a. one time
  - b. two times
  - c. three times
  - d. four times
  - e. five or more times

Age of first running away (or being thrown away)

How old were you when you first did that (ran away) or were thrown out?

1. Under 12 years old
2. 12 years old
3. 13 years old
4. 14 years old
5. 15 years old
6. 16 years old
7. 17 years old
8. 18 years old

Time of last continuous 3 months with parent or guardian

When was the last time you lived with a parent or a guardian for more  
Than 3 months?

1. Within the last week
2. Two weeks to a month ago
3. Between 1 and 2 months
4. Between 2 and 6 months
5. Over 6 months ago

Number of types of living situations

I'd like to ask you about places that you have lived.

1. With a foster family placed by a social worker
2. In a group home
3. In a foster care institution (residential treatment center)
4. In a mental hospital
5. In a detention center
6. In a work camp or prison
7. On the streets
8. At the home of a teenage friend
9. Independently—alone on your own
10. At the home of a relative (not including your parent or legal guardian)
11. At the home of an adult friend

### Institutional Experience

This variable was created by combing responses given to the question About previous living situations. All who had lived in any of the Following were considered to have had institutional experience.

1. Group home
2. Foster care institution
3. Mental hospital
4. Work camp or prison

These variables can be used to gain a picture of past stability and current status, as well as the adolescent's perception of his or her status. They were used to create variables related to residential stability or chronic stress.





Children, Youth & Family Services, Inc. (CYFS)

Runaway Emergency Services Program (RESP)

Outreach Worker Training

## **Children, Youth & Family Services, Inc.**

### Description & History

CYFS is one of the area's oldest private, non-profit human service organizations with roots dating back to 1921. Originally founded as an orphanage to house children left parentless after a tragic influenza epidemic, today CYFS provides a continuum of services for children and families in three focus areas: promoting parent education and support, fostering quality child care, and preserving family bonds through mediated clinical services.

CYFS is located in downtown Charlottesville and serves the residents of the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle, Greene, Fluvanna, Nelson and Louisa counties.

CYFS programs are funded through has federal, state and regional contracts as well as awards from private foundations and donations. It is the host agency for the Partnership for Children, a 13-member agency planning group to advance early childhood efforts. CYFS is a participating agency with the United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area. The Virginia Department of Social Services licenses CYFS as a child-placing agency. The agency has affiliations with national, regional and local bodies including the:

- Child Welfare League of America
- Mid-Atlantic Network of Youth and Family Services
- Prevent Child Abuse Virginia
- Member of the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Member of the Prevention Coalition
- Member of the Thomas Jefferson Area Coalition for the Homeless

### Mission

The agency mission is to “promote the health and well-being of children, youth, families and the community through education, prevention and treatment” to residents of Central Virginia.

## Focus Areas

Three program focus areas have the shared vision that all children should be safe, happy and nurtured today so that they can reach their brightest potential tomorrow. A continuum of services support children in the context of family, school and community makes a difference child-by-child, family-by-family, day-by-day.

***Child Care Programs*** help build and support quality and affordable child care so that children are provided care in a nurturing environment. Parents identify child care needs and locate appropriate providers in collaboration with the United Way. CYFS is the contracting agency for Virginia's Voluntary Registration program. Also provides training for child care providers.

### *Child Care Resource & Referral*

Helps parents identify child care needs and locate appropriate providers in collaboration with the United Way. CYFS is the contracting agency for Virginia's Voluntary Registration program. Also provides training for child care providers.

### *Quality Child Care Project*

Promotes the importance of quality child care and supports individuals in the development of a professional home-based business by recruiting training and mentoring individuals within the City of Charlottesville to become Voluntary Registered Family Day Care Providers. Provides long-term support as well as connecting participants to other community resources that reinforces their efforts in providing quality child care.

*Play Partners*

Provides enriching play experiences, including reading, singing and purposeful activities led by trained volunteers in private family care homes. Children in care have joyful and educational play experiences while providers learn new skills.

*Super, Thinking and Responsible Kids*

Provides pre-school children the opportunity to learn critical life skills needed to make healthy choices by providing weekly lessons, using AI's Pals Curriculum, to MACAA Head Start. Additionally, the program educates the community about substance abuse resistance skills.

***Parent Education and Support Programs*** promote the healthy growth of children by supporting the family by providing parents with the information and support they need to be the best parents they can be for their children. Services aim to teach parents about healthy development, positive parenting, establishing nurturing family relationships and available community resources.

*Healthy Families/Family Partners* is a home visiting program for parents of young children in the Albemarle / Charlottesville region. Home visitors meet with families in their home to offer support and information. Home visits are scheduled at a convenient time for parents and are usually held once a week.

*Parent & Family Connections* provides parent classes and community workshops to promote healthy parenting, enhance positive parent-child interaction, prevent child abuse/neglect, and offer support. Parent Connection will come to your organization, volunteer group, church, school, etc. to present and coordinate workshops geared toward the challenges facing today's parents. CYFS Parent Connection staff has access to information on a wide range of parenting workshops.

*The Fathering Initiative* helps fathers of young children by providing assistance with obtaining employment and education to become more financially stable, and

information about raising healthy children to promote positive father-child relationships.

Transparenting is a 4-hour educational program offered monthly, focusing on the needs of children during divorce and/or separation of parents/caregivers. This program will be helpful for divorcing parents, people contemplating divorce, parents seeking change of custody or visitation agreements, school counselors, lawyers, grandparents, teachers, or anyone concerned with disputing caregivers. Program participants will explore divorce through a child's perspective, learn how to avoid placing children in a "no win" situation, and discover strategies for dealing effectively with the other parent/caregiver.

Six Easy Steps for Parenting Young Children is a 6-week parenting class offered on Tuesday evenings from 6-7:30 p.m. Parents may attend one or all of the sessions as fits their schedules and needs.

**Clinical Programs** strive to strengthen family relationships and promote the healthy emotional development of children and adolescents.

Family Counseling programs provide individual, family and couples therapy to children, adolescents and adults with a wide range of issues including marital problems, child-rearing, domestic violence, anxiety and depression. Specialized treatment is available for child/adolescent victims of abuse and for adults who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The Runaway Emergency Services Program provides emergency services to youth ages 11 - 17 years of age who have run away, been pushed out of their home, are homeless or are at-risk. Seeks to preserve, reunite, and empower the family while keeping the youth safe. Services include short-term shelter, crisis intervention, and prevention counseling to youth and their families who are experiencing difficulties. A 24-hour hotline is staffed by seasoned clinicians and is available to youth, families, and the community. Hotline Services are free and confidential.

## Organizational Structure

CYFS has a Board of Directors that oversees agency operations through the Executive Director. A management team led by the Executive Director and including the Division Directors (Child Care, Parent Education and Support, Clinical, Development, and Finance) is responsible for the daily operation of the agency's programs. Each Division has staff necessary to perform its activities. Monthly all staff meetings bring agency employees together to keep them informed of agency programs and activities.

### **Runaway Emergency Services Program**

#### History

CYFS has operated RESP since 1981. RESP receives funding primarily from the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) through the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Act. RESP also receives local funding from the City of Charlottesville/Albemarle County and the United Way - Thomas Jefferson Area. RESP is the only such service in the region who can provide prompt response to youth and families in crisis and serves as a continuum of services to runaway, homeless and at-risk youth.

#### RHY Philosophy

The philosophy of RHY programs is to prevent youth from having to enter the system (social services, juvenile justice) just to receive services such as shelter and counseling.

RHY emphasizes a positive youth development philosophy that focuses on youth assets rather than problems. They also emphasize youth involvement through advisory boards and councils and program development

#### RHY Goals

RESP goals are consistent with those of the Runaway & Homeless Youth Act:

- Alleviate the problems of runaway and homeless youth

- Reunite youth with their families and encourage the resolution of intra-family problems through counseling and other services
- Strengthen family relationships and encourage stable living conditions for youth
- Help youth decide upon constructive courses of action.

These goals are met through the activities of outreach; case disposition; individual intakes; individual files; temporary shelter; periodic reports to funders; individual, family and group counseling; youth participation; services linkages; staffing and staff development; recreational services; ongoing planning; aftercare Services; and an Advisory Board.

### Why RESP - Facts and Figures

*From September 2000 to August 2001, 167 youth were reported as missing or on the run in Charlottesville.*

- 20% were between the ages of 11 and 13 (in contrast to 8% regionally and nationally)
- 74% were between the ages of 14 and 17
- The majority were girls (56%).

*In Albemarle County between July 2000 and June 2001, 147 youth were reported missing or on the run.*

- The majority were girls (51%)
- 8% were between 11 and 13 years
- 80% were between 14 and 17 years old

*Of the youth from Albemarle that RESP has served:*

- 80% were in high school
- 15 % were in middle school
- 5% were in elementary school.

- 9% were between the ages of 10 and 13, 12% were 14, 24% were 15, 20% were 16, and 23% were 17 years of age
- 13% were youth from the University of Virginia (some admissions are made for youth who are 17 years), private schools, out of state, or in residential/therapeutic schools.

*In our area:*

- Most runaway youth are girls between 15 and 17 years old, have a runaway history, and are on the streets up to 4 weeks before calling for help, similar to regional and national profiles.

### Basic Center Grant and Services

RESP is funded as a Basic Center grant. This means that it provides the core services of: 24-hour crisis intervention (hotline), emergency temporary shelter, individual and family counseling and aftercare services for sheltered youth, prevention individual and family counseling for non-sheltered youth, group counseling (prevention), and outreach services to runaway, homeless, missing and at-risk youth ages 11 to 18. We provide services to youth under the age of 11 on a case-by-case basis. We provide brief services to individuals over the age of 18 to help them connect with necessary services. RESP has a small Youth Companions program and is the formative stages of establishing a Youth Council. An Advisory Board meets quarterly.

***24-hour crisis intervention (hotline)*** – 972-SAFE (7233) is a hotline that operates through the land (agency) or cell phones to ensure that a caller receives a personal and immediate response. Anyone can call the hotline. Calls are free and confidential. Youth do not have to give identifying information when they call.

***Emergency temporary shelter*** - RESP recruits and trains host homes that offer emergency temporary shelter to youth. Host homes are in many respects foster homes however, placements are temporary and not intended to be therapeutic. Instead, they are designed to



provide immediate shelter, clothes, food, safety, and nurturance to youth who are without their home. Counseling is provided by RESP staff. Placements are limited to 2 weeks for youth not involved with another agency or system (i.e. social services). Youth in custody of social services may receive up to 29 days of placement, depending upon the circumstances of the need.

Youth are carefully screened by hotline counselors before the need and appropriateness for shelter is determined. A face-to-face interview with the youth and parent/guardian is required before placement is made. Youth must agree to voluntary placement and the parent/guardian must sign a temporary entrustment agreement. Matches with host homes are also carefully determined by hotline counselors. A placement should not be made without consultation with at least one senior RESP staff member. Youth may receive shelter services more than once however, RESP staff will review the reasons why multiple placements may be needed before agreeing to additional shelter services.

Youth must receive 24-hour supervision while in shelter so RESP staff work closely with host homes to ensure that this occurs.

Individual and family counseling is provided to youth in shelter care. If counseling is already being provided, RESP staff will ensure that the youth continues these services.

***Prevention counseling*** - Individual and family counseling for non-sheltered youth is provided to help prevent runaway and homelessness through the mediation of youth and family issues. Counseling is brief, lasting only several months. Case management is often a critical part of this counseling. Group counseling may be offered through the schools or other agencies.

***Outreach*** – Outreach keeps youth, families and the community informed about RESP, maintains program visibility to youth-serving agencies, maintains collegial working relationships within the community, is a resource as well as a referral for youth in need, and helps recruit volunteers.

## Licensing & Regulatory Practices

RESP has program and financial oversight by the ACF and local funding sources.

CYFS has a Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) child-placing license that allows for the placement of youth in temporary shelter host homes. DSS provides on-site reviews to ensure that agency child-placing practices are in accordance with state statutes.

## Staffing Pattern

The Director of Clinical Programs oversees the RESP. A Program Manager has responsibility for ensuring that the program operates within the child-placing license regulations. A Counselor takes the lead on shelter and counseling cases. An Outreach Counselor is responsible for taking the program to the youth and community. Hotline Counselors join the RESP in providing crisis intervention services 24-hours a day.

## Outreach Services

### *Philosophy:*

Outreach is a service that is well defined by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) in 1998:

“When street outreach is the core of program development, agencies focus on reducing the barriers that prevent youth from seeking services and allow young people to access services by entering and exiting programs as needed. Streetwork demands such flexibility in the provision of services and the resources necessary to support them. Getting youth to leave the streets requires giving them awareness and understanding of, and access to, the opportunities available to them. It is most frustrating to watch a youth who finally made the decision to seek help being turned away because of lack of bed space or inflexible program entry requirements.”

Also, FYSB notes:

“By always keeping the door to services open, staff enable youth to make their own choices, in their own time. Streetworkers help young people to reframe the issues and examine their problems from a new perspective. When youth are ready, staff help them explore the gap between where they are at that time and where they want to be; they then link youth to resources to help bridge that gap. If a young person is not ready to explore those options, staff simply remain available to them until they are. Streetworkers help youth learn to develop solutions to their problems by building on their strengths.”

“Outreach simply is marketing a product. The product is the local youth agency services, and the consumers are young people. Outreach has a purpose; it is the connection of people to resources. Outreach efforts might include working with the media, conducting educational sessions in schools or community organizations, or distributing informational materials. Street outreach ... is the primary link between a local program and the communities it serves.”

Finally, FYSB states:

“And street youth are incredibly strong. Their creativity and resourcefulness in the face of daunting life circumstances is extraordinary and their ability to survive is remarkable. Sadly, much of their strength comes from being survivors of abuse or neglect. But, with support, they can use that strength to begin to move their lives in more positive directions.”

### RESP Outreach Services

Through its outreach program, RESP:

- Informs youth and their families about RESP;
- Maintains RESP visibility to youth-serving agencies;
- Maintains collegial working relationships within the community;
- Is a resource as well as a referral for youth in need;
- Provides advocacy and emergency services and/or referrals for services;
- Promotes safety through education and exposure; and
- Recruits volunteers.

RESP uses media in outreach by distributing printed materials, using provide marquees to display the hotline number, radio public service announcements, newspaper articles, and other publications.

RESP maintains an emphasis on youth participation through a strong presence in the schools (informational tables, presentations in health classes and agency fairs), providing youth

volunteer and internship experiences, youth representation on the Advisory Board, and the development of a Youth Council.

RESP is involved in community outreach through participation in events on its own, with CYFS or with other youth-serving agency partnerships, collaborative efforts with other agencies on behalf of youth, training, and presentations.

### Examples of Outreach Resources and Strategies Recently Used

#### *Media:*

- Church bulletins
- Radio PSAs
- Albemarle County and Charlottesville City employee newsletters and utility bills
- Radio interviews
- Quarterly CYFS newsletter
- Virginia Child Protection Newsletter
- SunTrust Marquee
- All American Car Wash

#### *General CYFS Outreach Events:*

- University of Virginia Employee Fair
- Veggie Festival
- Community Breakfast
- Community Art Fund
- United Way Reception
- Legislative Forum
- Youth Council
- Barracks Road Charity Fair (weekend event)
- United Way Day of Caring

#### *RESP Specific Outreach Events*

- Albemarle County Schools Service Provider Fair
- Sexual Assault Resource Agency
- Shelter for Help in Emergency
- OutYouth of the Blue Ridge
- Departments of Social Services
- Mentorville
- Health departments
- University of Virginia hospital
- Lutheran Children's Services
- Private practitioners

- Piedmont CASA
- High and middle schools
- Charlottesville-Albemarle Technical Center
- Juvenile Justice Assessment Center
- Teen Center
- Music Resource Center
- Churches

*Community Collaboratives (RESP staff serves on community committees/workgroups):*

- Mental Health Association (including Suicide Prevention)
- Domestic Violence Workgroup
- Interagency Foster/Host Home Committee
- Child Abuse and Neglect Subcommittee
- Mentoring
- KidsWatch (city project initiative to combat domestic violence)
- Thomas Jefferson Area Coalition for the Homeless
- Dr. Eliason participated in a focus group sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health that conducted a program review of Youth Mental Health: A Parents Guide to Promoting Emotional Health and Well-Being, a web site based approach to reaching parents.

### *Training*

*(Staff received training in):*

- Family Constellation, childhood sexual abuse, grief and loss, trauma, the Mid-Atlantic Network of Youth and Families annual fall conference, and the Outreach Workers Summit

*(Staff provided training in):*

- Fearless October program “Trauma as Seen through the Eyes of a Child” - sponsored by the Mental Health Association, Teen Suicide – Mental Health Association conference - Dr. Eliason, and Special Needs of the Adolescent – Mental Health Association conference - Dr. Rafal

### Outreach Worker position

The Outreach Worker positions are designed to help RESP increase its visibility to all portions of its catchment area with special attention to at-risk youth not evident through more traditional channels, such as schools. Outreach Workers will also learn about youth and outreach needs in the different localities and relay this information to RESP so staff may refine its outreach services. Specific outreach activities will include:

- Direct contact with youth – provide crisis intervention and a person who will listen
- Networking – with community resources as well as youth and their families

- Distribution of printed materials – for youth, host homes, volunteers
- Advocacy and referral – help connect youth with needed services
- Information sharing – with youth, their families and the community
- Street outreach primarily after hours and on weekends
- Participation in planned outreach events

### Characteristics of a Successful Outreach Worker:

- Creativity and flexibility
- Self-starter
- Ability to think on one's feet
- "Street smarts," that is, an understanding of youth and street jargon
- Good interpersonal skills that span people from a range of cultures, professions and ages
- Familiarity with local agencies, resources and systems
- Understanding of the dynamics of street youth
- Respect for differences and diversity
- Patience - understand and tolerate that "success" with youth is not always observable or immediate
- Compassion

### CYFS/RESP Required Documentation

1. Outreach Schedule – turn in on Mondays for that week (attached)
2. RESP Outreach Report – turn in on Mondays for the previous week. May be faxed or e-mailed as an attachment (attached)
3. CYFS Timesheets – complete according to CYFS payroll schedule (see attached)
4. Mileage Log – complete according to attached sample.
5. Expense Log – complete according to attached sample.

## **National Runaway Switchboard (NRS)**

**1-800-621-4000**

### Mission

To facilitate relationships that ensures that youth and families have access to resources in their communities.

### Value Statement

- Providing education and solution-focused interventions
- Offering non-sectarian, non-judgmental support
- Respecting confidentiality
- Collaborating with volunteers
- Responding 24 hours a day

### History

The National Runaway Switchboard gives help and hope to youth and their families by providing non-judgmental, confidential crisis intervention and local and national referrals through a 24-hour hotline.

Founded by a group of Chicago agencies, the National Runaway Switchboard was established in 1971 to fill a need for comprehensive crisis intervention for young people in Chicago. It was conceived as a centralized organization with free 24-hour services, expertise in all youth-related issues and as an information clearinghouse of youth services.

In 1974, the National Runaway Switchboard received an eight-month federal demonstration grant to establish a national hotline. During this time, 11,000 calls were received demonstrating the need for this type of service. Since then, our capabilities and services have grown considerably. We now receive more than 100,000 calls each year.

The National Runaway Switchboard is the federally designated national communication system for runaway and homeless youth. They are available 24 hours a day throughout the United States and its territories, including Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam.

The National Runaway Switchboard services are provided through funding from and in partnership with the Washington D.C. based Family and Youth Services Bureau in the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services.

#### NRS Intervention Process

NRS staff is there to listen! All calls are CONFIDENTIAL AND FREE 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They won't tell youth what to do or give advice. They aim to help youth help themselves through the use of crisis intervention to work through problems and find a plan of action. They ask questions to find the source of the trouble. Then they will discuss informal and formal options and give appropriate referrals. They have a huge database of agencies and services that can be of assistance. Finally, they'll help youth develop a detailed plan of action.

RESP and the NRS work together in that referrals are made to each other. Sometimes area youth on the run need to know that there is a local resource for them. Sometimes area youth prefer to talk more anonymously with someone.



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