



**National Runaway Safeline
Runaway Prevention Roundtable: Research & Practical Strategies
Summary & Key Recommendations**

Title: Runaway Prevention Roundtable: Research & Practical Strategies
Date and Time: Thursday, September 23, 2021, 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm EST

Description:

The *Research & Practical Strategies Roundtable: Research & Practical Strategies* served as the second in a two-part series of panel conversations, focusing on the subjects of accessibility of services for youth experiencing homelessness and effective prevention efforts. A panel of three researchers, practitioners, and subject-matter experts offered their perspectives based on their work and experience, with questions reflecting several of the key findings and themes from the July 20, 2021 *Youth Voices Panel: Lived Experience, Services and Positive Outcomes*.

Research & Practical Strategies Panel Goals:

- Release and provide context for the 2020 NRS Crisis Services and Prevention Report;
- Discuss the impact of runaway and homeless youth (RHY) services;
- Respond to feedback from youth with lived experience with regard to effective prevention services; and
- Discuss the most effective prevention methods from the perspective of researchers and experts in the field.

Participating panelists included:

- **John “Jack” Martin**, Director, Clark County (NV) Department of Juvenile Justice Services
- **Dr. Resa Matthew**, Director, Division of Evaluation, Data, and Policy, Family and Youth Services Bureau
- **Dr. Forrest Moore**, Research Fellow, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Panel Discussion and Recommendations:

Susan Frankel, the Chief Executive Officer of the National Runaway Safeline, moderated the panel discussion. The conversation focused on the accessibility of RHY services, strategies and perspectives on prevention, and recommendations for systemic change. Below are the summarized responses and key takeaways from each of these conversation topics:

Accessibility of Homeless and Runaway Services:

The panel discussion began with participants reflecting on some of the key themes from the July *Youth Voices Panel*, specifically the lack of accessibility, knowledge of, and assistance navigating connection to existing services for young people in crisis. Panelists expressed their belief that the issue is not a lack of services available for young people experiencing a housing crisis, but in the failure to connect youth to the resources they need, resulting in an underutilization of existing programs.

Panelists suggested ways to mitigate the effects of and ultimately change this dynamic through better educating “trusted” adults on existing support services (particularly in schools), creating new ways to connect people to existing services through technology, removing barriers in transportation needed to access services, and developing collaborative partnerships amongst organizations working in the field of runaway and homeless youth services. Panelists agreed that it is not enough

for support systems and programs to simply exist; instead every party needs to do better in attempting to connect their services to people in need.

Prevention Strategies:

Panelists suggested that prevention efforts and investment must be focused in support of young people at an early age via schools, community resources, and accessible adult and child mental health care. Providing access to these kinds of support services from an early age offers the potential to disrupt the transmission of intergenerational trauma, criminal justice system involvement, family homelessness, and future homelessness. When young people face a crisis, the situation they are faced with in the moment cannot be viewed in a vacuum. Instead, one must acknowledge their past and the relationships in their lives that have led to the crisis they face. As a result, providing support from an early age and for the entire family unit has the potential to more effectively support and positively change outcomes for young people.

For young people existing outside of the home setting, such as foster care or group homes, more intentional planning, identification of formal supports, and conversations need to occur as a means of preventing homelessness once they age out of the system.

Addressing the systemic racism present in our schools, criminal justice system, health care, and child protective services was also identified as a necessary step in preventing youth homelessness. Children of color are more likely to experience the school-to-prison pipeline than their white counterparts by being pushed out of the classroom, receiving harsher disciplinary action, and more frequently having their behavior criminalized. Thoughtful, intentional, and widespread training and reform needs to happen across these settings to protect vulnerable young people from negative outcomes.

Recommendations for Change

The panel recommended that existing service providers continue to deepen their collaborations and partnerships within their community to better holistically support the people they seek to serve. While each program has its limitations, working collaboratively and resisting the feeling of competition allows separate entities to accomplish collective goals more effectively. Perhaps the most important such partnership service providers can pursue is with local schools, where young people have the potential to gain access to needed resources before, during, and after a crisis.

In addition, panelists responded to feedback from the *Youth Voices Panel*, where youth with lived experience consistently indicated that they found connections to available services via online search engines. Panelists highlighted the need for the RHY community to research keywords young people most frequently include in their searches and respond by optimizing website presence to increase ease of connection and access. Panelists also identified the lack of universal definitions for homelessness as a key barrier and source of confusion for those seeking services. Addressing this lack of universal language could directly impact service utilization and connection. Informative, data-driven campaigns breaking down and destigmatizing youth homelessness and runaway experiences will promote and advance citizen-led coalitions to advocate on RHY issues, and against legislation that criminalizes homelessness within communities.