



NATIONAL  
RUNAWAY  
PREVENTION  
MONTH

2022

# YOUTH AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT

[1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM](http://1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM)



**FYSB** Family & Youth  
Services Bureau

# Letter from the NRS Youth Advisory Board



**Hey there!**

Each November, we recognize **National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM)** as a way to spread awareness and amplify the voices of the 4.2 million young people experiencing **homelessness** annually. It's hard to imagine, but every year, 1 in 30 young people aged 13-17 experiences some form of homelessness in the United States.<sup>1</sup> That's a huge number of people – but by working together, we can reduce that figure and ultimately end youth homelessness.

In October 2001, national leaders met at the White House Conference on Exploited and Runaway Children to raise public awareness of the steps that parents, law enforcement, and communities could take to make America's children safer. They launched National Runaway Prevention Week, which has since been expanded into a month-long campaign.

At the National Runaway Safeline (NRS), our mission is to keep America's runaway, homeless and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. With the support of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and hundreds of community partners across the country, we invite YOU to get involved with National Runaway Prevention Month 2022.

Young people nationwide are leading movements to create lasting change, and we believe in the power that you hold to shape our collective future. Consider using your voice as an **NRPM Youth Ambassador** to educate others, share information and complete acts of service that directly impact youth who have run away and experienced homelessness.

The following pages of this toolkit provide in-depth information on the issues affecting youth who have run away and experienced homelessness. As you will see, the issue of youth running away or experiencing homelessness is complex and cannot be examined or understood from a single point of view. Every person's experience with **running away, housing insecurity** and **homelessness** is unique. In this Toolkit, you will find ideas for starting your own NRPM campaign within your community.

Information is power. The more often we share information, the more we can reduce **stigma** and better advocate for young people experiencing homelessness.



With love and **solidarity**,

*The National Runaway Safeline Youth Advisory Board*

# The Issue



## What does it mean to be a “runaway”?

A “runaway” is anyone under the age of 18 who is living apart from their guardians without permission.

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

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

## Who is at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness?

- LGBTQIA2S+ youth <sup>2</sup>
- Youth of color (specifically African American, Hispanic, and Native American youth) <sup>1</sup>
- Pregnant and parenting youth <sup>1</sup>
- Youth involved in multiple public systems (i.e., juvenile justice, child welfare) <sup>2</sup>

Find more information about each issue, as well as infographics, at the end of the Toolkit.

## What happens once a young person leaves home?

After leaving home, life can get challenging. Depending on the situation, young people may find it hard to find food and shelter, care for their mental and physical health, and avoid potentially dangerous and violent situations. It's also tough to continue attending school; studies show that young people experiencing homelessness are less likely to finish high school.

# Advocating for Yourself and Others



**Advocacy** is when you take the brave step to speak up for yourself or others. For National Runaway Prevention Month to be successful, we rely on young people to start conversations about the realities that young people experiencing homelessness are facing!

Telling the story of youth homelessness is critical to reducing stigma and ensuring these young people know they are not alone.

Someone who is standing up for themselves is using **personal advocacy**, and someone striving to change policies and rules that impact how people live is using **systems advocacy**. Both are important and can make the world a better place.

## What should I do if I, or someone I know, is considering running away?

If you're considering running away, think hard about what is involved. Before you make any difficult decisions, think about what it would be like on your own. Where would you stay, how would you continue with school and what would you do for money? Maybe you can improve your situation at home. Reaching out to someone you trust is a good first step. [The National Runaway Safeline](#) is always an option and our team is available 24/7 to help you come up with a plan.

If a friend is considering running away, ask them the same questions. You can help them create a plan to make their situation better and be an emotional support as they make difficult decisions. You can also encourage them to reach out to NRS. While it might sound surprising, being a good friend is an important way to help prevent someone you care about from experiencing homelessness.



# Where do I Start?



Use your voice as an **NRPM Youth Ambassador** to support your peers. The role of a Youth Ambassador is simple and important: educate others in creative, fun ways. Once you sign up using the link below, you'll get NRPM updates, information and resources, along with our **Social Media Toolkit** containing tips on how to tell the story of NRPM on your feeds.

**SIGN UP TO BE AN NRPM YOUTH AMBASSADOR  
AT [1800RUNAWAY.ORG/NRPM-YOUTH](https://1800RUNAWAY.ORG/NRPM-YOUTH)**

Are you a young adult between 18 and 25 who has experienced running away, housing insecurity, or periods of homelessness and want to become involved in our advocacy work? Consider joining our **Youth Advisory Board**. If interested, contact us at [prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org](mailto:prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org).

## Want to do more, but don't know where to begin?

Host a National Runaway Prevention Month event in your community. These events are great opportunities to talk about the issues of NRPM and the resources available to young people who are struggling with homelessness locally. Check out our suggested events below.

## Participate in November 2022 National Events

### NOVEMBER 1: SOCIAL MEDIA BLAST

Kick off National Runaway Prevention Month by posting on social media! We've provided a number of assets to make raising awareness easy and fun.

- Post a Facebook and Instagram Story using the NRPM2022 filter. Create a new story and scroll to 'Browse Effects.' Search for 'NRPM2022' to find our filter. Add it to your Story and post an image or video. Use a caption or record yourself talking about why NRPM is meaningful to you. For more buzz, take a screen capture of your Story and post it directly to your feed!
- Post a TikTok with the NRPM2022 sticker. When uploading your new TikTok video, search for the 'NRPM2022' in the sticker tab when editing your video. Talk about why this cause is so meaningful to you! Make sure to check out the 'Messaging Guide' for statistics to help your post stand out.

Be sure to include a caption along with your post to let your friends know about NRPM and how they can learn more. For example:

"4.2 million young people endure homelessness in the U.S. every year. I'm participating as a National Runaway Prevention Month Youth Ambassador to raise awareness of the issues runaway & homeless youth face. Learn more at [#NRPM2022](https://1800RUNAWAY.ORG/NRPM)"

# Where do I Start?

► Continued



## NOVEMBER 1–4: EDUCATION WEEK

Throughout the week, NRS will lead an online learning series to “shine a light” on issues facing youth who have run away and experienced homelessness. We’ll provide statistics, explore what ‘runaway and homeless youth’ means and discuss the challenges of navigating different systems.

**Step 1:** Connect with us on social media:

<https://www.facebook.com/1800RUNAWAY>

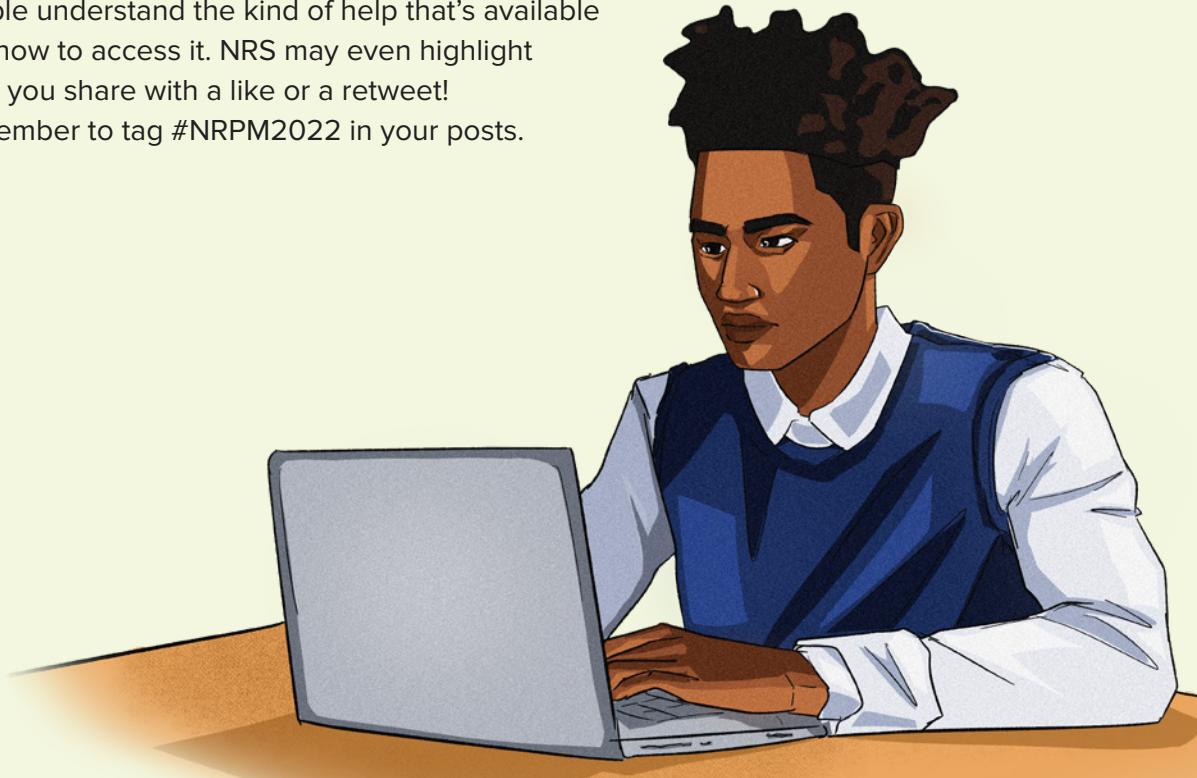
<https://twitter.com/1800runaway>

<https://www.instagram.com/1800runaway/>

**NEW!** <https://www.tiktok.com/@nationalrunawaysafeline/>

**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 helps people understand the kind of help that's available and how to access it. NRS may even highlight what you share with a like or a retweet!  
Remember to tag #NRPM2022 in your posts.



# Where do I Start?

► Continued



## NOVEMBER 10: WEAR GREEN DAY

Dress in green to show your support for NRPM. For added impact, post a picture on social media with a message about your commitment to support youth who have run away and experienced homelessness and include the hashtag #NRPM2022. The more shades of green and the greener the outfit, the better!

Other fun ideas include:

- Paint your nails green, or wear bright green makeup;
- Wear a green wig or hat;
- Put your pet in a green sweater!

Have fun with it -- stage your own fashion show featuring you and a friend dressed head to toe in green, and post photos on social. Or, post your picture with a message about NRPM. Don't forget the hashtags! #NRPM2022, #youthactivism, #youthhomelessness, #stopthestigma

### ► TIP

Ask your teacher, coach, or counselor if your class, club or sports team can designate a day to all wear green together! Use this as an opportunity to talk about NRPM with your classmates or teammates. Share your pictures with NRS on social media!



# Where do I Start?

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## NOVEMBER 17: LIGHT THE NIGHT COMMUNITY EVENTS

Youth service agencies, community groups and individuals across the country host events to “shine a light” on NRPM issues and show solidarity with young people. Some past successful events have included resource fairs, sleep outs, walks and art contests. Participate in a Light the Night community event in your area or organize your own. Follow the #NRPM2022 hashtag to learn about events near you.



#NRPM2021



# Where do I Start?

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Planning an event from scratch can be hard, and you may not know where to start! Check out some ideas below. If you need more specific advice, reach out to NRS – we're here to help with advice and feedback. Email us at [prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org](mailto:prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org).

## Support National Runaway Prevention Month in Your Community!

Engaging your community in a fun, interesting and educational project can be an ideal way to “shine a light” on the issue of youth homelessness.



SAMPLE PROJECTS →

# Where do I Start?

► Continued



## MOVIE NIGHT: SCREENING AND Q&A

Host a movie night! Watching a movie that highlights youth homelessness can be a powerful way to understand the realities of this issue. Here are some event planning tips:

- 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 you’ve confirmed the event details, spread the word by posting flyers in your community, at school and other popular places.
- 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



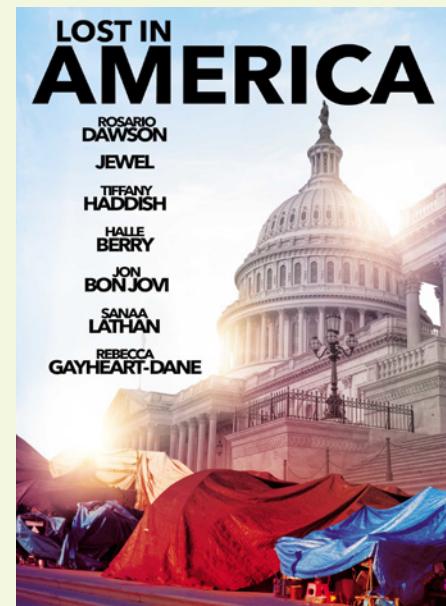
“**SHELTER**” highlights the compelling stories of youth at an emergency shelter.



“**American Street Kid**” tells the story of a group of homeless teens on the streets of Los Angeles, each with their unique background and experiences.



“**The Homestretch**” follows three homeless teens as they fight to stay in school, graduate and create a better life.



“**Lost in America**” profiles several homeless youth while exploring the issues that have contributed to the crisis.

# Where do I Start?

► Continued



## CARE PACKAGES

It can be difficult for those experiencing homelessness to access basic necessities, such as toiletries, money for public transportation, food and more. Assemble care packages for shelter residents or leave them in your school counselor's office for distribution to classmates in need.

- Step 1:** Determine the items you want to include in your care packages and research the costs. If donating to a shelter, contact them to find out what they need most and how many.
- Step 2:** Raise money to purchase the care package items. Contact local sports teams, religious organizations or nearby businesses to request support for this fundraiser. Alternatively, host a supply drive where members of your community donate items for the packages.
- Step 3:** Assemble the care packages and consider including a short, handwritten note. Simple, personal touches can lift someone's spirits. You can [order free educational materials](#) from NRS to include, as well! Once the packages are complete, deliver them.
- Step 4:** Share a picture of your completed packages on social media and tag @1800RUNAWAY! These packages are a reminder that some people don't have access to basic items like shampoo and toothpaste that we may take for granted.

### ► TIP

You can make this a class or grade-level competition! Talk to your teacher or school counselor about making this a school-wide project.



# Where do I Start?

► Continued



## COMMITMENT CARDS

Commitment cards show your personal support for ending youth homelessness. We've provided printable templates to share with friends, family and classmates.



**Step 1:** Print blank commitment cards. You can [find them here!](#)

**Step 2:** Gather friends, classmates, teammates, club members, family members and others to complete commitment cards, or distribute the cards for others to fill out on their own.

**Step 3:** Display your commitment cards on a wall in a highly visible location – be sure to get any necessary approvals. For example, if you'd like to post the cards in a hallway at school, first make sure your teacher or principal is OK with this.

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

**Step 5:** Show your social media followers how you're supporting youth who have run away and experienced homelessness by posting a picture of your cards, or share a short video holding your card and explaining how you plan to support NRPM. Remember to use the hashtags: #NRPM2022, #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! Depending on where your commitment wall is, we might even be able to get your local newspaper to "shine a light" on what you've achieved.

# Where do I Start?

► Continued



## TIKTOK STORIES

New this year, join our month-long TikTok campaign by sharing your NRPM activities as a video on TikTok. Remember to use #NRPM2022, and tag @nationalrunawaysafeline on TikTok and @1800RUNAWAY on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.



## SHARE YOUR STRENGTHS

Volunteer your time, energy and ideas with a local organization dedicated to ending youth homelessness. Maybe you can lend a hand by packing food donations, collecting clothing and cold weather gear or assembling holiday gifts for those in need. If you need help finding an organization, please contact us at [prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org](mailto:prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org).



## YOUTH FORUM

Assemble a panel of speakers, maybe some of your peers with different life experiences, and host a discussion about issues facing youth who have run away and experienced homelessness. You may want to include a moderator, such as a school counselor, who can help guide the conversation and add a professional perspective. Conclude the event with a Q&A. Invite students, teachers, parents, community leaders and others who are interested in the topic. This could be hosted as a virtual, in-person or hybrid event.

# Messaging



Shining a light on the issue of youth homelessness is critical to reducing stigma and ensuring these young people know they are not alone. Check out our Social Media Toolkit for tips on how to increase awareness of NRPM on your feeds. Learn more about the issue below:

## BECOME A 2022 YOUTH AMBASSADOR

**1 HOMELESSNESS**

**Not having a permanent or stable place to live.**

What does it mean?  
Experiencing homelessness makes life difficult in so many different ways. Having enough to eat, being able to go to school, and being physically safe are all harder while homeless.

**2 RUNAWAY**

**Someone under the age of 18 who has left home without their parents' or guardians' permission.**

What does it mean?  
Young people run away from home for a variety of different reasons. Fighting with parents, not being able to come out as LGBTQ+, or emotional and physical abuse are all some of the reasons young people leave home. Running away often leads to homelessness.

**3 HOUSING INSECURITY**

**Living in a state where your home/the place you're staying at can be taken away with little or no warning.**

What does it mean?  
Roughly a quarter of U.S. households experienced some form of housing insecurity last year<sup>1</sup>. This means that 25% of households were possibly one missed paycheck away from homelessness. This issue can effect anybody and there's a chance that there is someone in your class or on your sports team who is currently experiencing housing insecurity.

**4 STIGMA**

**The disapproval of, or discrimination against, a person based on the things that make them different.**

What does it mean?  
Stigma is out of an individual's control and can be incredibly harmful. It is damaging for self-esteem and can lead to bullying. There is often a lot of stigma attached to homelessness, and we need to work to reduce that stigma.

**5 ADVOCACY**

**Standing up for yourself or others.**

What does it mean?  
As a young person, your voice has so much power to help end youth homelessness. Regardless of your own situation, you can help stick up for your peers who are struggling. If you do have lived experience with homelessness, sharing your story can truly help make a difference!

**6 SOLIDARITY**

**Unity and friendship among people with common goals or interests.**

What does it mean?  
If you have never experienced homelessness, just by reading this you are expressing solidarity! By using your voice to advocate for your peers, hosting or participating in an event, and volunteering are all more ways to show solidarity.

Reference:  
<sup>1</sup> Bureau U.S.C. (2021, March 19). New Household Pulse Survey shows concern over food security, loss of income. The United States Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/05/new-household-pulse-survey-shows-concern-over-food-security-loss-of-income.html>

**7 YOUTH AMBASSADOR**

**Someone who pledges to support their peers who are considering running away, or who are currently experiencing homelessness.**

What does it mean?  
Youth Ambassadors are essential to the success of NRPM. Since running away and youth homelessness impacts young people, Youth Ambassadors keep the cause focused on those affected most. If you're interested in using your voice to help end youth homelessness, sign up to be a Youth Ambassador here.

**SIGN UP TODAY AT [1800RUNAWAY.ORG/NRPM](http://1800RUNAWAY.ORG/NRPM)**

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INFOGRAPHICS**

# Messaging

► Continued



## LGBTQIA2S+ & HOMELESSNESS

### *Did you KNOW?*

**1**

Around 7% of young people in the United States are LGBTQ, while 40% of youth experiencing homelessness are LGBTQ.



**2**

LGBTQ youth had over twice the rate of early death among young people experiencing homelessness.

**3**



Among all LGBTQIA2S+ youth 82% wanted mental health care. Of those who wanted mental health care, only 60% were able to get it.

**4**

LGBTQ youth are at more than double the risk of homelessness compared to non-LGBTQ peers.



**5**



Youth who identified as both LGBTQ and Black or multiracial had some of the highest rates of homelessness

**We're fighting to end LGBTQIA2S+ discrimination and end youth homelessness!**

Sources:

- Choi, S.K., Wilson, B.D.M., Shelton, J., & Gates, G. (2015). Serving Our Youth 2015: The Needs and Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Experiencing Homelessness. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund.
- Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- The Trevor Project (2022). 2022 Mental Health Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

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## NATIONAL RUNAWAY PREVENTION MONTH

# RACE AND HOMELESSNESS

### Did you KNOW?

According to the 2017 Voices of Youth Count initiative from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, vulnerable populations experience a greater risk for homelessness.

BLACK YOUTH HAVE AN  
**83% HIGHER RISK  
THAN THEIR PEERS**

HISPANIC, NON-WHITE  
YOUTH HAVE A  
**33% HIGHER RISK  
THAN THEIR PEERS**

There is a disproportionate representation of Black and Hispanic youth, as well as LGBTQ+ youth, who experience homelessness and are involved in the juvenile justice system.



**80%**

OF PROVIDERS REPORTED THAT JUVENILE JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT WAS A TOP CONTRIBUTOR TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS, ACCORDING TO A REPORT FROM THE COALITION FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE AND THE NATIONAL NETWORK FOR YOUTH.

A 2017 assessment of Native American housing conditions found that, nationally, 99.8% of tribal officials reported that doubling up (i.e. taking in family and friends who would otherwise risk homelessness) was an issue in their tribal area.

Sources:

- Morton, M. H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G. M. (2017). Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National estimates. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Retrieved from [http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall\\_VoYC\\_NationalReport\\_Final.pdf](http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_NationalReport_Final.pdf)
- National Network for Youth (n.d.). Homeless and runaway youth in the juvenile justice system. Retrieved from [http://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/Homeless%20and%20Runaway%20Youth\\_0.pdf](http://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/Homeless%20and%20Runaway%20Youth_0.pdf)
- Pindus, N., Kingsley, G., Biess, J., Levy, Simington, J., & Hayes, C. (2017). Housing Needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives in Tribal Areas. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/housing-needs-american-indians-and-alaskanatives-tribal-areas>

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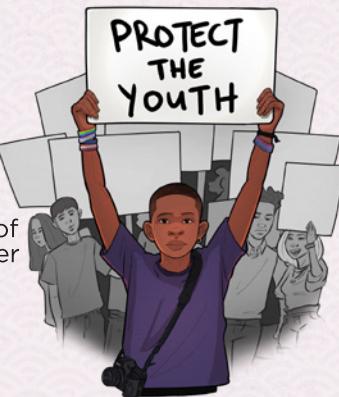


## FINDING A HOME IN FOSTER CARE

An estimated 19% to 36% of youth experience homelessness shortly after aging out of the foster care system. At a certain age (18 or 21, depending on the state), young people in foster care are expected to go out and make a living for themselves. This can be really hard, and often leads to housing instability or homelessness.

One study found that:

- About half (50.6%) of the homeless youth surveyed reported having stayed in a foster home or group home.
- Youth with a foster care history experienced homelessness for much longer (27.5 months on average) compared to youth who had never been in foster care (19.3 months, on average).
- Youth who had formerly been in foster care reported higher levels of victimization both prior to and after becoming homeless.
- Youth whose last placement type was a state shelter had a 55% greater chance of becoming homeless than those who had been in a family placement.



In some states, youth age out of the foster system at 18 years old. In other states, youth age out of the foster system at 21 years old. The youth who were aged out of foster care at 21 years old had a 42.4% lower chance of becoming homeless than those who were no longer in foster care.

Sources:

- National Network for Youth (n.d.). Education barriers for homeless youth. Retrieved from: [https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/IssueBrief\\_Education.pdf](https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/IssueBrief_Education.pdf)
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- youth.gov (n.d.). Homelessness and runaway: Education. Retrieved from: <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/runawayand-homeless-youth/education>
- Coalition for Juvenile Justice (2016). Youth homelessness and juvenile justice: Opportunities for collaboration and impact. Retrieved from: [http://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/policy%20brief\\_FINAL.compressed.pdf](http://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/policy%20brief_FINAL.compressed.pdf)
- Dworsky, A., Napolitano, L., & Courtney, M. (2013). Homelessness during the transition from foster care to adulthood.

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# Resources



## Who can 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 free crisis intervention and resources for youth and families 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Each year, NRS makes over 125,000 connections to help and hope through hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY), online (1800RUNAWAY.org) and prevention services. [Click here](#) to learn more.

We are here to support you, listen without judging and connect you with necessary services. If you or a friend needs help or wants someone to talk to, contact us at 1-800-786-2929 or online at 1800RUNAWAY.org.

**CALL | CHAT | EMAIL | FORUM**

*All information is kept 100% confidential.*

Connect with us



@1800RUNAWAY



@nationalrunawaysafeline

- **love is respect** aims to engage, educate and empower young people to prevent and end abusive relationships. 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. Call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or [click here](#) to learn more.

- The **Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline** is dedicated to the prevention of child abuse. Serving the U.S. and Canada, the hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with professional crisis counselors. The hotline offers crisis intervention, information, and referrals to thousands of emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls, texts, and chats are confidential. Their number is 1-800-422-4453. [Click here](#) to learn more.

- **American Pregnancy Association – Teen Pregnancy Hotline** provides pregnancy education, refers you to free and confidential testing centers, and offers a safe place to talk about options. Call at 1-800-672-2296.

- **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.

- **Trans Lifeline**  
Available 24/7 at 1-877-565-8860.

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4. Pergamit, M., et al. (2010). Why they run: An in-depth look at America's runaway youth. Retrieved from <https://www.1800runaway.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Why-They-Run-Report.pdf>
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