



# **2021 CRISIS SERVICES & PREVENTION REPORT**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Youth homelessness is a public health issue impacting nearly 4.2 million young people, ages 13 to 25, in our country each year. Once a young person faces the instability associated with homelessness, whether couch surfing, sleeping on the streets or relying on shelters, the consequences can be far-reaching. Youth may experience challenges finding consistent and healthy meals, struggle with their physical and mental health, face violent situations, and be unable to attend or graduate from school. Due to these potential adversities, along with negative outcomes associated with homelessness, including abuse, mental health challenges, drug and alcohol abuse, and premature death,<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> it is essential for youth to have support and access to resources to help them navigate their situations, and ultimately to ensure their safety and opportunity to pursue their lives without fear of experiencing housing instability or homelessness.

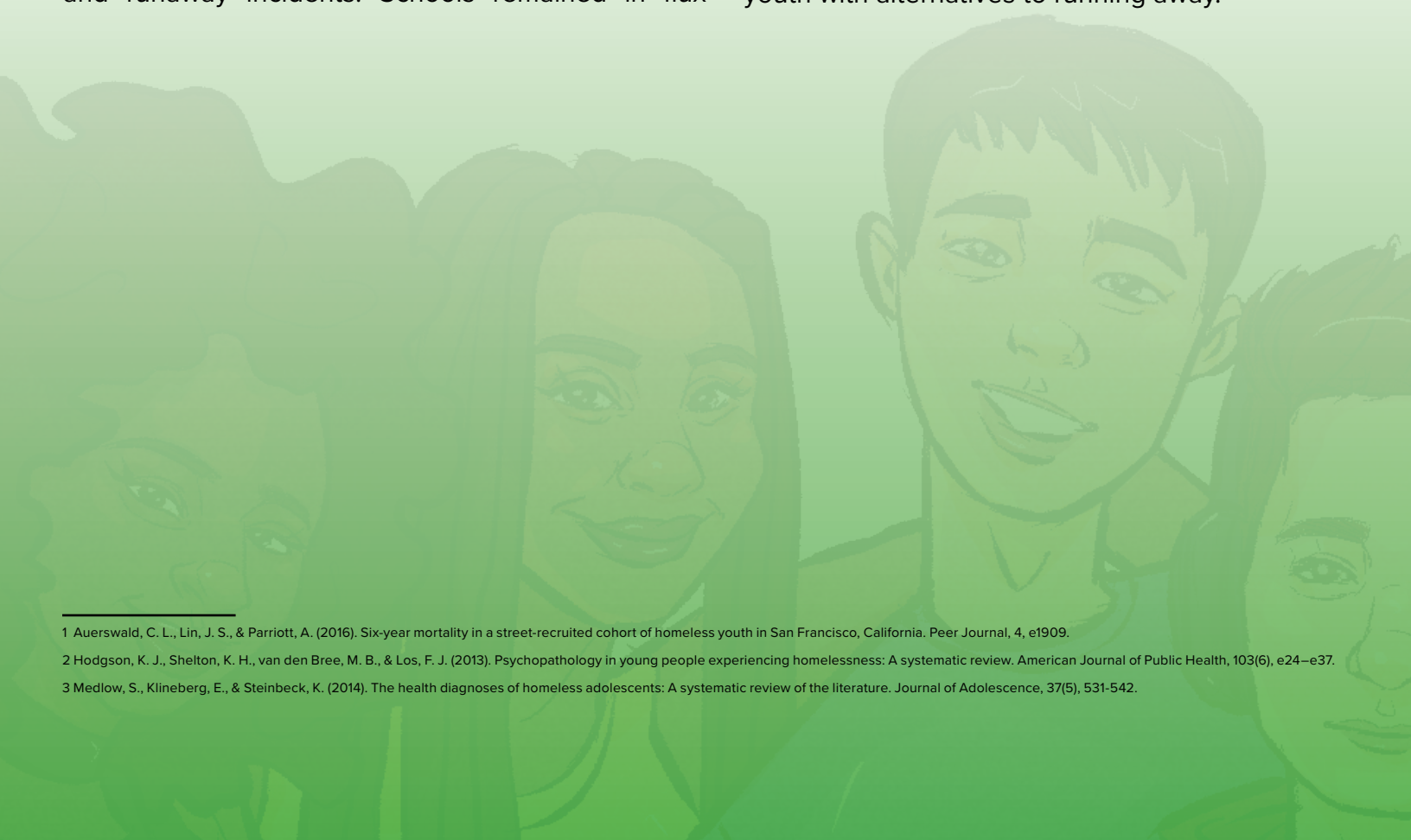
The ongoing impact and subsequent long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly increased risks for youth in crisis, youth homelessness, and runaway incidents. Schools remained in flux

throughout much of 2021 with some of the largest school districts in the country remaining virtual throughout much of the year. This, coupled with ongoing changes to the capacity of available resources, led to a reduction in access to afterschool activities, sports and other needed support systems and services for young people. It also reduced access to informal supports that young people utilize throughout the school day (i.e. teachers, coaches, mentors, etc.) who may be a listening ear or provide help when needed. Without these available systems, young people struggle and more often may turn to staying on the streets or other unsafe places. Overwhelmed by such adversities, young people may run away as a coping mechanism to deal with these situations. These youth may be unaware of resources or support services available to help them navigate their challenges; therefore, running away may seem to be their best option. It is critical to assist them in exploring and recognizing options and resources in times of need, and to provide these youth with alternatives to running away.

1 Auerswald, C. L., Lin, J. S., & Parriott, A. (2016). Six-year mortality in a street-recruited cohort of homeless youth in San Francisco, California. *Peer Journal*, 4, e1909.

2 Hodgson, K. J., Shelton, K. H., van den Bree, M. B., & Los, F. J. (2013). Psychopathology in young people experiencing homelessness: A systematic review. *American Journal of Public Health*, 103(6), e24–e37.

3 Medlow, S., Klineberg, E., & Steinbeck, K. (2014). The health diagnoses of homeless adolescents: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Adolescence*, 37(5), 531-542.





# NATIONAL RUNAWAY SAFELINE SERVICES

The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) has worked for over 50 years to help keep youth experiencing crisis, at risk of homelessness or facing unsafe alternatives safe and off the streets. In collaboration with the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), NRS serves as the federally designated national communication system in the United States for youth ages 12 to 21 who are contemplating running away, have run away and are experiencing instability, or are at-risk of experiencing homelessness.

NRS offers crisis services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to youth and families via the 1-800-RUNAWAY hotline and at 1800RUNAWAY.org, offering live chat, email, forum and texting services. Contacts connect with trained staff and volunteers who offer non-judgmental and non-directive support, provide connections to resources, such as shelters and mental health services, and help young people resolve their crises and reach safety. In this capacity, NRS connects with over 125,000 youth annually.

Key services and programs available to crisis contacts include: a messaging service, offering a means of indirect communication between youth and family members as a first step towards reconciliation; conference calls, where NRS representatives advocate for a young person in direct conversation with family members; and the Home Free program, provided in partnership with Greyhound Lines, Inc., helping youth return home or to an alternative safe living arrangement through a free bus ticket. Finally, NRS offers a referral database of approximately 6,500 shelters, counselors, treatment centers and other organizations in local communities across the country, helping youth and families receive the support they need to resolve their conflict.

In addition, NRS supports young people, adults, educators and service providers with valuable tools to prevent youth homelessness and runaway incidents. These include: the *Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum*, a 14-module, interactive curriculum that helps young people build life skills, learn about runaway resources and prevention, provides safe alternatives to running away, and encourages youth to seek help from trusted community members; National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM), a month-long public awareness campaign that takes place each November, designed to shine a light on the experiences of youth who have run away and experienced homelessness, while also spotlighting resources available to support youth in crisis; webinars and trainings, which cover a range of topics that educate and support service providers and families; and free educational materials, available in hard copy or digitally for distribution in schools, shelters, libraries, and other locations in local communities.

This report analyzes the voluntarily reported data from NRS crisis contacts throughout calendar year 2021. The report aims to highlight the demographics of those who reached out for support, the nature of the crises experienced by contacts, and the resources provided by the NRS crisis services team. Additionally, the report reflects on the shifts in data since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and considers ways in which NRS has responded to these data in its crisis services, prevention efforts, training opportunities, and organizational capacity. Ultimately, these data and NRS' actions may serve as valuable learning tools and resources for youth-serving organizations across the United States, allowing service providers to apply this information to better serve, advocate for, and reach out to youth placed at-risk in their own communities.



# ONGOING CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the shutdown of states across the country as well as access to support systems, resources and services often used by young people experiencing crisis. As a result, most youth could no longer attend school and many parents were left unemployed or underemployed. After the widespread rollout of vaccines in 2021, many people resumed the lives they led before the pandemic began – returning to school and work in person, spending time with people outside of their immediate household, and resuming more traditional after school and summer activities such as sports, music, clubs, etc.

At the height of the pandemic, studies showed that

youth and young adults experienced a significant need for resources and support, as demonstrated by an increase in call volume between 2019 and 2020 to the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline<sup>4</sup> and self-reported challenges affording food and rent<sup>5</sup>. The study of young adults found that these challenges were higher for Black and Hispanic young adults as compared with white young adults. These findings point to considerable challenges that young people faced both with their families and on their own during the first waves of the pandemic. However, less is known about how young people have fared as waves of the pandemic continued through 2021. This report highlights select trends for youth and families from 2019 through 2021.

## DATA ANALYSIS

NRS uses one data collection form to capture relevant information disclosed during calls, emails, and forum posts and uses a separate data collection form to capture information from chats. NRS does not use a survey or interview tool to collect standardized data from crisis intervention contacts. Instead, NRS collects information that contacts voluntarily self-report in the context of crisis intervention exchanges. NRS staff and volunteers gather information from calls, emails, chats, and forum posts, with information reported varying based on what individuals choose to share. As a result, the percentages drawn in tables and figures throughout this report are based on the number of

individuals (N) who chose to provide information on each data point, with the amount of missing data ranging from 0% to 89% across the data points analyzed.

In 2021, NRS collected records for 35,601 contacts from hotline calls, emails, chats, and forum posts involving youth age 21 and under. This report's analysis includes records for 35,406 contacts, excluding 195 records for the following reasons: 97 cases had no data, 96 were labeled "pranks," and 2 did not have valid ID numbers.

<sup>4</sup> Ortiz, R., Kishton, R., & Sinko, L. (2021). Assessing child abuse hotline inquiries in the wake of COVID-19: Answering the call. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 175(8), 859-861.

<sup>5</sup> Morton, M. H., & Daniels, E. (2021). *Untold Stories: Young Adults and Racial Dimensions of COVID-19*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

## II. 2021 CRISIS SERVICES CONTACT REPORT

### WHO CONTACTS THE NATIONAL RUNAWAY SAFELINE

When individuals contact NRS for crisis services, they are asked to indicate if they are reaching out for themselves or on behalf of a young person. In 2021, 25,179 individuals reaching out to NRS through the 1-800-RUNAWAY hotline and the digital services offered through 1800RUNAWAY.org (live chat, email, and forum) provided their relationship to the youth in crisis (i.e., a youth, parent, relative, youth's friend).

Table 1 shows that most of those who contacted NRS were youth seeking help for themselves (79%). However, concerned individuals also reached out on behalf of youth, such as parents (7%), adults (6%), and friends (4%) among others, including relatives, agency representatives, and police or probation officers.

Table 1. Relationship to Youth (N = 25,179; missing n = 10,213, 29%)

Contact Relationship	N	%
Youth	19,899	79%
Parent	1,719	7%
Adult	1,463	6%
Youth's Friend	930	4%
Relative	744	3%
Agency	251	1%
Other	125	1%
Police	48	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,179</b>	<b>100%</b>

Due to rounding, the total percentage adds up to 101%

Many of those who connected with NRS in 2021 also shared information about their age, race/ethnicity, and gender identity. The majority of these contacts took place with youth under the age of 18 (65%).<sup>a</sup> Notably, less than half of these contacts (42%) occurred with 15 to 17 year-olds. About 3% of contacts were under the age of 12, 20% were ages 12-14, 17% were ages 18-21, and 18% were over the age of 22 (please see Table 2). Forty-six percent of crisis intervention contacts

who reported their race/ethnicity<sup>b</sup> were white/Caucasian. Twenty-five percent identified as Black/African American, 16% identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 7% identified as multiracial, 5% identified as Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander, and 1% identified as American Indian/Alaska native.

Of contacts who reported their gender identity,<sup>c</sup> females were more than twice as likely as males to reach out for support. Sixty-six percent of contacts identified as female, 23% identified as male, and 10% identified as transgender or non-binary.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Contacts

Contact Characteristics	N	%
<b>Age<sup>a</sup></b>		
Under 12	718	3%
12-14	4,648	20%
15-17	9,860	42%
18-21	3,866	17%
22+	4,292	18%
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>b</sup></b>		
American Indian/Alaska Native	219	1%
Asian, Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	837	5%
Black/African American	4,270	25%
Hispanic/Latinx	2,706	16%
Multiracial	1,241	7%
White/Caucasian	7,868	46%
<b>Gender Identity<sup>c</sup></b>		
Female	13,793	66%
Male	4,896	23%
Transgender/Non-binary	2,179	10%

a Age: N = 23,384; missing n = 12,022, 34%

b Race/ethnicity: N = 17,141; missing n = 18,265, 52%

c Gender identity: N = 20,868; missing n = 14,538, 41% (Due to rounding, the total percentage adds up to 99%)

# HOW DO CONTACTS REACH THE NATIONAL RUNAWAY SAFELINE

NRS' crisis services offer four methods of contact, including hotline, live chat, email, and forum posts. In 2021, the most common forms of contact were the chat service (60%) and hotline calls (29%), accounting for nearly 90% of all crisis intervention connections. Twelve percent of contacts connected with NRS via online forum posts (7%) or email (5%, please see Table 3). Notably, while there were a total of 2,385 forum posts in 2021, over 226,000 people visited the forum throughout the year, suggesting that many individuals may have used posts already available to answer questions and address crises without adding new posts of their own.

Table 3. Method of Contact (N = 35,406; missing n = 0, 0 %)

Method of Contact	N	%
Chat	21,109	60%
Hotline call	10,226	29%
Forum post	2,385	7%
Email	1,686	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35,406</b>	<b>100%</b>

Due to rounding, the total percentage adds up to 101%

Most contacts (82%) learned about NRS through the internet and social media platforms, highlighting the importance of NRS targeting outreach, advertising, and awareness campaigns through digital sources, including social media. Five percent of contacts learned about NRS through word of mouth, and 2% were following up from a previous call (please see Table 4).

Table 4. How Contacts Learned of NRS (N = 29,079; missing n = 6,327, 18%)

How Contacts Learned of NRS	N	%
Internet	23,919	82%
Word of mouth	1,584	5%
NRS promotional material	590	2%
Previous call	668	2%
Social service agency	664	2%
School	594	2%
Public service announcement	492	2%
Law enforcement	209	1%
NRS partner organization	189	1%
NRS runaway prevention curriculum	100	<1%
Directory service	70	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,079</b>	<b>100%</b>



# WHY DO CONTACTS REACH THE NATIONAL RUNAWAY SAFELINE

Young people in crisis, contemplating running away, or experiencing or at risk of homelessness face numerous challenges, which may lead them to reach out to NRS for support. In 2021, crisis contacts typically reported one or more “presenting problems,” or reasons for seeking crisis intervention services, with more than three-quarters of contacts reporting at least one presenting problem. By far, the most common presenting problem was family dynamics (85%), including conflict with rules, problems with parents or siblings, blended family, divorce or custody issues, death of a family member, or teen parenting. Other common presenting problems were emotional abuse (32%), mental health problems (28%), and peer/social issues (24%), including problems with friends, internet relationships, gang or cult involvement, sexual activity, relationship problems, and independence (please see Table 5).

**Table 5. Reasons for Crisis Intervention (N = 23,583; missing n = 11,823, 33% missing)**

Reasons for Crisis Intervention	N	%
Family dynamics	20,066	85%
Emotional abuse	7,454	32%
Mental health	6,554	28%
Peer/social	5,622	24%
Physical abuse	4,405	19%
Economics	4,092	17%
Neglect	2,827	12%
School/education	2,072	9%
Youth/family	1,710	7%
Transportation	1,682	7%
LGBTQ issues	1,590	7%
Alcohol/substance use	1,204	5%
Sexual abuse	853	4%
Judicial system	851	4%
Health	542	2%
Exploitation	159	1%

**Note:** Because these categories were not mutually exclusive and contacts could report multiple presenting problems, a total N is not included in this table.

Despite the potentially overwhelming problems faced by youth reaching out to NRS for crisis services, about half of those who reached out to NRS (51%) did so from home, providing an opportunity for de-escalation of a crisis prior to leaving home in the first place. Contacts reported that youth who were not at home were primarily staying with a friend (9%, please see Table 6).

**Table 6. Youth's Location at Time of Contact (N = 21,805; missing n = 13,601, 38%)**

Youth's Location	N	%
Home	11,015	51%
Unknown to NRS staff/volunteers	4,002	18%
Friend	1,962	9%
Street/payphone	1,335	6%
Unknown to caller	1,011	5%
Relative	883	4%
Other	670	3%
Shelter	292	1%
School	225	1%
Recent acquaintance	165	1%
Detention/police	90	<1%
Greyhound	107	<1%
Work	43	<1%
Pimp/dealer	5	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,805</b>	<b>100%</b>

In addition, nearly three-quarters of 2021 crisis intervention contacts involved youth who had not yet run away or been asked to leave, this included 45% of youth who were in crisis and 31% of youth who were contemplating running away. Thirteen percent had already run away, 7% were experiencing homelessness, 3% had been asked to leave, and less than 1% were suspected to be missing (please see Table 7).

Table 7. Youth's Crisis Status at Time of Contact (N = 23,133; missing n = 12,273, 35%)

Youth's Crisis Status	N	%
Youth in crisis	10,455	45%
Contemplating running	7,252	31%
Runaway	3,077	13%
Homeless	1,662	7%
Kicked out/asked to leave	599	3%
Suspected missing	88	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,133</b>	<b>100%</b>

These figures indicate the importance and impact of the services offered by NRS. While home may not always be the best or safest option for youth facing challenges, about half of youth who connect with NRS seek support prior to running away or experiencing some form of homelessness. Just as NRS offers resources and referrals to support youth who are experiencing homelessness, this data highlights the importance of increasing the visibility and distribution of NRS' prevention and education tools to ensure that youth seek support from NRS when experiencing a crisis and hopefully avoid the dangers and risks associated with running away or homelessness.

A relatively small number of total crisis contacts (11%) indicated how the youth was surviving while experiencing homelessness. The majority, 86%, reported that friends and family networks were the primary modes of survival, while 13% survived through personal funds, and another 7% relied on shelters (please see Table 8).

Table 8. How Youth Survived While Homeless (N = 3,859, missing n = 31,565, 89%)

How Youth Survived While Homeless	N	%
Friends/relatives	3,294	86%
Personal funds	528	13%
Shelter	273	7%
Employment	175	5%
Survival sex	50	1%
Detention/police	45	1%
Panhandling	38	1%
Sex industry	22	1%
Selling drugs	18	<1%
Stealing	9	<1%

**Note:** Because these categories were not mutually exclusive and contacts could report multiple means of survival, a total N is not included in this table.

# RESOURCES & OUTCOMES

## REFERRALS

The primary goal of NRS' intervention services is to support youth who may be experiencing a crisis, along with those who care for them. After assessing the reasons for reaching out to NRS and the nature of the crisis, NRS crisis services staff and volunteers discuss services and resources that contacts might pursue to resolve the issues at hand. This solutions-focused approach led to 69% of crisis intervention contacts discussing options for referrals or next steps, with many contacts discussing multiple referral options (please see Table 9).

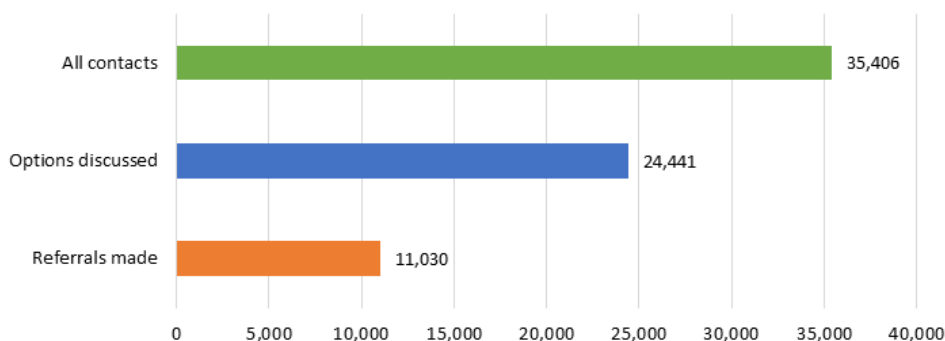
NRS staff and volunteers recommended additional NRS services for nearly all crisis intervention contacts who were interested in learning about referral options (97%). This included the NRS message service, conference calls, and the Home Free program. Other referral options discussed with crisis intervention contacts included family (43%), police (36%), and friends (36%). Of the 35,406 total crisis intervention contacts in 2021, 31% ultimately obtained referrals (please see Figure 1).

**Table 9. Referral Options that Contacts Discussed with NRS Staff and Volunteers (N = 24,441; missing n = 10,965, 31%)**

Referral Options	N	%
NRS services	23,615	97%
Family	10,529	43%
Police	8,889	36%
Friend	8,708	36%
Alternate youth housing	7,857	32%
Social services	5,492	22%
Child abuse reporting	5,120	21%
Adult	4,785	20%
Self help	3,336	14%
Mental health professional	3,303	14%
Transitional living program	3,497	14%
School personnel	3,107	13%
Legal services	3,274	13%
Home Free	1,573	6%
Social worker	1,109	5%
Missing children number	583	2%
Health professional	515	2%
211 United Way	507	2%
Juvenile court	479	2%
Religious organizations	250	1%
Transportation	75	<1%

**Note:** Because these categories were not mutually exclusive and contacts could report multiple referral options, a total N is not included in this table.

**Figure 1. Referral Options Discussed and Obtained**



## HOME FREE

One referral option referenced above is the Home Free program. This service, offered by NRS in partnership with Greyhound Lines, Inc., offers youth who have run away or are experiencing homelessness a free bus ticket to return home or to a safe alternative living arrangement. In 2021, NRS made 1,573 referrals to Home Free. Of those referrals, 686 individuals started the process to use the Home Free program, resulting in 238 bus tickets issued. Additionally, 10 tickets for parents/guardians were issued through the Home Free program.

While NRS and Greyhound aim to provide as many tickets as possible to youth in need, there are several reasons why requests do not always result in a ticket being issued, including: situations in which youth and their families do not agree on reunification; youth and/or family members do not call back to complete the ticketing process; youth do not have a safe location identified to which they would travel; youth and/or families find alternative transportation; or transportation is not available in a particular location.

Table 10. Home Free Referrals, Uptake, and Outcomes

Referral Options	N
NRS referrals to Home Free	1,573
Contacts in Home Free form	686
Youth had Home Free itinerary	238
Parent/guardian tickets issued	10



# HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONTINUED TO INFLUENCE CONTACTS' NEEDS

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on how people have been living over the past two years, with a return to pre-pandemic life for many being slow and uneven. Understanding how young people and their families used NRS' services in 2021 illuminates the challenges youth and families have continued to face during new waves of the pandemic and shifts in the social and economic environments.

This report does not contain a trend analysis, so it is uncertain whether changes in youth's and families' use of NRS' services between 2019 and 2021 are due to the pandemic or potentially other explanations or a combination of reasons. However, the data

highlights several noteworthy shifts in the nature of crisis contacts since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic: contacts under age 15 are the fastest growing age group served by NRS; underserved populations, especially Black/African American and transgender/non-binary youth are reaching out in greater numbers; and mental health continues to rise dramatically as a reason for reaching out to NRS.

Below, we highlight these and other notable differences in the use of NRS' services between 2019 and 2021 based on data voluntarily reported by crisis contacts.

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The number of contacts under the age of 15 increased from 3,500 in 2019 to 5,366 in 2021, an increase of 53%. Within this figure, contacts specifically under the age of 12 increased from 284 in 2019 to 718 in 2021, an exponential increase of 153%. Overall, this indicates that youth between the ages of 12 and 14 is NRS' fastest growing population of contacts, with an alarming increase in youth reaching out under the age of 12.

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In 2019, 933 contacts identified as transgender or non-binary, compared with 1,537 in 2020 and 2,179 in 2021, an increase of 134% between 2019 and 2021.

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In 2019, 2,909 contacts identified as Black or African American, compared with 3,446 in 2020 and 4,270 in 2021, an increase of 47% between 2019 and 2021.

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The number of contacts using the chat service increased from 16,361 in 2019 to 18,956 in 2020 and 21,109 in 2021, an increase of 29% since 2019. Over the same period, the number of contacts that came through the hotline, posted on the forum, and emailed all slightly decreased.

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In 2019, 4,690 contacts reported mental health as a reason for crisis intervention, compared to 6,099 contacts in 2020 and 6,554 in 2021, an increase of 40%.

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The percentage of contacts citing family dynamics, emotional abuse, and physical abuse as reasons for crisis intervention also increased from 2019 to 2020 and remained elevated in 2021. From 2019 to 2021, family dynamics rose from 57% to 85%, emotional abuse rose from 20% to 32%, and physical abuse rose from 12% to 24%.

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The number of contacts reporting economics as a reason for crisis intervention also increased from 3,251 in 2019 to 3,444 in 2020 and 4,092 in 2021, an increase of 26%.

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The number of youth residing at home at the time of contact increased from 10,986 in 2019 to 13,925 in 2020 and then decreased to 11,015 in 2021, for no net change between 2019 and 2021. While this arc aligns with the broad nature of COVID restrictions across the country, the 2021 figure falls below the rate of youth reaching out from home in 2018, well prior to the beginning of the pandemic.



# HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONTINUED TO INFLUENCE NRS' SERVICES

Together, these findings highlight differences before and during the pandemic in how contacts reached out to NRS, what challenges became more prevalent, and how NRS staff and volunteers supported youth who experienced or were at risk of experiencing homelessness. These trends have had a significant impact on the operations and priorities of NRS, most notably on strategies implemented by NRS to most effectively reach young people, as well as the organization's focus on prevention and education.

As referenced above, NRS has seen a dramatic increase in youth under age 15 reaching out for support, with a particular rise in youth under age 12, highlighting the need to expand the focus on resources and services for this age group. Based on NRS' target audience being youth ages 12-21, the organization has responded by investing in additional research and training for crisis services staff and volunteers on this younger age group and incorporating developmentally appropriate crisis intervention strategies to more effectively communicate and meet their needs. As more traditional service referrals for this population are limited or may not be appropriate, NRS has also begun exploring alternative resources and tools to most effectively serve youth under 12.

Crisis contacts also continue to diversify. Youth who identify as transgender and non-binary are reaching out in higher numbers than ever, and for the first time, in 2021, a majority of contacts identified as races/ethnicities other than white/Caucasian. NRS has remained steadfastly committed to expanding its outreach and engagement amongst diverse communities with an intentional focus on youth of color, youth who identify as LGBTQIA2S+ and youth from more underserved or marginalized areas of the U.S. NRS's work has incorporated updating and

enhancing messaging, developing and varying content that utilizes language that appeals to different audiences, genders and age groups, including feedback from youth with lived experience, expanding training for the crisis services team, and adapting NRS's crisis services model to ensure the organization is addressing these identified needs. NRS has also continued to adjust how it reaches out to young people, with the goal of most effectively meeting youth, especially those from underserved populations, where they are, namely online.

NRS will continue to prioritize work in this arena, fully recognizing its commitment to an overarching goal of ensuring that their crisis services and prevention resources are meeting the needs of all young people who are reaching out for support. Additionally, NRS will expand its collaboration with young people for the development of resources, enhancing services delivery, and fostering partnerships with diverse groups, organizations, and systems who are also committed to this same work.

The report also shows that many youth are learning about and reaching out to NRS via digital platforms. In an effort to meet youth where they are, NRS has focused on communicating and disseminating valuable information with young people via digital content. Messages highlighting the organization's services, providing valuable statistics, and connecting young people to key resources have been adjusted to address the challenges impacting youth people, such as mental health. NRS also varies its messaging to most effectively target key audiences on different platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (@1800RUNAWAY). NRS has also expanded its social media presence to include Snapchat and

TikTok (@nationalrunawaysafeline), platforms, which have become increasingly popular among younger age groups.

In addition, while the percentage of youth reaching out from home declined from 2020 to 2021 in a manner consistent with the loosening of restrictions experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of crisis contacts continued to reach out to NRS from home, highlighting the opportunity to prevent runaway incidents and episodes of homelessness prior to youth leaving home or running away. To expand and promote opportunities for prevention, NRS promotes its *Let's Talk: Runaway Prevention Curriculum*, which was recently updated and modernized to more effectively reach youth from a broad spectrum of audiences. The voice of youth with lived experience is a critical element when trying to increase awareness and prevention about the NRS's services. Young people's voices have been integrated throughout NRS' services and outreach to young people. For example, the NRS Youth Advisory Board actively participates in public and national events, adding their perspectives as youth with lived experience of housing instability, to elevate the national discussion about the impact of runaway incidents and homelessness among young people nationwide.

Finally, the sharp rise in crisis contacts reaching out related to mental health challenges has been a key area of focus for NRS. While mental health fell outside the organization's top 10 reasons for outreach for decades, it has risen consistently in recent years, becoming the third most common reason cited in crisis contacts in 2021. NRS is committed to increasing the number of resources and partners available across the country to support young people who face mental health crises, and to focus on expanding and building internal capacity to effectively support youth, as well as, increasing the conversation across communities about the links between running away, youth homelessness, and mental health.

NRS looks forward to continuing to be a national leader and resource, providing crisis services and prevention tools to youth, families, service providers and educators who support youth who run away or are experiencing homelessness in our communities. NRS remains steadfastly committed to reaching all youth, especially those from underserved and underrepresented populations.





# III. 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

## REPORT SUMMARY

79% of contacts were youth who connected directly with NRS on their own behalf

Two-thirds of contacts were under the age of 18

60% of contacts used NRS’ chat feature and 29% called the hotline

The most frequently reported reasons for seeking crisis interventions were family dynamics (85% of contacts), emotional abuse (32%), and mental health (28%)


At the time of outreach, contacts said that 51% of youth were still at home


Contacts reported that 45% of youth were in crisis and 31% were contemplating running away

69% of contacts discussed referral options with NRS crisis services staff and volunteers

31% of contacts received at least one referral for additional services

## 2021 BY THE NUMBERS

 21,109 crisis chats

 10,226 hotline calls

 2,385 forum posts

 1,686 crisis emails

 11,030 contacts accepted referrals

 238 Home Free tickets issued



The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) is a national non-profit organization committed to ensuring that runaway, homeless and at-risk youth are safe and off the streets.

Founded in 1971, NRS serves as the home for the federally supported National Communication System (NCS) and crisis line for youth and families, providing critical crisis intervention 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Each year, NRS makes hundreds of thousands of connections to help and hope through hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY), online ([1800RUNAWAY.org](https://www.1800RUNAWAY.org)) and prevention services.

For additional information, visit [www.1800RUNAWAY.org](https://www.1800RUNAWAY.org) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) @1800RUNAWAY or on TikTok @[nationalrunawaysafeline](#).

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Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center at the University of Chicago that provides public and private decision-makers with rigorous research and achievable solutions to support them in improving the lives of children and families.

Chapin Hall partners with policy makers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real-world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and ultimately, positive change for children and families.

Established in 1985, Chapin Hall's areas of research include child welfare systems, community capacity to support children and families, and youth homelessness. For more information about Chapin Hall, visit [www.chapinhall.org](https://www.chapinhall.org).

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The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) supports organizations and communities that work to end youth homelessness, adolescent pregnancy and domestic violence.

FYSB envisions a future in which all our nation's youth, individuals and families — no matter what challenges they may face — can live healthy, productive, violence-free lives. For more information about the Family and Youth Services Bureau, visit: [www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb).





**National  
Runaway  
Safeline**®