



**NATIONAL  
RUNAWAY  
PREVENTION  
MONTH**

# **YOUTH AMBASSADOR TOOLKIT** **20 23**

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



**FYSB** Family & Youth  
Services Bureau

# Letter from the NRS Youth Advisory Board



## Hey there!

Every November, we recognize **National Runaway Prevention Month (NRPM)** to raise awareness and amplify the voices of the 4.2 million young people who experience some sort of homelessness in the United States each year.<sup>1</sup> While living on the streets or in their car, staying in shelters, or couch surfing, these young people may struggle to afford food, care for their mental and physical health, attend and complete school, and avoid dangerous and violent situations. Additionally, youth experiencing homelessness are at an increased risk of physical and sexual abuse, substance use, and premature death.

**We need to do all that we can to support youth in crisis and help prevent youth homelessness. Getting involved with NRPM 2023 as a Youth Ambassador is a great place to start!**

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 children safer. The conference culminated in the launch of National Runaway Prevention Week, which has since been expanded into a month-long campaign.

The National Runaway Safeline's (NRS) mission is to keep runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. As members of the NRS Youth Advisory Board, we work closely with the NRS staff, providing our perspectives on the organization's work and ways to further elevate the national discussion about the impact of runaway incidents and homelessness among young people.

With the support of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and hundreds of community partners across the country, we invite YOU to become a **National Runaway Prevention Month Youth Ambassador**.

Consider using your voice as an **NRPM Youth Ambassador** to educate others, support your peers, motivate people to action, and complete acts of service that directly impact youth who are considering running away or have run away and are experiencing homelessness.

**If you haven't already, please sign up as an official Youth Ambassador by filling out the form at [1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM-youth](http://1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM-youth).**

The following pages of this toolkit contain in-depth information to help you plan and implement an 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*

1. 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)

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

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

Young people who do not have a safe, stable living environment are considered homeless. Youth experiencing homelessness may couch surf, bounce between relatives and friends, stay with their family in a hotel or motel, live in shelters or stay on the streets.

## Who is at the greatest risk of experiencing homelessness?

Black and Hispanic youth are at the greatest risk, and they spend longer periods of time homeless than their White, non-Hispanic counterparts, increasing their risk of re-entering homelessness after exiting.

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

- Family conflict and family dynamics
- Asked to leave home or kicked out by their parent or guardian
- Verbal, emotional, and/or physical abuse
- Neglect
- Peer/social issues
- Problems at school
- Financial challenges at home

Find more information about the complex issue of youth homelessness, as well as infographics, in the NRPM Social Media Toolkit, available [here](#).

# ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF AND OTHERS



**Advocacy** involves speaking up, raising awareness, and influencing others to take action or make changes to address a specific problem (like youth homelessness!) or advance a particular agenda. In support of National Runaway Prevention Month, be an advocate and start conversations about the realities that young people experiencing homelessness are facing. Check out the messaging guide in the Social Media Toolkit for information that will help get those conversations started.

By increasing the dialogue around youth homelessness, you are helping to reduce stigma and show your support for young people who are living on the streets, couch surfing, or staying in shelters.

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 about what's involved and the potential consequences. Before you make any difficult decisions, consider what it would be like on your own. Where would you stay, how would you continue attending school, and what would you do for money? Are there ways to 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 via a confidential hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY) and online crisis services (1800RUNAWAY.org), including live chat, email, and forum. **There's no pressure, no judgement, just support for those who reach out for help.**

If a friend is considering running away, ask them the same questions. 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 or a trusted adult. While it might sound surprising, being a good friend is an important way to help prevent someone you care about from experiencing homelessness.



# You've Become an NRPM Youth Ambassador. Now What?



The role of an NRPM Youth Ambassador is an important one: engage and educate people about youth homelessness in creative, fun ways.

And now that you've signed up as a Youth Ambassador at [1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM-youth](https://1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM-youth), you will periodically receive NRPM updates, information, and resources, and you can access our Social Media Toolkit containing tips on how to tell the NRPM story on your feeds.

With these updates, the Social Media Toolkit and the ideas detailed on the following pages, you're ready to plan National Runaway Prevention Month activities in your own community. We can't wait to see and hear about your efforts!

## National Events

NRPM 2022 was supported by more than 200 partner organizations and 25 Youth Ambassadors who participated in national events organized by NRS and executed their own creative events and activities locally. We encourage you to participate in any or all of this year's national events and to spread the word to your friends and family about these opportunities.

### NOVEMBER 1 SOCIAL MEDIA KICK-OFF

Kick off National Runaway Prevention Month by posting on social media! We have provided several assets to make raising awareness easy and fun. Find sample messaging and graphics, and valuable tips in our Social Media Toolkit, which you can download [here](#). And of course, remember to use the hashtag [#NRPM2023](#) when posting.

### NOVEMBER 2 NATIONAL RESOURCE DAY

Throughout the day, use social media to spotlight critical resources in your own communities, showing youth and families how they can access help. Consider volunteering at a shelter or are familiar with food pantries in your city; share information about these organizations and their services on social media to help increase awareness. Use the hashtag [#NRPM2023](#), and NRS may highlight what you share.

### NOVEMBER 6–10 EDUCATION WEEK

All week, the National Runaway Safeline leads an online educational series to inform the public about runaway and homeless youth issues. Focusing on a unique theme each day, such as mental health and health care access, we post statistics, explore existing issues, offer resources, and touch upon the challenges of navigating different systems.

Connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [TikTok](#) ahead of time to join the conversation.



# You've Become an NRPM Youth Ambassador. Now What?

Continued



## NOVEMBER 16 WEAR GREEN DAY

Dress in green to show your support for NRPM and then snap your photo for posting on social media. Have fun with it - spark a friendly competition among friends at school or on your sports team, invite local elected officials or the staff at your public library or favorite local coffee shop to dress head to toe in green, paint your nails green, and dress your pets in your favorite shade of green. The more creative, the greater the impact!

When posting, include a caption about your commitment to youth who have run away or are experiencing homelessness. And be sure to use the hashtags #NRPM2023, #youthadvocates, #youthactivism, #youthhomelessness.

## NOVEMBER 17 LIGHT THE NIGHT COMMUNITY EVENTS

NRPM partner organizations across the country host Light the Night community events to raise awareness of youth homelessness and engage individuals and communities in efforts to support youth who are considering running away or are experiencing housing instability.

Previous events have included resource fairs, sleep outs, candlelight ceremonies, open mic nights, walks, and more. Be on the lookout in your community for these events — and consider helping to plan the event and be sure to attend!

## NOVEMBER 21 LIVE CHAT ON INSTAGRAM & THREADS

The National Runaway Safeline will host a Live Chat on Instagram and Threads at 3:00 PM ET / 2:00 PM CT to discuss a range of topics related to youth homelessness. Follow along and participate @1800RUNAWAY and use the hashtag #NRPMChat. Registered participants will receive Chat questions in advance.

## TBD NRPM LUNCH AND LEARNS

The National Runaway Safeline will host three virtual Lunch and Learns covering topics related to runaway and homeless youth. In previous years, NRS staff have been joined by experts to discuss the intersection of mental health and youth homelessness, new data reports, and other interesting and timely topics. Lunch and Learn dates, topics and speakers will be announced as soon as possible. Please visit [1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM](https://1800RUNAWAY.org/NRPM) to find the latest details and registration information.



# You've Become an NRPM Youth Ambassador. Now What?

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## Additional Awareness-Building Ideas: Events, Activities & Resources

We've provided some tried-and-true event ideas below. Feel free to run with any or all of these – or develop your own activities that your friends and family will enjoy and will present educational opportunities.

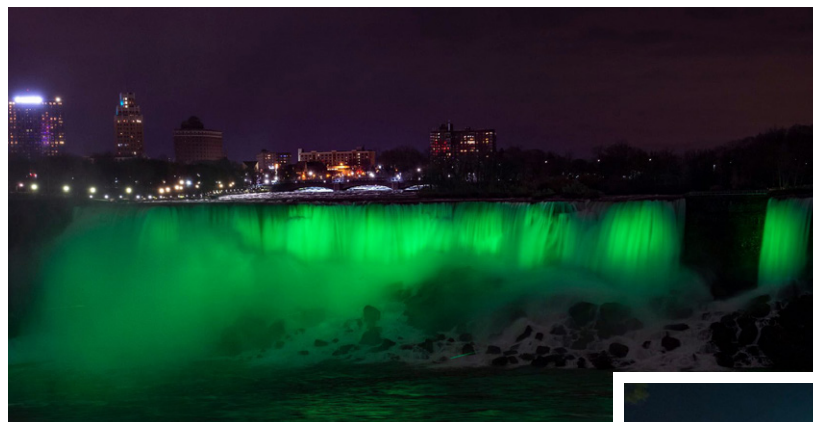
### GREEN LIGHT PROJECT

During NRPM, partners and Youth Ambassadors support the Green Light Project, a coordinated nationwide effort to illuminate landmarks – public spaces, monuments, bridges, stadiums, and buildings – in green as symbols of support and beacons of hope. These lightings provide excellent visuals for sharing on social media.

While there are usually no fees associated with illuminating a public space or building a specific color, these requests often need to be made months in advance of the date(s) you want the lights turned on. Search online to determine which local buildings are equipped to light up in a specific color, who you should contact and what the process is.

Another “bright” idea? Swap out regular light bulbs for green ones (available online or at most hardware stores) at home or offer the green bulbs to stores, local libraries, and other businesses.

Let us know about your Green Light Project plans. NRS can help spread the word by publicizing your lighting activities on social media.



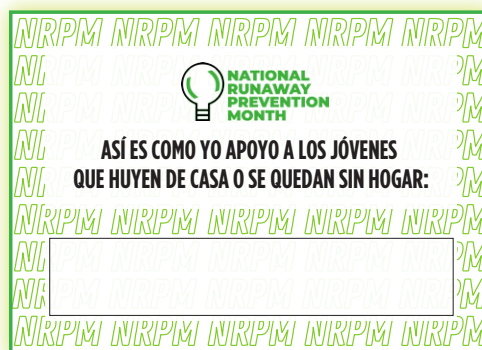
# You've Become an NRPM Youth Ambassador. Now What?

Continued



## COMMITMENT CARDS

Show your support for ending youth homelessness by completing a commitment card (download them here) and posting a photo of it on social media. Or record a short video explaining to friends and followers how you plan to support runaway and homeless youth. Use the hashtag #NRPM2023 in your post.

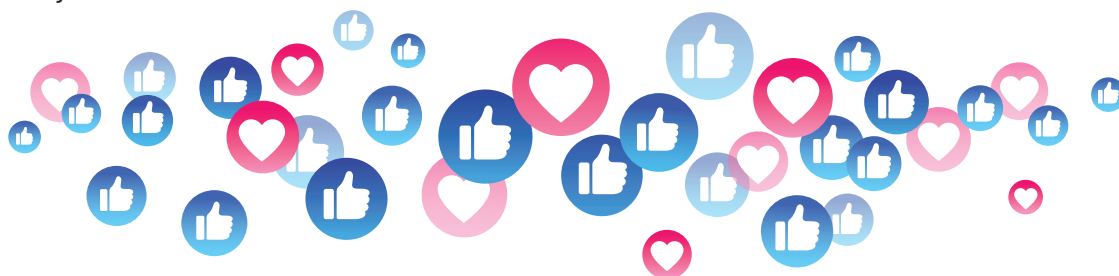


Want to make a bigger splash with commitment cards? A wall displaying commitment cards at your school, library, workplace, or another popular location makes a big statement! Ask friends, classmates, teammates, relatives, and others to complete a commitment card and then hang the collection in a high-traffic area, such as an entryway or on a window facing the street. Be sure to get any necessary approvals; for example, if you want to hang the cards in a school hallway, confirm with your teacher or principal that this will be allowed.

Commitment wall photos and video collages are powerful content on social media. Tag NRS @1800RUNAWAY and we may share your posts!

## INSTAGRAM LIVE AND TIKTOK Q&A

One of the easiest ways to connect with your own network – and get lots of engagement – is to use your social media to host live video chats! Stream a video about youth homelessness and your NRPM activities and allow followers to interact with you in real time on IG Live. Or use the question-and-answer feature on TikTok that gives you and your viewers new ways to connect. \*TikTok currently requires users have 10,000 follows to access the live feature. Partnering with a local organization to do this may also work.





# You've Become an NRPM Youth Ambassador. Now What?

Continued



## MOVIE NIGHT SCREENING AND Q&A

Gather up every blanket in the house, pop the popcorn and make sure there's plenty of candy, press play, and settle in for movie night! But before you get cozy, make sure you've handled all the event-related tasks and invited guests who are passionate about learning more about youth homelessness.

Here are some movie night (screening and Q&A) planning tips:

- STEP 1** Collaborate with a few friends to divide up responsibilities and ensure a good size audience. The group should discuss potential movies, possible dates, and times, how you'll spread the word and recruit attendees, and event logistics, such as where to host the screening/discussion (i.e., at someone's home, in a public park, or maybe a local theater).
- STEP 2** After you've confirmed the event details, spread the word. If you plan to show the movie at home or in a park and want to make it an invite-only event, then create an invitation and send it to friends and family. If your movie night will be held at a theater or community center and is open to the public, send an invitation to your network, and consider creating flyers and posting those throughout your community, at school, and other popular places.
- STEP 3** Post about the movie night on social media.
- STEP 4** Create discussion questions ahead of time and determine who will lead this part of the program. You might want to invite an expert from a local organization that works with youth experiencing homelessness. This person could speak about the issues and participate in the Q&A.

### 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.



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



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





## CARE PACKAGES

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

- 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.
- Raise money to purchase these 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.
- 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.
- Share a picture of your completed packages on social media and tag @1800RUNAWAY!

## TIP >

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



# You Did It!



We value our NRPM community of partner organizations and Youth Ambassadors and thank you for your efforts to support youth experiencing homelessness.

So . . . after the campaign wraps up, the National Runaway Safeline will host the NRPM Awards Ceremony and Celebration to recognize our collective success and the outstanding partners and Youth Ambassadors. Representatives from the Family and Youth Services Bureau and NRS will present awards, and each winner will speak about their organization (or themselves) and the NRPM activities they coordinated in November.

The December 2023 event will recognize the most creative and active NRPM participants, and we will present the following awards:

<p>★ <b>Outstanding Commitment</b> ★</p>	<p>★ <b>Greenest Team</b> ★</p>	<p>★ <b>Youth Ambassador</b> ★</p>	<p>★ <b>Media Master</b> ★</p>
<p>★ <b>Community Engagement</b> ★</p>	<p>★ <b>Youth Engagement</b> ★</p>	<p>★ <b>Social Media</b> ★</p>	<p>★ <b>“Shine a Light”</b> ★</p>

More details about the awards ceremony will be available in the coming months.

For questions about NRPM, please contact the National Runaway Safeline:

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## Who Can Help?

- **National Runaway Safeline (NRS)** - NRS is a nonprofit organization committed to ensuring that runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth are safe and off the streets. NRS' trained staff and volunteers provide free, confidential crisis services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Each year, NRS makes approximately 125,000 connections with young people and their families through the 1-800-RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929) hotline and online services crisis at 1800RUNAWAY.org, including chat, email, and forum. Click [here](#) to learn more.
  - **No Pressure. No Judgement. Just Support.**  
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 – TEXT – EMAIL – FORUM**
  - All information is kept **100% confidential**.
  - **Connect with us** on [TikTok](#) & [YouTube](#) @NationalRunawaySafeline
  - **Connect with us** on [Instagram](#), [Threads](#), [Facebook](#) & [LinkedIn](#) @1800RUNAWAY
- **love is respect** is a project of the National Domestic Violence Hotline. They offer 24/7 information, support, and advocacy to young people between the ages of 13 and 26 who have questions or concerns about their romantic relationships. love is respect also offers support to concerned friends and family members, teachers, counselors, and other service providers through the same free and confidential services via phone, text, and live chat. 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 **National Human Trafficking Hotline** helps 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 **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.
- **Safe Place** is a national youth outreach and prevention program operated by National Safe Place Network for young people under the age of 18 (up to 21 years of age in some communities) in need of immediate help and safety. As a collaborative community prevention initiative, Safe Place designates businesses and organizations as Safe Place locations, making help readily available to youth in communities across the country. Safe Place locations include: libraries, YMCAs, fire stations, public buses, various businesses, and social service facilities. Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Additional Resources

- **988/National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**  
Available 24/7 at 988.  
Live chat is available [here](#).
- **American Pregnancy Association – Teen Pregnancy Hotline**  
Call 1-800-672-2296.  
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.  
Find out more [here](#).
- **Trans Lifeline**  
Available 24/7 at 1-877-565-8860.  
Find out more [here](#).
- **Trevor Project (TrevorLifeline)**  
Available 24/7 at 1-866-488-7386.  
Also available through chat and text, find out more [here](#).