

Running away – the whys, the consequences

By Laura Salinas

Between 1.6 million and 2.8 million youth run away each year and even more contemplate running. What would lead teens to believe life is better on the streets than in their home? Factors that lead youth to run away are family conflict, sexual orientation, drug/alcohol related issues or escaping state care. For whatever reason youth choose to run away, life on the streets further exposes them to life threatening risks.

Youths under the age of 18 are at higher risk for homelessness than adults. Young people who have made the choice to leave their homes are at an elevated risk for pregnancy, suicide attempts, substance abuse, and participating in criminal activity.

Awareness and prevention is the best way to help the youth in our community from feeling that running is the best solution.

November is National Runaway Prevention Month. It is a public education campaign coordinated between the National Runaway Switchboard, Tahoe Youth & Family Services, and people in the community. The goal is to increase awareness of the issues facing runaways and to find solutions to prevent youth from running away.

When a youth runs away, the impact is felt throughout the entire community. Everyone is encouraged to participate in National Runaway Prevention Month. Working together to identify resources and to help youth develop life skills can make the difference between a youth running away or a youth finding needed resources. Youth and families need to know that there are options and alternatives to running away from home and living on the streets.

Tahoe Youth & Family Servicesâ€™ Drop-In Center is an excellent resource for runaway, homeless, throwaway and couch surfing youth in our community to get their basic necessities met. The Drop-In Center is a great place for youth to Get Recharged, Get Resources, and Get Respect. Staff at the Drop-In Center can assist youth with food, clothing, laundry services, showers, and hygiene kits, help looking for a job, a place to live, and obtaining proper identification.

For more information on the Drop-In Center or how you can help runaway youth in our community, please contact Tahoe Youth & Family Services' main offices at (530) 541.2445 in South Lake Tahoe, or (775) 782.4202 in Gardnerville. The Drop-In Center in South Lake Tahoe is open from 1-5pm Tuesday through Friday and 1-7pm on Saturdays. The Gardnerville Ranchos Drop In Center is open Tuesday-Friday 3-8pm and noon-8pm on Saturdays. (Both Drop In Centers are closed Sunday and Monday.)

Tahoe Youth & Family Servicesâ€™ 24-hour crisis line is (800) 870.TYFS (8937).

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