

Ways to help with runaway issues in Tahoe

By Nick Behney and Cheyanne Lane

What are the first thoughts that go through your mind when you see a youth on the streets? How did they get there, where are their parents, and are they safe? It's disturbing to realize that between 1.6 and 2.8 million youth run away annually. That's each year.



Most youth who run away do so because of threatening environments at home, such as physical/verbal abuse, substance abuse issues, questions of sexual orientation, or escaping state care. Unfortunately, by choosing to run away, they further subject themselves to threatening situations that impede their progress in life.

Youth who have chosen to run away are at an elevated risk of pregnancy, suicide attempts, substance abuse, sexual exploitation and participating in criminal activity.

November is National Runaway Prevention Month. It's a public education campaign coordinated between Tahoe Youth & Family Services, the National Runaway Switch Board, California Coalition for Youth, and other services agencies across the nation. The goal of National Runaway Prevention Month is to increase awareness of the issues surrounding youth who have run away, and help find ways to prevent youth from running away.

The best methods to avoid having our youth run away are first being aware of the causes, and then working on preventing youth from feeling like running away is their only choice.

Tahoe Youth & Family Services' Drop In Center is an excellent resource for youth who have run away, are homeless, throwaway or couch surfing. At the Drop-In Center, the staff can assist youth with food, clothing, socks, hygiene supplies, laundry services, showers, help looking for a job or filling out an application, obtaining proper identification, or we can simply be there to listen, which oftentimes is the most important part.

For more information about the resources, what the Drop In Center provides, or how to can help runaway youth in our community, contact Tahoe Youth & Family Services, South Lake Tahoe office at (530) 541.2445, or in Gardnerville at (775) 782.4202. 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 3-7pm and 2-7pm on Saturdays. Both Drop-In centers are closed Sunday and Monday. Tahoe Youth & Family Services' 24-hour crisis number is 800.870.8937.

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