

Opinion: Runaways often run into more problems

By 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 million 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, 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 that surround youth who have run away, and help find ways to prevent youth from running away. When a youth runs away, the impact is felt throughout the entire community.

All of us – individuals, local businesses, community groups, teachers, elected officials, and human service agencies – are encouraged to participate in National Runaway Prevention Month. If we work together to identify resources and to help

youth develop life skills, it can make the difference between a youth running away and a youth finding needed resources.

Prevention means assisting youth in discovering the delicate balance of life-saving skills.

Here are four things you can do to help prevent youth/teens from running away: 1.) Awareness: Teach them what it means to run away and why running away will not solve the problem; 2.) Resources: Teach them how to build a safety net of trusted people and organizations to turn to for help; 3.) Communication: Teach them how to speak and listen effectively; 4.) Stress Management: Teach them how to reduce or manage stressors and solve problems.

Tahoe Youth & Family Services' Drop In Centers are an excellent resource for youth who have run away, are homeless, throwaway or couch surfing. Our Drop In Center staff can assist youth with the following supportive services: food, clothing, socks, hygiene supplies, laundry services, showers, help looking for a job or filling out an application, obtaining proper identification.

We can also be there simply to listen, which often times is the most important part. The Drop In Center is a great place for youth to get recharged, resources and respect

For more information about our Drop In Centers, or how you can help runaway or homeless youth in our community, contact me (530) 541.2445, (775) 782.4202 or cheyanne@tahoeyouth.org.

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