



Home Free Program

The National Runaway Safeline (NRS), through a partnership with Greyhound Lines, Inc., administers the **Home Free Program**. Established in 1995, this program helps runaway, homeless, and exploited youth return home safely or get to a safe and stable place to stay where they can receive appropriate services. Provided below is a summary of the *Home Free Program*, including details about eligibility and restrictions as well as the application process a youth must follow to request the free transportation benefit. Runaway and homeless youth service providers; community and faith-based organizations; law enforcement; child welfare, health, and education professionals; along with other concerned and caring adults who come into contact with potentially eligible youth are encouraged to review the *Home Free Program* information.

The Issue

According to Voices of Youth Count, a recent study conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 1 in 10 young adults ages 18-25 and 1 in 30 youth ages 13-17 experience a form of homelessness over the course of a year. That's about 4.2 million young people every year! These homeless youth and young adults are at higher risks for exploitation, abuse, assault, and illness than those who are not homeless. Furthermore, according to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, youth who run away or experience homelessness are also at great risk from human traffickers. It's important that runaway and homeless youth and young victims of human trafficking get the opportunity to return home or find a safe place to stay where they can receive appropriate and tailored services.

Program Summary

The *Home Free Program* provides crisis intervention for youth with the goal of providing transportation to reunite runaway, homeless, or exploited youth with a parent, legal guardian, or an approved alternative living arrangement (ALA), such as a community-based transitional or independent living program.

In addition, the *Home Free Program* works in collaboration with youth, parents/legal guardians, law enforcement, anti-trafficking organizations, social service and health care providers, and others to ensure that youth who are victims of labor and sex trafficking benefit from uniting with caring and committed individuals and families or with a community-based transitional living program.

In 2017, 313 youth received *Home Free* bus tickets, including 19 youth who identified labor or sex trafficking as a factor contributing to their need for transportation assistance.

NRS is the sole organization that can issue a ticket through the Home Free Program.

Eligibility and Restrictions*

Youth must be between the ages of 12 and 21 and self-identify as homeless, runaway, or a victim of human trafficking. Youth must also agree to complete the necessary steps to obtain a ticket through the *Home Free Program*. On occasion, parents, guardians, or another adult family member designated by the parent or guardian may also receive a round-trip ticket to travel to the youth's location, so they can accompany the youth home.

- Youth under age 18 can only return to a parent or legal guardian, which may include a non-custodial parent, sibling age 21 or older, or an extended family member, such as aunt or uncle.
- Youth ages 18 to 21 are limited to one ticket in their lifetime. Younger individuals can use *Home Free* twice during their lifetime.

- For youth ages 18 to 21, options include returning home or traveling to an approved ALA, such as confirmed residential services housing, including a transitional or independent living program willing to accept them. Youth who were formerly in the child welfare system have the option to travel to a prior adult caregiver.
- Single parents traveling with children under the age of two are eligible, but married couples are not.
- Tickets must be used the day they are booked and are non-transferable.
- Participants must agree to participate in a follow-up phone call to verify the youth's arrival and to review the utilization of local resources agreed upon during the *Home Free* ticketing process.

Application Process

- Youth must initiate the process by calling NRS' hotline at 1-800-RUNAWAY and speaking privately with NRS staff about their situation. Youth will also be screened for signs of human trafficking (including force, fraud, and coercion).
- At the request of a youth, NRS can help them identify and access a local safe place, such as a police station, runaway and homeless youth service provider, shelter, other local youth service provider, or just a hospital emergency room. Once they are in a safe place, the *Home Free* application process can begin.
- With the youth's permission, NRS staff can communicate with any adults and/or professionals directly involved. When youth will be traveling to an ALA, conference calls with the youth and adults involved in the identified ALA are required to confirm that everyone agrees with the proposed living arrangement, and to confirm that safe and stable housing and any critical support services, such as individual and/or family counseling services, are available.
- For youth under 18, a guardian must have filed a runaway or missing person's report with the police within the first five days of the youth leaving home. In the case of youth in foster care, child welfare staff are required to report all runaways to local law enforcement and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children® (1-800-843-5678). The resulting police report number is required to participate in the *Home Free Program*. NRS understands that youth are sometimes running from abusers/exploiters and may not have been reported missing.
- When feasible, youth under age 18 will be transported to the bus station by a police officer or crisis care worker but will not be escorted on the trip.
- To ensure participants have the necessary support to continue to address the individual and family issues that led to the youth leaving home or becoming a trafficking victim, NRS requires participants to continue to use supportive services they are currently accessing or resources identified by NRS for follow-up support in their new location.

*NRS reserves the right to request any necessary support documents to verify the identities of all parties requesting *Home Free* tickets. NRS may use identification documents to ensure the appropriateness of reunification and/or the youth's eligibility as determined by the above guidelines.

National Runaway Safeline

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