



Home Free Program

The National Runaway Safeline (NRS), through a partnership with Greyhound Lines, Inc., offers 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.

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.
- 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.
- 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 1-800-786-2929 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.
- Guardian escort tickets can be offered as needed for youth 12-16 who use the program.
- Child tickets can be offered for parenting youth traveling with their children who are over the age of 2 or any child traveling with a car seat
- 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.
- In order to ensure the safety of the youth, NRS may request/require documentation (I.D.s, birth certificates, etc.) to verify the identities of all parties involved in the *Home Free* process, including from parents/guardians, service providers, siblings or other parties whom the youth may be living with.*
- For youth under 18, NRS may ask as to whether or not a runaway report was filed. If filed, NRS may request to verify it as an option in lieu of other forms of I.D.
- 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.

Hotline: 1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)
Live Chat/Email/Forums: 1800RUNAWAY.org
Business office: 773-880-9860

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