



Home Free Fact Sheet

Established in 1995 through a partnership between the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) and Greyhound Lines, Inc., the Home Free program reunites runaway, homeless and exploited youth with their family or guardian through a free bus ticket home or to a stable place where they can access appropriate services.

In 2019, 291 youth received bus tickets through Home Free, including 16 who identified labor or sex trafficking as a factor contributing to their need for transportation assistance. In 2020, amidst the pandemic, 299 youth used the Home Free program to return home or to another safe location.

Runaway and homeless youth service providers; community and faith-based organizations; law enforcement; anti-trafficking organizations; child welfare, health, and education professionals; along with other concerned adults who come into contact with potentially eligible youth are encouraged to review the Home Free information.

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 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 alternative living arrangement (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 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 to 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, such as I.D.s or birth certificates, 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 if 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.