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National Safe Place Launches TXT 4 HELP “Interactive” to provide help for youth in crisis

New initiative allows teens in crisis to text interactively with a professional for help

LOUISVILLE, Ky., March 20, 2012 – The preferred form of communication among teenagers has changed over the last ten years. Research in teen communication demonstrates that youth seeking help for difficult situations are more prone to access electronic information and help than direct intervention. National Safe Place (NSP) is proud to announce TXT 4 HELP “Interactive,” an additional service to the established TXT 4 HELP program that allows youth in crisis to text live with a mental health professional.

“Texting is a popular communication strategy among teens and the more we strive to connect with them in a way that they’re comfortable with, the more assistance we can provide,” said Laurie Jackson, NSP Executive Director. “With TXT 4 HELP Interactive we hope to reach thousands more youth in crisis and inform them that immediate help is now just a text away.”

How TXT 4 HELP Interactive works: Any youth can text the word “SAFE” and their **current location** (e.g. safe 101 main st. Chicago IL) to **69866** and receive the address for the closest Safe Place site and contact number for the local youth shelter. This automated response will also prompt users to “**reply with 2CHAT for more help.**” Once a user replies with **2CHAT**, he/she will be connected with a Master’s level mental health professional.

TXT 4 HELP Interactive has the ability to reach more youth in crisis than NSP reached in the past. Several studies over the last few years have determined that 75 percent of American teens carry a mobile phone and 88 percent of teen cell phone users are text messaging daily. NSP believes the TXT 4 HELP Interactive program will impact many lives and encourage teens to ask for help when dealing with tough issues.

Each year an estimated 2 million youth run away. Most young people do not run away to experience additional freedoms but rather are running away from a problem that they cannot solve, according to Department of Justice statistics from 2006. A Department of Justice study from 2002 indicates that 21 percent of runaway youth had been either physically or sexually abused within their homes within the year prior to their leaving.

Safe Place was created as a community collaboration that provides easy access to help for all young people in dangerous, threatening or vulnerable situations. More than 19,000 designated businesses and community



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buildings display the Safe Place sign nationwide. Since 1983, more than 270,000 youth have accessed help at a Safe Place site or contacted their local youth shelter after learning about Safe Place at a school presentation.

“Too often we hear stories about abuse, neglect, bullying and crisis situations that impact children and youth. Now, more than ever, we must create opportunities for connecting teens in crisis to safety and assistance,” said Jackson.

About National Safe Place

National Safe Place, headquartered in Louisville, Ky., provides training and technical assistance for youth service agencies and businesses interested in developing the Safe Place program. Safe Places provide access to immediate help and safety for all young people in crisis. A public-private network of more than 19,000 sites across the country extends the doors of local youth shelters by displaying the Safe Place sign. Business partners and community locations that appeal to youth – such as fast food restaurants, convenience stores, fire stations, public buses and libraries – connect kids looking for help with the youth service agency. In 2011, 6273 youth received immediate help at a Safe Place site. Another 6,414 youth contacted a Safe Place site or shelter for help after learning about the program through school and community education. The Safe Place program was created by the YMCA of Greater Louisville in 1983. For additional information, visit www.nationalsafeplace.org.

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