

The strength of this county depends on the strength of its families. Throughout Monroe County, parents do their utmost to provide their children with loving, caring, nurturing homes, in which they can mature into responsible adults, possessing the skills to realize their full potential. Even in the most loving of homes, though, problems do arise. Sadly, in some cases, children run away from home, leaving worried parents behind.

According to the National Runaway Switchboard in 2007, an estimated 1,041 Crisis Calls, were received from the 305 area code. These are our youth running away from home or thinking about running away from home, opening themselves to wide-ranging risks.

Prevention is the best way to address this serious issue, and, as parents, government officials, and members of a caring society, we should all work to strengthen families throughout our county. When children do run away, however, it is critical that we have a structured system in place to which children can turn for help. To that end, the Florida Keys Children's Shelter serves as a link between youths and their families. Today, programs like Project Lighthouse and Community Based Counseling provide crisis intervention, telephone counseling, and information and referrals for callers seeking food, shelter and transportation home, and confidential conference calls between youths and families. The Florida Keys Children's Shelter is working hard to protect runaway and homeless youth from harm.

During the month of November, 2008, an awareness campaign will be conducted to publicize this vital service. At this time, therefore, I urge all Monroe County Residents to consider ways to support the Florida Keys Children's Shelter efforts and to learn more about how we can help in combating this serious problem. By supporting efforts that reunite families, we all play a role in building a stronger community.