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Youth in crisis can seek out a King County Metro bus for help

"Safe Place" program helps bus operators connect youth to local services

Tonight in King County, more than 1,000 young people may find themselves without a safe place to go. Some are abandoned, some are abused, and few know where to get help. Within 48 hours on the streets, one in three runaways will be approached by a predator.



But starting today, help is just a bus away thanks to a new partnership between King County, local service agencies, and "Safe Place," a national non-profit organization that builds community safety nets for young people in crisis.

"Young people in crisis with no place to turn can now seek out a nearby **Metro** (<http://www.kingcounty.gov/metro>) bus and find an operator who is ready to help," said **King County Executive Dow Constantine** (<http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec>). "Our coaches are out at all hours of the day in all parts of the county, and this offer of a Safe Place should bring a little peace of mind to families. I thank our operators for taking this extra step to protect our region's youth."

"Preventing young people from becoming homeless is a big step toward our efforts to solve homelessness and to keep at-risk kids safe," said **King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert** (<http://www.kingcounty.gov/Lambert.aspx>), who helped coordinate the partnership. "Safe Place expands the reach of our existing youth services by connecting with our network of buses and finding new ways to get help to youth in crisis. Any teen who is scared and alone and confused should know at least one thing – the nearest Metro bus is a safe place to get help."

With the addition of Metro and the local service agencies — YouthCare, Friends of Youth, and Auburn Youth Resources — King County becomes the largest Safe Place partner in the state of Washington and one of 1,529 communities nationwide with a Safe Place program. The purpose of the program is to have

the necessary community resources in place to get help to young people quickly, decreasing the potential for harm.

“We are thrilled to bring this Safe Place program to King County and the Seattle metropolitan area,” National Safe Place Executive Director Laurie Jackson said. “As a community with a large number of homeless and street youth, having Safe Place as an option presents a great opportunity to connect these young people in need to available local resources. Utilizing King County Metro buses as Safe Place sites make accessing safety as close as the nearest bus.”

When a young person in crisis needs help, all he or she has to do is approach any Metro bus driver and say, “I need a safe place.” The operator will then make a call that will trigger contact with a youth service provider, who will arrange to meet and transport the youth to safety.

Sound Transit Express buses serving King County will also participate in the program.

What happens next depends on the needs of the youth. Sometimes it's counseling and providing help to reunite the child with family or friends. In the absence of alternatives, youth can be taken to a safe shelter.

“Over the past two years, we've seen an alarming increase in the number of youth seeking shelter and support from YouthCare,” observed Melinda Giovengo, Executive Director of this non-profit which provides services to homeless youth in Seattle. “Safe Place is no doubt a program that will greatly benefit our community, as all of our children deserve safety and support.”

“Metro is proud to be a partner in this effort to make our county a safer place to be for young people,” Metro Operations Manager Jim O'Rourke said. “Our operators are accustomed to serving as the community's eyes and ears. Through this program, they can now additionally serve as a bridge in helping to get kids off the street and into the hands of a youth resource agency that can help.”

In addition to help from Metro drivers, young people in King County have another option if they need help quickly. “Text 4 HELP” is a National Safe Place service being introduced that uses technology to offer information about the closest location to access immediate help and safety. By texting the word “SAFE” and their current location to 69866, youth can get help within seconds. In our area, they will be referred to shelters that will provide the assistance they need.

On any given night, United Way estimates there are 700-1,000 young people with no safe place to sleep in Seattle alone. It's estimated that at least 300-500 children in King County under the age of 18 are sexually exploited each year. That's a troubling statistic, given estimates that one in three runaways will be lured into prostitution within 48 hours.

Through the work of agencies such as YouthCare, Auburn Youth Resources, and Friends of Youth, young people can get the help they need. In 2010, more

than 4,000 runaway and homeless young people ages 12-24 accessed YouthCare services in Seattle – from street outreach, emergency shelters, meals and drop-in services, to education, employment training, and transitional housing.

The new Safe Place partnership in King County welcomes other organizations and businesses interested in providing additional safe places where youth can get connected with services. Facilities frequented by young people, such as libraries and malls and coffee shops, are good candidates.

“More than anything, our children deserve to feel safe,” said Councilmember Lambert. “Keeping just one child out of trouble and out of harm’s way can make the difference for a lifetime of success.”

To learn more about the Safe Place program, please visit:
www.nationalsafeplace.org (<http://www.nationalsafeplace.org/>) and
www.youthcare.org (<http://www.youthcare.org/>)

See more at:



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