

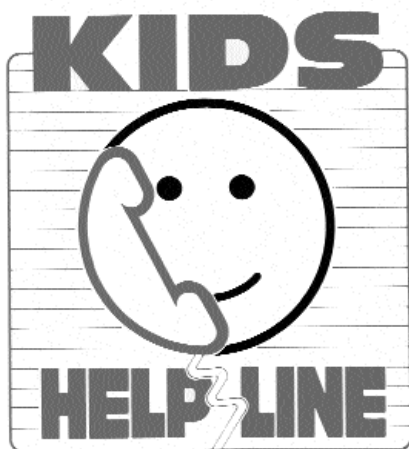
Listening To Young People
The Australian experience

An initiative of the De La Salle
Brothers

Who Cares?



Who Listens?



Kids Help Line is Australia's only free, 24hr, confidential and anonymous telephone and web counselling service for 5-18 year olds. Each week we answer 10,000 calls from kids in need. Sadly due to lack of funds, thousands more go unanswered.

1. Their Stories

These examples are typical of calls to Kids Help Line. Due to confidentiality they remain anonymous. Names have been altered.

17-year-old male. Has strong suicidal feelings as feels there is no hope for the future. Recently got out of a detention centre and is back on drugs and stealing to support his habit. Is grossly overweight and has tried starving himself. Has no job and fears his ability to go back to school. Suffered back injuries in a car accident some years ago and still experiences pain. Has no friends and suffers dreadful loneliness. Has no money or food and is alone at grandmother's house. (She is away interstate). Tried several days ago to suicide on painkillers. Made three calls in one night. Eventually talked through all issues, including self-esteem. Made a contract with the counsellor not to make any suicide attempts but to keep in contact as they worked together through each of the issues. Has agreed to seek referral to a dietician, will follow up local counselling service and will contact local welfare service re need for food. Undertook to call same counsellor again next evening.

13-year-old boy whose older friend has begun using drugs on a daily basis - in large quantities and potentially dangerous combinations. He has expressed his concerns to his friend, but this had the effect of his friend becoming more secretive about his behaviours, and he is worried that perhaps he did not handle the situation properly by raising it. The counsellor praised Andrew for recognising the problem and for having the courage to express his concerns to his friend. They discussed the fact that others' behaviours could be either constructive or destructive, and that he was right to feel worried. However, he ultimately agreed that there was a limit to how much responsibility he should take for what was ultimately someone else's decision. Asked why his friend may have turned to drugs he revealed that he knew his friend's parents had been discussing separation and that he was "probably really upset deep down, but not talking about it." Andrew felt that if he encouraged his friend to talk about his feelings on this matter, it could perhaps open up communications on the substance abuse issue. He felt it important that his friend understand

that he was not judging him, just wanted to help. He asked the counsellor for the telephone number of a local drug rehabilitation facility, and said he would offer it to his friend and encourage him to seek help.

About six months ago, a 17-year-old girl phoned in extremely distressed, unable to speak until after some 15 minutes of sobbing. She had been physically abused by her adoptive parents, and had finally left the home and had nowhere to live. The counsellor arranged emergency accommodation for her and she called him quite regularly. On one occasion, she indicated that she would like to try and find her natural mother, and the counsellor was able to assist in providing details of the Jigsaw agency. He also put her in touch with the Commonwealth Employment Service. On Christmas Eve, after about a month without hearing from the girl, the counsellor took a call from her. She just wanted to report to him that she had found a job, was living in a flat, and that she had found her natural mother and was spending Christmas Day with her. She said "I want to thank you for changing my life." The counsellor replied that it had been the girl herself who had turned her life around, to which she responded "yes, but if you hadn't let it be OK for me to cry that first night, none of this would have happened."

16-year-old girl rang to thank the counsellor who had spoken to her at length the other night. She thought the male counsellor was "great" and had helped her "enormously." She also expressed the view that her school friends also thought that all the counsellors at Kids Help Line were terrific, but she hoped they didn't get too depressed through helping so many kids!

Robbie is 11 years old. His parents are currently renovating the house, everything is in a mess and Mum and Dad are stressed. He heard them arguing late night in their bedroom and they were yelling very loudly and were very angry with each other. There seemed to be some trouble about how much it was all costing and whether the job would ever get finished. He has never heard Mum and Dad fight like this before and is worried that they might be getting a divorce like the parents of one of his friends did last year. This would be really bad, because Robbie would have to live with just one parent and he wouldn't know which one to choose because he loves them both and wouldn't want to hurt anyone feelings. Robbie needed reassurance that it was very nat-

ural for him to feel upset and worried to hear his parents fighting. He started to feel better being able to talk about the impact this event had had on his feelings. He hadn't told Mum and Dad that he'd overheard them and had been worrying about it at school all day. Robbie's parents both work full-time. He decided that he would like to tell them what he'd heard and how worried he was over it. He thought it would be a good idea to wait until they were eating dinner to bring up the matter - rather than when they first arrived home. Robbie rang back later that evening to say that all went well. His parents had been dismayed that he had heard them fighting, and had explained the pressures they were feeling and reassured him that the marriage was sound. They had been very pleased with him for talking to Kids Help Line and wanted him to say "thanks" to the counsellor from them too.

Made Us Smile

9-year-old boy - his after school caregiver watches cartoons all afternoon - he'd prefer to watch sport replays. How to tell her?

7-year-old boy - very worried. Has been told for two years that he cannot have a pet mouse, but has gone after school and bought one today. Now doesn't know how to tell Mum.

13-year-old girl - has offered to cook a meal for her grandmother tonight and needs advice on what old people like to eat.

12-year-old girl - concerned that her brother is playing with Barbie dolls.

16-year-old male. His mother was in hospital this evening having just given birth to a baby girl. He was home looking after his two-year-old brother. Was very distressed about the fact that he had been sexually abused as a youngster by his maternal grandfather, and had very angry feelings about his belief that his younger siblings would be better taken care of than he had been at a young age. He was going to hang himself this evening, had planned the details and had written letters of explanation to his mother. Would not agree not to harm himself and refused to give any identifying information. Ended call.

tle or no sense of self worth. More recently, she phoned in to the same counsellor to report that she had been reunited with her parents, was living at home and pursuing a course at TAFE. Her message to the counsellor was "thanks for hanging in with me all that time. I'm back on track now. And by the way, Mum says to say hello."

A 15-year-old girl rang after taking a heroin overdose. She revealed that she was calling from a public telephone box at a railway station and intended to throw herself in front of the next train. The counsellor was able to ascertain the location of the train station from the girl, and arranged for the local police to be advised while she kept her on the phone. The police arrived while she was still on the phone to Kids Help Line and she was taken to hospital. Two weeks later, she sent a poem of thanks to Kids Help Line which contained a message to other young people thinking of committing suicide.

14-year-old male. Phoned in a terribly distressed state, asking the counsellor if she loved him. Repeatedly asked the counsellor if she loved him. He said everyone hated him, including his mother. Intended to suicide because no one loved him. He then asked the counsellor if she "liked" him and was given a strong affirmative answer. The counsellor suggested that she and the caller take some deep breaths and try to calm down sufficiently to talk through some of the caller's very deep emotions. This occurred for a short while, then the caller gave a very loud scream of pain and the phone was dropped.

18-year-old female, very depressed and worried about suicidal thoughts. Seeking immediate information as realised she was in danger and needed to get herself to hospital. Counsellor referred her to local Salvation Army after-hours number and also gave local hospital number.

15-year-old female. Deep depression and discussing hanging herself. She was in disgrace with her family (cultural issue) and could see no way out. The counsellor determined that the suicide risk factor was low, and was able to engage her in a discussion about what had prevented her from following this course of action in the past. She said that her family and friends were very important to her and that she was working towards a tertiary education and had been achieving good grades. She said that this ambition had kept her going. She also said that she found writing poetry a good

A 14-year-old boy called from a phone box, and started giving the counsellor a very hard time. It was clear that he was being egged on by a group of other boys in the background. Rather than hang up on him, the counsellor sought to engage him in a bit of lively conversation, and offered to tell him a good joke. Due to the noise in the background from the other boys, the counsellor told the boy he would have to ring back at another time. The boy did call back on several occasions wanting to hear the joke, but it was actually a month later that he next got to speak with the counsellor. After sharing the joke, the two got to talking more seriously. It transpired that the boy was actually living in a school boarding house, and was having a lot of difficulty fitting in with the other children, was severely lonely and was feeling very much the burden of peer pressure. A good relationship with the counsellor then ran for some time - having stemmed from a call that initially presented as an abusive prank call.

In another incident involving a school boarder, what commenced as a "joke, chat" call led to a 14 year old boy discussing his fear of being expelled as a result of certain behavioural problems. The two commenced a working relationship to determine strategies to enable him to control his behaviours. One day, the boy rang to say that his older brother had been killed in a car accident. He was about to fly home to be with his parents, but he needed the external support of the counsellor to assist him with his own grief. As time went by, his parents' expectations of him, and the attention paid to him as their remaining child, was a source of concern for him, and with the counsellor he was able to set objectives to assist him through an extraordinarily traumatic time. The instant availability of the counsellor by telephone - and the stability that she represented for him at that time during both his and his parents' despair - was of enormous importance for the boy.

At 3 a.m. a counsellor received a call from a 14-year-old girl who lived on the streets after having run away from home. She was almost incoherent with grief and loss, as she had just been told of the death of her friend. She was terrified about attending the funeral. The girl was counselled about that incident, and proceeded to keep in touch with the same counsellor every two to three weeks. She had embarked upon a life of homelessness, crime and drug and alcohol abuse and was usually intoxicated when she called. She was also engaging in casual sex, and had lit-

outlet for expressing herself when her emotions felt out of control. The call eventually focused on all the positives in her life, and with the validation of the counsellor she said she felt "much better" at the end of the call.

An 18-year-old male called, very concerned about his 17-year-old girlfriend. She had become pregnant, knew that she could not look after a baby, and there would have been major issues for their parents given issues of nationality/religious beliefs, so they are unaware. She had an abortion just over a week ago but is deeply depressed and plagued with thoughts of having killed their child. He is terribly worried that she is seeing suicide as an option. At the end of the call, the counsellor had been able to validate the caller's concerns about his girlfriend and he agreed to arrange help for her. He also said he would encourage her to ring Kids Help Line herself and talk through her feelings with the same counsellor.

16-year-old boy rang to say that his life is going well now. He has moved from a small country town to live with his cousin in the city. He is currently looking for work in advance of returning to school next year. He is no longer using drugs and no longer thinks of suicide as an option for his problems. He has big plans for the future - including one day owning a Porsche! He will keep in touch from time to time to let us know how he is progressing.

13-year-old male phoned. He was with his friend of similar age - both home alone. His friend has a history of suicide attempts and he has just found his friend has cut one of his wrists with a carving knife. He got his friend to the phone, and although reluctant to talk to the counsellor at first, he eventually explained that he had medical troubles and felt very angry about that. His sole parent was not due home until night shift finished. In the end, the two boys agreed to contact the initial caller's mother who could come over and join them and see if there was a need for immediate medical attention. Both boys felt better at end of call.

15-year-old female phoned with immediate suicide intent. Has suffered bullying and harassment from kids at school over past year, and tried to suicide a few months ago by cutting her wrists. This became known to the other students, and the comments are making her life unbearable. Her parents have arranged for her to have counselling, but the first appointment is not scheduled for

another two weeks. Desperate to change schools for a fresh start. After talking through various options, she agreed to have a good talk with Mum and Dad about what was happening at school and how serious her self-harm feelings were. She indicated that she would like to keep in regular contact with the same counsellor.

13-year-old Gavin is calling from a phone box one Sunday morning. He is distraught because last night his parents had a party and he saw his Mother in the kitchen with a male family friend and she was hugging and kissing him. He has been feeling sick all night, because he thinks she must be having an affair and he doesn't know whether he should tell his father about it. The counsellor asked Gavin to relate what he saw to describe his feelings. He was advised that it was natural to feel "sick" but should be perhaps get some more information about what he witnessed? Gavin told the counsellor that his parents got on very well, and that the man in the kitchen was one of their closest friends. Asked why he felt that his mother's affection towards the man might indicate an "affair", Gavin revealed that he had seen a similar scene in a recent television "soapie" and it had reminded him of that. After a long chat, Gavin had calmed down quite a bit, and thought perhaps he had reacted a little too hastily. He would head back home and talk to his Mum. Later that day, Gavin rang back from his home phone. He wanted to let the counsellor know that he was a bit embarrassed. Over breakfast, his Mum and Dad were talking about their friend John who had just been made redundant from his job after recently taking on a large mortgage. His Mum had been comforting him. When Gavin had told them of his fears and subsequent call to Kids Help Line, they had all laughed uproariously!

16-year-old male. Feeling very depressed and needs to talk. Is regularly attacked by parents when they are on drugs. Has access to a gun in the house and is thinking of using it tonight. Has a regular counsellor who he is supposed to call when he feels suicidal, but he doesn't have her number on him, so has rung Kids Help Line. He talked for a couple of hours with the Kids Help Line counsellor and seemed to calm down considerably, and agreed not to hurt himself overnight. Will be making contact with his regular counsellor tomorrow morning at her work number.

15-year-old Fiona's Mum and Dad have not been getting on well for the past year, and have decided to separate. She thinks this is

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12-year-old female - is phoning from a caravan park where her family and about a dozen others have been camping for several days. Seeking advice on just how often she should be expected to do the dishes.

18-year-old boy - is fighting with his mother as to who owes whom borrowed cigarettes.

14-year-old boy - his Mum's budgie died yesterday and he doesn't know whether to own up to the fact that he didn't feed it for a week.

16-year-old boy - is sick and tired of eating fast food from his parents' takeaway shop. Is "hanging out" for some fresh fruit and vegetables.

probably a good idea because the fighting has been really bad. However, she is feeling really upset about it all and is "all mixed up inside." Sometimes she feels depressed, other times really angry. She has a younger brother who seems to have ignored the impending separation and is getting on OK, so she feels quite lonely about the feelings she has. She hasn't been able to concentrate on her schoolwork and this is an important academic year for her. She doesn't feel it would be right to burden her parents at this time. Fiona needed to talk to someone about her mixed emotions, and the counsellor acknowledged her right to feel episodes of grief and loss. They also talked through the fact that children can't always control the decisions that are made in their lives, but that it was most important that she share her feelings and thoughts with her parents and explain the effect it was having on her and her studies. She concluded the call by saying that she wanted to be listened to, and agreed that she should not trivialise her need for communication because of her worries about her parents' current emotions. Fiona called back a few days later. She had asked her parents for a chat one evening, and they had all cried a lot. Her parents had been really honest about their feelings and circumstances, and had made her feel that her feelings and thoughts were important to them. They had also encouraged her younger brother to discuss how he felt, and Fiona had been quite surprised that he wasn't as carefree about the situation

as his behaviour had implied. She now feels better about the separation, and her parents have encouraged her to talk with them whenever she feels bad. They have also decided to get her a maths tutor when next term starts so that she'll feel more confident in this subject.

10-year-old girl. Her parents have separated and she lives with her Mum. She sees her father every second weekend, and really looks forward to it. However, Dad has got a new girlfriend and in the last few visits, Jodie has become increasingly upset that the girlfriend is included in all their activities. She really wants to spend time alone with her Dad, even though she thinks the girlfriend is quite nice. She doesn't want to hurt Dad's feelings or appear selfish, but is becoming "sad" about the situation. The counsellor helped Jodie to see that it was OK to have such feelings, and asked if she had discussed them with anyone. She hadn't and felt that the more time that passed, the harder it was going to be. She was encouraged to think about when would be the most appropriate time to raise the issue with her Dad, and she decided that she would feel quite comfortable to do so when he rang her mid week. In this way, she could share her feelings with her Dad without feelings embarrassed in front of his girlfriend. She felt he was likely to be very understanding but prior to calling hadn't been confident that her feelings about the visits were valid. The counsellor also discussed with her the best way to handle the situation if change were not agreed to. She felt this unlikely to be the outcome but said she would call back and let us know how she got on.

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8-year-old girl - worried that their mother must be going mad, because she has started feeding them worms (probably pasta!).

13-year-old girl - doesn't like the new wallpaper that her mother has chosen for her bedroom and doesn't know how to tell her.

8-year-old girl - "Sick and tired" of my brother showing off when he wins Monopoly.

18 year old boy calling over difficulties with his girlfriend. He loves her and wants to become engaged. However, her response was to ask for "some space". He is scared that in giving her "space," she will meet somebody else and their relationship will end. He also feels that his parents are turning against him at present, and has been resorting to alcohol to keep himself "calm." The counsellor encouraged him to explore his feelings, and to discuss the link between feelings and his present behaviours. Together, they reviewed the appropriateness of using alcohol as a crutch, and he agreed that he should cease this behaviour and determine other methods of dealing with his feelings. The counsellor talked through the need of people to recognise that their own needs may not necessarily be the same as the needs of others. At the end of the call, the boy had determined to find a quiet time to open up communication about his feelings with both his girlfriend and his parents.

11-year-old girl. She finds it very difficult to fit in at school and claims to have very few friends. Recently she got new glasses and this has led to increased teasing by the other students. In an effort to become more popular, she recently shoplifted a small item and is now wracked with guilt. The counsellor and Katie talked for some time about her feelings and behaviours and her perceptions of the behaviours of others. She agreed that it was OK to be "different." She volunteered that it would be a good idea to talk to a trusted teacher about the difficulties she was experiencing, and to find out if the school had a policy on bullying and could promote it within class. With regard to the theft, Katie's discussion with the counsellor led her to the realisation that we all sometimes make mistakes. She felt good about the fact that she had - in making the call - acknowledged and taken responsibility for her act. She decided that she would feel better about the incident if she owned up to her parents about what had caused it to occur. She saw this as being a part of the consequences for what had happened. They also explored what strategies she could use for her to better cope on future occasions where she felt under pressure. She volunteered that she felt immensely relieved to have been able to admit her feelings and was confident about talking with both her teacher and her parents.

12-year-old girl called, very concerned that she had been planning a sleepover for the night of her birthday. However, she had

been defiant and rude to her parents, and her punishment had been that she could now invite only one friend over. As she has "two best friends," she was very worried about choosing just one, and the effect it would have on the friend who was not "picked." Sally agreed that her behaviour towards her parents had warranted punishment of some kind, but couldn't see her way out of the dilemma. The counsellor asked whether she had shared this information with her two girl friends and explained how she felt. She was also asked to consider whether in fact both of the girls were able to go to the sleepover. After discussion, Sally felt that there was a good chance of being able to negotiate the issue with her mother if she were prepared to acknowledge her wrongdoing and talk about the difficulty she was experiencing with the effect it could have on her friendships. She also suggested that if her mother was insistent that the punishment stand, she would be prepared to ask if the sleepover could be delayed until a later date so that both friends could attend.

14 year old Carly is very worried about her girlfriend who appeared to have stopped eating lunch at school every day. She had become noticeably thin and she was very concerned that she may have anorexia. When she had tried to talk to her friend about her worries, she had just laughed it off. As this had been occurring for some months now, she felt desperate that she was not being able to adequately help her friend. The counsellor first reassured Carly about her sensitivity towards the issue, and validated the appropriateness of her concern for her friend's well being and her efforts to discuss it. They discussed the fact that there were often underlying reasons for people exhibiting eating disorders, and that perhaps "being a good friend" meant exploring with her what other issues could be happening in her life. Carly determined that she would encourage her friend to talk about anything that may be troubling her, and to encourage her to phone Kids Help Line herself. The counsellor acknowledged how difficult it was to be a friend when your friend is troubled.

13-year-old girl rang to thank counsellor for listening to her regularly about a month previously when she was suffering grief following a death in the family. She had taken up the suggestion of reading some literature on grief which had culminated in her presenting a school project on the subject to her class which had been met with amazement but delight. This process had made her

feel much better about the situation and her efforts had led her to be more accepting of what had happened. Her mother also came on the phone to thank the counsellor for her advice.

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11-year-old girl - is fed up with having to be dressed in the same clothes as her twin sister.

13-year-old girl - is not supposed to eat chewing gum because she has braces. Bought some after school and has some in her hair. Scared of what her Mum will say.

12-year-old girl - her brother is 9 and can do the 100 metres backstroke three seconds faster than her. But does he have to keep telling everybody?

11-year-old girl - feels that her mother is being "sexist" by expecting her to assist with household chores.

14-year-old girl rang to let her counsellor know that everything has turned out well for her. When she originally phoned two months earlier, she was in hospital having attempted suicide after having been kicked out of home and having nowhere to go - had been living on the streets. She reported that she is now living with her sister, her life is on track and she now knows that there are many options to suicide. She still has occasions where she thinks about self harming, but is getting counselling at school to deal with this. She is also re-developing a relationship with her mother.

12-year-old girl had rung a few days ago, very concerned that she might start menstruating soon and very scared about how to deal with it, particularly if it commenced when she was at school one day. By talking through her fears with the counsellor, she decided that she would raise the issue with her mother and ask her for more information. She rang to say that she ended up having a really good conversation with her Mum that had explained a lot and allayed her fears. She was ringing to say thanks to the counsellor for "really good advice".

12-year-old boy rang from a public phone booth. Was thinking about running away from home because he didn't think any one in his family loved him or cared about him. After speaking at

length with a counsellor, he decided to go home and tell his Mum about his feelings and how bad he felt within himself. They had sat down and had a long talk and his Mum had reassured him that he was loved and wanted and that she had apologised for neglecting him lately due to some personal problems she had. Things have been much better lately and his parents and friends had noticed a big improvement in him and much happier he seemed to be.

16-year-old boy had called regularly to speak to a counsellor because of concern with his school results and severe distress about his up-coming examinations. Called back to let the counsellor know that he had just been advised today that he had been awarded a scholarship.

13-year-old boy rang to let the counsellor know that he was spending Christmas with his father for the very first time. He was very happy that Kids Help Line had helped him come to terms with his relationship with his Dad and wanted to express his gratitude to the counsellor in a "major way". He also wanted to speak to a supervisor to say that he was "over the moon."

14-year-old girl rang to thank the counsellor who had assisted her girlfriend after her parents had split up. Her peers had been very worried about her because she wasn't coping well, but since speaking about her feelings with the counsellor, she seemed much better.

14-year-old boy rang to say that three months ago he had sought help and advice from Kids Help Line about his apparent addiction to smoking marijuana. He was proud to say that he had now stopped using the drug and has become a leader in his school group.

For Discussion

After reading these real life stories

- What have you learned about the feelings of these youngsters and their way of dealing with their life situations?
- Are there differences as to the youngsters with whom you are involved?

2. What is Kids Help Line?

In 1991 the De La Salle Brothers in Australia realised the need for preventive measures to give early help and support to children and young people before and when their needs become acute. As a result Kids Help Line was founded by Brother Paul Smith. Kids Help Line is primarily funded from the revenue-raising activities of BoysTown Family Care through its lotteries. BoysTown Family Care and Kids Help Line are initiatives of the De La Salle Brothers. Kids Help Line is also supported by their corporate sponsor Optus, some State and Federal funding, and through individual donations, fundraising events, trusts and funds.

Kids Help Line is a national telephone and web based counselling service for young people aged 5 to 18 years - it is free, anonymous and confidential.

Kids Help Line aims to:

- provide a professional counselling service accessible to all Australian Children.
- empower the caller by assisting them to form opinions for themselves.
- help children identify and understand the consequences of a particular course of action.
- facilitate more productive relationships with parents, teachers and care givers.
- fill the gaps in existing services.
- provide information on support services in the caller's local area.
- advocate on behalf of children and young people where their interests are ignored or unrepresented.
- to care and to listen.

Anonymous statistical information is collated which is invaluable for research into youth problems and needs throughout Australia.

Values and beliefs

The two main values that underpin Kids Help Line are:

1. Empowerment
2. Child-Centred Practice

Counselling from an empowerment perspective involves:

- assisting clients to develop options for change
- assisting clients to understand the consequences of particular actions
- helping the client identify her/his own resources
- informing the client about resources
- supporting the client in developing a sense of control in her/his own life
- working with strengths rather than weaknesses

Providing a child-centred practice involves:

- listening to and respecting what children have to say
- focusing on their needs
- seeing the world from their perspective
- acknowledging and believing that the child is the primary client
- seeing the child as an individual person as well as a member of a class or group
- respecting the child

KHL has 5 operational principles. These child-centred principles influence practice and management decisions at Kids Help Line.

Operational Principles:

1. confidentiality and anonymity
2. all callers are treated with respect
3. callers are free to choose the gender of the counsellor to whom they speak
4. callers are able to access the same counsellor if they wish to call back
5. callers are encouraged to give feedback about Kids Help Line and the service they receive

2002 Statistical Summary

Kids Help Line (KHL) is a free 24-hour telephone counselling serv-

ice available every day of the year to Australia's 3.8 million young people aged between 5 and 18 years. Kids Help Line began in the state of Queensland in 1991 and extended to become a nationwide service on the 10th of May 1993.

KHL counsellors record non-identifying details of all calls to which they respond. This information provides a pool of valuable data on issues of concern to the young people who phone the service. Specific reports, information sheets or analyses for any region or state can be produced upon request.

In the year 2002 over 1 million phone calls were made to Kids Help Line, of which 429,982 were answered. Approximately 20% of these calls involved immediate and significant concerns.

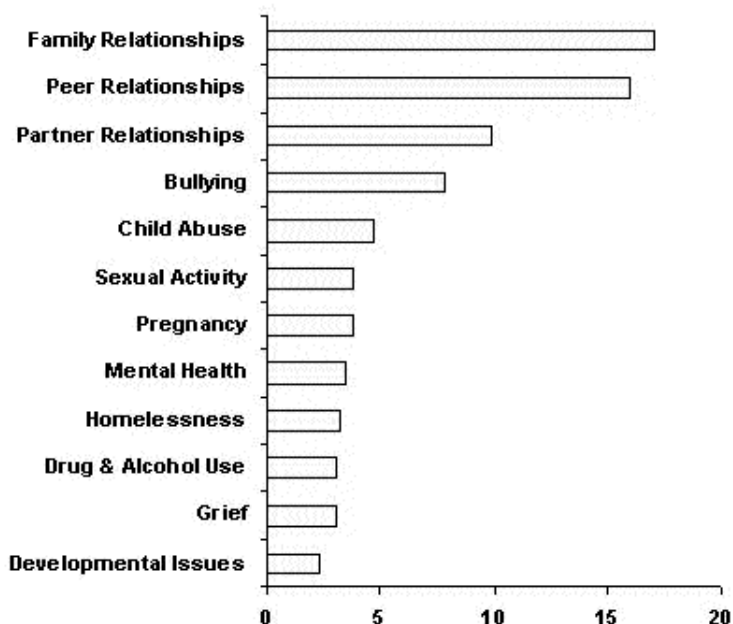
KHL simply cannot respond to demand - despite having 90+ counsellors working around the clock. What happens is that kids ring up and get into the queue - at times there are longish waits, and the kids hang up before being responded to. If they hang on they WILL be answered, but kids (especially littler ones) simply can't wait for very long. We can only hope that they will try again when its quieter (our message says when busy and quieter times are, and suggests calling during quieter times). In 2002 40% of calls were answered and this year we are aiming for 50%. This is well above the response rates for other tele - counselling services.

Don't forget either that kids have the option to e-mail a counsellor, or use our real-time webcounselling - see the info about Online counselling on our website.

Calls from children and young people are categorised into one of 35 different problem types. Figure 1 below shows the 12 most common problems about which children and young people contacted the service in 2002. Together these 12 problem 'types' accounted for 78% of calls.

Some Important Facts

- Males made 28% of calls and females 72%. This gender breakdown is consistent with help-seeking trends in most human service agencies.
- Fifty-one percent of callers were younger than 15 years of age.
- Counsellors recorded nationality for 14% of callers. Of these, the majority were Anglo-Australian (76%) However 13% of



callers were of a non-English speaking background, 7% were from an Aboriginal/Indigenous background and 4% were of another English speaking background.

– Young people contacting the service for the first time accounted for 37% of calls during 2002.

Relationship Issues

During 2002 the majority of calls (43%) received from young people were about relationships with others including family, friends and partners.

Family relationships were the main reason young people phoned KHL during 2002. The majority (53%) were from children and young people experiencing frequent or major conflict and disruption in their family or who phoned KHL to talk about family breakdown. A further 32% phoned about occasional family conflict or disruption. The remaining 15% of young people called because they were worried about a family member.

Relationships with friends and peers represented the second most common reason for contacting KHL. Forty-two percent of these

calls were about occasional or one-off friendship problems, while 16% concerned significant relationship problems. Twenty-eight percent of calls were from children and young people concerned for a friend's well being. The remaining 14% of peer relationship calls were from young people having difficulty making or maintaining friendships.

Of the 7,413 young people who phoned about relationships with partners, 42% stated they were experiencing significant relationship difficulties or relationship breakdown. Another 27% were seeking help with negotiating a relationship. Of the remaining calls focusing on relationships with partners, 24% involved wanting to establish a relationship and 7% related to pressure or uncertainty about sexual relations.

Seventy-one percent of callers who phoned about relationships with their family or friends were under 15 years of age. In contrast, 61% of callers who phoned about their relationship with a partner were aged between 15 and 18 years.

Bullying

While bullying remains the 4th most common reason for calling KHL, the proportion of calls concerning bullying or school-related harassment decreased by 10% in 2002. Males made 39% of the 5,855 bullying calls with the majority (91%) of callers aged under 15 years.

Ninety-four percent of callers had been bullied at least once with 37% of these young people experiencing frequent incidents or continual harassment. A further 43% reported episodic incidents while 20% phoned about an isolated instance of bullying.

Child Abuse

The proportion of calls concerning child abuse increased slightly in 2002, reversing an eight-year downward trend. Of the 3,537 calls relating to child abuse, 86% concerned physical or sexual abuse.

Of the 1,591 callers who phoned about physical abuse 63% stated they were victims of occasional or regular abuse. While 13% had experienced an isolated incidence of abuse, 6% were at risk of injury or harm at the time of their call. The remaining 18% were seeking information.

Sixty-four percent of the 1,437 callers who phoned about sexual abuse stated they had been sexually abused at least once, with 25% reporting the abuse occurring on a regular basis. For the remaining callers, the abuse was no longer current but issues resulting from the abuse were unresolved.

Kids Help Line counsellors implement duty of care obligations if a child is at risk of injury or harm.

From the 2001 survey

Where Do Calls Come From?

All calls are directed to the KHL counselling centre in Brisbane. When possible a caller's postcode is collected and classified into one of 7 regional categories based on population size. Closely mirroring the Australian population, 62% of calls to Kids Help Line are from young people in metropolitan areas (+ 100,000 population). A further 35% of young people are located in rural towns (5,000 to 90,000) while 3% identify as coming from remote locations (less than 5,000).

Sex-Related Issues

The proportion of calls about sex-related issues has decreased by 34% over the last 5 years. Pregnancy represented 3.9% of all calls to Kids Help Line. The majority (55%) of the calls were made by individuals who required information about pregnancy or were unsure if they were pregnant. A further 26% of callers were distressed about telling significant people or confused/undecided about their options. Of the 2,897 calls concerning sexual activity 40% were from young people seeking information about sex. Other common themes included uncertainty about beginning sex, concern about a specific sexual activity and young people needing to talk about a sexual experience. Almost two-thirds (63%) of those who phoned about sex-related issues were aged between 15 and 18 years. As would be expected, the majority of calls about pregnancy were made by females (86%) while males were responsible for 56% of calls about sexual activity.

Mental Health

The proportion of calls about mental health concerns has more than doubled since 1996. Of the 2,946 callers, 28% had a clini-

cally diagnosed mental health issue, while 40% percent reported mild or occasional symptoms or concerns. A further 18% were severely distressed or experiencing major effects on their life. The remaining callers were seeking information about mental health issues or were concerned about a significant other. Over 80% of calls about mental health concerns were made by females with 72% of these calls coming from young people aged 15 to 18 years.

Grief & Loss

Sixty percent of the young people who called about grief needed to talk through an experience of loss. A further 24% had undergone a recent loss leading to acute distress, while 11% of young people were unable to resume their usual lifestyle or were experiencing extreme long-term distress.

Leaving Home & Homelessness

During 2001 KHL received 2,549 calls about leaving home or homeless issues. The majority (65%) of young people had left home or been told to leave, with 31% having nowhere to stay. The remaining 35% were seeking information or contemplating leaving home.

Drug Use

While 14% of the 2,322 calls received during 2001 about drug use related to experimental use, one-third concerned frequent or habitual use. Urgent intervention was required in 2% of these calls. The remaining drug related calls were from young people seeking information (22%) or concerned about a friend's drug use (29%). Males were responsible for 47% of the calls about drug use with 55% of these calls coming from young people aged 15 to 18 years.

Suicide

The proportion of calls about suicide has almost doubled since 1996, accounting for 2.1% of calls in 2001. Almost 50% of the young people who called about suicide reported experiencing suicidal thoughts or fears. Twelve percent of callers reported an immediate intention to attempt suicide and a further 7% were making a suicide attempt at the time of their call. The remaining 32% of young people were either seeking information or con-

cerned about a friend. Similar to mental health concerns, 83% percent of suicide related calls were from females with 15 to 18 year olds responsible for 70% of calls.

For more information

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To subscribe to the newsletter mailing list, email us at library@kidshelp.com.au with your name, address, organisation, phone number etc. and a note saying you would like to subscribe and how you would like to receive the newsletter e.g. by post or email. Kids Help Line's newsletter comes out every 4 months and is free of charge.

For Discussion

From the different areas indicated in the statistics:

- Check on the statistics relative to your educational situation
- Make a comparison with the Australian situation
- What do you learn from the youngsters you live amongst?

3. How Children Tell their Troubles

The ways in which callers to Kids Help Line disclose and describe their troubles and how counsellors respond is currently under investigation by a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from two Queensland Universities (see below). Using a technique known as Conversational Analysis the team are examining taped conversations between callers and counsellors. Their findings will be useful in improving communication between children and adults. This article describes some observations on the opening sequences in calls.

1. Greetings.

Counsellors greet callers with a friendly and casual - 'Hi Kids Help Line' - allowing for a range of possible responses from the child. Counsellors do not give their names, thus the caller does not feel obliged to give theirs, preserving the notion of anonymity.

However, by naming the service counsellors do let the caller know they have reached the right place. Neither does the greeting presuppose that the caller wants help by using phrases such as 'how can I help you'. This puts an onus on the caller to say what comes next, providing more choice on how to enter the conversation.

2. Building trust and rapport.

In the first turns of the conversation, callers generally use many pauses and placeholders such as 'umm' as they gather their thoughts and begin to describe their problem. The pauses leave spaces for the counsellor to offer acknowledgements such as yeah, sure, mmm and okay to show they are listening and to encourage the caller to continue. For example:

Counsellor: Hi there Kids Help Line

Child: um hello . hh um....
ah-uh like I wanted to talk to er someone
about like I have some problems at school?.....

Counsellor: sure

Caller: yeah.....

.....hh um ha I kind of have this trouble.....
you see I don't know why it happened?.....
.....basically um hh.....I was sick for a
couple of days.....

Counsellor: mm

Caller:and yeah.....um um ah went to the doctor's...
.....and like he....

The above example shows the caller describing his 'problems at school' very hesitantly and pausing frequently. In the initial phases the counsellor uses 'sure' and 'mm' as a neutral response that neither affirms nor agrees with the caller's topic but has the consequence of acting as a continuer, encouraging further talk from the caller. The initiative stays with the caller, with the counsellor leaving space for the caller to decide how they will tell their own troubles. When given the opportunity and time, children and young people are competent in communicating.

While the pauses provide opportunities for the counsellor to speak, for the most part they use sounds such as 'mm' and 'uhuh' to acknowledge that they are listening but have nothing significant to add at that moment. This is a further, powerful way of indicating to the callers that the initiative is with them.

While these pauses also offer spaces for the counsellor to begin to ask questions and speak as is frequently the case in adult-child interactions, this is not what usually occurs in the opening sequences of calls. This is a different style to that used typically by adults with children and young people. When interacting with children and young people, adults typically use a framework of questions, advice and control of the pace - speaking rather than listening. It can take a long time for a young person to get to a point and sometimes even longer for an adult to grasp the meaning and dimensions of a young person's troubles.

3. Listening for how kids want to be heard.

Listening for how the caller wants to be heard is a crucial skill and is evidenced not only in non-intervention during early stages of the conversation but also using a pattern that closely resembles the caller in both pace and tone. Reflecting the caller's intensity or casualness is part of this process, as well as repeating some of their words.

Children and young people have different ways of indicating the magnitude of their problem or distress, for example 'oh everything is wrong' to 'just a bit worried'. While counsellors hear these formulations of how serious things are, they do not engage directly in agreeing or disagreeing with such assessments as might be the case in everyday troubles-telling between children and the adults they interact with. For example adults frequently respond with phrases such as 'it can't be all that bad' or 'don't worry, it will be fine', in effect dismissing, minimising or trivialising the young persons problem. The counsellor's approach lets the caller's assessment stand for the moment, indicating respect and also as a resource for subsequent counselling work.

4. Searching for the reason for the call

Counsellors listen, not for the problem, but for the reason for the call. The trouble expressed by the caller is not always the same as the reason for the call. Counsellors must separate the caller's statements of problems from their statements or allusions to what they are seeking from the counsellor. The trouble (for example being kicked out of home) may be different to the reason for the call (for example not knowing what to do, needing some advice), and can be presented either before or after the reason for the call, or at the same time. When they have heard why the caller is calling and what they want, the counsellor can proceed to talk about the problem.

5. Avoiding Advice Giving

At times, what the caller wants is not what the counsellor can provide. This occurs when the caller wants advice, in which case the counsellor works to avoid giving advice directly. For instance, callers may ask the counsellor specifically for their opinion ("do you reckon that's a good idea?") or, in a less direct appeal, appear to be asking for advice via formulations such as "I don't know what to do".

Rather than offering guidance, counsellors respond by suggesting possible courses of action without actually giving advice. This is accomplished through statements that provide information ("there are many different ways of starting a conversation, what do you think would happen if you said..."), point the caller to where they may find information for themselves, or ask a question ("anybody else you've talked to?") offering a possibility or course of infor-

mation the caller has not put forward.

This avoidance of advice giving is an unusual pattern between adults (such as parents and caregivers) and young people, which typically is to tell young people what to do. In this respect, Kids Help Line offers the opportunity for the young person to begin their own problem solving process rather than giving them advice and solve the troubles for them.

6. We Listen - We Care

These openings in troubles-telling display a clear sense of the Kids Help Line philosophy in action. The counsellor's way of listening captures an important philosophical and procedural aspect of the counsellor's work: "we listen, we care" rather than "we can solve your problems". Instead of a format of 'problem identification - advice giving', the format 'talking about problems - listening to that talk' or even just 'talking-listening' provides the framework for service delivery.

Looking at the fine details of how interactions occur, at how responses are related to prior turns, at how spaces are filled or not filled, we find the conversational machinery (and conversational art) through which the listening and caring is done in the important opening moments of calls. Kids Help Line offers the caller the rare opportunity to retain control of the definition and management of their troubles.

The research team are Susan Danby from the Centre for Applied Studies in early Childhood at Queensland University of Technology; Carolyn Baker from the School of Education at the University of Queensland; and Michael Emmison from the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland. Their findings are to be published in their upcoming book 'Calling for Help'.

For Discussion

- What is your reaction to this educational activity?
- What does it teach you about your own?

4. Helping Kids Tackle the Tough Issues

1. Peer skills

Peer Skills is a means of assisting young people to help themselves and others and to practice caring in a useful and effective way.

Kids Help Line (KHL) developed the Peer Skills workshop in 1994 in response to the number of calls from young people concerned about their friends, and requests from schools for students to do work experience at KHL. Since that time the Peer Skills workshop has trained over 4000 young people across Australia

Young people appreciate developing skills that enable them to feel and be more competent in negotiating their relationships and supporting their friends and peers. They demonstrate aptitude, openness and willingness to learn and practice communication skills.

Mission Statement and Aims

Peer Skills aims to provide skills, knowledge and strategies to assist young people to develop self-understanding and effective supportive relationships.

Underlying this aim is a belief in the worth of young people and their capacity for effective engagement with each other, families and communities.

Peer Skills aims to:

- Create a fun, safe learning environment in which young people are introduced to the concept of Peer Skills and the operation of Kids Help Line;
- Assist young people to understand the concepts of values and attitudes;
- Provide information about listening and responding, and to provide a safe constructive environment in which they can practice these skills;
- Provide a framework for problem solving which can be used in many different situations;

- Encourage young people to be aware of their own strengths and limitations and to develop self-care strategies;
- Assist young people to gain knowledge about professional helping resources and services in their local communities and how to effectively access these services.

The Peer Skills workshops primarily target young people aged 14 to 18 years. The target population may be accessed through schools, youth groups and any other appropriate settings where young people meet together. The program is usually delivered over 2 days with about 15 participants. The program is flexible in order to meet particular community and cultural needs.

Skills

The skills that young people can develop include:

- negotiation
- recognising and understanding values
- goal setting
- active listening
- engaging in a non-judgmental manner
- demonstrating pace and voice tone
- appreciating and valuing difference
- reflecting feelings
- problem solving
- asking open ended questions
- networking
- recognising own limitations
- rapport building
- maintaining boundaries
- thinking about the consequences of actions
- respecting cultural and gender differences
- developing support networks
- gaining knowledge of local resources

Participants are encouraged to seek assistance, particularly for serious problems such as self-harm or abuse. Barriers to seeking help and how to encourage friends to seek help are discussed.

More importantly participants are taught skills in 'self care' by examining how they can look after their own well-being when challenged by difficult issues. Participants are provided with a list of local and regional service providers at the workshop. By bringing young people in to contact with service providers in to an informal setting, relationships can be enhanced and young people may be more likely to seek help for themselves or their friends.

Outcomes

Feedback from the young people who have participated in the program indicate that they:

“will be able to use the skills in real life situations”

and that:

“it ... (will) enable me to help my family and friends”

Questions about the Peer skills programme

Are the peer helpers a replacement for the professional counselling staff?

Not at all. With training and continued supervision, the peer helpers can become a constructive addition to the school environment. Because peer helpers are generally students who share values, experiences and lifestyles of other students they can often help accomplish tasks that professionals are unable to do on their own. Consequently, peer helpers may be able to help counsellors use their professional time and service more effectively.

In addition, peer helpers can be available to students who for one reason or another just won't go to an adult for assistance. Peer helpers can operate in such a way as to diffuse problems that may occur and alert professional counsellors about problems experienced by students.

School personnel are necessary for the training and leadership of peer helpers as well as for the ongoing supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the program.

How are the peer helpers made available to students?

Line facilitator will discuss this issue with school representatives. We also recommend visiting our website for some ideas or discussing this issue with the peer helpers for their input.

Can the program include training not only in personal problems but course selection, planning, and coping with school subjects?

The major focus of the workshop is verbal skills to help other students within a problem-solving framework. Students who have undertaken the workshop may provide constructive additional assistance to schools. This is dependent entirely on the school's interest in using workshop participants within school-based support or mentor programs.

When and where will/does the training take place? What type/kind of space is required to run a program?

This is one of the issues negotiated pre-workshop. This information is also available via the School Information Booklet and can be obtained from a State/Territory Co-ordinator.

Could someone from outside the school do the training?

Yes. Kids Help Line is retaining responsibility for selection and recruitment of appropriate staff to facilitate the 2-day workshop. Some facilitators are employed by Kids Help Line on a casual basis and others work at local agencies that have entered into partnership with KHL to provide the workshops. Facilitators are selected on the basis of their experience in working with youth, counselling skills and group facilitation skills.

Should the peer helpers be supervised, and if so, how much time does it take?

This issue is canvassed pre-workshop by the Kids Help Line facilitator. Kids Help Line is strongly of the view that if helpers are given a role in the school or community group an appropriate professionally trained adult must have responsibility for supervision and guidance of the young person in any role they undertake.

How many students are/can be trained at once (i.e. what is the size of the training groups)?

12 - 15 is the optimal group size. Selection of group participants is discussed as one of the issues pre-workshop.

Can this program be implemented at primary as well as secondary levels?

The target group for Kids Help Line is 14 - 18 year olds. It is not Kids Help Line's practice to promote this program in primary

schools. We share the reservation that it may be too great an expectation to place on primary aged children. This issue is a difficult one in that research shows that help seeking behaviour is established in children during their primary school years. We recognise that primary school aged children still seek the advice and support of their peers often before seeking adult or professional help.

What amount of time is involved to organise and keep the program functioning?

This depends on a number of factors and should certainly be considered by school representatives together with the Kids Help Line facilitator prior to any workshop being introduced into a school.

Are there any programs functioning successfully in Australia?

The Peer Skills program has now been provided to more than 7000 young people in rural Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory, Western Australia and Tasmania. A recent audit of the program revealed the following statistics. (As at 30th December

2. Parentline

Mission Statement

Parentline exists to assist people to develop strategies and skills which enable them to more effectively manage their own lives.

Parentline Aims

- Maintain a confidential and anonymous counselling service for all parents in Queensland which meets the highest standards of professional practice and management.
- Collect, analyse and disseminate non-identifying information which supports research and reflects the issues and problems of parents.
- Assist parents to have a direct voice on those policies or issues that affect them.

Parentline is a confidential telephone counselling service for parents and/or primary care givers. Parentline is staffed by paid counsellors who have been professionally trained to understand and

respond to the particular issues that concern parents.

Parentline is a joint initiative of BoysTown Family Care and Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland. A nine-month trial in the Brisbane metro region commenced in 1995 was followed by the launch of Parentline as a statewide service on 28 April 1996. In 1999 Families, Youth and Community Care Queensland allocated additional funds for Parentline to be externally reviewed. Community Link Australia commented that, "Parentline is a needed, worthwhile and professionally run community service. It is a community service in which Queensland can take pride." In October 2000, Parentline has received a significant boost in funding as part of the Queensland Government's Putting Families First strategy.

Our Role in Putting Families First

Parentline will play a central role in providing Queensland families with access to professional advice on parenting challenges as part of the State Government's new statewide information services for families. Parentline has been upgraded so that more families can benefit from the service. A 50% increase in funding has meant an increase in staff and an upgrade of the referral database. Supplementary training has also been provided for the counsellors to ensure they are able to respond to a range of family issues.

Our Commitment to Families

Parentline has a commitment to providing an environment that offers a safe place to discuss any parenting and family related issues.

<mailto:parentline@kidshelp.com.au>

5. Staff Reflections

1. Being a counsellor at KHL for 12 years is like “being” at a very special school that I have the privilege to attend. The ongoing learning that the children of Australia continue to teach me is incredible and amazing. Just when I thought right now I have heard it all, along comes another new lesson that leaves a feeling too hard to describe - it simply affects my whole being and a wanting to say 'thank you' for finding the strength and courage to talk and share “your experience” with KHL (and I mean what courage these children have).

At the end of a call when a client says 'thank you so much for listening and being there for me' the 'thank you' goes both ways my young teachers.

2. What has pleased me is the number of indigenous callers who use the service. I have a little 8-year-old aboriginal boy who has reconnected with me at least 10 times and is beginning to talk about issues which are of deep concern to him. I even spoke for 30 minutes or so one day to a group of young people calling from the public phone in Balgo Hills - they were amazed that I seemed to know so much about their place and the various place names. It is interesting to reflect that even from the center of Brisbane it is possible to be directly involved in the mission of the Institute in such a remote place.

3. Having worked at KHL for many years as both counsellor and shift supervisor, here is one thing that stands out for me. Kids access this service for their reasons, and on their terms. Kids call about something that is important or difficult for them at the time they need to talk. The process is in their hands. They can hang up or call back when they choose; and our role is not to make them understand something, or do something that we want them to. It is to support them to reach a clearer understanding of their own, and to make conscious decisions that will help them make the changes they want for themselves. It is by invitation that we play a role in the life journey of one of our callers. It is a privilege to work with a young person who is feeling vulnerable and therefore looking for support, and often very open in what they disclose

about themselves and their circumstances... especially when that young person on the end of the phone is experiencing something painful or is in crisis. How helpful or influential our contribution is for the young person can only be known by them.

4. Moving into a Shift Supervisor's position after having worked for five years as a Counsellor means I no longer have direct contact with the young people who call, and sometimes I miss that... laughing with them as they bundle into telephone booths... sharing their delight in some wondrous happening in their lives... sitting quietly while they cry or providing a safe outlet for their anger. I'm still there for them though - now it's supporting Counsellors, and often it's during a crisis when they need us to act quickly... when they need emergency assistance. I hear their voices when they've lost all hope or when they're very frightened and I listen while Counsellors support them with their calm, measured responses and I know that the kids of this country are being well served - by all of us here... on every level.

5. Having worked at Kids Help Line for over 2 years, I have gained a new level of respect and regard for the children and young people of Australia. The resilience they show, in circumstances where many adults would flounder, is phenomenal. Their capacity to love reigns against all the odds.

There has been many a humbly experience, where the mere act of truly listening to another human being, has been so deeply appreciated.

Since working here, I try hard to take account of the stories that have been so preciousy shared with me, on days when I feel challenged by a young person's behaviour. Keeping the plight of many young people in mind has helped me to feel/show compassion, when others in society may show disapproval.