

EMBARGOED to Tuesday, 24 May 2016

Kids Helpline turns 25 What's been concerning kids over that time?

Kids Helpline (KHL) is celebrating 25 years of providing counselling and support which has seen more than 7.5 million contacts responded to nationally, and in its '2015 Kids Helpline Insights Report' released today, reveals what's changed for contacts to KHL over that time.

According to **yourtown** CEO Tracy Adams, KHL was created to give children and young people someone to turn to when they needed help, particularly around abuse and neglect, but while these were still issues today, other concerns now topped this list.

"In the first four months of opening, KHL received more than 550,000 calls. Key issues of the day included relationships, child abuse and family violence, along with teen pregnancy," Ms Adams said.

"Today, we still receive many contacts about these issues, but mental and emotional health concerns are now the number one reason young people reach out to us for counselling.

"In 2015, 22% of all counselling contacts to KHL were about these issues followed by family relationships at 19%."

The Insights Report shows there has been a 626% increase in contacts to KHL about mental health and/or emotional health, including self-injury, and a 246% increase in contacts about suicide since 1996. According to Ms Adams, behind those statistics is an increased social understanding of mental illness.

"The rise in contacts to KHL about mental health is likely due to a number of factors, including a growing community awareness and acceptance of mental illness as a major concern for children and young people," she said.

"There's a lot more information out there about mental health. Young people are recognising these issues and are willing to seek help and reach out, an important step towards improving the health of those living with a mental illness."

Ms Adams said the expansion of the KHL service from 5-18 to 5-25 year olds in 2003 had been a contributor to the increase in mental health contacts. The introduction of specialised training for KHL counsellors to recognise mental health issues and ongoing case management for these and other complex issues had also contributed to the rise.

More complex issues have also meant KHL counselling session times have more than tripled over 25 years, going from around 10 minutes in 1991 to 36 minutes in 2015. Changes in how young people prefer to seek support and information also saw changes for KHL.

"We're glad to be here to meet this need and are always looking to innovate to ensure young people can get help. This can mean increased training for our counsellors or new technologies," she said.

"In 2000, KHL was a world leader being the first helpline internationally to offer real-time publically available web counselling for young people.

"Today, we respond to thousands of contacts via chat and email and our website offers a wealth of self-help information for children, teens and their parents. In 2015, we had 1,385 unique visitors to the KHL website every day and 554,988 page views of 'Tips & Info' over the year.

“We also talk to classrooms across Australia via video conferencing and our Kids Helpline @ School program, supported by Optus. More than 17,000 primary school students took part in 2015.

“We spearhead research into the key issues affecting children and young people, like youth suicide and the impact of domestic and family violence on children. We partner with universities and others to find new ways to reach out and protect young people, responding to the changing needs of children and young people.

“KHL plays a critical role in the protection of children and young people across Australia. We give them choices, support and someone to listen any time and for any reason. This commitment has never changed.

“Simply put, we care and we listen, and will continue to be there to advocate for and help children and young people when they need us most.”

KHL is a service of **yourtown** (formally BoysTown). It is 72% funded by the **yourtown** Art Union, donations and corporate support. Federal and State Governments fund 28%.

KHL gives children and young people choices, support and someone to listen. It is Australia’s only national 24/7 counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years – free call **1800 55 1800** or **www.kidshelpline.com.au**.

The **Kids Helpline Insights 2015** report is available at **www.kidshelpline.com.au/reports**. It is supported by the **Kids Helpline Insights 2015: National Statistical Overview** which provides extensive data about the issues affecting children and young people as well as regional based **State and Territory** reports.

ENDS

Interview/filming opportunities:

Tracy Adams, **yourtown/Kids Helpline** CEO
Tony Fitzgerald, **yourtown/Kids Helpline** Counselling Centre Manager
John Dalglish, **yourtown** Head of Strategy and Research
Former Kids Helpline client
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Kids Helpline turns 25 FACT SHEET

- Kids Helpline is free, private and confidential
 - Gives children and young people choices, support and someone to listen any time and for any reason
 - Children and young people speak with qualified counsellors
 - Counselling is via phone, webchat and email
 - KHL phone lines opened in Queensland on March 25 1991
 - 550,000 calls in the first 4 months
 - KHL went national in May 1993
 - KHL were world leaders in 2000 establishing the first real-time publically accessible web counselling service
 - 7.5 million contacts with KHL in 25 years – this is the equivalent of responding to one contact every 1.7 minutes continually for 25 years
 - From 1996 to 2015:
 - 626% increase in contacts about mental health and emotional health, including self-harm *
 - 246% increase in contacts about suicide*
 - 89% decrease in contacts about contraception and safe sex
 - 81% decrease in contacts about pregnancy
- *Increased contacts about mental health and suicide likely due to: increased community awareness about the issue, expanding age eligibility of young people using the service going from 5-18yrs to 5-25yrs in 2003, and introduction of specialised training of counsellors to recognise and respond to mental health issues
- Top five issues in 2015 are mental health, family relationships, emotional wellbeing, suicide-related and dating and partner relationships
 - Top issues when KHL started included relationships, child abuse and family violence, bullying, and pregnancy
 - Funded 72% by **yourtown** (formally BoysTown) charity, primarily through its Art Union prize homes
 - There are 1,385 unique visitors to the KHL website every day (2015)
 - 35% increase in unique visitors to the KHL website since 2013
 - 79% increase in Teen Tips & Info pages on the KHL website since 2013
 - More than half of contacts are 13-18 year olds (55%)
 - More girls than boys access the service – 71% girls and 28% boys
 - 1,720 Duty of Care emergency actions were initiated in 2015 to protect children and young people from harm:
 - 39% about child abuse
 - 33% suicide attempts
 - other issues included drug overdose, mental illness escalation, self-injury and sexual assault
 - 12% increase in number of Duty of Care interventions from 2013-2015
 - Kids Helpline @ School was launched in 2013 offering virtual links up between a KHL counsellor and a primary school class about keys issues affecting young people

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