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24/7 helplines critical to combatting youth suicide

yourtown (formerly BoysTown) welcomes both major political parties' mental health strategies aimed at reducing suicide, but recent research shows 24/7 youth specialist confidential counselling needs to be higher on the agenda.

According to **yourtown** CEO Tracy Adams, while welcoming proposed mental health strategies from both major political parties, there is not enough recognition of the importance of 24/7 professional confidential counselling support for children and young people.

"Private and confidential telephone and online counselling services literally save lives. Last year, Kids Helpline (KHL) initiated 11 emergency care actions every week related to a suicide attempt by a young person. In addition, around 145 contacts per week were young people talking to us about suicide," Ms Adams said.

"To find out how KHL could help more young people, **yourtown** recently surveyed 472 young people who had thought about, planned or attempted suicide.

"84% of young people who had received counselling said it was helpful and worked.

"Sadly, 60% of those surveyed said they had never received any kind of support for their mental health concerns because they feared 'being judged' or called an 'attention-seeker' by family or friends if they revealed they had an issue.

"It can be hard for family and friends to tell the difference between every day teen ups and downs and the serious depression or distress that may suggest a risk of suicide. That can make it hard for children and young people to get the professional help they need.

"This means that for some young people being able to access free, private and confidential counselling via a helpline service is the only support they feel they can access."

Ms Adams said it is crucial that these services are provided free of charge, are available 24/7 and that national mental health strategies recognise this need. It's also important that parents and others in the community concerned about a young person know that services like KHL are there to help.

"Counselling saves lives, both in times of crisis and by enabling young people to build a trusting relationship with a counsellor," she said.

"Young people need to know help is available whenever they need it, that someone is always there to listen, care and provide the support needed. Their life may depend on it."

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**.

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

ENDS

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