media release



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Demand for child protection on the rise at Kids Helpline

The 2016 Kids Helpline (KHL) Insights report into issues concerning Australia's children and young people, released today, has revealed a 157% increase in emergency duty of care interventions by KHL since 2012.

In 2016, KHL counsellors actioned 1,907 emergency 'duty of care' interventions where they contacted emergency services or another agency to protect children and young people who were experiencing or were at imminent risk of significant harm.

That's more than 35 emergency duty of care interventions every week.

According to **yourtown** CEO Tracy Adams, children and young people can contact KHL about anything but all too often it's because they feel unsafe, are being abused, or feel like hurting themselves or others.

"Child abuse, at 38% of all duty of care interventions, has overtaken suicide attempts (34%) as the number one reason KHL counsellors enact duty of care emergency interventions for the second year running," Ms Adams said.

"Duty of care interventions have also been actioned because of drug overdoses, harm to others, self injury, sexual assault, homelessness, domestic violence, assault, child exploitation and physical health. We can literally save young lives.

"Some situations can be where violence is unfolding, like that of 13 year old Xavier*.

"Our counsellors called the Police while on the phone with Xavier following a drunken altercation where his father had hit him with a belt causing welts and cut his forehead by throwing a glass at him."

Ms Adams said that the intensity of support required by children and young people contacting KHL for counselling is increasing.

"In 2007, counselling contacts (where more intensive support is needed) made up 18 percent of all contacts. This has risen by around 20 percent, making up 37 percent of all contacts in 2016," she said.

The KHL Insights report showed the service responded to 181,165 contacts in 2016 of which, 66,963 were counselling contacts. Mental health (23 percent of all counselling contacts) and family relationship (19 percent of all counselling contacts) issues were the most common reasons why children and young people contacted KHL.

Emotional wellbeing was number three at 17 percent followed by suicide related issues (13 percent) and dating and partnerships (10 percent).

According to Ms Adams, while KHL is very glad to be there to answer cries for help, the service was also dedicated to providing support and information to reduce vulnerability to harm before it happened.

"We believe prevention is key and work with parents, governments and other agencies to educate and inform young people and empower them to protect themselves in the world around them," she said.

"This includes partnerships with the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner to provide direct support to young people with cyber safety concerns, our Kids Helpline @ School program for primary schools, and increasing our knowledge to evolve the KHL service and continue to meet the needs of the young people reaching out to us."

Increased use of technology has seen Kids Helpline experience a 151 percent increase in WebChat counselling in the past five years, going from 12,643 in 2012 to 31,765 contacts in 2016.

To better understand the online safety experiences of those contacting KHL, in July 2016 KHL began gathering data on the prevalence of cyberbullying and other issues in this space.

"From July to December 2016, 1,566 counselling contacts were from children and young people concerned, worried or feeling unsafe as a result of online or texting activity," Ms Adams said.

"In addition to bullying, this included participation in sexting, receiving unwanted online contact, suspected grooming and uncontrolled or excessive use of online gaming or social networking."

The 2016 Insights report showed New South Wales and Victoria as the leading states accessing Kids Helpline services with 35 percent and 25 percent of all contacts coming from these States respectively.

To access the 2016 KHL Insights Reports, including state and territory reports, go to www.kidshelpline.com.au

Kids Helpline (KHL) remains Australia's only national 24/7 counselling and support service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years – free call **1800** 55 **1800** or online at www.kidshelpline.com.au

Primary schools across Australia can access the free **Kids Helpline @ School** program. KHL counsellors connect with classes via video link to talk about issues like bullying, staying safe online, friendships and resilience. See **www.kidshelpline.com.au/school** for more information.

INTERVIEW/PHOTO/FILMING OPPORTUNITIES

- Tracy Adams, yourtown CEO
- Brendan Bourke, yourtown Head of Client Services
- John Dalgleish, yourtown Head of Strategy and Research
- Tony Fitzgerald, KHL Counselling Centre Manager
- Louise Davis, KHL Clinical Practice Manager
- Leo Hede, KHL Counselling Centre Supervisor

NB. *name changed to protect privacy.

-ENDS-

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Kids Helpline case studies where duty of care interventions have occurred

*names and some details have been changed to protect privacy

Case study I - Angie*, 16 Female

Angie called Kids Helpline (KHL) for the first time to talk about the concern she had about seeing her father. She reported a long history of family and domestic violence in the home: describing how she and her mother and younger sister (10 years) experienced shouting and screaming from him on a daily basis, which then escalated two years ago to him hitting walls, driving erratically and threatening to hit them all on a weekly basis.

Angie described how, leading up to 6 months ago her father started grabbing, pushing and hitting her mother and call her all kinds of terrible names. Angie also said that her father had threatened on a number of occasions to kill her mother. Angie and her sister witnessed this on a number of occasions and when they tried to intervene, her father would push them and restrain them and lock them in their rooms. Angie talked about how distressing it was to hear her mother begging for her father to stop but her father not being able to.

Finally, about 6 months ago, someone (Angie thinks a neighbour) contacted the Police and they attended the house where they witnessed Angie's father attempting to strangle her mother. Her mother had blood and bruises on her and the Police took out an Apprehended Violence order on the mother's behalf and that started a process in court. Angie's father was not able to come home but he had been granted access to Angie and her sister for about three weeks now. Angie and her sister stay over every second weekend but Angie reported to KHL that she was increasingly feeling scared about going as he was still really angry and was saying terrible things about her mother and was trying to get information out of her and her sister about their mother. Angie said that he had started to grab them around their wrists and wouldn't let them go until they told him about their mother. Angie also went on to say that he had started to threaten both of them with "killing their mother and them and hiding their bodies where no-one could find them".

Angie had not spoken to anyone about what was happening, not even her mother as she didn't want her to worry. Angie said she didn't want to put any more pressure on her mum as she felt like her mother was at breaking point, as her mother was always crying a lot and finding it difficult to get out of bed every day.

KHL encouraged Angie to talk about the situation and how this was impacting her. KHL also discussed some options, which included notifying Child Protection Services about what was happening for her and her sister. Angie was initially reluctant to do this as she didn't want anyone to "get into trouble". She just wanted her father to stop and be kinder, and her mum to be better and for everyone to get on. KHL explained that helping families manage these kinds of situations is what Child Protection Services could assist with. KHL also talked about being able to support her to let Child Protection Services know - KHL could stay on the line and support Angie whilst she talks with the Child Protection Officer. KHL talked about the importance of Angie and her sister's safety and that is was not OK that they were experiencing threats to their safety and feeling scared. KHL also talked with Angie about how we sometimes will need to let Child Protection Services know about these situations even if the young person doesn't want us to; KHL needs to make sure we are prioritising their safety.

Angie agreed that she would like us to help her make the call to child protection with support from KHL. KHL talked with Angie about what she would like us to share and what she felt comfortable sharing herself, and it was very clear what the call with Child Protection would be like. We wanted to empower Angie to advocate for herself when she felt comfortable and to also ask for help when she needed it.

KHL initially contacted the Child Protection worker, with Angie being able to hear everything KHL was reporting and then Angie was able to talk to the worker herself. The worker gathered the information and let Angie know that they would be following up with their manager and they would be in touch with Angie to let them know what the actions would be. They encouraged Angie to call them if anything changed and also to call KHL for ongoing support. KHL also reiterated this to Angie and checked in with her around how the call went for her and what Angie could do in managing how things would be for the next couple of days. We invited Angie to check in with KHL over the next couple of days to see how she was going and Angie agreed to do this.

Angie checked in with KHL on a daily basis and then on the third day Angie informed us that Child Protection Workers had attended her school and talked with her about the situation. They also met with her mother, sister and her in the home to assess further the situation from the sister and mother's perspective. Angie stated that she felt comfortable with this.

Outcome: Further support and interventions were provided to the family by Child Protection and the matter also went back to court for review of visiting arrangements with Angie's father. Support was also provided to Angie's father and he had made positive changes to his behaviour. Angie continued to contact KHL on a regular basis and she was feeling much happier with the family situation and relationships within the family. Her father had stopped making threats and being angry and Angie and her sister felt more comfortable with him.

Case Study 2 - Xavier* 13 living with mum and dad

Xavier contacted KHL via phone saying that his mother was at work and would be for another 5 hours and that his father had hit him with a belt 20 minutes ago and he had red welts on one arm, both of his legs and he had a cut on his forehead where is father threw a glass at him. Xavier stated that his father had been drinking and was very drunk. Xavier said that he was outside in the garden hiding from him. He stated that his father was trying to find him and Xavier could hear him shouting that he would find him and "beat the shit out of him". KHL recognised that Xavier was at serious and imminent risk and we let Xavier know that we would need to contact the Police for immediate support. Xavier was able to provide us with his address and phone number and we contacted Police straight away. We stayed on the line with Xavier until the Police attended 5 minutes later. Police were able to intervene and remove his father from the home and contact Xavier's mother to return home.

Xavier contacted KHL a week later stating that his father had been living away from the family home; living with a friend. Child Protection services were involved now and making recommendations about support for the family. Xavier stated that his mother was very supportive and he felt better that he could call KHL for help when he needed it most.

Case Study 3 – Tennille* 17 years living with her Grandparents and her two younger siblings (James* 12 and Jessie* 9 years)

Tennille contacted KHL for the first time so she could talk about an incident that happened with her grandparents in the last 20 minutes. Tennille informed KHL that she had been arguing with her grandmother, who she is very close to and her grandfather intervened and slapped her and called her stupid. When her younger brother tried to stop her grandfather from slapping Tennille again, her grandfather grabbed her younger brother around the neck and had tried to strangle him for about a minute. Tennille pulled her grandfather's hands from around her brother's neck however this made her grandfather even angrier and he had kicked them out of the house and told them that they would not be allowed back in the house again. Her other younger sister was still in the house with her grandparents.

Tennille reported that they were known to Child Protection services as they had been removed from their mother's care and placed with their grandparents. Tennille was able to provide the name of her case worker and the Office they worked in but didn't have the telephone number. Tennille, whilst reluctant to contact her case worker agreed with KHL that it would be important to inform the case worker as her and her brother's safety was paramount, particularly as Tennille and her brother had nowhere else to go. KHL contacted Tennille's case worker and they came right out to meet with Tennille and her brother to discuss what had occurred and to take them to a place of safety so that everyone could have some time to calm down. The case worker was also able to meet with the grandparents to discuss what had happened and to look at what caused the situation and think about strategies that would support the family to prevent this happening again. The grandparents engaged in this process and through mediation and working out a clear plan with each member of the family, they were able to prevent the situation from happening again.

Tennille continued to call KHL to update on her home and family relationship situation and her brother and sister were also able to contact KHL on a regular basis to talk about how it was for them to being living away from their birth parents and adjusting to living with their grandparents with a service outside of the statutory system. They

were also able to talk with KHL about strategies for coping so that they can better manage situations of conflict in the family.

Case study 4 - Ellie* 15 years of age, lives with parents

Ellie contacted KHL stating that she wanted to talk to someone about something terrible that had happened to her two days ago. Ellie stated that she had been using Instagram over the last couple of months and a boy wanted to follow her on Instagram. She didn't know who he was but from his picture he looked really hot and so she had accepted his request to follow her. Ellie said that they started sharing funny pictures on Instagram and then he suggested that they share their mobile numbers so that they could text. Ellie said that she felt really comfortable with this and thought it would be easier to chat over text.

Via text, the boy had told her that he was 16 years old and lived with his mother and young brother and older sister and that his father had died 6 months ago. Ellie talked about how her grandfather had passed away about 8 months ago and it felt like they understood each other's losses. Ellie said that she was really happy that they were getting on well and she felt really flattered when he had started to flirt with her and saying how much he had found her attractive. From his Instagram picture Ellie thought he was really cute too.

A couple of weeks ago he started asking her to send him pictures of her and she did this. She asked him to send her pictures of him but he only sent pictures of his dog. Ellie thought this a bit strange but wondered if he felt uncomfortable sending through pictures of himself. Ellie said that he also asked her to send him naked pictures of herself. Whilst she felt a little uneasy about this, a lot of her friends had been doing this and she thought it would be ok as he promised not to share it with anyone.

After sending through a number of naked pictures to him, he asked her if they could meet. Ellie stated that she felt really excited about meeting him and they agreed to meet at a park two days ago. Ellie said that she went to the place in the park they agreed to meet and an adult man (who looked older than her father, who is 46 years) approached her and addressed her by her name. Ellie said she was shocked and didn't know what to say and he confirmed that he was the one talking to her via text and Instagram. Ellie tried to leave but he wouldn't let her go and Ellie reported that he had sexually assaulted her. Ellie said that she had only told her friend today who suggested she call KHL. Ellie was really worried about what her parents would say. Ellie blamed herself for what happened.

KHL highlighted to Ellie that what had happened was not OK and that it was important for her to tell someone like KHL so that we could get support to her. KHL highlighted that it would be important for us to let the Police know what had happened as well as her parents and we discussed what that might look like. Ellie asked KHL if we could talk to her parents and let them know what had happened to her and whilst she was scared she wanted to report what had happened to her to the Police.

KHL also discussed what had happened to her may have happened to other girls in the past and may happen in the future and that it was important to stop this man from assaulting and hurting other girls. Ellie agreed with this and didn't want to see another girl experience this.

Ellie got her parents to come on the telephone to speak with KHL and whilst they were very distressed to hear what Ellie had experienced they provided her with love and support and they were also intent on supporting Ellie to make a report to the Police. KHL also suggested that it might be in Ellie's best interest to seek medical attention as well.

Ellie made a report to the Police which initiated an investigation and culminated in the arrest of the man who groomed and sexually assaulted Ellie.

Ellie sought support from KHL in an ongoing way for three months after contacting KHL and was able to utilise the service to discuss strategies for keeping safe in the future.