



# 2021

## INSIGHTS



kids**help**line

POWERED BY **yourtown**



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**yourtown** Acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Lands in which we operate, and the Peoples of the various Nations in which we undertake our services.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and as an organisation with national reach, we extend our respect to all Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia.



## CEO report

Since Kids Helpline was established, we have responded to almost 8.5 million contacts and supported millions of interactions via our website and social channels.

The effects of the pandemic have significantly increased the number of young people reaching out to us for help over the past few years, and we do not anticipate this additional need will dissipate any time soon.

Mental health services were already over-stretched before 2021. The scale of mental distress in children and young people in 2021 resulted in increased demand with young people presenting to Kids Helpline with more complex mental health concerns, requiring longer and ongoing counselling sessions.

Kids Helpline provided almost 100,000 counselling sessions in 2021 and we provided more in-depth support for children and young people in 2021 than we did in 2020. However, there is no doubt that the enduring nature of the pandemic has taken a toll.

In part, this is because the pandemic has helped to normalise conversation about mental wellbeing.

The service experienced an increase in its demand in 2021, with the number of contacts to Kids Helpline counsellors rising to 459,811 from 456,995 in 2020.

Self-help remains high with 2,981,825 visits to the Kids Helpline website and our counsellors have demonstrated continued compassion towards young people in need with 169,064 contacts responded to in 2021.

Another disturbing trend in 2021 was the increased incidence of child abuse including sexual abuse resulting in more emergency responses by Kids Helpline where police, ambulance and child protection services were contacted to provide an immediate response to keep children and young people safe from harm.



On average, our counsellors provided emergency responses 16 times a day in 2021, 109% more than in 2020 increasing from 2,783 in 2020 to 5,823 in 2021.

Crucial insights from the pandemic years have led us to an exciting and vital evolution of Kids Helpline. We are embarking on a significant transformation in how we deliver virtual services across digital platforms that support children and young people in Australia. The technology program will play an important role in meeting increased demand for services, assisting to close the gap between what children and young people need and what current systems can deliver.

We will directly improve the capacity and capability of Kids Helpline to deliver our current suite of virtual counselling options – telephone, WebChat and email counselling – as well as invest in further tailored digital services and resource tools in line with young people's changing preferences for help-seeking.

Kids Helpline is designed for the world that children and young people inhabit and is there to support them at all stages of their journey.

The actions we are taking today will offer greater efficiency and convenience for children and young people when they connect with a Kids Helpline counsellor into the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy Adams".

Chief Executive Officer





**Kids Helpline continues to experience significant demand, with counsellors dealing with more complex cases, increasing numbers of young people requiring ongoing support, and increases in contacts requiring an immediate emergency response.**

## Key statistics

**169,064** contacts recorded by counsellors

- **99,012 (59%)** counselling sessions  
– an increase of 9.9% on 2020
- **70,052 (41%)** information and referral  
– a decrease of 18.5% on 2020

**In 2021**, Kids Helpline received approximately **1,260 contacts per day, one contact every 69 seconds.**

### Website

**2,394,584** unique users

**2,981,825** web sessions



Concern	2020	2021	Increase (%)
Unique Users	2,147,759	2,394,584	11.5%
Sessions	2,745,655	2,981,825	8.6%
Page Views	5,627,991	5,844,816	3.9%

### Emergency Responses

There were **5,823 emergency responses in 2021, a 109% increase** when compared to 2020, increasing from 2,783 to 5,823 with approximately 112 emergency responses a week during 2021.

Of these\*:

- 37%** involved child abuse
- 33%** involved suicide attempt
- 10%** involved sexual assault
- 35%** involved other emergencies

\* each emergency response may involve up to four concerns. Therefore, percentages total more than 100%

### My Circle

The My Circle platform supported 3,583 new participants in 2021 – a **45.7%** increase compared to 2020. The majority of young people registering for My Circle in 2021 (61.6%) were aged between **13-15 years.**





## Media Coverage

Media mentions of Kids Helpline featured prominently in 2021 with **25,823** media mentions

**172,746,856** total reach audience/circulation

**More than 65,000 counselling sessions related to mental health, emotional wellbeing or suicide-related concerns.**

Mental health and emotional wellbeing remains the number one reason that children and young people contact Kids Helpline. In 2021, Kids Helpline's professional counselling workforce provided almost 100,000 counselling sessions for children and young people. More than 65,000 or 66% of these sessions related to mental health, emotional wellbeing or suicide related concerns and represented an increase on the record numbers we saw in 2020 as the pandemic started to escalate.

Extended lockdowns and restrictions – especially in major cities such as Sydney and Melbourne – were a key driver of this increase in help-seeking from children and young people who were isolated from traditional support networks, such as schools and peer groups.

At the same time, Kids Helpline also saw a significant increase in emergency responses where our counsellors had to act to prevent immediate harm to a child or young person. In 2021 we responded to 5,823 emergencies, a 109% increase when compared to 2020. This equated to approximately 112 responses per week. Of these, 33% were related to a suicide attempt.

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Australia and we anticipate that these impacts will be long lasting.

What is encouraging, however, is that we have turned a corner in reducing the stigma surrounding help-seeking, particularly in relation to mental health and that more and more young people are willing to reach out for support when they need it.



# Profile of Kids Helpline counselling contacts

**1 in 2** mental health or emotional wellbeing

**1 in 6** family relationships

**1 in 6** suicide-related issues

**1 in 11** friend/peer relationships

**1 in 12** child abuse

**1 in 13** self-injury concerns

**1 in 13** dating/partner relationships

**1 in 23** identity, self-image and self-esteem

## Methods of contact to a counsellor

**59% phone**

**32% webchat**

**10% email**

\* Total percentage may exceed 100% due to rounding up of percentages

## Kids Helpline @ School

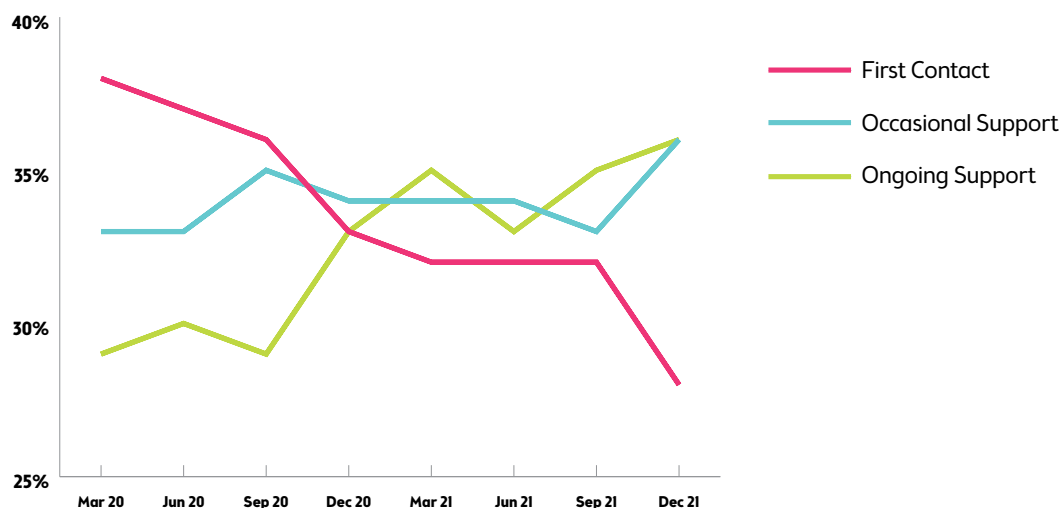
**55,446** primary school and **19,187** high school students participated in video link-up sessions with a counsellor.

## Children and young people's help-seeking needs are changing

The proportion of contacts requiring ongoing support reached 36% in December 2021.

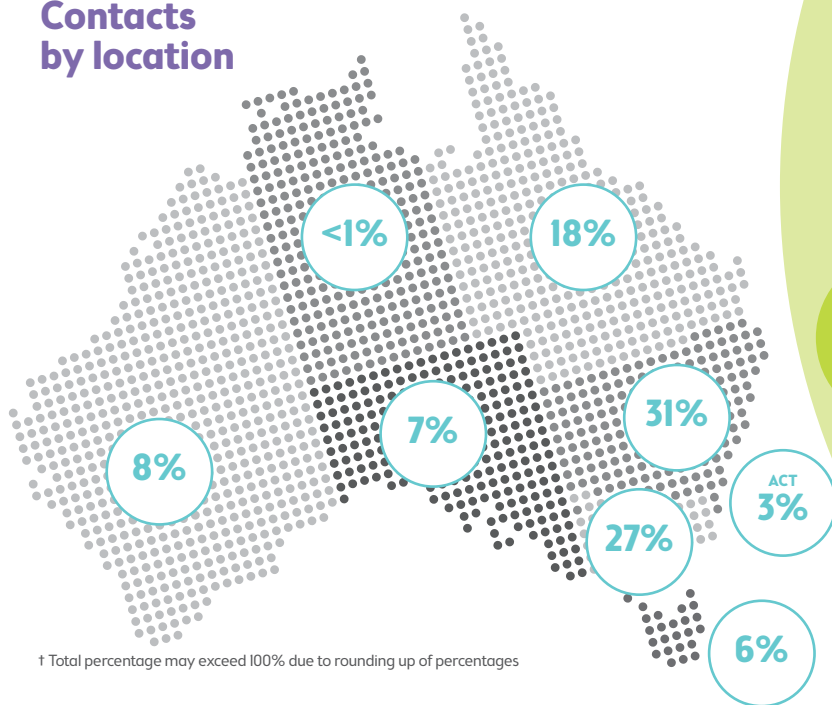


Changing Support Types



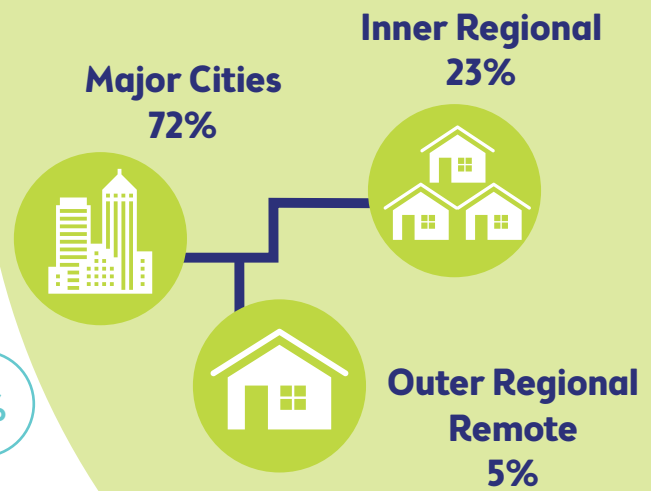
# Demographics<sup>\*†</sup>

## Contacts by location



† Total percentage may exceed 100% due to rounding up of percentages

## Locality



## Cultural background of contacts



## Age

5 – 9 years	3%
10 – 14 years	33%
15 – 18 years	36%
19 – 25 years	28%

## Gender











\* Where known

# COVID-19

COVID-19 placed considerable stress on children and young people during 2021, especially those that experienced extended periods of lockdown. Nationally 7,092 counselling contacts were related to the pandemic with over 85% (6,061) from NSW (43.5%) or Victoria (41.9%).

During lockdown, average daily emergency responses also increased particularly those involving child abuse, suicide attempts and sexual assault. In NSW there were two additional emergency responses, on average, each day during lockdown.

**Average number of emergency responses per day and concern for affected states and territory, in and out of lockdown**

State	Days in lockdown	Child abuse		Suicide attempt		Sexual assault		All problem types	
									
NSW	107	2.6	1.6	1.3	1.1	1.0	0.3	6.0	3.9
VIC	108	1.6	1.4	2.2	1.9	0.4	0.3	5.6	4.7
ACT	64	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.6	0.3
QLD	17	1.4	1.2	0.9	0.9	0.3	0.3	3.5	3.1





### Emergency responses in detail

Kids Helpline counsellors made contact with police, child protection and ambulance services on average 16 times a day, to help a young person at imminent risk of harm. This resulted in 5,823 emergency responses in 2021 compared to 2,783 in 2020.

### KEY NATIONAL STATISTICS

Top three reasons for an emergency response.

Number of Emergency Responses

Concern	2020	2021	Increase
Child abuse	977	2,161	121%
Suicide attempt	1,042	1,927	85%
Sexual assault	67	556	730%

Across all emergency responses:

- 72% involved females, and
- 16% involved 5 - 12 year olds.

On average, six interventions per day (37%) were related to child abuse. Of these, two per day involved children aged between 5 and 12. Worryingly, emergency responses involving sexual assault increased by 730% from 2020 to 2021.

Proportion of Emergency Responses

Concern	2020	2021	Total Proportion Difference
Child abuse	35.1%	37.1%	2.0%
Suicide attempt	37.4%	33.1%	-4.3%
Sexual assault	2.4%	9.5%	7.1%



# Kids Helpline @ School

Bupa Foundation is the principal partner of Kids Helpline, supporting the Kids Helpline @ School program and My Circle.

Bupa's support enables Kids Helpline @ School, to be delivered as a free early intervention program to all primary schools nationally. The program is delivered by qualified Kids Helpline counsellors via video link to promote wellbeing and normalise help-seeking.

Eighteen topics aligned to the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum are currently delivered through interactive sessions. Each session is tailored to the needs of individual classes and grades, and topics can be individualised to also support groups of parents or teachers.

The Kids Helpline @ School mental health and wellbeing program doubled participation rates in 2021, with more than 55,000 children from 325 schools across Australia taking part in sessions promoting mental wellbeing, resilience, and digital safety tools for all stages of life.

The topic, Managing Your Emotions, was the most attended session delivered by the program with 20,789 students taking part. 'Being Kind Online' was the second-most attended session, with over 6,759 students taking part.



## Kids Helpline @ High School

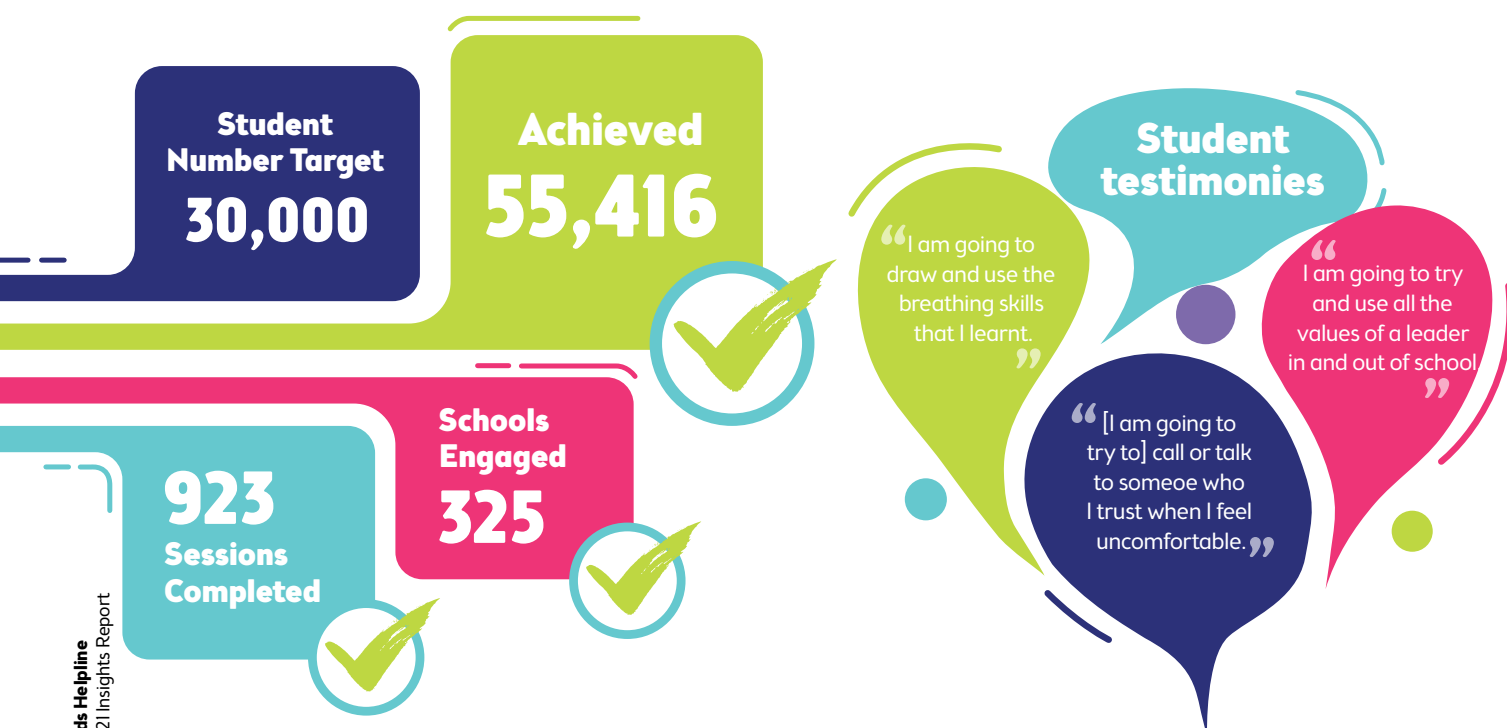
The Kids Helpline @ High School program expanded with new funding from the Australian Government to support the mental health of young Australians in New South Wales impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program's goal of reaching 12,000 students by 30 June 2022 was exceeded in December 2021. A total of 13,960 New South Wales High School students from 23 schools participated in Kids Helpline @ High School sessions.

To support student's mental health, the Kids Helpline @ High School program delivered supportive topics: Introduction to Kids Helpline and Help-Seeking, Emotional Intelligence, Fostering Resilience, Your Online Wellbeing, Cyberbullying and Mental Health and Respectful Relationships.

Our North Queensland Kids Helpline @ High School supported by the North Queensland PHN connected with 5,257 students from 16 Schools.

During the year, a Cape York Community Engagement strategy was launched with a focus on engaging with Traditional Owners in Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands. This project will strengthen existing community partnerships and lead to co-designed Kids Helpline @ High School topics with local communities and schools.



# Driving excellence

We're driving excellence by constantly improving Kids Helpline to meet the needs of children and young people.

With ever-increasing demand for our services, we will invest in a sustainable and scalable uplift to our services by building the critical digital infrastructure that will allow us to increase our service effectiveness and efficiency, extend reach and ensure relevance to children and young people.

While we remain committed to the delivery of Kids Helpline's current suite of virtual counselling options – telephone, WebChat and email counselling – we believe we can complement these services with further tailored digital service provision in line with young people's changing preferences for help-seeking.

It is for this reason we have embarked on a digital transformation to extend the number of young people we can reach in a meaningful and relevant way.

Importantly, the technology will mean we will be able to help more young people earlier on the mental wellbeing continuum before they escalate to more serious mental health conditions that place demand on government health systems.

Our digital strategy has been designed following consultation with 550 young people to ensure that the solutions we are developing will benefit them.

This has led us to design a digital approach which provides children and young people a choice of care options that are right for them, given their needs and circumstances. This ranges from information gathering, to self-help to personalised counselling, with each accessible as and when people need them.

## FUTURE GENERATION

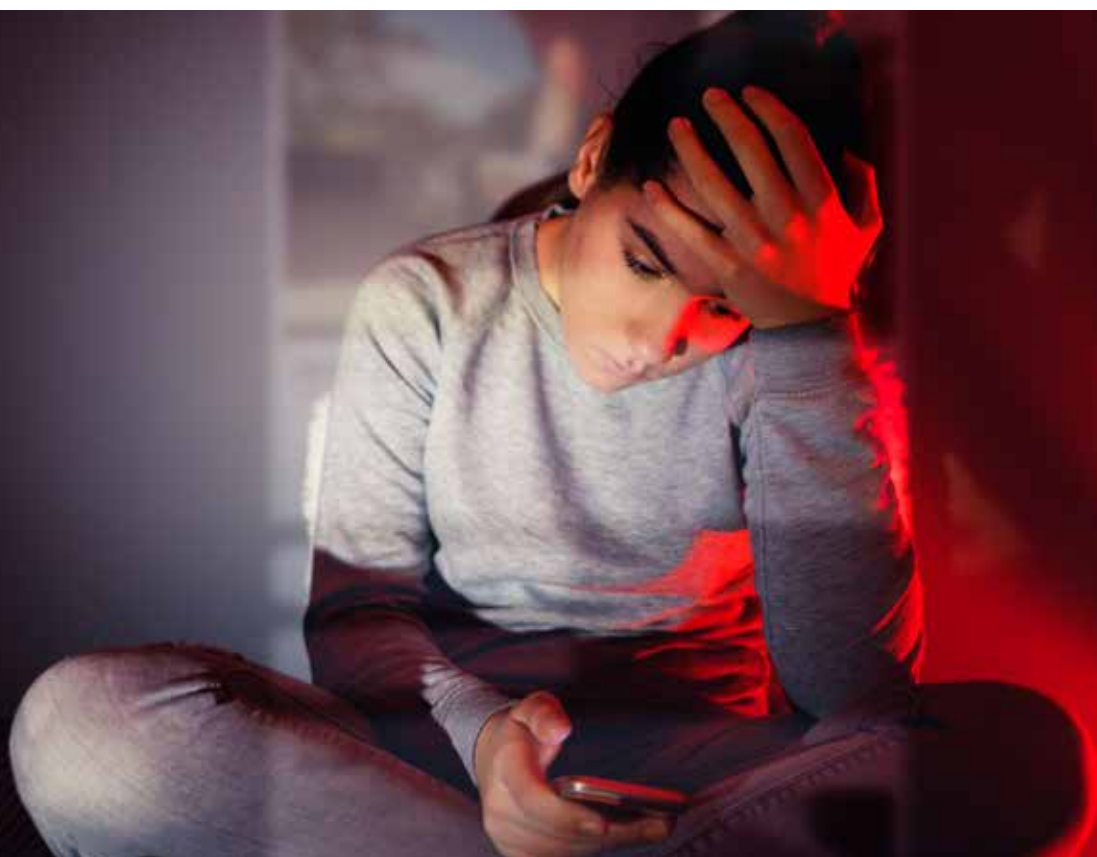
Kids Helpline is a proud recipient of funding from Future Generation Global (FGG).

FGG focusses on charities that support youth mental health.

FGG has invested in a key enabling strategy for Kids Helpline – “Tech for Mission”. We are designing and integrating dedicated support services, including ecosystem partners, ensuring that young people are provided with the skills, tools and follow-on services that help them build a better future.

With FGG's support we have begun a digital transformation that will ensure we are relevant to young people's evolving needs and help-seeking preferences, as well as ensure young people have seamless access to expert help, and self-directed support tools on their terms, when they need it.

**Future  
Generation**  
INVESTMENT & SOCIAL RETURNS





# Supporting young people in need

## Counselling Case Study

Emma\* (aged 14) contacted the service and reported experiencing “a depression rollercoaster”. She told the Kids Helpline counsellor that she was in a terrible headspace and had limited access to support as her friends and family were at work or unavailable. The young person told the Kids Helpline counsellor that she had found Kids Helpline through school and started reading other people’s stories. It made her feel better knowing she was not alone in this stress and depression rollercoaster.

Following the call, Emma reflected that in the midst of navigating her sadness and frustration, the Kids Helpline counsellor remained patient and empathetic. This made her feel comfortable and keen to talk further. Emma reported that this call helped her to find clarity and perspective on a situation she was struggling with and that she left the call with a marked improvement in her headspace.

\* Caller’s name has been changed

Emma contacted the Kids Helpline Service through the **yourtown** feedback channel to ensure that the Kids Helpline counsellor she was working with was acknowledged for her work with her and to pass on her gratitude to the service.

“All I can say to summarise is if someone who was in the same situation as me I would tell them that things do get better, but it won’t happen overnight. You have to make these things happen yourself, otherwise you’ll keep feeling these negative emotions and it will never stop. Kids Helpline is for all ages and can help anyone’s situation. I feel better knowing that I, as well as others, can get the help we need through Kids Helpline”.

**Emma, 14 years**





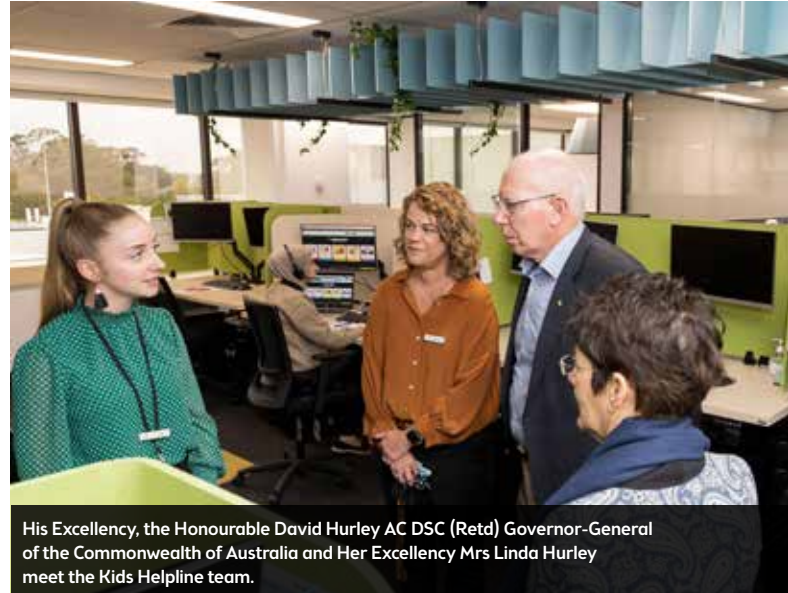
# Governor-General visits Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline NSW Service Manager Sarah Van Bentum and the counselling team were delighted to welcome His Excellency, the Governor-General, David Hurley, and Her Excellency, Linda Hurley, to the Kids Helpline Sydney headquarters.

As the New South Wales community was enduring the pandemic, Their Excellencies were keen to better understand the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians and the support being provided by Kids Helpline in response.

They enjoyed a hosted walk-through of the service and stopped to chat with many of our counselling staff, as they checked in on the impact that the lockdowns were having on children and young people as well as the 24/7 counselling team.

Their Excellencies stressed the need to keep spirits up and self-care during this challenging time and thanked the Kids Helpline team for their grit, determination, kindness and standing strong in the face of challenges.



His Excellency, the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia and Her Excellency Mrs Linda Hurley meet the Kids Helpline team.

## Kids Helpline Fundraiser - As seen on Sky News, Paul Murray Live

"There's no doubt about it: the lockdowns across the nation in 2021 had been tough for children and young people.

From no school, to the loss of social contact, to the loss of routine - it hasn't been a good time for this nation's young people."

With that message, Paul Murray host on Sky News, Paul Murray Live, rallied the nation with a fundraising event on his program in September 2021.

Within 24 hours, Within 24 hours, Kids Helpline had donations totalling close to \$410,000 including individual donations of hundred thousand dollars plus, being pledged by Shaw and Partners and Sarah and Lachlan Murdoch.

Thank you Paul and Sky News for investing your time and energy in driving this massive financial support to make a positive impact on the lives of children and young people in Australia.



# The survey says: mental health has and continues to be impacted by COVID-19

At Kids Helpline we're all about giving a voice to young people.

Your Voice 2021 did just that by handing the mic to young people aged 15-24 to have their say on government, mental health, education, employment and more.

Now that the project is wrapped up, our Youth Ambassadors have presented these ideas to the Australian Government.

Here's what young people had to say.

"It is not often that you are given the space to speak as a young person and to be taken seriously. To have my and the experiences of other young people considered, has been incredibly empowering for myself and every other young person involved."

"I am deeply grateful for the work the Your Voice team has put into hearing and genuinely listening to young people. Thank you."

In 2021, **yourtown** spoke to over 3,500 young people as part of the Your Voice project, funded by the Australian Government.

Young people shared their views about issues they currently face, their worries about the future, and recommendations for changes in society to give all young people the best chance of success. Young people's insights and recommendations were consolidated into a report sent to Government.

This project was essential in giving a voice to young people and ensuring their views were heard.

The process also helped them to build their skills and confidence in developing their voices to advocate to government to improve their quality of life.

The voices of young people have also been used to inform and shape research and advocacy projects here at **yourtown** as we are committed to amplifying their voices in all that we do.

Young people told **yourtown** that they face multiple, varied, and complex issues in their daily lives that are impacting on their mental health and wellbeing, in particular:

- Their mental health has and continues to be impacted by COVID-19
- They face barriers in accessing appropriate and timely mental health support and
- The education system leaves young people stressed, unsupported and unprepared for their future.



Your Voice

# My Circle is a new frontier for mental health support

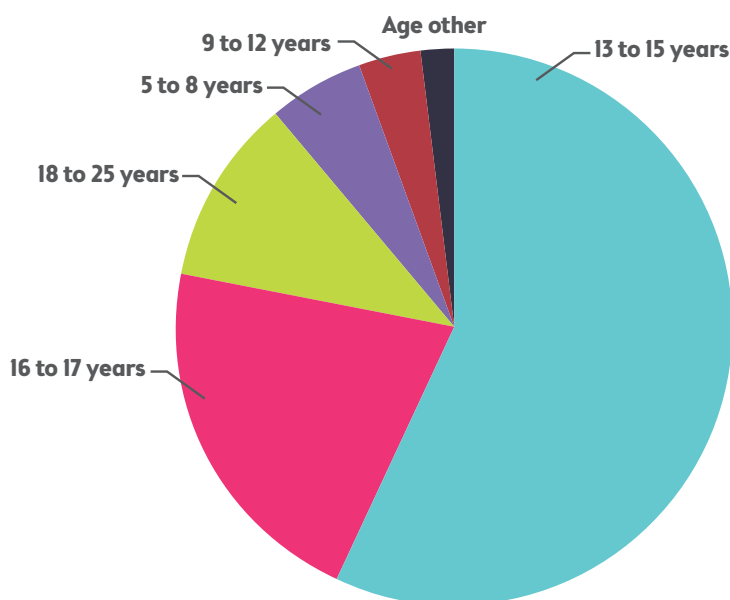
My Circle is a new frontier for mental health because it responds to the changing habits of teens.

My Circle is a social networking platform where young people can connect anonymously with peers who are dealing with similar challenges and access group sessions, all facilitated by Kids Helpline counsellors. As My Circle evolves, the University of Sydney will evaluate the outcomes and fine tune the tool, creating an evidenced based, cost-effective program to help more young people access the care they need.

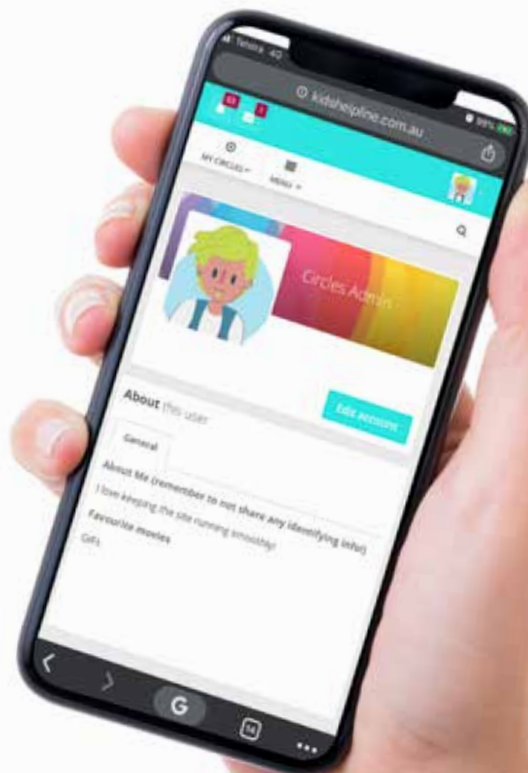
My Circle is generously funded by the Bupa Health Foundation and supported by the University of Sydney's Cyberpsychology Research Group.

The platform saw 3,583 new participants register in 2021 - a 45.7% increase over the previous year.

Those aged 13 to 15 were the most highly represented age group at the point of registration in 2021 (61.6%), with those aged 16 and 17 making up 22.9%, and 18 to 25-year olds, 11.5%.



 **Bupa Foundation**  
Creating a healthier world



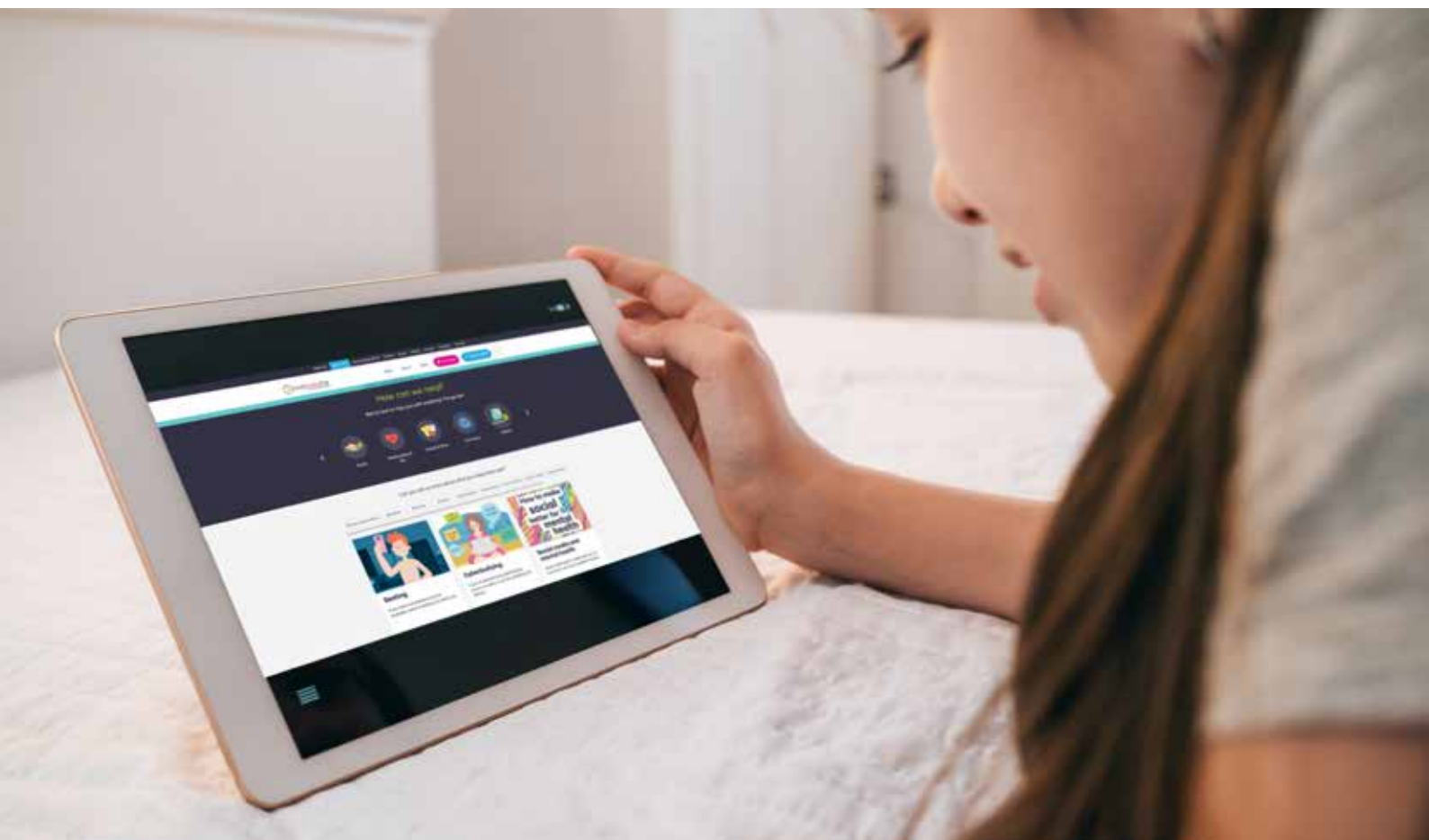


# Safer children, safer communities

In 2021 **yourtown** partnered with the Westpac Group – Safer Children, Safer Communities initiative to develop an enhanced 24/7 national digital response to children and young people who have been sexually exploited or abused, or are at risk of sexual exploitation or abuse to:

- improve the quality and consistency of our service responses to children and young people who have been sexually exploited or abused, in line with best practice
- fill gaps and reduce pressure on existing services, including in regional, rural and remote communities where there are few services
- remove barriers to accessing professional support, including cost, stigma and wait times
- ensure children and young people feel believed and supported when disclosing allegations of sexual exploitation or abuse and
- assist children and young people to navigate the system and connect with the right services for further support on their healing journey.

In 2021, **Kids Helpline supported 1,379 children and young people seeking support for issues of child sexual abuse and exploitation**, and worked collaboratively with police and child protection services to ensure that safety needs of the children and young people were met.





# Online safety and wellbeing

Kids Helpline counsellors responded to 3,991 children and young people worried about online safety issues

Kids Helpline helps children and young people understand what to do about online safety and provides practical steps through information and support when they need it most. Thanks to our longstanding relationship with the Australian Office of the eSafety Commissioner, children and young people can receive priority access to Kids Helpline web counselling via the eSafety website or referred directly. To support its continually growing role in responding to the cyber-safety concerns of children and young people, Kids Helpline collects data to gauge the frequency of cyber-safety issues discussed in counselling sessions.

Compared to other counselling contacts, eSafety issues were more likely to be from children under 18 years of age with children as young as five years old contacting Kids Helpline with a concern or worry about online or texting activity. Of Kids Helpline contacts disclosing cyber-safety issues, the most common accompanying concerns were:

- bullying (29%) • emotional wellbeing (22%)
- peer/friend relationships (18%) • mental health (17%);
- suicide-related concerns (13%) • dating and partner relationships (12%)

Being safe on the internet is the top topic of interest on the Kids Helpline website for children aged 5-12 years old (19,826 views) and sexting (84,553 views) and cyber-bullying (75,000 views) are the third and fourth top topics accessed by teens. The impacts of pornography (4,021 views) is the third top issue accessed on the website by young adults aged 19-25 years. Our web resource on sexting is the third most frequently visited page in the teens area on the Kids Helpline website.

Similar trends are reflected in sessions conducted by Kids Helpline @ School, with our counselling support delivered through a range of topics that align to the eSafety Commission's messages and the curriculum. In 2021, Kids Helpline @ High School delivered sessions on online safety and cyberbullying to 291 students.

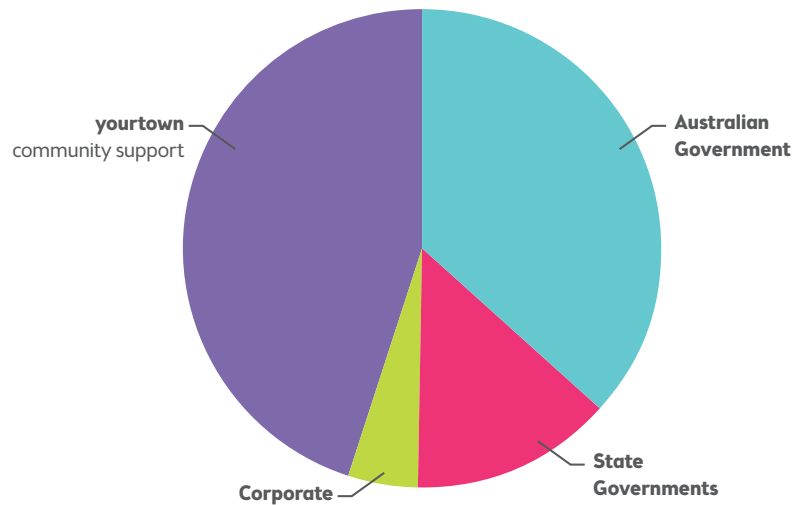


# Securing our future

Kids Helpline is grateful for support across community and governments in 2021.

With demand for mental health services at an all-time high, the challenge of meeting this demand is real.

To best meet this demand Kids Helpline will seek financial support from the Australian Governments to enable significant uplift in digital platforms that support our mental health services to children and young people.



## Funding support

Kids Helpline enjoys funding support from across the community including Art Union supporters, donors, corporate partners, governments, schools and bequests.

### Principal Partner



### Corporate Partner support



### Government support





## Acknowledgements

Kids Helpline would like to pay tribute to Australia's emergency services and those on the front line for their work in keeping our children and young people safe.

On average, our counsellors referred 16 contacts a day to these services - 109% more than in 2020 - increasing from 2,783 in 2020 to 5,823 in 2021.

It's reassuring for the community to know that each state and territory's emergency services continue to support Kids Helpline as we help children and young people at risk.

We know our nation's first responders - the paramedics, police officers and professional and volunteer firefighters are among the world's best.

Kids Helpline plays an important role as a safety net to support young people. This is highlighted by the increased promotion and awareness of the service across the sector and by government and media outlets.

We acknowledge the role played by these organisations in raising awareness of Kids Helpline and encouraging and normalising help-seeking at a time where this has been more important than ever with the demand on Kids Helpline during 2021.

**We thank you all wholeheartedly.**

## How you can support Kids Helpline

Despite the generosity of the community, Kids Helpline is unable to meet the current demand from children and young people for counselling and other support. We are here any time, for any reason. This is the

promise Kids Helpline has made to the children and young people of Australia. Please help us to keep this promise by supporting the **yourtown** Art Union or donating today: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/donate>



**We're here.  
Anytime. Any Reason.**

[kidshelpline.com.au](https://kidshelpline.com.au)  
1800 55 1800 Free Call

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