

Media release



25 March 2021

30 years of Kids Helpline with 8.4 million responses to children and young people

The 30-year anniversary of Kids Helpline, the country's only free, 24/7 online and phone counselling service marks a significant milestone for the service, and decades of support with more than 8.4 million telephone and online contacts responded to over that time.

Kids Helpline took its first call in Brisbane on 25 March 1991. On its first day, 3,200 young people called Kids Helpline; two-and-half years later Kids Helpline was operating as a national service available 24x7 in every Australian state and territory.

Within a year of opening, Kids Helpline had answered 75,000 calls and by 1993, its calls numbered over one million.

“Over the last 30 years the top three reasons children and young people sought counselling support are mental health, emotional well-being, and family relationships, with more than 500,000 counselling sessions related to mental or emotional health concerns including self-injury, and over 440,000 counselling sessions relating to family relationships,” said CEO Tracy Adams.

According to Ms Adams, Kids Helpline has become a crucial part of the child protection and mental health systems and works to not only support young people, but to normalise the concept of help seeking. The complexity of issues reported to Kids Helpline over the past 30 years has grown substantially, as has the number of children and young people using the service in an ongoing way.

What started as phone service has become so much more with support available via phone, email, webchat, and information and resources available via social media and the website. In recent times the service has also evolved to include KHL@School taking counsellors in primary school classrooms via virtual means, and introduced counsellor moderated peer-to-peer support via MyCircle.

“Having multiple ways to engage, enables children and young people to make contact in ways they feel comfortable with, from anywhere in the country,” said Ms Adams.

Whilst 2021 marks a significant milestone for Kids Helpline, the 2020 Kids Helpline Insights Report released today highlights that the service is needed as much today as when it started 30 years ago, with the report highlighting just how challenging 2020 was for many children and young people. Of particular note was the increase in first-time contacts about mental health from younger children in the 5-12 year old age group; and an increase in Duty of Care emergency interventions.

The Insights report analyses the issues children and young people raised in counselling sessions with Kids Helpline during 2020, with the effects of the summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic putting pressure on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Kids Helpline received a significant increase in the volume of children and young people seeking help in 2020 - up 20% in 2020 vs 2019, with mental health or emotional wellbeing the most common issue for children and young people with one in four raising these as concerns in counselling sessions.

“Children were particularly vulnerable during 2020 since they rely on parents, schools and friends for support. Many children and young people struggled with changes to their learning environment, and with the impacts the pandemic had on their family life. First-time mental health contacts to Kids Helpline increased 38% in 2020 vs 2019 across all age groups,” Ms Adams said.

Kids Helpline received a significant increase in the volume of children and young people aged 5-9 years of age seeking support during 2020 with an 80% increase compared to the same time in 2019.

Young people in the 5-12 age group tell us they experience issues ranging from anxiety, problems sleeping, online addiction, anger issues or mood swings through to self-harm, eating disorders, depression and thoughts of suicide.

Ms Adams said, “Young people’s concerns highlight the need for an ongoing commitment to support their mental health and wellbeing beyond the pandemic, so that today’s young people are equipped with the information and tools to manage their mental health early on in their journey to adulthood.”

Kids Helpline has responded to a greater number of children and young people in 2020 across all age cohorts as a direct result of the additional counsellor resourcing of the service. With more 100 additional counsellors recruited over the past 12 months.

“In addition to direct support, Kids Helpline holds a unique data set and qualitative information on different issues faced by the children and young people who contact us,” Ms Adams said.

“Many may not realise that Kids Helpline also works as an important public advocate for young people, using non-identifying data we give voice to the concerns, needs and aspirations of young people.

“Kids Helpline continuously listens and seeks to understand youth perspectives. We believe it is an important part of our role to use every means at our disposal to effectively support and promote the protection of young people,” said Ms Adams.

Facebook: @kidshelpline, Inst @kidshelplineau, Twitter @KidsHelplineAU www.kidshelpline.com.au

-ends-

yourtown Corporate Communications & Media Advisor – Maree Reason-Cain Phone 0423 843 786
mreason-cain@yourtown.com.au