

Session 59 –

Recommendations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on Sale of Children and the Optional Protocol on Children and Armed Conflict

Prepared by Child Helpline International and Kids Helpline – September 2011

Background:

Australia's child helpline is operated by Kids Helpline- a service of BoysTown, and is available 24hrs per day, seven days a week. The child helpline can be reached nationally through the number 1-800-551-800. The service receives approximately 40% of total operating costs under the Australian Commonwealth and state government funding strategies. A fully equipped and resourced child helpline, with current technologies and infrastructure, has the potential to answer over 400,000¹ calls annually.

Recommendation 1

The Commonwealth Government support for Kids Helpline should include adequate funding to ensure that children and young people have free mobile phone access to telephone counselling and increased availability for online counselling. KHL is Australia's only national youth specific telephone and online counselling service catering for young people under the age of 25 years. Besides its target market of children and young people, Kids Helpline is unique to other Australian helplines for the following reasons:

- The staff are all professional paid counsellors
- They are able to offer ongoing therapeutic counselling relationships to clients with complex and enduring concerns
- The service can streamline the entry process through online portals onto telephone for younger children and teenagers who would otherwise not ask for help or maintain contact with support services.

In 2010 the service received 302,175 attempted calls from mobile phones. This equates to nearly 72% of all attempts to contact the telephone counselling service. Kids Helpline was able to answer 164,536 of these mobile phone attempts, equating to 69% of all telephone calls answered by Kids Helpline. Currently all landline call costs are passed on to the Kids Helpline service. The majority of mobile telecom providers absorb call costs for mobile phones to the 1800 number, except for one company capturing about 40% of the mobile phone market. This translates to call costs ranging between \$310,000 and \$520,000 being passed onto Australian children and young people each year. Online services are in high demand (more than 40,000 attempts for email and web counselling in 2010). They are currently under-resourced and require urgent additional funding due to the increasing attraction of these media for children and young people.

Recommendation 2

The Australian Commonwealth Government should fund programs that support vulnerable young people in their transition from school to employment. Due to mental health issues, the impacts of prematurely leaving school and disruptive family and peer relationships, many young people do not positively manage the transition from school to work. This was identified in the recent House of Representatives Inquiry Report titled 'Before its too Late': Report on Early Intervention programs preventing Youth Suicide. Mental health related concerns amounted to almost 1 in 2 direct help-seeking contacts to the Kids Helpline in 2010 (26,688). We recommend that the Commonwealth Government increase its investment in school to work programs to improve available levels of support to vulnerable young people.

¹ According to an estimate of McKinsey. Data used from ITU (2010) and Unicef (2009)



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Recommendation 3

The Australian Commonwealth Government, as a matter of priority, should invest in the development of social enterprises to increase the participation of Aboriginal young Australians in the workforce.

Kids Helpline and BoysTown have demonstrated evidence that participation in social enterprises within their own communities reduces criminal offending behaviours and facilitates open employment outcomes. It is recommended that the Federal Government create commercial business tendering environments that value social outcomes and make awarding decisions based on social value and a longer-term social return on investment basis rather than short-term accountancy principles.

Recommendation 4

The Australian Commonwealth Government should work with the State governments to support innovative and safe accommodation options for homeless children and young people.

Children and young people contacted Kids Helpline almost 1,500 times in 2010 in relation to homelessness. A significant proportion of these young people left home because they were not able to tolerate the violence, abuse and dysfunction occurring within their families. There are not sufficient places of safety for them to go when they are forced to leave their homes in crisis situations, or adequate and appropriate options for their longer term care.

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

Kids Helpline does not currently receive significant numbers of contacts in relation to these issues. CHI and Kids Helpline do recommend the Australian Commonwealth Government develop strategies to raise awareness of the existence of Kids Helpline within potential communities of child prostitutes and/or trafficked children.

Optional Protocol to the Convention on Armed Conflict

Kids Helpline recommends that the new National Children's Commissioner be appointed as the legal guardian for unaccompanied children applying for refugee status in Australia rather than the Minister for Immigration, regardless of where they are detained under Australian legislation.

Given the current mandatory detention environment for refugee children arriving in Australia, Kids Helpline has no contact with this most marginalised and at risk group until they are released into the community. Kids Helpline also has no data relating to the number of contacts it receives from refugee children and young people who have either received permanent residency visas or who have been released from mandatory detention and are awaiting visas in community care facilities. Regardless of the above limitations to its evidentiary knowledge, Kids Helpline recognises the rights of refugee children to be appropriately cared for and additionally recognises that their needs are not currently being met by the Commonwealth government's policy on mandatory detention.

If you would like further information please contact Child Helpline International:

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