



Childline

Gauteng

☎ 08000 55 555

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT - NOT FOR PROFIT REGISTRATION NUMBER - 040-010-NPO
& A REGISTERED CHILD PROTECTION ORGANISATION
NOT FOR PROFIT COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER – 2015/173593/08
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SERVING CHILDREN & FAMILIES 24/7 & 365 DAYS - IMPLEMENTING SECTION 28 OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS (1996)

COVID-19 - REPORT ON HELPLINE DATA

INITIAL LOCKDOWN PERIOD

27TH MARCH 2020 – 16TH APRIL 2020

(21 DAYS OF SERVICE)

INTRODUCTION

Childline Gauteng serves vulnerable children and families 24 / 7 and 365 days a year on the Help Line.

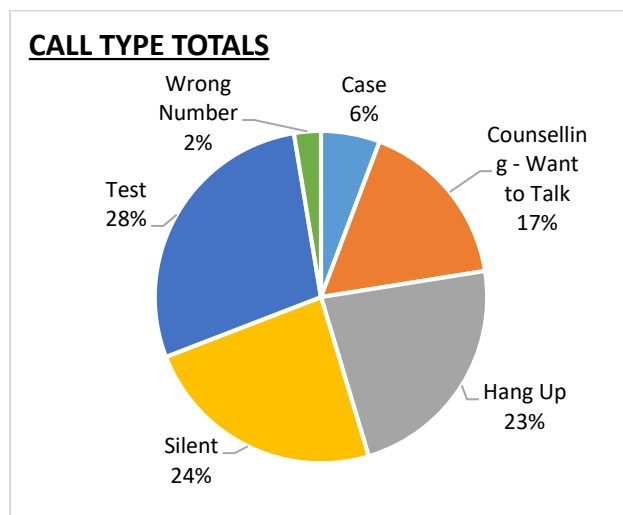
We thank our partners for your support, enabling us to deliver services during the past 21 days of the Covid-19 pandemic and Lockdown – the first three weeks announced initially. We hereby report on the work done since the State of Disaster was declared on the 27th March 2019 until the 16th April 2020. In summary we have engaged with 12 503 callers and opened 2 100 contacts with those who are experiencing serious challenges requiring assistance in this time of the Lockdown.

NUMBER OF CALLERS ASSISTED

During the period under review, trained and professional counsellors answered 12 503 calls of the 16 476 dialed to the Childline 08000 55555 number in Gauteng.

These have been categorized as follows:

- **Cases** - pertaining to serious issues of abuse, neglect, abandonment, poverty, family problems, legal issues, HIV, Homelessness, substance abuse, psychological problems and behaviour problems - 536
- **Telephone counselling** on a range of issues – 1 564
- **Hang-ups** are typically children testing the responses of the counsellors before they get the courage to talk about their problems – 2 137
- **Silent callers** are similar to the callers who hang up at 2 221
- Callers **testing the line** are generally children who “play” on the lines and we welcome these as children gain mastery over issues by “playing” and the fact that they are engaging with Childline, often regarding, covid-19 enables us to give them basic information on the pandemic and how they can keep themselves safe in this time – 2 638
- There were 244 **wrong numbers**



CATERGORIES OF CALLERS

The **desperation and urgency of callers** is increasing daily as the Lockdown continues into the second phase: increased fear and panic expressed by callers; abusive behaviour both gender related and towards children; poverty and immediate hunger; separation from parents; shack fires; run away children; parents drinking and not obeying the lockdown regulations; and many more.

The counsellors, after doing a **risk assessment**, struggle to find joint solutions with callers to mitigate the tremendous challenges they face. We are relying on DSD and the SA Police Services (SAPS) as some child protection services are on skeleton staff and difficult to access. The counsellors have persisted with follow up calls until they are sure that children at risk have a temporary solution. Please see success stories hereunder.

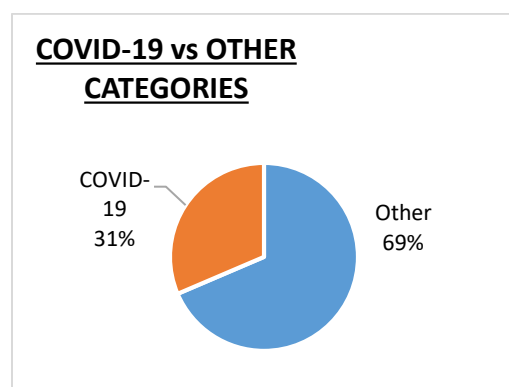
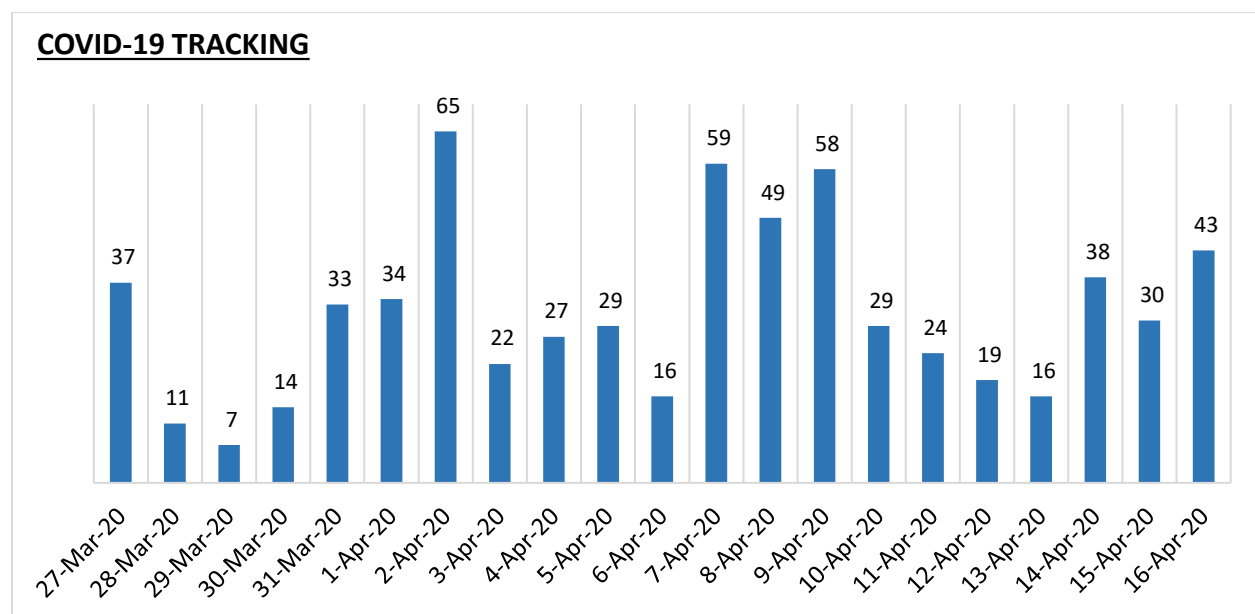
The highest category of callers pertain to: **Covid-19** at 662 linked to these are 647 requests for services many regarding Covid-19; family issues at 159 plus 77 legal problems; and neglect (99) and poverty at 70.

The counsellors dispense valuable Covid-19 information; safety and prevention measures; health information such as symptoms, testing clinics, ambulance procurement and hospital services for those that are positive; referrals to the food line which is not able to distribute to all; and available shelters.

We are encouraged by community members, who often to step up and assist the children in their communities at this time. The African spirit of humanity is fully operational at this time.

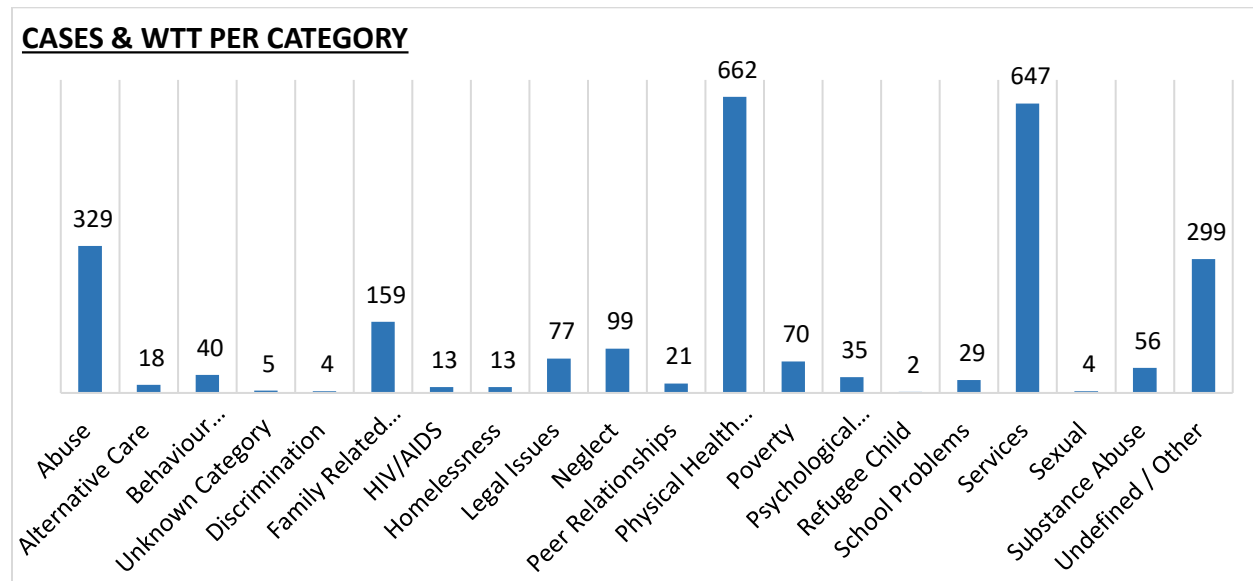
We have an updated Resource Manual on Covid-19 with up to date, accurate information as well as lists of emergency services for: Institute for Communicable Diseases, DSD, SAPS, reporting lines, Presidential line and helplines available to communities.

Covid-19 Specific Calls



Cases Opened and Counselling / Want to Talk Contacts

Pre-existing problems seem to have been exacerbated in families during the lockdown period: 329 physical, emotional and sexual abuse cases were opened and 99 neglected children; 159 family related and 77 legal issues; poverty and hunger are of grave concern at 70 cases; and children behaving badly (40) or impacted by substance abuse (56) continue to put themselves at risk at this time.



The Covid-19 related calls range from children, families and communities requesting assistance with:

- Information regarding safety measures
- Concerns about family members breaking the Lockdown regulations
- Visiting rights for non-custodial parents
- Parents wanting to travel to children to deliver food and medication. SAPS national instructions is that no-one is allowed to leave the province are mandatory
- Referrals for medical testing
- Requests for information regarding food security
- Information regarding continued education of children
- Information regarding testing sites
- Needing debriefing after being tested
- Callers struggling from the withdrawal of alcohol and nicotine
- Children calling to tell us they love Childline and they are bored at home
- Teenagers refusing to stay at home
- Neighbours worried about the street parties in their community and were referred to SAPS
- Prisoners who are worried about their families at home
- Homeless people who need shelter or complaints regarding these shelters

SUCCESS STORIES

A young orphan of 16 years, reported being **physically abused** by his older sister, who allegedly gave him Rattex for which he was admitted to hospital. On his discharge the physical abuse continued. The Police confirmed the abuse.

We contacted his extended family in Limpopo who agreed to take him into their care post the Lockdown. A caring community member will accommodate this young lad until then.

A 12 year old girl from Ekurhuleni called to say her mother was bedridden due to HIV Aids related complications and the family had not eaten for days. When she tried to get **food parcels** for herself and two siblings she was unsuccessful. The counsellor managed to get donations of food from Teddy Bear which we were able to deliver and future delivery of bread from a local group assisting in the area.

After a **fire** destroyed a family shack in Sebokeng a young boy called frantically asking us to help his injured mother. The ambulance was called and took both to hospital whilst the remaining children were taken to their uncle.

A clinic sister called regarding a mother who was desperate after her husband ejected her from their home after **gender based violence**, insisting that her four month old child, who she was breast feeding, remain with him. The child was starving. The child's aunt took the child to clinic where the counsellor arranged that he was reunited with his mother amidst tears of joy and continued feeding.

A 27 day old baby was suffering from constipation and serious **health issues**. The mother was turned away from the clinic who were prioritizing covid-19 cases. We managed to get a Netcare ambulance to admit the child to hospital as the mother fortunately had medical aid.

A Domestic Worker called to say she saw blood on her two year old charge's underpants and suspected **sexual abuse**. When the mother was told of this, she washed the child. We requested SAPS to investigate the circumstances and they took the toddler to the Thuthuzela Care Centre for a medico legal report. We await the results and placement of the child if found to have been sexually abused.

A desperate mother called to report her 15 year old girl **child missing**. We requested SAPS to please assist and they took the mom to search the community. She was reported to be seen with local taxi drivers and the search through the Taxi Association continues.

A young boy of 16, whose mother is a drug addict, reported being **physically abused** by his aunt who threatened to stab him with a broken glass. A kindly community member cared for him until the Moffat View Police Station intervened and placed him at Nkosi's Haven where he will be placed in isolation until his Covid-19 test results are available.

A young boy arrived at Childline today having been turned away from Charlotte Maxeke when he went to collect his **ARVs** as the pharmacy was closed. Follow up revealed that they were on strike and our client was asked to return the next day when the HIV Clinic at the hospital would be able to assist him.

A mother, originally from Lesotho now living in Johannesburg, lost custody of her children as she was an illegal immigrant and as a domestic worker did not have accommodation for her children. The father who lives in the Free State has been reported for **neglect** and Welkom Child Welfare investigated the matter previously. The boy of 11 reported to his mother that the father beat him until he bled. We have referred the case to Childline Free State as the social worker in Welkom is not available telephonically.

Two community members came to Childline to report a desperately ill mother and child living in a backyard room. Mother was refusing treatment and they were afraid of being infected. Follow up with SAPS was unsuccessful after a long struggle. EMS was efficient and went out and ensured the mother was **hospitalized** while the child was placed with his father for further observation.

We continue to be inspired by the resilience of our children, the high levels of care from community members and the support we receive from our extended Childline partners in finding solutions for every caller. We honour the counsellors who have been tirelessly serving on the lines for the past 19 days.

CHALLENGES

The Childline Gauteng telephone system experienced technical problems with some of the MTN calls not coming through. The Vodacom Helpline 116 calls were being transferred to Childline. This has been reported by Childline SA and the faults are being resolved. The following issues are of major concern to many of our callers:

- Many family problems are exacerbated at this difficult time and counselling services enable them to deal with these in a more emotionally intelligent manner
- Although we have not done comparative studies as yet, it does appear that the intensity of the abuse has increased over this period. Ensuring child safety is a critical service at this stage. We will follow up to ensure all children receive the necessary statutory services once these are fully operational
- Some organisations working on skeleton staff are difficult to access for services to abused and neglected children at this stage. We have relied on community members, DSD and SAPS to assist in the interim until all services are fully operational. The DSD child protection social workers have been very helpful.
- Many children are separated from their families who have sent them to rural areas before the lockdown. There is nothing to be done as the National Police Instructions prohibit travelling at this time. Callers are advised to keep telephonic contact and to send money orders
- Mothers of very young and new borns are desperate for clothing for their babies
- Food security for families and the Gauteng Province food helpline is not fully operational and able to assist currently. This is of grave concern. We are requesting food parcels for our Childline Community Based Centres to hand out to their clients
- Troubled children and teenagers are refusing to remain at home and reportedly abusing substances. Their single mothers are finding it difficult to discipline them. This is putting the entire family at risk. Each case is handled according to the specific needs of the caller to find a solution. At times it is sufficient for the counsellor to speak to the child and SAPS have also been called in to give them a “tough love” message
- Many of the Child and Youth Care Centres are full and finding a place for abused children is on a case by case basis
- Economic hardships from many callers is of grave concern both now and in the future
- Challenges anticipated in the future include:
Continuation of the Lockdown post April 30th will require Childline to access greater resources, especially food and warm winter clothes for those in dire need
Childline funding for the 2020/2021 year is likely to be delayed as our sponsors consider donating to Covid-19
If SA is unable to “flatten the curve” the orphan rate is likely to increase requiring additional foster care placements

CONCLUSION

In summary, Childline Gauteng has answered 12 503 calls in the past 21 days, of these: 662 pertained to Covid-19 and 647 requests for information about services; 329 abuse cases; 99 neglected children plus 70 poverty related concerns; 159 family problems plus 77 legal family issues; 539 smaller categories; and the balance of callers who are silent, hang up or test the counsellors responses before disclosing their problems.

We continue to receive great support from community members demonstrating their concern and care for children, often to the point of putting themselves at risk, by taking them into their own homes. We are humbled by their high levels of care. The SA Police Service and DSD have delivered exceptional services to children and families at this time. We honour them, the medical workers, the essential services organisations and the many people who have risen up to serve those that are vulnerable at this time.

We thank our partners for your support enabling the Childline to render these critical psycho-social and child protection services.

We trust that we will collectively “flattened the curve” and a new South Africa will emerge from the lessons learned during Covid-19 where: the right to equality, dignity and life is assured; a reduction of gross economic inequality; increased services, compassion and support for vulnerable people; and a restoration of pride in our country and our people working together to build a great nation demonstrating our African Humanity.

Lynne Cawood

Director

20th April 2020