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COVID-19: REPORT ON HELP LINE DATA LEVEL 5, 4 & 3

LOCKDOWN PERIOD:

LEVEL 5: 27th MARCH 2020 – 30th APRIL 2020 – 35 DAYS

LEVEL 4: 1st MAY 2020 – 31st MAY 2020 – 31 DAYS

LEVEL 3: 1st JUNE – 31st JULY 2020 – 61 DAYS

(3 MONTH - 127 DAYS OF AROUND THE CLOCK SERVICE)

*SERVING CHILDREN & FAMILIES 24/7 & 365 DAYS - IMPLEMENTING SECTION 28 OF THE
BILL OF RIGHTS (1996)*

1. INTRODUCTION – 24/7 TOLL FREE - HELP LINE SERVICES (08000 55555)

Childline Gauteng serves vulnerable children and families 24 / 7 and 365 days a year on our Help Line and Sunlight Safe House and our Community Based Counselling Centres provide psycho-social and community support.

In summary we have engaged with 66 358 callers in the period under review. We opened 19 694 cases and counselling sessions with those facing challenges and requiring our assistance. COVID-19 remains the main priority for callers. The structural inequality in our country results in the impact on vulnerable families being extreme with a great need for psycho-social and economic support, to deal with the exacerbation of these problems.

The Help Line service has been awarded the short code, 116 internationally recognized number for children and families by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). This 116 number can now be dialed (as well as 08000 55555 until the end of the year) to access our services. 116 will be easier to read, remember and dial. The national marketing campaign will further increase our call volumes.

As we collectively engage to assist the children of our nation, to emerge from the pandemic physically, mentally and emotionally stable; ensuring their positive growth for a sustainable future, Childline is committed to provide hope, counselling, access to protection services and support / information to deliver their basic needs. Together we can ensure a positive outcome for our youth.

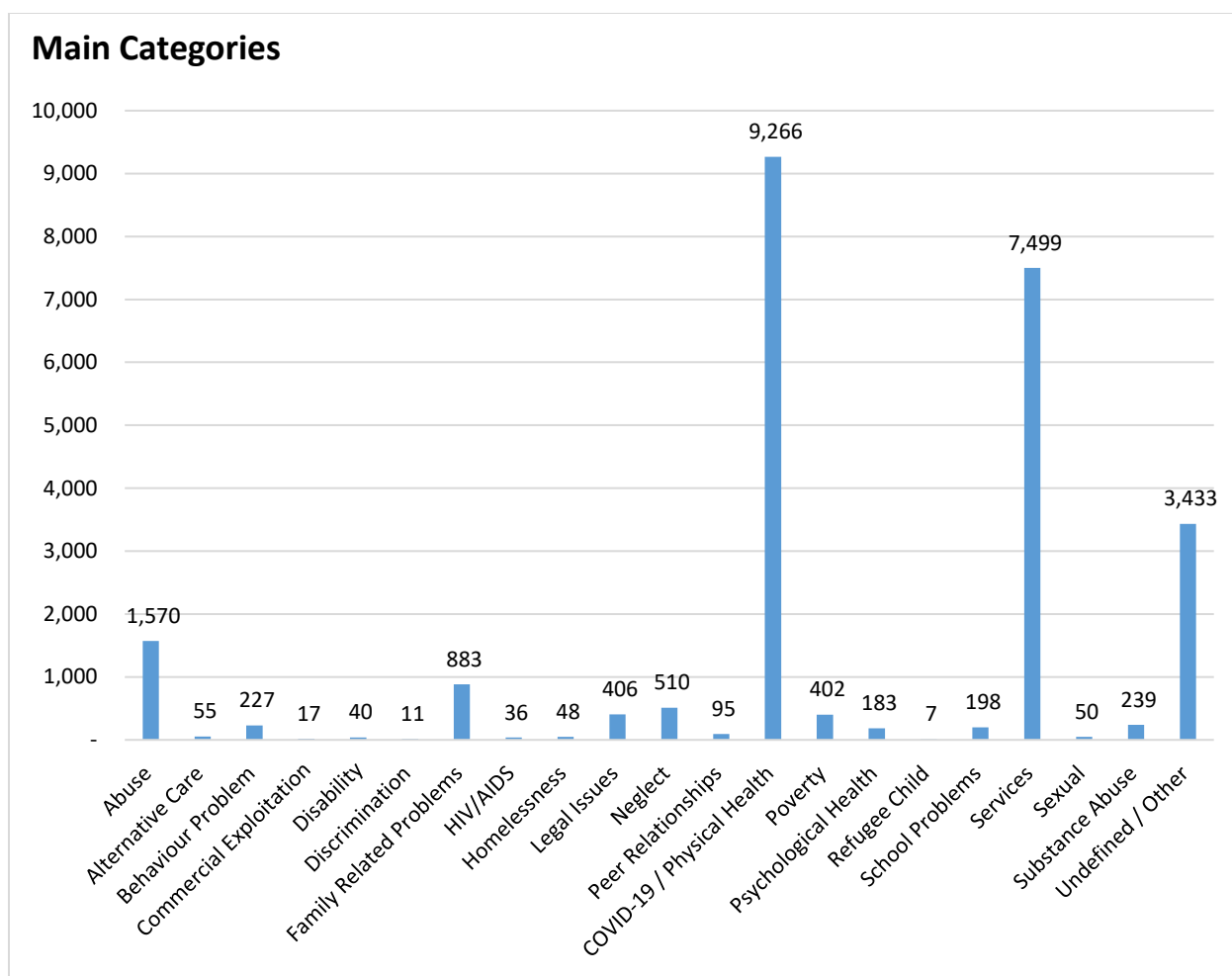
We thank you for your support of children and hereby report on our analysis of child and family issues, as reported to Childline, since the declaration of the National State of Disaster, 27th March 2020 – 31st July 2020.

2. NUMBER AND CATEGORIES OF CALLERS ASSISTED

During the period under review, trained and professional counsellors captured 66 358 contacts on our data system of calls dialed to the Childline 08000 55555 number in Gauteng, as follows:

- 19 694 cases and counselling sessions were opened. 3 856 **Cases** and 15 838 **telephone counselling clients** pertaining to issues of: COVID-19, health and HIV; physical, sexual and emotional abuse; neglect / poverty; abandonment; family problems and legal issues; homelessness; substance abuse; psychological and behaviour problems.
- 30 117 callers were silent or hung up - being unwilling or not ready to discuss their concerns.
- 16 547 callers engaged in testing the counsellor responses which aligns with international research indicating children will phone up to 20 times before they are brave enough to talk. We welcome this opportunity to promote positive relations with young people.

There is a noticeable increase in the levels and extent of violence, fear, psychological and emotional problems indicating that the pandemic has resulted in an urgent need for additional psycho-social and economic support for vulnerable communities. In summary, we opened cases pertaining to: all forms of abuse (1570); family (883) and legal problems (406); neglect (510) and poverty (402); substance abuse (239); children and parents (198) are stressed about the uncertainty around schools reopening and our concern is that when they do return, they may expose their caregivers, especially their “gogos” who are vulnerable to early passing due to the virus.



COVID-19 Related Cases

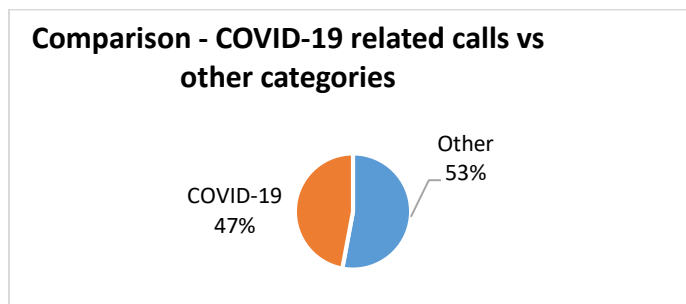
Callers demonstrate great anxiety and stress, with an increase in COVID-19 related cases (9 266), linked to requests for services at 7 499, mostly related to the pandemic, i.e. a total of 16 765 clients. This is a **62.5 increase** in the number of calls compared to Levels 5 & 4.

We continually update the Childline Resource Manual on COVID-19 with accurate information as well as lists of emergency services for: Institute for Communicable Diseases, DSD, SAPS, DoH reporting lines, CYCC capacity for emergency placement of children, mental and health facilities, Presidential line and services available to communities.

The counsellors dispense valuable COVID-19 information; safety and prevention measures; health information such as symptoms, testing and quarantine sites, ambulance procurement and hospital services for those that are positive; referrals to the food line which is not able to distribute to all; donations of food parcels; travel regulations; and available CYCCs and GBV shelters.

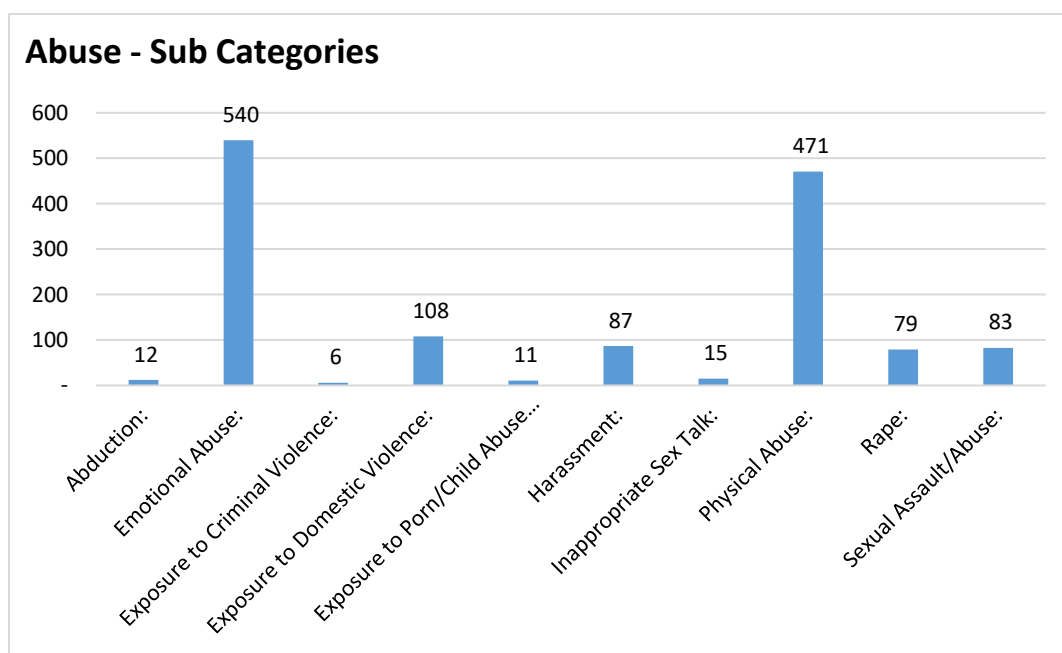
COVID-19 cases include: prisoners who have no protective equipment and are concerned for family; community anger regarding those who are not adhering to regulations and having street parties; economic stress and hunger as a result of higher unemployment; persons seeking urgent medical support;

children or partners refusing to say home posing a risk to the family. The pandemic exacerbates all other child and family problems, such as abuse, psychological issues, poverty and neglect, as well as GBV.



Physical, Sexual and Emotional Abuse

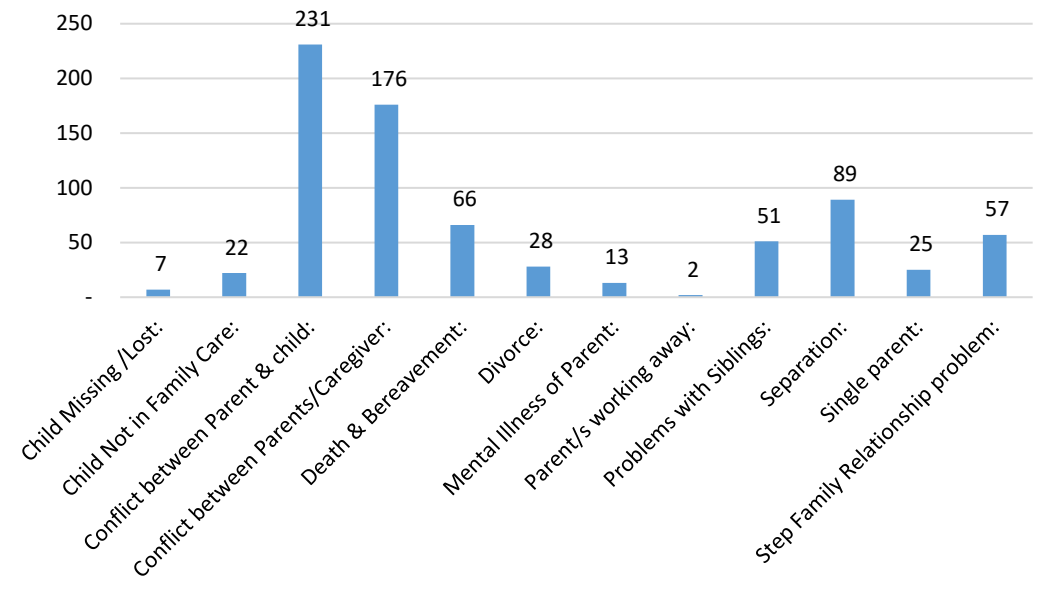
Abuse is the second highest category at 1 570 cases and pertains to: physical abuse (471); sexual violence – rape, assault, verbal and exposure to porn (188), emotional (540), abduction (12) and domestic violence (108). Clients are supported and risk assessment indicates the level of danger, after which, SAPS or child protection services from DSD are sought. Abuse cases include: both mothers and fathers being violent with their children; sibling aggression; financial abuse; swearing; and even children being violent towards their caregivers.



Family Related Problems

A total of 883 **family problems** and 406 related **legal issues**, pertaining to: family aggression; care, parenting plans and custody issues; single mothers struggling with great responsibilities; fathers feeling alienated; increase in corporal punishment; sibling rivalry and bullying; allegations of step fathers treating their non-biological children with contempt; mothers who have given birth in this time feeling very vulnerable; separation from parents; and home fires. This gives rise to 183 **psychological problems** of depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety and parents recalling traumatic childhood experiences which impacts on their parenting.

Family related problems- Sub Categories

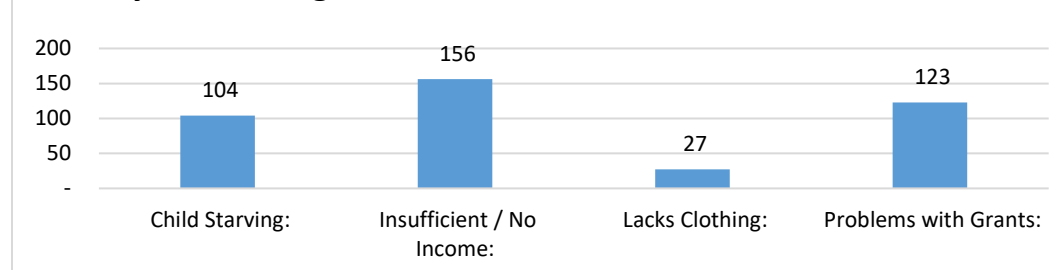


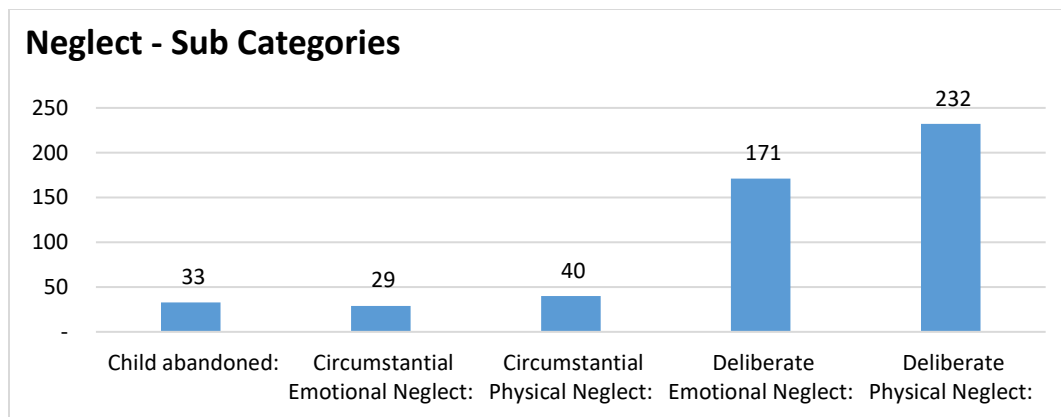
Poverty Related Concerns

Poverty related issues (402 cases) resulting in hunger, homelessness, lack of winter clothes and food insecurity. This is aligned to cases of **neglect** at 510. We have been able to source food parcels from the HCI Foundation, Tzu Chi Foundation, Afrika Tikkun and African Children's Feeding Scheme which we distributed to the most desperate of families.

Cases pertaining to neglect and poverty include: being left alone at home with no food; parents out partying; children left with grandparents for extended periods of time, with no support. Concerns regarding aggressive by loan sharks; request for assistance in getting IDs from Home Affairs and grants; abuse of the Child Support Grant by parents; delay in grant payments; and, difficulty in accessing the unemployment grant of R350.

Poverty - Sub Categories





Children with Behavioural Problems

227 children with behavioural problems, placing additional pressure on already overwhelmed families is gravely concerning. This behaviour is often a result of early childhood trauma and reflects in: teens refusing to stay at home; run away children; refusal to do chores or school work; disrespecting care givers; and even child physical violence towards family members. **Substance abuse** (239 cases) by teens including drinking, smoking dagga and nyaope and not obeying the Lockdown regulations to get illegal supplies. Parents abusing alcohol is a serious problem as well. Some callers struggle with withdrawal symptoms from nicotine, alcohol and substances, creating greater stress and violence. There have been a number of successful cases where counsellors have spoken to disobedient youth where they apologized and promised to behave better. Counselling to address early emotional trauma and tough love is helpful.

School Related Concerns

School problems (198) and **peer relationships** (95) are less than usual as children are not exposed to schools at this time. However, anxiety about returning to school and child care in the interim is worrying. Many children are missing school, the feeding schemes and their friends and are longing to go back. However, their safety is of primary concern.

The Childline services provide an individualized assessment and risk analysis with all callers. This allows for reflection on the best plan of action for each client based on standard operating procedures for all issues. Solutions are devised with callers to mitigate the tremendous challenges they face. We rely 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 safe solution. Please see Point 3 - success stories.

Our focus is to build family resilience with counselling and information that assists them to deal with the challenges of the times. This enhances their coping skills and emotional intelligence and enables children to play a role in supporting their families. We honour our partners in child protection: community members, who often step up and assist the children in need; the health workers, SAPS and DSD who assist in finding solutions to children's problems. The African spirit of humanity is fully operational at this time.

3. MYTHS THE COUNSELLORS ADDRESSED WITH CORRECT INFORMATION

- Children suggesting various cures
- Level 3 means that the pandemic is over

- Child asking the counsellor to wash hands with him and children can't see the point of washing their hands so often
- COVID-19 virus only effects rich white people as they travel a lot
- COVID-19 is spread through the phone or by mosquitoes
- It is safe to travel as no one knows that they are sick
- The rain will wash the virus away
- COVID-19 is not real as they don't know anyone who has passed away
- Masks are just for fun
- You cannot open your door to anyone
- Areas with low infection rates are not at risk so should be allowed out of the home
- Red cheeks mean you have COVID-19
- Childline has to fetch them as they are tired of staying at home and this violates their rights
- The virus is a punishment because they were naughty
- The police will arrest a child if they play outside
- You will definitely die if you get COVID-19
- Children don't get COVID-19

4. SUCCESS STORIES

Among the very many stories with a happy ending, we are privileged to share a few with you:

- A grandmother reported her 23 year old granddaughter for neglect of her baby who is left with "gogo" consistently as she disappears with the SASSA card never meeting the needs of the child. The grandmother was advised to contact the nearest SASSA branch at Kopanong and report the matter. Followed up calls revealed that the grandmother is now able to withdraw the grant and support the child.
- A 21 one year old sister of two young siblings, requested a food parcel as she could not feed her family. When she collected a food parcel and voucher donated to Childline, our social worker discovered that the mother is an alcoholic and leaves the responsibility of the siblings to her oldest daughter. The mother was referred to SANCA, the oldest daughter to Afrika Tikkun for skills development, and child support services from SASSA. The family were extremely grateful for the counselling and food support.
- A young child said Childline visited her school years ago, taught her the Childline numbers and encouraged her to call whenever she wanted to talk to someone. She reported there was no food at home. She lives with her grandmother as her mother passed away. The family was referred to an organization that distributes food parcels in their area and received relief. The grandmother was referred to DSD to apply for a grant and the child to receive bereavement counselling.
- The caller was in a panic as her mother was in contact with a neighbour who tested positive for coronavirus. They had tried unsuccessfully to receive assistance from health workers. The counsellor contacted the COVID-19 Help Line who called the child immediately and referred them to the nearest testing station. Tests came back as negative a week later and the child was greatly relieved and expressed gratitude for our services.

- A concerned neighbour called about an elderly lady in her neighbourhood who lived alone in her shack and went for days without food as her children neglected her and took her SASSA card. She told the caller that she had been raped by Nyaope boys while going to relieve herself in the bushes in the past. The counsellor contacted the police to ensure the return of her SASSA card, and social workers from a home for the elderly assisted with support services. Township Ubuntu really is a deeply touching aspect of our work!

We are heartened by the many children and parents who phone to: thank the counsellors; say a prayer; sing a song; wish our counsellors well and tell us to prevent COVID-19; wishing us a happy Father's Day / Youth Day. 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 127 days of lockdown, day and night.

5. CHALLENGES

Childline Gauteng counsellors are overwhelmed with the increase in the need for our services. We currently receive all the national Cell C and Telkom Mobile calls until the software can be installed to distribute to the province of the caller. As our funding for the 2020/2021 year is likely to be delayed as our sponsors consider donating to COVID-19 we are concerned about the long term sustainability of this very important service.

Ensuring staff safety at this time has been a major challenge with four Help Line members testing positive, requiring the closure of the service for 2 days to ensure their safety. We have provided staff transport, changed the roster to ensure greater safety, provided periods of isolation for those exposed, and all PPE required.

We require access to greater resources, especially food and warm winter clothes for those in dire need.

The constantly changing face of the virus and regulations, especially pertaining to Essential Service workers, require great agility to ensure the correct HR policies and practices.

The following issues are of major concern to many of our callers, with levels and extent of violence increasing compared to levels 5 and 4:

- Fear, stress and anxiety due to the high infection and death rates requires our counsellors to contain the high levels of emotion and assist in making positive choices regarding the way forward
- Economic hardships culminating in hunger is devastating and ensuring access to food parcels or vouchers is critical.
- Many family problems are exacerbated at this difficult time and counselling services enable them to deal with these in a more emotionally intelligent manner
- Comparative studies for the same period last year indicate a massive increase in the number of calls and all categories of calls received. Ensuring child safety is a critical service at this stage. We follow up to ensure all children receive the necessary statutory services as per the Child Care Act. Some organisations 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. Many of the Child and Youth Care Centres are full and finding a place for abused children is on a case by case basis

- Pregnant women and mothers of children born at this time are extremely anxious for their babies
- Troubled children and teenagers are refusing to remain at home and are 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.
- If SA is unable to “flatten the curve” the orphan rate is likely to increase requiring additional foster care placements

6. CONCLUSION

In summary, Childline Gauteng has had 66 358 contacts in the past 120 days, registering 19 694 cases, a massive increase compared to the calls received for the same period last year and in levels 5 and 4. Vulnerable families bear the brunt of the pandemic and structural inequality in our country, with increased psycho-social and economic problems of: family functioning undermined by emotional abuse and violence; neglect, hunger and poverty; great anxiety regarding health issues; children behaving inappropriately; and difficulty in accessing support services at this critical time.

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 spirit of African Humanity.

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 Childline to render these critical psycho-social and child protection services. We urge you to continue to support the vital work that Childline does in supporting children, families and communities.

We trust that we will collectively overcome this traumatic time and a new South Africa will emerge from the lessons learned during COVID-19 where: compassion; equality, dignity and life is assured; a reduction of gross economic inequality; increased services 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
3rd August 2020