

Online help-‘chat’ project for child helplines

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Summary plan: implementing online help for children

1. Grounds for application

At the Global Portal (www.chiworld.org) child helpline meeting held in Amsterdam in June 2006, it became evident that more helplines wished to provide online services for children. Several websites were presented by helplines already working online and it was clear to see that these services are a good addition to telephone services already on offer. Children all over the world are already 'chatting' online, so it is a natural way for child helplines to help those children in need of care and protection. In order to ensure that child helplines best serve the needs of the child through a safe and meaningful way, CHI will develop a strong and effective training programme that takes child helplines through from the beginning stages to actually launching the website.

It seems that the threshold for writing an email or instant messaging (chat) is much lower than the threshold to pick up the phone. There are very few "prank" emails or chat sessions and finally, the subject matter is often of a more serious nature, with abuse cases and potential suicides appearing more often than via the telephone. In 2006 the child helpline *de Kindertelefoon* in the Netherlands, who was the first child helpline worldwide to implement the chat function, experienced an approximate 30% decline in telephone calls compared with the previous year, with a staggering **increase of around 45% in the use of the online chat function**. In addition, valuable volunteers who enable the child helpline to continue generally feel more satisfied when they are able to combine both answering chat conversations with telephone calls.

Research undertaken by *de Kindertelefoon*¹ has demonstrated that the chat function works well with older children, thus improving their service to children of all age groups. Children who chat with *de Kindertelefoon* are on average 13.8 years old, children who call are on average 12 years old.

To assist helplines to provide online services without having to reinvent the wheel and spend much needed funds on developing chat applications or email services, CHI has asked specialists to develop a manual, training sessions and a blue print of a website. Later in this proposal we will describe each of these in more detail.

In order to ensure that this project covers each region of the world, we will invite six child helplines (from Asia, Europe, Middle East & North Africa and the Americas) to participate in this training over 2009. They themselves also requested this training.

As the training will take place in English, we have ensured that participating child helplines have an excellent knowledge of English.

An overview of the budget is detailed below.

¹ Experiences with *de Kindertelefoon*; A comparison between contacts through 'chat' and by telephone, R. Fukink & J. Hermans

2. Procedure for project implementation

Implementing online services means a number of organisational changes. This process will entail making a number of operational choices within the organisation, in which the role of the volunteer or staff member should not be undervalued. The new services will need additional operational procedures and additional trained staff.

CHI hopes that by providing a manual on step-by-step implementation, training for the staff and a well tested website that can be formed to each helpline's specific needs, the helpline will be able to offer online services in a cost-effective and relatively simple manner.

Manual

The manual will contain all the relevant background information regarding the implementation of online help, the most important aspects, both for content and for processes and the possible choices that can be made. There will also be a number of examples of websites from other child helplines that have a proven record.

The manual will contain the following aspects:

1. Introduction to online help
2. Kids & internet
3. Policy: reasons to offer online help services, goals, target groups and risks
4. Themes that can be used to provide online help
5. Online help forms: examples of different forms of online help services e.g. FAQ, self testing, email, chat etc.
6. Method: the interactive forms of online help i.e. e-mail and chat each need a specific type of counseling.
7. Internal organisation: Which procedures need to be in place Financial matters
8. Finances: an overview of expected costs of implementation and maintenance
9. Evaluation of the services
10. Technique
11. Safety
12. Legal & ethical aspects
13. Writing website texts
14. Recruiting, selecting & training
15. Administration
16. Publicity: Raising awareness for your services
17. Organisational change & Project management
18. Best practices

Training programmes

Training 'implementing online services'

This training is an extension of the manual which has already been developed. This is for those who will be taking the lead in implementing the project. Choices within the organisation, organisational changes and choices in applications will be discussed. The training will last three days, and will begin early 2009. One project manager from each helpline will participate.

Training for trainers

This training is meant for those who will be training the counselors in online counseling, both email and chat. Different techniques will be described and discussed. The participants will be able to train their staff in the specific skills needed to counsel online, either via chat or e-mail.

Modular website

Some of the possibilities and applications that the modular website can provide are listed below.

- information
- tips & advice
- my story
- idol stories
- forum
- 1 on 1 chat
- e-mail contact
- search engine

Every helpline can choose the combination they want. The helpline, CHI and a specialist partner will work together to create the best possible website for each helpline. The helpline itself should develop the content in their chosen language and logos and personal design should also be carried out locally.

Planning

Activity	weeks
Write handbook	21
Training 'implementing online services' *	1
Define basic assumptions	2
Define general target groups	2
CHL: create own project plan	4
CHL: chose own themes	2
Design website	6
Built help forms, incl. chat	12
CHL: select own help forms	2
CHL: define structure own website	2
Training for the trainers	8
CHL: determine name own website	3
CHL: set up own internal organisation	3
CHL: produce content own website	8
CHL: prepare own evaluation	3
CHL: Recruit & select own counsellors	4
Set up general website	1
CHL: Train the counsellors	8
CHL: Prepare publicity	8
CHL: Formulate safety policy	3
CHL: Install own website	4
CHL: Set up administration	3
CHL: Launce own website	1

CHL= Child Helpline

Budget

The cost of training for each child helpline is approx. € 6000-. This fee covers both training sessions; includes additional online assistance from an expert during the implementation stage; and development of the website module.

Grand total: €36,000.

ANNEX

Child Helpline International

According to the United Nations around 20% of the world's population is between the age of 5 and 14 years. Instead of leading content childhoods, millions of children around the world are abused, exploited and discriminated against on a daily basis. Every year child helplines across the world received around 10.5 million contacts from children and young people who needed crisis intervention, rehabilitation, counselling or just someone to talk to. A helpline is accessible around the clock, free of cost and enables them to contact someone in an emergency situation. It provides supportive information or directly links children to immediate rescue and safety.

Child Helpline International (CHI) is the global member network of child helplines, working to protect the rights of the child. We work in over 160 countries and were founded on the belief that children and young people not only have rights, but that they alone are the best individuals to identify their problems if they are equipped with the proper tools.

Our mission is to respond to children in need of care and protection and voice their concerns to policy- and decision-makers. When a child contacts a helpline he/she is asking to be heard, a right that is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). Our aim is to have a child helpline in almost every country in the world by 2010.

We support the child helplines at all stages of development, working towards ensuring minimum quality guidelines and collect international data on caller profiles and the reasons why children call. Together with our member helplines we are reaching out to children through all possible mediums of communication. Their voices in turn help us to advocate their rights at the local, regional and international level thereby influencing policy decisions.

CHI is the leading organisation for child helplines, bringing them together to create strong and unified support for children all over the world. Our members have agreed to advise each other and share their experiences. So not only do we have the expertise of our highly qualified team, we can also call on the experience from similar countries in a particular region.

CHI follows a bottom-up, membership based approach in making decisions. We consistently evaluate our own performance to ensure accountability to members and partners. Being well connected and informed we are capable of responding to new challenges and opportunities as soon as they arise. Both inspiration and empowerment motivate our actions to improve the quality of life for children all around the world. Our vision is a world where telecommunication allows children to be heard one by one and through their voices shape the world and realise their rights.

Target group

The main beneficiaries of CHI's work are minority, marginalised children and young people. The target group is helplines providing the service.

Children

Children have first-hand information about their situations – how marginalization, vulnerability and poverty affect their daily lives. Their knowledge and capacity to bring this information to key adults, including adult decision-makers, is crucial for advocacy on children's rights and in helping children to better protect themselves and other children from violence, abuse and exploitation. Children's participation is a way of working and an essential principle that cuts across all work with children and takes place in all arena's – within the home and family, in schools, in the wider community, at local and national policymaking level and also at the international level.

When a member helpline assists a child in any region of the world, several steps towards child protection are set in motion: the caller is helped, the helpline builds on its knowledge of child protection, and through referral and intervention broader social change is initiated. At the same time, a single phone call made by a child (or by an adult on the child's behalf) is a first critical step towards adhering to a child participation philosophy. When a child makes a phone call, he or she is building on a helpline's knowledge. In the broader scope of things, this information, whether as data, a case study or the handling of the call, is communicated to CHI by the helpline. CHI, in turn, uses this information to develop its activities to support the helplines.

Child Helplines

CHI members can be found in every continent of the world, and we aim to have a child helpline in almost every country in the world by 2010. While this may sound like a lofty and nearly unattainable goal, CHI's history thus far proves otherwise: 61 members attended its first gathering in 2003. **At present there are 97 members and 28 associate members (associate members are organisations actively working with CHI to establish child helplines).**

CHI is committed to adhering to a bottom-up, participatory method of feedback. As a result, we look to our own members for guidance in shaping the future of CHI. Through the use of rotating chairs, each region can play an important role in decision-making and putting forward ideas. The membership plays an active role in the development of all policies and products affecting member child helplines. This relationship enables us to maintain a global overview of the child protection sector and respond to developments quickly, efficiently and effectively. This way CHI listens to the voice of children.

Goals

Our vision is a world where telecommunication allows children to be heard one by one and through their voices shape the world and realise their rights.

CHI has four strategic goals for the period 2007 – 2010:

1. Improve the child protection system
 2. Increase the recognition of children's voices
 3. Establish an effective global network of child helplines
 4. Facilitate adequate response to all children in need of care and protection
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The organisation

CHI believes that a small, yet dedicated team can take on the task of reaching these objectives. At present the team is made up of 14 staff, divided into two departments: Programmes and Advocacy, with the large majority of staff in the programmes department who work directly with the member child helplines. The departments are each led by a department head, who together form the management team with the Executive Director. CHI wishes to remain small, so we do not anticipate an increase in staff over the coming 3 years.

Transparency and accountability are at the heart of our work. CHI does not rely on outdated norms of NGO processes. Instead, it models itself on a corporate entity and operates as such. That is, the CHI Secretariat has a set of deliverables that must be fulfilled, as does each individual employee. In this way, the CHI Secretariat retains its transparency and remains accountable to CHI's key stakeholders: the donors, the members and, most importantly, the children.

In 2007 CHI started with implementing a continuous organisation wide monitoring and evaluation system. The system has as its main purpose to facilitate CHI's organisational learning. In practice this means that CHI reflects on its internal and external work processes, guiding principles, assumptions and its results, based on evidence such as feedback from its members, quarterly progress reports and reflective group discussions. With this CHI strives to improve its effectiveness and quality continuously. Furthermore in 2007 CHI became a member of the Dutch brand organisation for NGO's: Partos. Within the coming three years CHI will have mounted its organisation to comply with Partos' minimum standards as outlined in their quality system.

Our major source of funding for now and the foreseeable future is the Dutch Ministry of International Cooperation (DGIS). Grants from national and international foundations, both private and government funded, have been a significant part of Child Helpline International's income. We have also been successful in obtaining mostly in-kind donations from companies.

Results

Since its founding in 2003, CHI has grown from 50 network members to 125 and has aided the launch of a number of new child helplines. We have developed training manuals for counsellors and staff, fundraising and good governance, while working with partners at all levels. Through a Written Declaration presented to the European Parliament and signed by 394 members, strong support for child helplines in Europe was created. The Written Declaration recommends that the EU support child helplines, including toll-free numbers, and encourages their involvement in the development of EU policy regarding children. We have also established a close working relationship with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Since 2004 we have been involved in the development of a global telecommunications policy through our partnership with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

CHI made tremendous inroads in making a global 3-digit toll-free number a reality by attending the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis in November 2005. CHI successfully included articles 90q and 92 in the Tunis Agenda. Article 92 specifically mentions the need for every country to have a local, easy to remember, 3-4 digit toll free number:

For many years child helplines across Europe have advocated for a common 3-4 digit free phone number for their

services. As a step towards a “European Strategy on Children’s Rights” the European Commission decided² to reserve the national numbering range starting with 116 for harmonized services of social value. The European Commission has now adopted a common toll-free telephone number for all child helplines in Europe.

Child Helplines in Europe in spite of their wish to have a common number are concerned what effects the actual implementation of the number could have for their services. Therefore they asked CHI to carry out a feasibility study, involving relevant stakeholders including children. The study will assess how children in Europe as well as advice and support services offered to children in Europe can be further developed and strengthened through the realisation of a common European number.

“We encourage countries, including all other interested parties, to make available child helplines, taking into account the need for mobilization of appropriate resources. For this purpose, easy-to-remember numbers, accessible from all phones and free of charge, should be made available.”

Partners

At the core of CHI’s network lies collaboration between the private, public and non-profit sector, both nationally and internationally. Partnership building is one of our strengths. CHI endeavours to lobby policymakers and bring all key stakeholders together in working towards a better life for children.

The MoU between CHI and ITU opens the way for helplines to receive toll-free numbers as standard policy and share in technology such as internet and chat facilities even in the poorest of countries. Before ITU recognised children as a target group, child helplines had very little clout with individual national telecom companies and had to rely on the good will of the company to provide toll-free numbers.

The majority of CHI’s partnerships are among the non-profit and private foundations. In particular, CHI has set-up operational and strategic alliances with *Save the Children*, *Plan International*, *WorldVision*, *Stichting Kinderpostzegels*, *Kinderen in de Knel*, *Oak Foundation*, *Daphne II Programme* and *Terre des Hommes (TDH)*. Many of these same organisations work with CHI at the regional and national levels as well. CHI has brokered Save the Children resources for the Middle East and China helplines, and Plan for four individual countries including Kenya and Vietnam. In India and Mongolia, CHI works with World Vision in an operational partnership to support the local helplines. In addition, CHI is working with *SOS Children’s Village* in some countries.

CHI also works together with the private sector and aims to realise knowledge-based relationships with expertise organisations. These are seen as in-kind contributions to CHI. Some examples of our operational partnerships include:

- *McKinsey & Company*: a team of four consultants worked together with CHI staff pro bono, to define strategic options to maximize CHI impact;
- *PricewaterhouseCoopers*, *Ernst & Young*: all these firms have donated pro bono services and products in support of accountancy and auditing;

- *Microsoft Netherlands*: has provided software and has also build the online database used for international data collection. This data is used for the publication, *Connecting to Children*;
 - *UPC/Liberty Global*: they have sponsored CHI with the staff's Christmas donation. Moreover, UPC is the sponsor of CHI's feasibility study on the '116 111' European child helpline common number;
 - *Proximus*: designed the Global Portal;
 - *European Commission*: sponsored the European region of child helplines through the DAPHNEII programme;
 - *Oak Foundation*: strengthens child helplines and individual projects focused on the African region.
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