

NATIONAL PHILANTHROPY DAY

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KIDS HELP PHONE

Innovation keeps Kids Help Phone relevant to young people

Innovation can be challenging for charities that are often focused on meeting the operational costs of delivering their services. But for Kids Help Phone, innovation is what keeps Canada's only national service for young people accessible to those who need it.

"When we launched in 1989, telephones were all plugged into the wall and the Internet was still in the future," says Alisa Simon, vice president of counselling services and programs at Kids Help Phone. "Since then, the journey of Kids Help Phone has been one of innovation supported by donors to ensure we remain relevant to young people."

In 2002, the charity launched a web posting service where a young person could anonymously send an electronic letter and receive a reply. Kids Help Phone then offered its counselling services via instant messaging and later in 2016 launched its Always There app that connects directly to Live Chat. For young people who prefer to find a service without calling a counsellor, they can visit the Kids Help Phone website to use Resources Around Me, which enables them to find services and support groups in their own communities.

"Innovation is critical because in order for us to remain relevant, we know that young people expect us to communicate with them and be available in the ways that they want to connect," says Ms. Simon, adding that more than a third of the organization's counselling sessions are conducted over Live Chat.

The next innovation will be a texting service, and while the organization is raising funds to add that capability, it is watching other developments in technology that could positively impact its accessibility such as artificial intelligence and integrating with social media.

Innovation is made possible by the



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Alisa Simon

is vice president of counselling services and programs at Kids Help Phone



Kids Help Phone provides counselling by phone or online to more than 60,000 young people a year, and about one million young people reach out to the website for content, support, information or to find community-based services. SUPPLIED

organization's donors. When Kids Help Phone launched nearly three decades ago, a group of concerned citizens and four founding partners – Bell, BMO Bank of Montreal, Nestlé and Parmalat (then Ault Foods) – recognized the need for the national 24/7 service.

"These four sponsors continue to give and provide us with significant financial support. They also engage their employees, customers and networks to help fund our service," says Ms. Simon, who adds that Kids Help Phone raises about a third of its \$17-million annual budget through community-based events that take place across the country.

She notes that while technology has changed over the years, the reasons young people call Kids Help Phone

have not. Mental and emotional health concerns – anxiety, depression and self injury – were the number one reason people called the toll-free service when it first started, and it remains the number one reason.

When Justin Preston first called Kids Help Phone it was midnight, he was depressed, sad and also feeling the effects of homophobia and bullying – experiences he had kept from his parents. "I was nervous, but the person I spoke with was so accepting, loving and understanding of my problems. No one should feel nervous about calling in; being able to speak about your problems can really make a big difference," he says.

Now a Kids Help Phone ambassador and founder of Rise Against

Bullying, Mr. Preston speaks at schools across the country, where he says he sees youth struggling with their self-confidence and trying to fit in with their peers. "A lot of kids feel very alone and they're going through a tough time. It's important for them to know that Kids Help Phone is there for them 24/7; they can call anytime they need someone to talk to," he says.

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BC SPCA

Emergency medical care costs stretch resources at BC SPCA

Last year, the emergency services at the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA) were stretched to the limit when 200 animals in severe physical and psychological distress were seized from unscrupulous breeders and puppy mills in a two-week period. They included Old English sheepdogs, wheaten terriers, and 67 Persian and short-haired exotic cats.

The animals' suffering ranged from broken limbs, missing eyes, infections and malnourishment.

But these are only a fraction of the 26,000 animals that receive emergency medical care every year, says Lorie Chortyk, general manager, community relations, BC SPCA.

Animals that arrive in such dire condition often require thousands of dollars of medical treatment and months of rehabilitation before they can be re-homed, says Ms. Chortyk. The BC SPCA raises about \$3-million each year for emergency veterinary bills for abused, abandoned and injured animals.

"We keep them for however long it takes to find them a home. Animals that are surrendered to us in good condition can find homes in days; others that have medical and behavioural issues as a result of mistreatment can take up to a year," she says.



Top left: More than 26,000 animals a year receive emergency treatment from the BC SPCA. Above left: Horses come into the BC SPCA's care through cruelty investigations. Right: A staff member comforts a dog in BC SPCA's care. SUPPLIED

Ms. Chortyk explains that while the BC SPCA is mandated to enforce the animal cruelty laws in the province, it must raise all the associated funds, such as salaries for special constables and the cost of the investigations in addition to the veterinary costs. These are part of its total annual budget of \$34-million.

"We are so grateful to donors. These animals have no one else to care for them, and they are in pain and suffering. If it were not for the generosity of people who reach out and help, we wouldn't be able to care for them and give them a second chance," she says.

While the organization's reactive services are more often in the news, the BC SPCA also has vigorous education and advocacy programs focused on reducing the root causes of animal suffering.

"We have many programs for children between 8 and 12 years of age – these are developmental years for kids when they learn about empathy and compassion," says Ms. Chortyk. "We take a holistic approach to our programming. Although it is animal focused, it encourages kids to care about the world around them and understand that their actions can make a difference. Whether it's bullying at school or mistreating animals, they have the tools to speak out when they see injustices."

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