

## Pre-Budget Brief

# The Honourable Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance Submission to pre-budget consultations, Budget 2018

Respectfully submitted:

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## About Kids Help Phone/Jeunesse, J'écoute

Kids Help Phone is a national charity and global leader known for our expertise in improving the emotional health and well-being of young people through vital, innovative service offerings. Since 1989, Kids Help Phone has been the only national helpline for young people in Canada, providing a lifeline of hope in English and French through its counselling, support, information and referral services, as well as its online resources and tools. Kids Help Phone provides counselling by phone or online to young people more than 70,000 times per year, with an additional 1 million people visiting our research-informed youth websites to find relevant content and support. Our expertise has resulted in young people from urban, rural and remote communities accessing the support they need without intermediaries – an adult's permission or doctor's referral – to get help directly, in any moment of crisis or need.

In addition to providing life-saving in-the-moment support, Kids Help Phone maintains the largest resource database of youth services in Canada, with 30,000 programs to which young people can be referred. Over 10,000 of these services are posted online using a mobile-optimized tool: Resources Around Me (RAM). RAM allows young people to search for and find supports and services in their community.

**Our vision:** A future where every young person in Canada will access the support they need, in the way they need it most.

**Our mission:** We are always open, providing a safe and trusted place to young people in any moment of crisis or need.

For more information: [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

## Recommendations

To ensure young people in Canada receive the vital support they need, Kids Help Phone asks the Government to follow through on the commitments outlined in *Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada* meant to promote the mental health of infants, children, and youth, prevent mental illness and suicide wherever possible, and intervene early when problems first emerge. We look to the Government to support the following initiatives:

1. **Supporting the creation of Canada's first national Commissioner for Children and Youth.**
2. **Addressing the problem of anxiety, depression and suicide on Canadian campuses by supporting 24/7 post-secondary mental health services, like Good2Talk, currently operating only in the province of Ontario.**
3. **Helping communities in crisis by supporting innovative services that use technology to support young people in the ways they prefer.**
4. **Creating a national registry of emergency services contacts in Canada**
5. **Support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.**

## **1. Establish Canada's first national Commissioner for Children and Youth.**

**Recommendation** - Kids Help Phone recommends that the position of national Commissioner for Children and Youth be created.

**Background** - The National Youth Serving Agencies (NYSAs), of which Kids Help Phone is a member, convened a working group in May 2017 to provide The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Office with recommendations regarding the need for a federal Commissioner for Children and Youth. Kids Help Phone supports the recommendations proposed by NYSA, as outlined below.

**Value of a Commissioner for Children and Youth – charged to fulfil these responsibilities -**

- Monitor and review federal laws, policies, practices and government programs to ensure that they are consistent with children's rights.
- Investigate issues where the rights of children and youth may be adversely affected or violated, keeping within federal jurisdiction.

- Increase public awareness regarding child and youth issues by promoting public education programs on children's rights and communicating the role and work of the office to youth in Canada and the public at large.
- Report on progress made by the federal government with respect to the protection of children's rights.

## **2. Address the problems of anxiety, depression, and suicide on Canadian campuses by supporting post-secondary mental health services like Ontario's Good2Talk helpline.**

**Recommendation** - Kids Help Phone respectfully requests an investment and commitment from the federal government to support costs associated with developing a national, 24/7 post-secondary mental health helpline, involving appropriate partners in each province. This helpline should be modeled after the proven Good2Talk helpline, operating in Ontario since 2013, focusing specifically on addressing the needs of post-secondary students.

**Background on Good2Talk-** Kids Help Phone led the creation of Good2Talk, a free, confidential mental health helpline available 24/7 in English and French for Ontario postsecondary students. Good2Talk is delivered by a partnership of 4 organizations, of which Kids Help Phone is the lead. It provides professional counselling as well as information and referrals to local community-based services and is available to all students attending provincially funded colleges and universities in Ontario. The service supports students in-between appointments and on waiting lists for other services. Good2Talk provided support to 10,000 students in 2013, growing to serve more than 20,000 students in 2016. Service evaluation research has demonstrated that the service is making a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of Ontario's post-secondary students.

**Current Funding – Ontario:** Fully funded by the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development.

**Why is a national post-secondary helpline needed?** – Seventy five percent of mental health disorders in young people in Canada develop by age 24. Research has demonstrated the importance of supporting the mental health of young adults as they transition to adulthood. A lack of mental health support can have disastrous results. Suicide is the

second leading cause of death for young people in Canada, and campuses across Canada have had instances of multiple students taking their own lives in a small amount of time. Good2Talk has proven that post-secondary students, staff and faculty benefit greatly from a helpline, targeted specifically to student needs.

**Where will resources be invested?** - Resources would be invested in Kids Help Phone as a proven lead partner, to develop the national service, confirming appropriate provincial and community partnerships to support service delivery across the country.

### **3. Fund innovative support services that communicate with young people the way they want.**

**Recommendation** - Kids Help Phone respectfully requests an investment of \$6 million over three years to support costs associated with launching a new, national texting service to revolutionize how young people in Canada access needed support.

**Background-** Kids Help Phone is one of the world's top helplines for young people and a Canadian leader in understanding their concerns. We understand directly from young people that they no longer prefer to speak on the phone, but rather prefer to find support using non-verbal/text-based methods. In fact, surveys with youth have demonstrated that young people find it challenging to call our service for the following reasons: 75% felt too nervous to phone; 62% do not have enough privacy to speak on the phone; and 42% would rather write than speak about their problem. The need for non-verbal supports led Kids Help Phone to develop our Live Chat counselling service in 2012. This service has proven to be very effective, used by young people with high-risk mental health concerns and is in high demand – a demand that we are not able to meet with our current budget. At the same time, we believe we can and must do more to address the needs for accessible text-based support. So, Kids Help Phone has developed and is launching Canada's first and only nationwide 24/7 texting service for youth, with a scheduled service pilot in Manitoba in Fall 2017, with a national rollout planned for 2018.

**Why is texting support valuable?** - A new text/SMS service will provide vital 24/7 crisis resolution support to any young person in Canada for any challenge they face – without wait times or busy signals. We are confident that for potentially vulnerable groups of young people – including Indigenous youth, those in remote communities that lack access to technology and resources, newcomers to Canada with cultural barriers to help-seeking,

or victims of crime and neglect – the new service will be a critical support available to them in any moment of crisis or need.

In addition, the texting service will also help Canada better understand the challenges facing young people. The service is utilizing cutting-edge technology and big-data solutions to provide direct insights into challenges facing youth in Canada to inform public policy development and research. In particular, Kids Help Phone is designing the service to have real-time open data on mental health issues that can (1) inform the public and media, (2) shape government and school policies, and (3) drive cutting edge academic research.

#### **4. Creating a national registry of emergency services contacts in Canada**

**Recommendation** - Kids Help Phone asks the Government to enable national services to make timely and direct referrals to emergency service providers, by providing a registry of all 24/7 local and accessible numbers to 911 dispatch centres across Canada.

**Background** – As a 24/7 service that hears from young people across Canada on issues including crisis situations, like suicide and self-harm, our professional counsellors and responders often need to quickly connect to 911 to have emergency services dispatched to a young person's location. Kids Help Phone's Counselling Centres are located in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver – but youth contact us from everywhere in Canada. Because the physical locations of our Centres are different than the locations of our clients, we cannot simply dial 911 to dispatch emergency services. Further, local police, fire and ambulance centres are often not staffed 24/7 and therefore published direct business lines do not meet the needs of young people in distress outside of regular business hours. Services like Kids Help Phone require a national registry of emergency service contacts that are accessible 24/7 and serve every community in Canada.

**Why Kids Help Phone thinks this is important** – The need for this registry is life-saving. When Kids Help Phone needs to connect a young person in imminent danger with emergency services, we need to ensure the connection happens quickly. Unfortunately, too often we encounter wrong numbers, numerous transfers and, sometimes, disconnections. Ensuring young people in danger receive immediate assistance needs to be a straightforward, simple process. Without a national registry of 24/7 emergency

numbers, and the support of the Government for this registry, the safety of young people seeking help is compromised.

## 5. The Government support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action

**Recommendation** - Kids Help Phone asks the Government to advance the Calls to Action set out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, specifically those that will enable Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations to close gaps in a number of health indicators like suicide, mental health and addictions, to ensure availability of appropriate health services for Indigenous peoples and increase the number of Indigenous professionals working in the healthcare field.

**Background** - The Commission published 94 Calls to Action urging all levels of Government — Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Indigenous — to work together to change policies and programs in a concerted effort to repair the harm caused by residential schools and move forward with reconciliation.

**Why Kids Help Phone thinks this is important** - Since Kids Help Phone launched 27 years ago, Indigenous young people have reached out to our service for professional counselling, support, information and referrals to local service providers. Kids Help Phone recognizes that we cannot adequately support these young people without recognizing the barriers Indigenous young people face. Our 2017-2021 Strategic Plan makes a commitment to maximizing access to service and is aligned with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's Calls to Action. How Kids Help Phone supports the needs of Indigenous young people must be rooted in reconciliation but we also recognize that we cannot do this work alone. We urge the Canadian government to support Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations to come together in this important work.