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SUCCESS STORY

Single Toll-Free Telephone Helpline Number for Children Introduced in Russia

USAID-funded ‘Assistance to Russian Orphans 3’ (ARO-3) Program successfully implemented telephone helplines project



Photo: NFPCC

One of many fliers advertising telephone helplines for children: this provider operates in Moscow with support from the National Foundation for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NFPCC) – leading Russian think-tank in child welfare.

Telephone helplines are social and psychological services that are widely accessible and reach a great number of people in a short period of time. Helplines for children and adolescents play a special role - they are early indicators that a child is in crisis. They make it possible to quickly take measures to prevent unwanted consequences that might arise from a family conflict, running away from home, or an attempt at suicide.

Anna (name changed), 12, called children’s helpline in Barnaul, Altay Kray, from a village to tell the counselor about her problem – step-father beats her regularly. The girl’s mother knows about this horrible situation, but instead of protection she suggested to Anna “to be patient” because she does not want “to lose her husband”. Anna loves her mother and understands the situation but cannot suffer anymore. The counselor suggested that a social worker can visit her family and help, but Anna refused because of fear. They discussed other options and finally agreed that Anna will call her grandmother in the nearest village and ask for help...

Children’s helplines are an effective tool of child abandonment prevention. According to the surveys conducted by NFPCC, the number of telephone help services grew threefold over the last five years. At present, there are about 200 services in Russia that provide emergency psychological care. However, as many new services appeared, the quality of professional training of its specialists fell, along with the quality of care. That is why providing technical assistance and training to new helplines became one of NFPCC’s main priorities. Towards this end, NFPCC, as part of USAID-supported ARO-3 Program implemented in 2006-2009, founded the ‘Association of Helplines for Children and Adolescents’ to ensure protection of children’s rights from all forms of violence and neglect of their needs and raise the quality of emergency psychological counseling for children and adolescents.

At present, 268 service providers in 68 Russian regions have been united under the Association. The project implementation promoted the federal level decision on the establishment of a single toll-free nationwide number for Russian helplines for children and funding of training and methodological support for helplines providers.

...Anna called back the counselor after two months to tell that her life changed drastically. Once she called the grandmother, the later immediately took her away. Now Anna lives with her grandmother and goes to new school. She loves her elderly granny, helps her with housekeeping and feels herself happy, but misses her little brother and waits for the holiday to visit him.