



Parentline ACT

Submission to the ACT

2019-20 Budget

Parentline ACT would like the ACT Government to consider the following two recommendations for inclusion in the 2019-20 Territory Budget:

- 1. Parentline ACT would like to request ongoing base funding for our vital parentline information, counselling and support services. This includes phone referrals and counselling as well as face-to-face sessions and regular phone 'check-ins' with vulnerable families.***
- 2. Parentline ACT would like to pilot a new program in response to the recommendations of the recent Royal Commission into Organisational Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We believe that past victims need support in their future parenting role. Also that with the increased media and public attention, many parents feel ill-equipped to raise these issues with their children, recognise the signs of abuse or isolation or support them to protect and safeguard their childhood.***

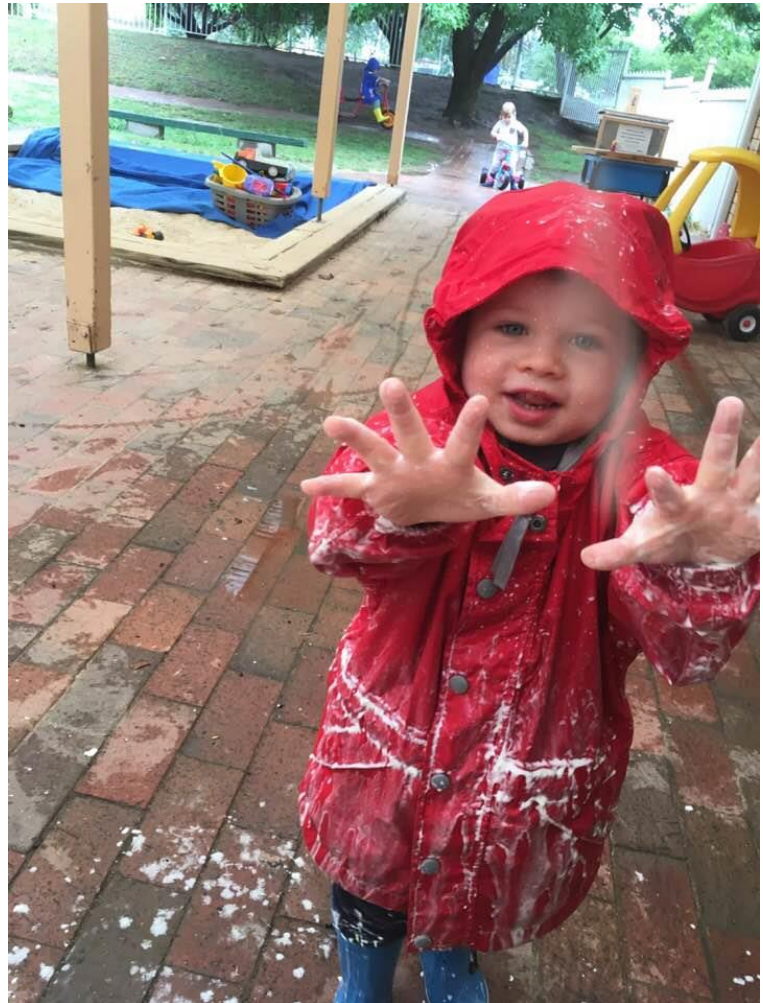
We would be happy to meet at any time to discuss this submission further or to provide more detail on any of the issues below.

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Background

Parentline ACT is an incorporated not-for-profit community organisation that has been providing quality services to children and their parents and carers in the Canberra region for nearly 40 years. Our purpose is to enhance the lives and well-being of children by improving and enhancing the capacity of their parents. We focus on the developmental health and emotional well-being of young children.

Parentline is focused on providing early support and advice to parents so as to prevent child abuse, childhood trauma and developmental and behavioural problems developing at an early age. We aim for children to have a healthy and safe and nurtured childhood. We provide outreach through our Paint and Play activities for children 0-5 and provide family support and advice through our telephone counselling and face to face counselling services.



Parentline ACT has worked in the area of parenting advice for 38 years. Parentline counsellors are skilled in parenting effectiveness and in Circle of Security counselling. Parentline counsellors receive professional and skilled supervision.

All Parentline services are universally available and free.

1. Ongoing base funding for free parent support and counselling services

Parentline ACT has received no ACT Government funding since 2012. Since then we have maintained a service based on reserves, volunteers, single grants and goodwill. In that time we have provided an essential service for thousands of local families, supported thousands of parent and carers and provided face to face counselling to dozens of families in dire need. In the last 12 months alone, we have had over 1700 contacts with parents in need. Demand for assistance, support and our services are not decreasing, but rather increasing with the challenges of modern life.

Our face-to-face counselling service is conducted by fully trained and qualified volunteers as well as counselling students, undertaking the supervised practice component of their qualification at the University of Canberra. We are one of the few organisations in the ACT that is able and competent to take on these students and demand more than outstrips our capacity.

Without this component of our support offering many families would not be able to afford the \$200+ session fee recommended by the APS and many students would not be able to complete their qualification and begin practice in the ACT. Supervision and debrief of this element of our service is done by fully qualified psychologists on a regular, as well as on-call bases.

We would like to request ongoing base funding for our volunteer-centred service. Providing support and counselling to these hundreds of families costs less than \$800 per week. We have more than 20 active trained counsellors, covering shifts from 9am to 4pm most days. Funding is now required to secure this essential service into the future.

We are requesting funding of \$40,000 per year to fund the administration of the service to ensure that families have access to free and interactive support on their parenting journey.



2. Supporting victims and preventing child sexual abuse in the ACT – Pilot Proposal

We would like to suggest a proposal to fund a pilot program to support parents either who were victims themselves of child sexual abuse or to assist parents that want to take more active steps to prevent their own children becoming victims of sexual abuse.



People who have been victims of childhood abuse often struggle with the demands of parenting and forging attachments or loving relationships with their children. Some are concerned about recreating the mistakes of their own experience. Others may have difficulty with understanding a normative approach to child rearing, have issues with intimacy, are mistrustful or suspicious of other adults, are concerned about discipline and behaviour and may have unrealistic expectations or boundaries for their child/ren.

We believe that some victims need greater support to become happy and whole parents and more assistance in their child rearing journey on a day to day basis. This pilot does not aim to replace the therapy, counselling, justice and redress that these victims require to move forward from the damage of their past, but more that in concert with these initiatives, we need to support their parenting practices to help prevent the mistakes of the past being repeated on the future generation.

The pilot project will:

1. Train the Parentline counsellors in trauma informed care practices to enable them to better relate and assist victims of abuse to have effective parenting of their children.
2. Develop strategies and resources to assist counsellors in their interactions with parents and their children.
3. Will provide a service to parents either who are concerned about their children, or who want to take a more active role in gaining better skills in abuse prevention.
4. Develop low key promotion of strategies with parents and carers at Paint and Play (play activities for 0-5 year olds)

The pilot will train the Parentline counsellors in trauma informed care practices to enable them to better relate to and assist victims of abuse.

Strategies and resources will then be developed to help counsellors in their interactions with these clients. Supervision and de-briefing will be organised as well as shared support models for those clients with multiple or complex issues. Counselling services will be offered from our trained and experienced volunteer and paid staff. This can range from one-off telephone responses, to regular phone support, scheduled telephone counselling sessions and face-to-face counselling and support. All of these services will be offered to these clients free of charge.

This project seeks to address the issues that were identified in the outcomes of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse. Organisations identified in the Royal Commission's findings have on the whole indicated that they will endeavour to repair the wrongs of the past, to listen to and hear victims, to put victims needs first, and to do everything to ensure a safer future for children. Parentline has identified the need to give parents, who may have been abused as children and parents and carers resources and tools to ensure that they become happy and whole parents with skills to ensure they have appropriate parenting practices to prevent the mistakes of the past being repeated on future generations.

The pilot project has the potential to be replicated. Resources and materials will be available to volunteer counsellors and to other organisations working with children to apply. Parentline will endeavour to continue to train volunteer counsellors in trauma informed care after the project has finished.

Parentline will work with NAPCAN in the ACT to better inform our counsellors on strategies for parent to help keep children safe, as well as techniques for opening difficult conversations in this area and signs to look for. We will use resources from the ACU Institute of Child Protection Studies to better support parents in preventing or dealing with abuse in their children.

We will run this service for 8-10 months and in that time will collect data and feedback about the success and impact of the service (from both clients and stakeholders/referral agencies).

We estimate the cost of training (trauma informed care, NAPCAN, ICPS sessions etc) to be about \$5,000. The cost of developing the guidelines, resources, communication and promotion of the service (to be done in-house) will be about \$2,000. The delivery costs of the service for 8 months (\$200 per week for 34 weeks) is \$6,800. We estimate that the data collection, final report and associated costs to be in the order of \$1,000.

The cost over 12 months would be approximately \$14,800.

