

**30 Years of ChildLine**  
**(1986-2016)**

**The transcript of a witness**  
**seminar, held at the BT**  
**Tower, 1 June 2016**

**Edited by**

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## Context

ChildLine emerged in 1986 as a confidential children's helpline. It was a small charity operating alongside large and long-established children's charities including the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Barnardos, the Children's Society and Action for Children. In 2016 ChildLine, part of the NSPCC, has 12 bases across the UK, and has influenced the establishment of children's helplines in Africa, Asia and Europe. ChildLine stressed from its beginnings the need to listen to children talking about their concerns and the threats they faced in their own terms. One result of that project was to conceptualise 'child abuse' widely – incorporating sexual abuse, but moving beyond it to encompass physical and emotional abuse, and neglect. In addition to these areas, ChildLine and other children's charities now address child abuse and exploitation on digital platforms, including via social media. The role that ChildLine has had, and should and could play in raising consciousness about these issues, and suggesting solutions to politicians, children's service providers, schools, families, and children themselves, raises a series of questions: about shifting attitudes towards the child and children's health; social responsibility; and individual rights (including the rights of the vulnerable and non-enfranchised) over recent decades.

This witness seminar, held at the BT Tower on 1 June 2016, was organized to reflect upon ChildLine's history and impact within these contexts, and to consider how that history can inform future directions of policy and practice. This research was generously funded by a Wellcome Trust small grant number 200420/Z/15/Z, and by the University of Southampton (ERGO reference number: 18526).

The seminar was moderated by Sue MacGregor CBE, BBC radio broadcaster, former presenter of *Woman's Hour* and the *Today* programme, and now of *The Reunion* on BBC Radio 4.

## **Biographies of Pannelists**

Dame Esther Rantzen, Founder and President of ChildLine; Trustee of the NSPCC

Colin Butler, MBE, ChildLine counsellor 1986-present

Anne Houston, OBE, DUniv FRSA, Child Protection Consultant & Independent Chair (Director ChildLine Scotland Jan.1990-Jan. 2007)

Baroness Valerie Howarth, OBE, Chair All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children & Member of a number of Safeguarding Committees (Chief Executive ChildLine 1986-2001)

Mary MacLeod, OBE, Deputy Chair Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) and Senior Independent Director Great Ormond Street Hospital (Director ChildLine 1991-1999)

Rt Hon Shaun Woodward, former Secretary of State and MP (former Deputy Chair and Trustee of ChildLine)

David Brindle, the *Guardian*, Public Services editor

John Cameron, OBE, NSPCC, Head of Helplines and lead on ChildLine

Anne Longfield, OBE, Children's Commissioner for England, March 2015-present

Sue Minto, NSPCC, Head of Helplines Transformation (Head of ChildLine)

## **Instructions for Citation**

References to this witness seminar should follow the format below:

[Witness name], in '30 Years of ChildLine (1986-2016)', Witness seminar, held 1 June 2016 at the BT Tower, London, held at Modern Records Centre, Coventry, [page number of reference].

## Panel 1: 'ChildLine: 30 Years'

**Eve Colpus**: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, hopefully you can hear me using these mic[rophones]. A very warm welcome to the witness seminar, '30 Years of ChildLine'. I am Eve Colpus based at the University of Southampton in the History department; this is my colleague Dr Jenny Crane who is based in History at the University of Warwick.

We've just played for you the short, original film, first shown on BBC 1 in October 1986 to launch a new service, ChildLine.

Media is one of the important strands of ChildLine's history. ChildLine was first considered, I'm sure we're going to hear, following an overwhelming response to an episode of the BBC consumer programme, *That's Life!*,<sup>1</sup> which discussed the often hidden phenomenon of child sexual abuse.

The video of a girl walking to a red phone box motivated thousands of children to note the ChildLine phone number, the free BT number, to call it and to talk to someone who cares. We've organised today's seminar to reflect on how ChildLine and children's lives have changed in the thirty years following the first showing of this short film, and to consider how ChildLine's history can inform current and future debates in children's health, welfare, services and policy. So to this end, it's wonderful to see so many of you here today from really quite diverse fields of practice and disciplines.

What we are hoping to do in this witness seminar is to recover some of the history behind the existing documentation, to help develop and assess a rounded interpretation of events and so having this diverse experiences, expertise, professional backgrounds in the room, we hope, will begin to open up some of the complexities of ChildLine's history and its connection to a whole host of other histories, practices and debates: social, medical and political.

The recent nature of ChildLine's history – a history of thirty years – offers particular opportunities for historians, practitioners and policy-makers, so we really have two aims today. Firstly, to create an additional part of the record of ChildLine's history for future generations, and secondly to reflect upon that recent history to consider how responses to current and future challenges faced by children, by children's charities and children's services, might be shaped. So we are hoping that all of our panellists will have something to say to both of those aims.

**Dr Jenny Crane** : We are very delighted and very grateful to receive funding for this event from the Wellcome Trust and from the University of Southampton. We also received extremely generous sponsorship from BT to hold the event in this iconic venue and to celebrate and also to reflect upon the relationship between ChildLine and BT. We are delighted to welcome Susie Goodman from BT to the event this afternoon. Thank you for coming and we are also very grateful to Gavin Patterson, the

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<sup>1</sup> *That's Life!* was broadcast on BBC 1, 1973-1994.

BT CEO for making this event possible. We'd also like to thank the NSPCC and PublicPolicy@Southampton for all of their support in the organisation of this seminar.

There are two panels this afternoon. The first one is seeking to reconstruct the histories and the context around the development of ChildLine over the past 30 years, and the second is trying to look at how this history can help us to inform the present and future of children's health, welfare, services and policy.

**Eve Colpus:** It's our very great pleasure to introduce Dame Esther Rantzen as our keynote speaker today. Dame Esther, as Founder and President of ChildLine and Trustee of the NSPCC, has had an absolutely central role in ChildLine from its beginnings, across its thirty years and counting. Dame Esther, thank you very much for making the event happen today and we hand over to you now for your keynote introduction.

**Esther Rantzen:** Well now, we meet under the shadow of the death of Liam Fee, and it feels as if over the last thirty years nothing has changed. Perhaps it has, and that discussion is what this afternoon is about. But I remember only too clearly March 1986 when I was struggling under the shadow of the death of another toddler, this time one that was starved to death. I remember reading a background piece in one of our newspapers which described how her mother and her mother's partner had met at a special needs' school. I remember thinking to myself, maybe they hadn't realised what they were doing to that toddler, and perhaps that family could have been supported and protected earlier and saved that baby's life. That's the reason I went to see Michael Grade who was then running BBC 1 with colleagues to say to him, would it be possible to create a landmark BBC programme exploring the topic of cruelty to children, to see if there could be more effective ways of intervening early? That is a dilemma which still faces those in social work today, doesn't it?

Anyway, he agreed, he said, 'I think a Thursday night would do'; those were the days in television where you could make up your own mind in that way. 'How long do you need?', he said, and we said, 'about ninety minutes, maybe thirty minutes before the watershed and an hour after', and he said 'Yes, Thursday would be fine'. We decided to call the programme *Childwatch*.<sup>2</sup> We decided to base the programme on the experiences of viewers of *That's Life!*, a programme you are all far too young to remember, but those viewers had helped us in the past with other surveys we'd done and so we decided to ask them whether any of them had suffered any kind of cruelty or neglect when they were children. Thousands of them responded and for those researchers in the audience, it might be of interest to know that those surveys still exist and are still intact in the NSPCC/ChildLine building in Birmingham. They will give a very interesting portrait of the adults' recollections of the abuse and neglect they'd suffered as children. Anyway, because *That's Life!*, which you may be incredulous to learn not only carried consumer items but also talking dogs and the occasional vegetable, had a lot of children among its viewing audience and it occurred to us that maybe we should open helplines for them just in case any of them had, were suffering, or had suffered cruelty or neglect themselves. Those helplines were only open for forty-eight hours. In that time, something like 100 children talked about the sexual abuse they were experiencing. When I went in the next day and talked to the social workers who were in charge of running the answering service on those lines,

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<sup>2</sup> *Childwatch* was broadcast on BBC 1, 30 October 1986.

they told me that actually talking about it and being reassured that this was not their fault and that things could change, but having the safety of anonymity, seemed to empower the children. It made them feel more confident; it made them feel happier.

I remember standing there – nowadays we talk about ‘lightbulb’ moments – and I had one of those moments. I knew that what I was listening to was far more important than any television programme I had ever made, or as it turned out, would ever make.

So we pulled together experts, some of whom are in this room, with whom we were discussing the way we would put together the *Childwatch* programme. As the surveys had come in, so many of them said, the vast majority said, that when they had suffered, these adults reported that most of them had not asked for any help, didn’t know how to ask for help. Most of them had told someone; they’d told another child, so that was two children holding information they didn’t know what to do with. Most of them had not had any other outside help but those that did, the minority that did, reported that it either made things worse or made no difference at all. When I told the experts meeting around a table in a BBC building that isn’t there anymore, the professionals were not surprised, the experts were not surprised. When I asked them, ‘Do you think that children would use a helpline like the one we opened after *That’s Life!* but one that would be open 24/7?’, they told us two things: a) children would use it, b) it would be impossible to create.

Now I am very fortunate in the genetic inheritance from my family because I had inherited from my father selective deafness. So I only heard the bit about children would use it, and I didn’t hear the other bit. Instead I went to see George Jefferson. Sir George Jefferson was Chair of BT and I want, if I may now, to pay tribute to the partnership which is typified by having this wonderful theatre to be able to hold this seminar and upstairs the extraordinary view from the BT Tower. Because BT have stood alongside us for thirty years. As a result of that meeting with George Jefferson, he gave us the 0800 1111 which is the only phone number which has remained unchanged for thirty years.<sup>3</sup> BT allowed us, George actually, George Jefferson allowed us to put an appeal for funds into the envelopes – remember envelopes? – with the telephone bills – remember telephone bills? – and that was I think the biggest appeal of its kind that had ever happened, [the] biggest charitable appeal that ever happened in Britain. As a result, ChildLine began to get the funds it needed.<sup>4</sup>

So what was the difference then? Well, you saw the commercial we created with the jingle by B. A. Robertson and a film by Jonathan Gershfield, all of whom donated their services. You saw that red phone box. Well that was how so many of our kids contacted ChildLine, and many of them had to run to the phone box on the corner at midnight; it was the only time they could be sure that they would not be overheard. Some of them described running through the snow to the phone box on the corner. Some of them, and Valerie will remember, had to put up with drunks hammering on the glass because the adults didn’t realise that that child inside the phone box was saying something crucially important. Nobody of course in 1986 would have considered for a moment that you could pick up a phone and walk with it. Nobody considered for a moment that you could sit at a keyboard and send messages through

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<sup>3</sup> With the exception of the emergency services telephone number, 999, which was first introduced in the London area in 1937.

<sup>4</sup> ChildLine also received start-up donations from the philanthropist Ian Skipper.

the ether, around the world. But now as I speak to you, more children are right now contacting ChildLine online than by phone. We still have the phone service, of course, but they contact us by one-to-one online chat, or by email. We have the website and my goodness in July we are going to have a fantastic website because we are, it's going to be all bells and whistles ... and those are the ways that children are communicating with us today.

For the first five years, from 1986 onwards, the biggest single problem children talked to us about was sexual abuse. For seven years after that it was bullying. Now it is feeling unhappy; it's emotional problems at home; it's sexting; self-harm; eating disorders; depression. Then it was problems that involved someone doing something horrible to a child and that still happens, Lord knows we know it happens. But now so much of ChildLine's communication with children is about the way they feel. The other day I was standing in a ChildLine base, I walked past one of our computers and I saw that the counsellor had just, was just working with a message that said, 'I don't want to be here anymore, I don't want to live'.

So one of the things I will be interested in discussing this afternoon, if it occurs, is why, why are today's children, thirty years later, so profoundly unhappy? Since the launch of ChildLine, I don't know how many court cases there have been involving children and I don't know whether you experts would consider that there has been a radical change in the way we treat children in our courts? For me the changes have been miniscule. I don't want an inquisitorial method of interviewing children to obtain their evidence. I don't want an adversarial method which confuses or baffles children. I am grateful for the fact that we now have video links and that we now have screens but I think those are comparatively cosmetic changes.

One big change is the impact of the [Jimmy] Savile documentary in which I took part, whether that was a wise decision or not I'll leave it for you to judge.<sup>5</sup> But certainly what it revealed is that a huge number of cases of child abuse never do reach court and we could ask ourselves and each other: why that is? However, it does make sense that if you have got the word of a single child against the word of the most famous broadcaster in broadcasting, in this country – the one who had a golden coffin, the Army came out in the streets to mourn his passing, he had a huge grave with a tryptic with a special poem which I believe has now been destroyed – but Jimmy Savile was in a uniquely privileged position and you can understand why police and prosecutors didn't want to put children up against that obstacle if they were trying to get a conviction. But I do think this is a topic that I would love us to tackle if we could. How is it that, still, it's so difficult to bring court cases involving cruelty to children to court?

So I've been a bit gloomy, haven't I? In January of this year, *The One Show* (BBC One) ran a report about ChildLine and it allowed me to sit in the studio and appeal to viewers, once again, 30 years later, to come forward if they had experienced cruelty

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<sup>5</sup> ITV aired *Exposure: the other side of Jimmy Savile* on 3 October 2012. This documentary alleged that Savile, previously seen as a 'national treasure', was in fact a 'prolific sexual predator'. The documentary precipitated mass news coverage, and the development of several public inquiries into historical child abuse cases, which in 2016/17 are ongoing. See, on the influence of this documentary: Chris Greer and Eugene McLaughlin, 'The Sir Jimmy Savile scandal: Child sexual abuse and institutional denial at the BBC', *Crime, Media and Culture*, 9 (3) (2013), pp. 243-263.

or neglect as children. With this difference: I asked them to get in touch with us if they had contacted ChildLine. I have had something like fifty or sixty emails telling the most extraordinary stories of the help they received and why it was so important.

‘My name is Charlie, I contacted ChildLine twenty-four years ago. I was eighteen-years old, I’d run away from home a year previously. I was in a dreadful state. I’d been physically, mentally and sexually abused from the age of four until seventeen by my step-father and his friends, and my brother. I was ready to end my life because I felt so bad inside. Someone who I finally broke down to suggested I should call ChildLine. I spoke to a lovely lady called Veronica who probably saved my life. She encouraged me to go to the police which I did. I have lost my family through it all but I went to court and my step-father was convicted and got twelve years in prison. I’ve struggled a lot through my life but I have remained strong and managed to stay a decent person. I can talk about things, although my childhood was horrific. I really do believe that Veronica from ChildLine saved my life.’

From Dena:

‘I have such vivid memories of a period of my life when I called ChildLine, a bit more than twenty years ago. I don’t want to relive those memories now. I do want to say a massive thank you. I phoned three times, the first time I hung up.’ Twenty-five per cent of our calls are still silent. ‘Then you listened when no one else did. You made me feel like I mattered, you changed and saved my life, thank you very much.’

‘My name is Tracey, I first wrote to ChildLine approximately 1994/5.’ We’ve received many letters. ‘I wrote for help as I was sexually abused by my grandfather. I am grateful to ChildLine for the support and friendly advice I was given. In 1997 my grandfather was prosecuted and sentenced to twenty years in prison. This would not have been possible without ChildLine to give me confidence and assure me that it was never my fault.’

These days, as I've told you, we get emails and this one came from someone’s mother:

‘Can I say a huge thank you for being there for my teenage son? He was physically abused by his father when he visited him on alternate weekends, which started when he was about six. He used to get hysterical when it was time to go and eventually told me what was going on. Later he took an overdose, jumped out of the first floor window and jumped out of moving cars. Although he could and did talk to me, he very often used to email ChildLine as writing things down and sending them away was one way he used to try and get rid of the bad thoughts he was having. He showed me the emails back from ChildLine; they always made him feel just that little bit better and able to cope until the next dip in mood. Without ChildLine being there for him, I don’t like to think what he might have done. So a huge thank you from my whole family for being there.’

I started with a reference to Liam Fee. Shaun was in a way a Liam Fee, in a way a Daniel Pelka.<sup>6</sup> With this difference: he was eleven when ChildLine was launched:

‘I would like personally to thank ChildLine for their tireless work and for making available to me an escape from the wretched circumstances in which I found myself in early childhood. Think Daniel Pelka, except that I survived. I remember my call to ChildLine very clearly. My biggest fear was that the person on the end of the line would snatch control of the situation from me and that I would suffer horrendous reprisals at the hands of my childhood abusers and that is why I remember shaking with fear during the call.

My earliest memories include hearing my parents shouting and swearing at each other, doors slamming, the sound of plates smashing against walls. My sister and I tried to stay out of their way and be invisible so that we didn’t end up on the end of their anger. They frequently put their needs first and if they had a few pounds left they would buy cigarettes rather than food for tea. My Grandad started to sexually abuse me on a regular basis. My sister is younger so she was sent to bed earlier. It became a weird nightly routine. And this carried on for about a year while we were shipped between my grandparents and my Dad. We would be locked in our rooms from 7.00 pm until morning. I was given a bucket as a toilet, it was constantly close to overflowing. There were maggots in the bucket and swarms of bluebottle flies buzzing around the room. I had a constant gnawing hunger as I grew up as I was not fed at home. I had to steal from friends’ lunch boxes and pick food up from the ground. I ate grass, ate paper smeared with toothpaste so that it would remind me of food, and broke chunks of cowlicks to taste the salt as it reminded me of food too. Dad’s punishments got even more frightening and his partner told me that I deserved my hands to be cut off. One time she and Dad held me and tried to put my hand on to the top of a red cooker ring. I was petrified and at the last minute they let me go. They also tied me to a chair and went round the kitchen finding different things to beat me with whilst laughing all the time. I was crying and begging to be untied.

Then ChildLine launched. I heard the jingle of the number and it stuck in my head. I knew I had to call them but I was hyper-vigilant about threats so I planned it out really carefully. I waited until no one was around and called from the phone in the school reception area. I felt relieved making the call because before ChildLine, I didn’t know of any other way of speaking in confidence about what was going on. I remember a counsellor saying, ‘You don’t have to tell me your name or where you are; I am here to listen, share as little or as much as you want’, and that made me feel safe because I knew I could open up without fear of retribution. Without the call I don’t know how much longer I could have endured that life.

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Pelka was a four-year-old child murdered by his mother and her partner in 2012, after years of abuse. Liam Fee was a two-year-old, also abused and ultimately killed by his mother and her partner, in 2016. There is a long and tragic history of related cases, some of which have motivated legislative change seeking to better protect children. For more on this see: Ian Butler and Mark Drakeford, *Scandal, social policy and social welfare* (Bristol, 2005); Ian Butler and Mark Drakeford, *Social work on trial: the Colwell Inquiry and the state of welfare* (Bristol, 2013).

Talking to ChildLine gave me courage to tell a friend; together we told our form tutor. He told the head of year who alerted social services. I went into care and was finally away from them. I remember my foster father telling me I was very much a part of the family as any of them. I didn't know how to take that as I wasn't used to people showing me affection but they were the right family for me, and I started to feel wanted.

I wanted to turn my childhood into a positive legacy so I have now set up an agency to help foster agencies bring in new, high quality, foster carers and retain good foster carers. I work to attract, to ensure foster agencies attract, new applicants rather than poach them from existing agencies, so that the number of good foster carers go up and young people have a better experience.'

So many of these stories end with that ChildLine caller deciding to take on a role to help other children. My daughter says, 'Saved children save other children.' I think all those in child protection need to hold in their hearts the fact that it may not be the child you are working with only, it may be generations more that benefit from your work.

So on behalf of these children, I want to thank everybody who works so hard to try and ensure children live happier lives. I want to thank the 4 million plus children who have the courage to contact ChildLine. I want to thank the generations of staff and volunteers who have made it a reality, this 'lightbulb' moment I remember so vividly. Most of all, I want everyone to bear in mind that when terrible cases like little Liam Fee breaks over our heads like a nightmare when we open the papers or see the television news, there are hundreds of other children whom you protect, whom we protect and who live on to rich fulfilled lives. Thank you very much indeed.

[Round of applause]

I must now introduce Sue MacGregor, CBE, who will be conducting a small but perfectly formed version of the [BBC Radio 4] *Reunion* programme with the assembled team around you, all of whom are associated with the earliest days of ChildLine in their different ways. Sue is going to moderate this seminar, so Sue.

**Sue MacGregor:** Esther, thank you very much, what a good idea: a *Reunion*. Thank you for your warm introduction and also for furnishing us with important and detailed statistics really of about what does happen to children. I think most people in this room do know but you've made it perfectly clear that this is something that is still going on and you mentioned an important current case.

What I am going to do, is invite my fellow panellists to speak for five minutes and then I will first of all ask them a question each and then over to you on the floor.

Next to Esther is Baroness Valerie Howarth who is going to speak for five minutes. She is the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children and she's a former Chief Executive of ChildLine from almost the beginning to 2001.<sup>7</sup> Next to me is Shaun Woodward, former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, former Deputy Chair and Trustee of ChildLine and I know Shaun is going to talk about what it was like for him to be there right at the beginning. On my left is Mary MacLeod, Deputy

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<sup>7</sup> Valerie Howarth joined ChildLine six months into its operation, in April 1987.

Chair of Cafcass which is the voice of children in the family courts of England and Mary is a former Director of ChildLine, 1991-1999.<sup>8</sup> Next to Mary is Colin Butler – right at the beginning you were a ChildLine counsellor, Colin – and you will tell us more about that in a moment, and next to Colin is Anne Houston, Child Protection Consultant and Director of ChildLine Scotland from 1990 to 2007, until quite recent times. Lady Howarth, Valerie, will you start us off please?

**Baroness Valerie Howarth:** Thank you very much, Sue. It's really quite difficult for me to know what to do about the five-minute reflection on ChildLine, because ChildLine is a phenomenon and following Esther in itself is not easy. We worked for the first fifteen years of ChildLine together. They were exceptional years in which we established the work and so I really want to pay tribute to you Esther, for all that you have done in this fantastic organisation.

But I am not very good about looking back. Not unless I can learn lessons from the past that actually do something for the future. Because there is just too much to do now. So some of my reflections are slightly different. I think, Esther, that thirty years ago children were viewed differently from today and I think we have made some progress with a long way to go. Some of the issues which were then hidden are much more transparent. Arnon Bentovim, who is with us today, Chair of our Professional Advisory Group for those years, will remember that the battered baby syndrome brought child abuse, physical abuse, to the fore but that child sexual abuse remained the hidden destroyer of lives and that's what our little film and the jingle is about.<sup>9</sup>

Bullying was largely dismissed. I had schools all over the country telling me it didn't happen there but children were committing suicide in despair. Young people had few places to go in their confusion about growing up, crises in their friendships, anxiety about their physical and mental health. Most struggled on. Worried about parents separating, concern about racism, confusion around gender, they all came pouring out when ChildLine opened the lines. It was overwhelming. Esther, you remember it was, I wasn't there when it first opened, but you described it as a buzz, of a hive of bees that was angry and it could not be seen through. But the most positive thing I think that ChildLine did from the very beginning was listen. Listen and hear, and the two have to go together. We had good systems in place thanks to our counselling director Hereward Harrison, who unfortunately can't be here, and we had systems where we got more of the calls. We thought about how do we get more of the calls taken.

In time we opened national centres across the UK and I am sure Anne is going to say somewhat more about that.

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<sup>8</sup> Cafcass is the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, formed in 2001.

<sup>9</sup> The term 'battered child syndrome' was coined by the paediatrician C. Henry Kempe in an article for the American Medical Association in 1962. Kempe purposefully chose a 'jazzy title, designed to get physicians' attention', and the syndrome was widely covered by medical press in America and Britain. The NSPCC established a Battered Child Research Unit in 1966, to try to 'create an informed body of opinion about the syndrome and to devise methods of treatment'. See C. Henry Kempe, Frederic N. Silverman, Brandt F. Steele et. al., 'The Battered-Child Syndrome', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1962, 181 (1), pp. 17-24; Annie Kempe, *A good knight for children: C. Henry Kempe's quest to protect the abused child* (e-book, 2007), 67%; Edwina Baher, Clare Hyman, Carolyn Jones, Ronald Jones, Anna Kerr, Ruth Mitchell, *At risk: an account of the work of the battered child research department*, (London and Boston, 1976).

But listening has never been enough. ChildLine told the nation about just what was happening to children and you've heard some of their stories. Through our publications, which I think Mary will talk about because she steered many of them through, and through a positive media strategy we were able to change some of the issues and shed light, particularly on child sexual abuse. I think we changed the level of tolerance of child sexual abuse in this country. BT, I think, can take a lot of credit for that and I said that when I was working here at the time. I doubt if today a judge would say that it was alright for a man to have sex with his daughter with learning difficulties because his wife had refused sex during her pregnancy. We chased that judge around the television companies and he finally resigned. But I very much doubt that that would happen today.

I know bullying still happens but most schools do have an anti-bullying policy. My question is: does it work in academies? Work in schools does continue through the brilliant NSPCC programme. Maggie Turner started it with CHIPS (ChildLine in Partnership with Schools), and I just know and I've seen how valued the NSPCC programme is in schools.

Certainly ChildLine had a very positive effect on the court system. Esther said something of that and as I am short of time I am not going to add anything except to say to Peter Wanless: somehow the work on that stalled Peter and there's an awful lot of work to continue to do. The NSPCC and ChildLine changed the courts and we could change them even more in the future through different partnerships. Because that was a partnership with all the organisations.

In this Parliament, there's been a real focus on adoption, a tiny topic which doesn't always get an airing in ChildLine. But when I talked to a six-year old enabled by a ten-year old neighbour about being adopted because she'd been taunted at school and didn't know what adoption was but was told that she didn't have real parents. But there she was on the phone asking what this meant. Now I hope that the work that's been done on adoption has made that sort of thing move on. I hope we've now got much better programmes. Whether speeding up adoption in the new legislation will be the best way of ensuring proper preparation of children and regarding the rights of natural parents, is to be seen but I do think that we are moving somewhat in the right direction. It can sometimes be a bit skewed.

We have to remember too that ChildLine pioneered child helplines across the world.<sup>10</sup> We gave them our protocols, trained counsellors and advised on governance. Thirty years on we can truly say the work is global. Now supported by Child Helpline International, the NSPCC has also been very instrumental in giving support.

But these random thoughts would not be complete without reference to the ChildLine confidentiality policy. As Esther said, when children rang ChildLine they knew that no one could identify them, who they were, where they were. It gave them the confidence to pour out their stores. They were threatened, their mothers or their pets would be harmed if they told anyone, so they didn't want to do that face to face. They were told it was a normal part of growing up and they wanted to check it out. Bullies

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<sup>10</sup> ChildLine was influenced by the establishment of the service Kindertelefoon in the Netherlands in 1979. Since its foundation, ChildLine has supported the creation of parallel services internationally: in 1993, ChildLine co-hosted the International Forum for Child Welfare. ChildLine also helped to set up helplines in Hungary (Kek Vonal), India, and Trinidad and Tobago.

made similar threats. Children were afraid about talking about divorce in their homes for fear of letting down one parent.

It all depends on the counsellor and the quality of the telephone work, to help children change their lives. Of course if a child was in danger we had ways of intervening. Nowadays they can be traced but I hope that this is as careful a decision now as it was then in terms of breaking confidentiality.

Last year, we managed to win the battle in relation to mandatory reporting.<sup>11</sup> But we've just been told that the government is to announce a twelve week consultation and that could result in teachers and doctors facing criminal sanctions if they fail to report concerns. Will it make a difference? Have the FGM [Female Genital Mutilation] sanctions made a difference? I haven't seen a lot of cases coming forward.

So to finish. The All-Parliamentary Group for Children, which I co-chair, is looking at what works in children's social care and will report next year (2017). We need to understand why so many local authorities are failing under the new Ofsted inspection regime, and find out what truly works for children in trouble and in danger. There are good authorities; Leeds has a whole-city approach where the whole city coalesces around children and the children's services.<sup>12</sup> We will also be working in the House on the new Bill which does more for children in care and look to improve the delivery of social work. Well we shall see. But there's nothing in the Bill about prevention; nothing about extending the troubled families programmes; nothing about poverty in an era of foodbanks and hungry children being fed in school holidays by their local authority, and I'd be interested to know how many children telephone ChildLine telling them that they are hungry.

So do we need more legislation or just better implementation of resources? What are children saying today about what troubles them, and are you listening? So I challenge the charity to keep listening, to ensure those voices and issues are heard, and continuing to tell the Government, the media and professionals what more is needed so that every child has a life challenge that is positive and meaningful.

I've had my day in that, it's really over to you.

**Sue MacGregor:** Valerie, thank you very much indeed. I'd very much like to ask you a question. There's so many that arise out of what you said and I am sure we'll cover them. But it is ten years exactly since ChildLine merged with the NSPCC. What have been the benefits of that do you think, in your experience and in your view? You mentioned overseas expansion for instance...

**Baroness Valerie Howarth:** That happened before the merger with the NSPCC. But I think the value, part of all is survival: smaller charities were really finding it quite difficult to survive and it was crucially important that ChildLine survived. The thing

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<sup>11</sup> Mandatory reporting makes it an offence for professionals such as teachers or social workers *not* to report known cases of child abuse. In 2016 England and Wales do not currently have mandatory reporting, and this is a divisive issue. Proponents argue that it will make children safer, by ensuring that all potential cases of abuse are reported; but opponents fear that children may be dissuaded from telling adults about abuse, or that this may lead to unfair prosecutions and punishment for teachers and social work staff.

<sup>12</sup> The 'Leeds Approach' is further outlined in: *Leeds children and young people's plan 2015-19 – from good to great* (2015) <<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/CYPP.pdf>> [20 March 2017].

that the NSPCC did, and does, was to retain ChildLine's identity for the children.<sup>13</sup> I think that is crucially important so that children know that that's for them. I think the other thing is that the NSPCC brings a wider umbrella, more expertise, and pulls us all in to those partnerships still, and pulls all the expertise in which means we get a better overview of some of these issues with greater expertise. I just think that in this day and age partnership is the only way forward, merger may even be better if we are going to have the kind of impact we need to have to face the next round of problems. Because I think the next round of problems for children is going to be even more complex than some of the past.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you Valerie, now Shaun, you were there at the beginning. What would you like to say today?

**Shaun Woodward:** First of all I'd like to congratulate Southampton for doing this piece of work.<sup>14</sup> I am very conscious that you are going to post this online. I want to put a few things on record which I think with thirty years of time, can get lost. I want to say these things because as somebody who has been in television, worked with Esther at the beginning, had the privilege of being Deputy Chairman of ChildLine in the very early years, went on to be a Member of Parliament, a Minister and then Secretary of State, I've seen quite a lot about how this works both within charities, within television, with partnerships of private and public sectors, and how government and institutions and organisations like ChildLine come into being.

The first thing that really I want to put on record here is the role that chance plays in these things happening and in these things succeeding. When things go wrong you can have a perfect storm. A terrible set of things that all come together all at the same time and cause a disaster. That clearly happens sometimes in the field of child protection and Esther rightly mentioned the shocking story of Liam Fee, and we all feel what we do about that, which in one sense is no different to how we would have felt thirty years ago.

But the truth is we have learnt a lot and a lot has changed because, whilst a terrible perfect storm of events gathered together which prevented Liam Fee's life being saved, a perfect storm also gathered together in a good way to create ChildLine. That's an interesting story and it's interesting Sue, if you will indulge me for a minute or two, it's relevant not only to ChildLine but it's relevant to any other major charity which needs to get out there, which needs to be born, which needs to prosper, which needs to survive. I say all this because chance is regrettably incredibly important but as Ted Kennedy once said about luck rather than chance, 'You make your own luck.' What we had, what children had in this country, was an extraordinary campaigner who made her own luck. Now that person is sat here and began the seminar this afternoon in the form of Esther Rantzen and I don't want you, again, because it is very easy thirty years on with ChildLine being the extraordinary success that it is in partnership with the NSPCC, to actually lose sight of really thirty years ago what was really happening.

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<sup>13</sup> ChildLine was rebranded Childline in 2017.

<sup>14</sup> This research was generously funded by a Wellcome Trust small grant number 200420/Z/15/Z, and by the University of Southampton. The work was conducted by Eve Colpus, of the University of Southampton, and Jenny Crane, of the University of Warwick.

Thirty years ago we didn't talk about child abuse. Child abuse was something that most people thought happened in extreme cases in places that had nothing to do with them. This wonderful journalist and television producer Esther Rantzen decided that wasn't the case. She decided it, not because she woke up one morning and thought I must make a programme about child abuse, but because through a television programme which she produced and presented called *That's Life!*, she had an extraordinary resource which was that every day thousands of letters written by the public to the programme from people who trusted Esther – who trusted her with ridiculous things like, 'I have a vegetable that's shaped like a penis', and they would want that on television because they thought that would be funny. But they also trusted her in another way. They told her the biggest secrets of their hearts. They told her things about their life that meant, for example, in 1984 a woman called Debbie Hardwick who had a small boy who was called Ben, and who was going to die because he couldn't get a liver transplant, that woman trusted Esther enough to ring Esther on a television programme called *That's Life!*, and say, if you can't help me, my child will die.<sup>15</sup> Now here was this extraordinary television programme, 12 million viewers at the time, on a Sunday night, regarded in the BBC as something of an odd ball. There were people in the BBC who loved the programme, like Michael Grade, and there were other people in the BBC who thought this is a light entertainment show that somehow sits in the current affairs department; if only we could get rid of it from news and current affairs, because news and current affairs is about serious things like *Panorama* and *Newsnight*. So the idea for some in the BBC that *That's Life!* would even do serious items was anathema to them. But Esther would get these letters. The passion of this journalist – and I say journalist first and foremost because it was about journalism – the passion of this journalist to say we can do this story, meant that we did the story about the little boy [Ben Hardwick] who needed a liver transplant and that little boy went on, sadly he died himself because his liver transplant could not save him eventually. But there are now thousands of young men and women in this country alive today because of the paediatric liver transplant programme that was begun because *That's Life!* told the story.

Now Esther brought the same conviction to wanting to tell the stories of young people and older people who were recollecting about child abuse. She dreamt up the idea of making a programme called *Childwatch*. Once again, a bit like the story of Ben Hardwick, she took it to the bosses and once again, and I'm sorry to say this, there were some in the BBC who got the point and there were some who didn't, and on Ben Hardwick I can share with you that the then Head of our Department said to Esther when she said I want to tell this story about this little boy and his liver transplant, the Head of the Department said, 'But your programme doesn't do stories like this, it's a light entertainment show, and Esther, the little boy might die'. Esther's response was, 'Well he will die if we don't tell the story.' And the response from the boss was, 'I don't think you should do it Esther and I am your boss', and Esther's response was, 'And I am under contract and I will end my contract if we don't do the story.'

That's the same purpose that created ChildLine, because within the BBC there was a desire that actually Esther wouldn't do this sort of television programme. But she said, 'I'm doing it.' The great thing about a great star who has great power – and

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<sup>15</sup> Esther Rantzen and Shaun Woodward provided an account of this case in *Ben: the story of Ben Hardwick* (London, 1985).

when you are broadcasting to an audience that would be now three times the size of the *Voice* or *Britain's Got Talent* or *X Factor* or any of those shows, you have a lot of power – this is somebody who used that power with a purpose and created ChildLine. Now of course you would imagine, again I say this now as an observer, I am incredibly grateful to the NSPCC for helping ChildLine endure. But I do remember, in the early days, there were plenty of people who said, the NSPCC knows best, this is not really the work for a television programme. And the National Children's Home (NCH) said, 'Well you know Esther, it's great that you are doing this but really we are the experts.' And so when Esther put together that group of volunteers because again Esther said, 'I can't just make a television programme which tells tragedy, I have to do something. So let's put together a group of people who will listen and answer the children after we put the programme out.' The response to that of course in the following few months when Esther tried to put together a group of people who would listen to the children was yes, but these may not be expert enough. What happens if they make a mistake? To which Esther's response was, 'We'll find a way to train them but let's remember, if we don't listen to these children, more children will be hurt and it would be better that we listened and we learnt and we develop as we go along.' So this passion, this purpose, this extraordinary series of acts of chance which would include, as Esther says, BT – again wonderful story about Esther ... Esther is at home one day, her phone is being fixed, she notices the telephone engineer uses a line to call his bosses to get something repaired – normally a 'him', of course – it was 0800 1111. Esther being Esther looked at it and thought that's a good number, phones the boss at BT and says, 'I want your service number because it is a number that children will remember.' I make these points because what I have seen as Secretary of State, what I've seen as a Minister, what I have seen in the NGO sector both here and in the United States, is that you need somebody with extraordinary passion, with extraordinary intellect and with sheer determination and [who] won't take no for an answer. In understanding why ChildLine is here after thirty years, why it is now an institution which, if ever such a day comes that Esther actually did put her feet up and not work anymore, would now endure and survive, it's because of this journalist, it's because of this producer, it's because this is the person who after six months of ChildLine spotted Valerie Howarth. This is the person who said: 'That's the person that could take ChildLine really forward.' It was Valerie's courage to come on board and help lead the organisation and lead it in a partnership with Esther, which had a very interesting partnership I can tell you ... we would sit at meetings and it was pretty lively, these two incredibly strong women. And then joined by other incredibly strong women and then people like Mary and Hereward Harrison and others came on board, but they came on board because these two people together were building an extraordinary dynamic machine. It never, ever lost its sense of purpose because behind both of them was this passion for making a difference and saving children. As a Minister, I would later see in Ireland the public came to me to say we want you to do more to help ChildLine. And if Ken Clarke were here now he would tell you how he was badgered and bamboozled by Esther at the very beginning into doing something for ChildLine. And similarly Valerie, you know you can remember how you guys worked with Virginia Bottomley and others, and I actually think we never did enough for you in government. You know I would later be in government and I would often think to myself, why don't we do more? That again I see time and time again in other charities.

So what I want to say to you as I kind of wind up these remarks is as I reflect on ChildLine, ChildLine needed Esther Rantzen to happen. Sadly, the problem was out there but it needed somebody who really believed in seeing things differently from the way the establishment, and that's not a criticism of the NSPCC, or a criticism of the NCH, but those organisations were already out there. What Esther brought to it was her journalism and what she found was that there were these kids who for whatever reason weren't being picked up by the NSPCC, weren't being picked up by the statutory services. And so she came at it from a different direction and put it there. She put it onto prime time television, and again remember the significance of that: we took something that was not talked about, that was hidden, that was on page seventeen of a newspaper, and Esther put it onto prime time Sunday night family television. So after ChildLine, in 1988 Esther had the courage to tell the story with the young brilliant journalist called Richard Wolfe, of a school called Crookham Court.<sup>16</sup> Again I remember the struggle inside the BBC because I was now the Deputy Editor of the programme. We were being told by our bosses, 'We don't really think *That's Life!* can tell this sort of story.' Again Esther came back and said, 'We have to tell this story.' And so we exposed terrible abuse inside a children's boarding school. Again, Esther put it on prime time TV and that's one of the really big differences because Esther made it something we had to address. In polite society, people didn't want to. But Esther made it something you couldn't avoid. She shone the light onto a subject we didn't want to talk about and the great thing is of course that sunlight is the best disinfectant. When you put the sunlight onto something, when you shine the torch on it, once you begin to talk about it you begin to discuss solutions.

So I've seen ChildLine evolve over thirty years. Yes, as I read that story today about Liam Fee there's a bit of me that thinks, 'What's changed?' But the truth is everything has changed because today we do talk about it, we all talk about it. If we all take responsibility for it, we will, in the end, get closer to breaking that horrible vicious cycle that we know sits under all child abuse.

I just want to say to all of you guys who are putting this together at Southampton, this is really important that you do it: it's important for ChildLine, it's important for child protection and it's important for other charities too.

Thank you very much.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you, Shaun. I will turn immediately now to Mary MacLeod next to me and family courts are among other things your area of expertise. Talk to us about that and how important it is for ChildLine and its success. Thank you.

**Mary MacLeod:** I'm going to talk about the policy and practice work that ChildLine did between 1991 and 1999, simply because that's when I was there and that's what I know about. I look back on my time at ChildLine with the most enormous gratitude, which may sound odd given the misery that we were all listening to day after day. But I think anyone who worked there felt utterly privileged to be hearing directly from children and young people who trusted us and talked to us about their troubles and troubled feelings. There was also, I mean the passion was certainly there, there were great colleagues, a tremendous sense of mission and purpose and a real sense that it

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<sup>16</sup> Crookham Court was a boarding school which was exposed on *That's Life!* in 1989 as harbouring teachers' sexual abuse of boys. This led to the setting up of ChildLine's boarding school line.

was possible to make a difference. I look back on the time with enormous pleasure, oddly.

So to say it was ground-breaking as the other speakers have said is completely to underestimate, I think, the seismic shift that ChildLine was involved in. Of course, ChildLine didn't come out of nowhere. Part of the changing context that contributed to its setting up was certainly the women's movement and that was very much, for me, part of the personal journey that took me to ChildLine.

When I arrived, the service framework had been thoroughly put in place by Valerie [Howarth], Hereward [Harrison] and the team, and that included the wise decision to keep a note of each child's call. This wasn't a cheap option before electronic case records and we had ongoing debates, very fiery debates, about the need for notes, about the time it took for counsellors to write them and take their time off the phone talking to children, and the cost to ChildLine, at that time, of staff keying in the records into a database that could be accessed. But without the records ChildLine wouldn't have been able to bear such extensive witness to children and young people's experience over a range of issues. We couldn't have given children and young people the voice that everybody recognises that ChildLine did give to children and young people. This wasn't only to record the reality of their experience but also to raise awareness and to make change. There was hardly an issue, apart from all the current issues that have been subsequently amplified by the internet and the impact that the internet and social media have on all their lives, there was hardly any issue that we didn't deal with and look at and explore: bullying; life in boarding school; being in care; being in foster care; divorce and separation; family and friendship relationship breakdown; being ill and in hospital; experiencing racism; being in a crisis and running away from home; having a parent who abuses alcohol or drugs; what are boys worried about; what young children worried about; feeling suicidal; and, of course, the physical and sexual abuse and domestic violence that has been talked about so far.<sup>17</sup>

The scholars among us might think that there was a sampling problem, and, of course there was, because the case records would have fields that hadn't been completed, they would also be a record of a call rather than children talking directly into a tape recorder. However, the very volume of calls that we had on any subject meant that we had a very strong case for saying strong things. We could draw from that sample a smaller sample for more extensive review. The quotes in these studies – and I've unearthed a number of them from my archive and I'm hoping that they can go into the ChildLine archive if you don't have them already, *Why Me?* on bullying, *Children and Racism*, and reading them – the quotes are as fresh now as they were, as fresh and poignant as they were all these years ago.<sup>18</sup>

The studies that we did, they emerged in different ways. Sometimes, as emerged from Crookham Court, government said we are going to put some money into a special

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<sup>17</sup> See for example, Mary MacLeod and Christine Barter, *We know its tough to talk: boys in need of help: A ChildLine study* (London, 1996); ChildLine, *Children living away from home* (London, 1997); Anne Houston, Sue Kork, and Mary MacLeod, *Beyond the limit: children who live with parental alcohol misuse* (London, 1997); Brigid McConville and Hereward Harrison, *Saving young lives: calls to ChildLine about suicide* (London, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Mary MacLeod, Sally Morris and Valerie Howarth, *Why me?: Children talking to ChildLine about bullying* (London, 1996); ChildLine, *Children and racism*, (London, 1996).

helpline and in that way we could perhaps make ChildLine more accessible for children in boarding school, but we could also find out much more of what their experience was, similarly for children in care. Sometimes funders who wanted an issue that would galvanise their staff into fundraising for us would say is there anything that we can support you, and out of that would come a report and media work that would satisfy the corporate involved, raise money for us and raise an issue in the public domain. Sometimes the sheer volume of calls on the subject like exam stress just made it impossible not to do something about it. Sometimes there was a partnership with other organisations like Alcohol Concern, Women's Aid on domestic violence and the Commission for Racial Equality on children and racism.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes simply a counsellor had a real special interest that they wanted to explore, like children being ill or in hospital. Then some of the issues, the child abuse, just as we've heard, screamed out to be taken on.

Of particular interest, I found the work that we did on adults' difficulty in doing anything to take forward the concerns that they had about specific children, and I don't think anyone who was involved in ChildLine could be surprised by the focus on historic abuse now. But I think the lessons that we learnt in that report still need to be learnt again: about how enormously difficult it is to take the step of taking action when you see, without the authority of institutions behind you, that something's wrong, and that's a story again that came out of Liam Fee.

That particular campaign produced – we did alongside a social work organisation (Community Care) and it produced both a report *Child Protection – Everybody's Business* – and a guide to the child protection process current at that time which was widely distributed to social workers and voluntary organisations.<sup>20</sup>

Another issue screaming to be taken up was of course how the courts treated child witnesses and I have to say, I had young children at the time and I came to the point of view that I wasn't sure I would involve the police if I knew from my children that something had happened to them, because of the stories we heard about of how we were treating children in court. So it was a real campaigning issue. I suppose the culmination of that one part of the campaign was a conference that we held in May 1999, called 'Children and the Law'. It happened that Esther was in the hairdressers with Cherie Booth, the then Prime Minister's wife and said could you do something for ChildLine? She came to visit us and she said, 'Children and the law, a conference; if you do it with me I'll get Hilary Clinton over.' So there we were with this conference with a panoply of, Shaun [Woodward] was there, judges, barristers and practitioners from all the disciplines, and it became really impossible not to make progress on that issue and progress has been made, insufficient of course. That conference brought to the UK some of the experience from other jurisdictions. I vaguely remember that Tronde Waage, the then Norwegian Ombudsman was there and, at the time, we were pushing to have a children's commissioner. The then Labour Government was very anti the appointment of a children's commissioner at that time; so at the time it was rather startling for us in the audience and on the platform to hear

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<sup>19</sup> ChildLine, *Children and racism*, (London, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Mary MacLeod, *Child protection: everybody's business* (London, 1997).

the Prime Minister's wife support the case in her closing address in the presence of the Downing Street minders and the Home Secretary.<sup>21</sup>

That conference was a watershed, I felt, in making that change. As Shaun [Woodward], Valerie [Howarth] and Esther [Rantzen] have said, you know having a media platform made an enormous difference and we were able to work with the media that the children and young people looked at. We had relationships with *Mizz*, with *My Guy*, where they would produce an insert in their magazine, we would get 80,000 copies and we could hand these out to schools.

If I reflect on how things have changed for children and young people, children's voice is the big thing that's there for me: a bullying policy in every school (how effective we don't know); school councils; peer counselling in schools; children's commissioner; children's hospitals and even Royal Colleges having young people's forum. The family justice young people's forum, it advises Cafcass, it advises the family justice board, even the President of the Family Division about children's experience in family courts. The Children Act (2004), specifically now amended to take account of children's experience of domestic violence and the impact on them. I could go on but perhaps the most important change was the change in culture that others have referred to from something being behind closed doors, seen and not heard, into something that became a public narrative, a public conversation.

What about the impact on the children, the individual children that we talk to? Well it was really good to hear from Esther that we are able to get some feedback directly from children because it is quite hard to find what the outcomes have been for each individual child. Though I have absolutely no worries about saying that I believe that these conversations could be and often were transformational for children.

So yet again, delighted to have been part of this amazing organisation and it's still there in my heart, as I think it is in everyone's, and I am sure that that's clear from what we've heard so far.

**Sue MacGregor:** Mary, thank you very much. It's an interesting year this anniversary to do with the law and children because it's twenty years since the Family Law Act (1996) gave the law the power to remove perpetrators from their homes. But you talked earlier about the importance of notes taken by counsellors and we will come to a counsellor in a moment. Are they allowed to be used in family courts?

**Mary MacLeod:** They certainly were allowed to be used in criminal courts, but the, what we were very concerned about was to make sure that children's confidentiality wasn't breached. So if we were approached, we would want to speak to the child concerned and find out what they were comfortable with.

**Sue MacGregor:** So sometimes they were?

**Mary MacLeod:** Sometimes they were indeed. And sometimes, I mean I remember a particular case of an eleven-year old who asked us to write to the judge to tell the

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<sup>21</sup> The ChildLine conference 'Hearing Children's Voices', had been held in London on 13 May 1992. There is some more information in Robert Verkaik, 'Law: in the name of the child', *Independent*, 10 May 1999 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/law-in-the-name-of-the-child-1092919.html>> [11 April 2017] and further proceedings may be available from the NSPCC archives (closed at the time of writing).

story of what she was experiencing and that was in the family court where the anxiety was that the father was abusing her would get access and unsupervised access.

**Sue MacGregor:** So that was a real breakthrough when it worked.

**Mary MacLeod:** When it worked, it was.

**Sue MacGregor:** Mary, thank you, let me move onto Colin Butler now. You were a counsellor, somebody who took the calls right from the beginning Colin?

**Colin Butler:** Yes.

**Sue MacGregor:** What are your memories of that?

**Colin Butler:** Yes, when it all began back in 1986 I was Deputy Head of a secondary school in West London and I dealt with some pretty horrendous cases of child abuse which had come to light in the course of my work. And of course the NSPCC were out there, police were out there, social services were out there, all of them there to protect children. But there wasn't an easy way for children to get access to those services. It takes an incredibly brave child to walk into a police station and say, 'I'm being abused, please help me.' So when I saw what was being planned for ChildLine I thought, 'yes, that'll work', and I wanted to be a part of it. I was lucky enough to get the chance to be a volunteer on the first night, where we had thirty lines: ten lines open in the one small ChildLine office, just behind St Paul's Cathedral and twenty more in broadcasting support services. There were 50,000 attempted calls that night. I gather the switchboards fell over.

My very first call was from a little girl in Northern Ireland, she was about eight or nine I think and she wasn't going home, her daddy was a devil, she was in a phone box and of course the first thing that went into my mind was, October, end of October, 8 o'clock at night, it's dark out there, she's in a phone box: how safe is this kid? We had to get police and social services out to that child so that was the very first call that I took. She'd be around forty now I guess.

We had no idea what the demand would be like. It was only a few days after that I had a phone call, would I mind coming back to volunteer for a little while just until it calms down. And I'm still waiting for it to calm down. [Laughter]

I mentioned that we started in one small room in Addle Hill. Very quickly we grew out of those premises and currently we have twelve centres throughout the four nations of the UK in order to deal with the demand. Each call centre provides us with another pool of volunteers from the immediate area and that enables us to answer more children.

It's been mentioned earlier that over 100 children's helplines around the world have been started since Esther's idea and I think they all owe something to her. In recent years, our tie-in with the NSPCC has enabled us to continue that growth.

When we first began there was a tremendous emphasis in the calls on sexual, physical and emotional abuse because basically the initial publicity was about those areas in launching ChildLine. Those issues sadly are still there and we are still getting probably a similar number of contacts about them. The difference is that children are more aware now, that this shouldn't be happening and they are asking for help sooner, they are suffering less time before they ask for help.

In the last few years, we've seen a huge increase in the number of contacts around self-harm, suicide, anxiety, hearing voices, hallucinations and other mental health related issues. I think one of the reasons for that is the savage cuts in mental health provision, because as the NHS budgets fail to meet the various demands placed upon it, sadly mental health is a relatively easy area to cut and it is an area where it is very hard to demonstrate the outcomes.

Somebody once asked me when I was giving a talk about ChildLine, how many times I had called out an ambulance to a suicidal child during a call? I couldn't answer their question because I lost count somewhere between thirty and forty. That was some years ago; one of those would have made thirty years worthwhile, just one.

However, volunteering isn't always a stressful experience and sometimes we have calls that make us smile. I'll just tell you about one of those. This is going back again to the first days of ChildLine, I can tell you it was December 26<sup>th</sup> 1986, it was Boxing Day. I was just doing a shift there and this girl rang up and she said, 'I've got a problem.' 'Okay, tell me about it.' 'My dad brought me a new bicycle for Christmas', I said 'oh did you want a bicycle?', 'oh yes, and it's lovely and it's got ribbons and it's got a bell, it's got a pink saddle and it's just what I wanted.' 'So where's the problem?' 'Well I've broken it and I've hidden it behind the shed, and he keeps asking me why I'm not riding it.' So I asked her to tell me how she'd broken the bicycle and she explained she'd been lifting it up some steps and the saddle had come loose. So I was able to tell her that it wasn't broken, that Dad could very easily tighten the saddle up again and that's one little girl's Christmas saved. I was just thinking she's probably around forty now as well.

Nobody could have predicted the advances in technology that we would face at ChildLine. Mobile phones in 1986 were around, they were the size of a brick, they had a battery life of fifteen minutes and they cost £2,000. So we didn't anticipate that many children having them. Now, the vast majority, seventy-seven per cent of the phone calls that we get from children, are on mobiles.<sup>22</sup> That makes it easier for them to call us, they don't have to go out in the park to a phone box if they can find one now (they are almost an endangered species). They can go to their bedroom, they can phone from the bathroom, the bottom of the garden, the park, on their way home from school and indeed they do, they phone from all of those places.

Tim Berners-Lee hadn't had his big idea in 1986, there was no internet so we couldn't have anticipated that either. But now seventy per cent of our contacts from children are online.<sup>23</sup> They find it easier to talk online than to talk to the voice of a stranger.

It also provides equal access for children who are deaf and speech impaired, and with the aid of special equipment also for blind children as well. So unless a child tells us

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<sup>22</sup> For more on how children have engaged with ChildLine see for example recent ChildLine reports: NSPCC, *Under pressure: ChildLine review: what's affected children in April 2013-March 2014* (2014); NSPCC, *ChildLine annual review 2014-15: "Always there when I need you": what children are contacting ChildLine about* (2015).

<sup>23</sup> For more information about the different types of concerns which are raised via voice or online contact, see NSPCC and ChildLine, *ChildLine: 30 years of listening to children* (2016) <<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/publications/childline-30-years-listening-children.pdf>> [20 March 2017].

now that they are disabled if they are contacting us online, we don't know. It is exactly the same for them as for anyone else.

But there's a negative side to the internet as well, we've touched on that earlier, but we are getting a lot of contacts now from children around issues of sexting, their photos being passed around, around grooming online and around online bullying – the fact that they can't escape except by switching off the phone when they get home, switching off their computer and that cuts them off from everybody else.

The volunteer experience during this time has been amazing for me. During those thirty years I've worked in education, I worked in the computer industry and I worked in the voluntary sector, and finally I retired, the best job of all by the way. But I've always remained a ChildLine volunteer. We are all motivated by knowing that children need us and that we can and do make a difference to their lives and it has been a privilege to be a part of that for thirty years and I am looking forward to many more years as a volunteer with ChildLine.

[Round of applause]

**Sue MacGregor:** Colin, thank you very much and I am sure you will continue for many more years. Anne Houston. You have a Scottish perspective obviously, you are based in Scotland and you will know whether there are strong differences between the rest of the UK and Scotland in terms of what children call in about?

**Anne Houston:** There are certainly some differences and there's also obviously different legislation and different systems. I am going to talk a little bit about that.

In the short time I'll touch on some areas in the briefing but I am happy to expand later on on these or any other topics. I suppose I would just share very briefly at the beginning that this is really interesting to sit in this panel and feel that passion is still very much there which I think we all share.

I am going to cover three areas briefly each: why ChildLine Scotland was developed in the first place and what was the relevance of geographic bases, a bit about public policy influence and the importance of really listening to children's issues, and the volunteer ethos and its wider impact.

Inevitably being the last to speak there's a lot of things that have already been touched on and there will be similarities, but I suppose that's actually more to be pleased about than anything else. It would be a bit strange if it was different.

ChildLine Scotland opened in 1990, it was the third base following London and the Midlands. The main drivers at that time for its development were first and foremost children's issues. Children in Scotland, even then, before the current Scottish government, were living within a different system of education, social work and legislation. Sometimes that could result in difficulties when a child called if you needed specific advice or to be referred to another agency within Scotland which had very different processes.

There are also some national cultural differences which could cause some problems in communication and understanding at times. Fairly significant difficulties were experienced by both children and counsellors I think it'd be fair to say, in navigating some of the strong accents of children living in Scotland, particularly where a child

was very distressed when accents tended to become even stronger: that was an issue at that stage.

The second area over and above children's issues was around funding. Local people in Scotland, where the per capita give to charity tends to be higher, were already raising funds. Many were actually very clearly saying they wanted it spent in Scotland, and in addition the group Wet Wet Wet, again thanks to Esther's contacts, offered the profits from the single, 'With a little help from my friends', to fund a ChildLine in Scotland.<sup>24</sup> So overall there was quite an extra potential for fundraising which was really important for our sustainability.

Third but not last of those drivers was around volunteers and volunteering. There was lots of interest from potential volunteers who were really keen to support children in Scotland, a real positive volunteer culture. And certainly I think our experience, not only in Scotland but across the various bases in the UK, where there is a connection with a local base, that local connection tended to increase the number and the passion of many potential volunteers to come forward and increase significantly that volunteer pool.

So that's just touching on some of the drivers.

The second area I want to mention is public policy influence. Mary has made quite a lot of reference to this but I think it is useful just to think back to the reactions from the professional child protection, child welfare agencies to the set up of the base in Scotland and to say it was mixed, I think, would be fairly straightforward. There were some concerns about, and I use this in parenthesis, 'well-intentioned meddling by amateurs' and whereas others feared that ChildLine would uncover huge unmet need that couldn't then be managed by professionals. Both those contradictions in a sense could be heard regularly and interestingly sometimes by the same individuals which was a little dichotomy, but there we go.

In Scotland, I think we benefited from being a relatively small country where we could access the appropriate professionals at all levels, and in the Scottish Office as it was then, both politicians and policy makers. We were able to evidence the quality of our privileged, and there's that word again, our privileged contact with vulnerable children. We were able to evidence how we could ensure quality through robust recruitment, training, supervision and appraisal of all staff and all volunteers.

We saw very clearly from day one that it was our responsibility to speak with the voice of children, making their views and their opinions count, where they could influence and change policy, practice, legislation and indeed public opinion. We analysed what children were saying to us, expressed in a way that was never before possible, or I would suggest since, to be honest. It wasn't dictated or even mediated by adult opinion and it provided both statistical and case study evidence. I think from the case studies we've had already today, the power of those case studies puts so much more information onto bare statistics.

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<sup>24</sup> 'ChildLine founder tells us "debt" to Glasgow's Wet Wet Wet as helpline prepares to mark 30<sup>th</sup> year', *Glasgow Evening Times*, 29 May 2016 <[http://www.eveningtimes.co.uk/news/14522638.Childline\\_founder\\_tells\\_of\\_debt\\_to\\_Glasgow\\_s\\_Wet\\_Wet\\_Wet\\_as\\_helpline\\_prepares\\_to\\_mark\\_30th\\_year/](http://www.eveningtimes.co.uk/news/14522638.Childline_founder_tells_of_debt_to_Glasgow_s_Wet_Wet_Wet_as_helpline_prepares_to_mark_30th_year/)> [11 April 2017].

Some issues, again has been said, surfaced that were causing many children and many more children than I think at that time anybody realised, great distress and which directly resulted in new legislation and guidance. Across the ChildLine service as a whole, across the UK, new information and understanding was developed and some of the issues have already been mentioned: suicides, self-harm, impact of parental alcohol misuse, physical and sexual abuse, but many, many more. In Scotland we partnered with some academic institutions and our records, which mainly detailed our conversations with children, were researched and used directly to influence policy and practice. These resulted in often significant changes. We also involved the media locally to get the voice of children into the public arena because it wasn't just about changing policy makers' views, it was also about changing the public and how they viewed children, to shape thinking and affirm that child protection and welfare is everyone's responsibility – something now we talk about a lot but back then wasn't as clear.

The media, for example, supported us and the issue of bullying was mentioned earlier. Often, up until that point, it was seen as just part of growing up. Actors from the TV show *Taggart* (ITV, 1983-2010), which you may well remember, were involved with us, speaking personally about their experiences of being bullied when they were children in the press and media. And as a direct result of that, the Scottish Office was motivated to fund a bullying line for Scotland, that later on was funded by education departments in local authorities across Scotland. We also launched a ChildLine for Children in Care in Scotland which was funded by our social work departments. So that was very clear: it became possible then, as devolution progressed, to see whether different legislative policy and practice development specific to Scotland was making a difference in children's lives compared to the rest of the UK, for example the Choose Life suicide [prevention] strategy which was launched very early on in Scotland.<sup>25</sup> It was an opportunity to see what the difference was between what children were telling us from Scotland and from the rest of the UK. At the same time we could bring together the UK experience so that you could also get UK trends as a very powerful policy message. This promoted positive sharing of good practice across the UK, learning from areas of maximum change.

Our independence, I think being ninety per cent voluntary funded, also allowed us to challenge traditional agencies and some of the ways of doing things where children weren't being listened to, services weren't meeting the needs or systems weren't child friendly.<sup>26</sup> Policy makers and the public, I think, were confronted by a powerful commentary from a child's perspective in a way never expressed before by so many. The result has been a legacy of insight into children's issues and concerns, very much their priorities.

The last thing I wanted to just mention was the importance of the involvement of the public as volunteers in fundraising, admin[istration], awareness-raising and working with the children in every single aspect of the organisation of ChildLine. I think a common assumption at that time was that volunteers were used because they were free. Well first and foremost volunteers are not free but more importantly than that,

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<sup>25</sup> Choose Life was launched in 2002, a ten-year national strategy and action plan from the Scottish Executive to prevent suicide in Scotland.

<sup>26</sup> Researchers may further look at the funding sources of ChildLine by examination of the organisation's annual reports of the time and/or from materials produced by the Charity Regulator.

they weren't used, they were involved in developing and delivering all aspects of ChildLine's work. It was richer for the vast experience, energy and their commitment. The added value which I would like just to mention on a more local level is that volunteers live in communities, they took their new skills and their understanding about children's experiences and in constructive ways of communicating with them directly back into their homes and their communities. They talked to me about passing this learning onto other adults. This really is turning child protection being everyone's responsibility into a reality and that has had a significant ripple effect and it's one of the things I think we have to keep working at.

It is hard to explain how radical ChildLine was in the 1980s and 1990s. Children saw ChildLine as their line, it felt safe and that they would be heard. It was a great privilege for me to counsel children and young people on the phone and I was really surprised to discover that some of my most in depth counselling was done on the phone as opposed to previously face-to-face. It gave a child control over their own experiences. They didn't have to look into my eyes, fearful that I would blame them for what was happening to them. They could hang up if it all became too much for them but they could also always call back. That control had not previously existed for many children and we came to understand that loss of control of their own experiences was often one of their biggest fears. Children's belief in their ownership of ChildLine and in the confidentiality and the respect that were afforded was absolutely crucial and was evidenced every single day in the huge numbers who called.

I'm going to stop because I know you are really tight for time. I could go on and on and on and also pick out some of the other things that have changed but I am sure we'll do that in discussion.

**Sue MacGregor:** Anne Houston, thank you very much indeed. You implied that Scotland has, which it does have indeed, a much smaller population than the rest of the UK. But it is a vast country and a lot of parts of Scottish society are quite isolated. That gives, perhaps one thinks of cases in some of the island, highlands and islands, that gives a sort of unique perspective on child damage and things going wrong for children in Scotland. Would you just like to say a few words about that?

**Anne Houston:** Yes, I mean I suppose if I think directly what children said about those issues, sometimes for children living in very, very tiny communities it is quite, well even harder for them to find anyone that they can speak to who is not in some way connected, who doesn't drink down the pub with their parents or doesn't go to the same clubs or doesn't go to the same school. Those children found any kind of sounding board very, very difficult to find that they could rely on that confidentiality. So one of the things I think came across extremely powerfully in calls from children in very tiny communities was that for them it was often the very first time they could access somebody who was truly away from it, they were anonymous, they could say all the things they were terrified of saying and that it wouldn't get back if they weren't ready for that to happen. I think that just links in with that whole issue of confidentiality. Because of the huge numbers of children who called then where we did know or were able to broadly identify the geographic area from which they called we could gain an understanding of the different issues for different areas of the country – for example between rural and urban. Although we often didn't know

during the call where a child had called from in those days it was easier to do a bit of analysis because landlines were much easier to identify – not the specific town or village but broadly the area of the country from where the call had been made. One of the complexities I think of the new technology, actually, it is much more difficult to do that kind of geographical analysis now with mobile phones as they break into different masts in different parts of the country so you cannot tell where they originated from. But in those days when it was landlines, it was much easier to have a sense and we knew and could evidence that, for example, the number of children calling related directly to the per capita size of the population in each local authority in Scotland, with a very few exceptions. So that also allowed us to grasp some of that rural information that maybe we wouldn't get otherwise.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you very much Anne. Now let's open this up to the floor, we've got about twenty minutes for questions.

**Arnon Bentovim:**<sup>27</sup> Arnon Bentovim, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist. I'd like to thank the panel for evoking some extraordinary memories that many of us have shared of those experiences. I do want to mention Paul Griffiths who was actually the first individual who really set up the process of ChildLine, [in] the first 6 months, and the memories of those early months struggling to think about issues of confidentiality, the programmes which Esther described.<sup>28</sup> There's a great many things I could say, but I think the issue and the question which I would like to ask people to reflect on, what role they feel it's played in this whole process which all of us want to see, which is actually the eradication of maltreatment, and helping children to manage the extreme mental health issues which they're beginning to share.

**Sue MacGregor:** Right, let me put that to Valerie [Howarth]. I don't suppose you would agree that you ever could eradicate bad treatment towards children but how far has ChildLine gone towards helping to try to do that?

**Baroness Valerie Howarth:** I think the complexity of the question is the point at which a society and culture has reached in the way it, as a whole, views and treats children. I think what we have done is become more aware that we have to listen to and understand children. At the same time we put enormous pressure on children and I think that's what ChildLine is hearing now, which is that the stress level that children are living under is making them present different problems.

Now I know child sexual abuse and child abuse continues, but nothing, I don't think, to the level that we were hearing on the lines in those early days. But what we are hearing much more is, you know, every child has to succeed in this economic age as an economic unit, to have a, you know, to work towards being a productive member of their family, to pass their exams and I think that that kind of strain, and I think ChildLine has responsibility, because I think that's what they are hearing, to point that out, and whether or not the way we run our schools, the leisure activities, the fact we have no youth services, the mental health services and well done for the mental health programme that NSPCC are doing, are all vital. I think that's where we are now.

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<sup>27</sup> Arnon Bentovim is a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Psychoanalyst and Family Therapist who has worked as a Consultant at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital and London's Tavistock Clinic. In 2016 he practiced at the Child & Family Practice in Wimpole Street.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Griffiths was the first Director of ChildLine and went on to lead on the establishment of ChildLine in Ireland.

We'd moved on in some things, there are other things now which are stressing children much more.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you Valerie, Shaun [Woodward], a brief addendum to that.

**Shaun Woodward:** I just think you can't, sadly we haven't eradicated, we know that but I just think you can't underestimate the significance of Esther deciding to put this on prime time television in 1986. You know she'll be too modest to reflect on this but the battles that took place within the BBC of people who thought, you know Esther, *That's Life!*, this isn't the right place and anyway, child abuse is not really something we want for prime time television. Then when Esther said afterwards, and we're going to go on campaigning and using *That's Life!* for this because I am getting even more letters than ever ... again she'd be too modest to say this and volunteer it anyway, the response in the BBC absolutely divided, right down the line. There were those who said, 'This is awful but it's so important, you do it.' And those who just said, 'Look she's done it now, couldn't you sort of put it over there and can't it be done somewhere else?' Esther's relentless response, and the Crookham Court Case is a really interesting one about that school...again it just kept coming up which is, is this the place?. I think the prime time television bit here was absolutely critical.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you very much. Esther, I think we deserve your view on this.

**Esther Rantzen:** Going back to Arnon's question, because you know that is kind Shaun, but obviously there were others like Bill Cotton and Michael Grade who shared our passion for trying to make sure this crucial problem was aired to as many viewers as possible, and it is still happening, we are still getting documentaries and other programmes, looking at various aspects of child abuse and they are catching up with it after the event.<sup>29</sup> But I would like to ask a question here and that is are we expecting too much of the professionals? Are we expecting too much of the state? Are we asking too much of our social workers with their caseloads that we know about? And the many others, the courts, the many other professionals working with them. Should we be asking about communities? Should we be asking about families? Should we be asking about neighbours? Should we be saying that when Liam was punched to death aged two, would in previous generations this have been noticed, or perhaps it would have been taken for granted? I suspect that there is a word that I mind a lot and I might add it affects our children and our old people, and that is busy. I suspect that we have become addicted to filling our time with an activity which sometimes takes us away from seeing the vulnerability, the needs, not just of our children or incidentally our old people, but the children next door. I am just asking this question because if parenting becomes perhaps more chaotic, if parents are finding more and more difficult, are there enough professionals to fill that gap? I would suspect there aren't. I think that we, as a nation, have to look very carefully about blaming other people when terrible things happen, and we have to ask ourselves whether we could have done more, could be doing more?

Hearing what everybody said, what Mary [MacLeod] and others have said, about how difficult it is to march into somebody else's home and to point out problems that are

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<sup>29</sup> Bill Cotton had a variety of managerial and producer roles at the BBC over his career, including Managing Director of Television (1984-8). Michael Grade has held executive roles at BBC, Channel 4, and ITV. He was the Controller of BBC 1 from 1984-6.

affecting those children, I am not suggesting it's easy but I am wondering, child abuse is everybody's business, it matters to all of us.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you Esther, we'll leave that question floating in the area.

**Matthew Kelly:**<sup>30</sup> Thank you very much, Matthew Kelly, University of Southampton. I've got a quick observation and a quick question. The observation is that I realise, sitting here, that I am actually also a witness, I am in a sense of the first ChildLine generation. I didn't ever phone ChildLine but my consciousness as a ten-year old in 1986 about these sorts of questions was undoubtedly raised by the existence of ChildLine. When the revelations came out about [Jimmy] Savile, it made me think about how, when I was a kid in the 1980s, the idea that some people were a bit pervy, some people were a bit touchy feely, and Savile was definitely felt by kids at the time to be bit creepy, all of this had a, a quite broad currency; it was somehow a part of the rich diversity of life. And ChildLine was part of, you know, a set of processes taking place around that time that started to change attitudes.

**Sue MacGregor:** Could we have your question please?

**Matthew Kelly:** Yes, given that we are here thinking about the history of ChildLine, my question is about the socio-political context of the time: how far are you thinking about chronic underinvestment in social services, how far are you thinking about very, very high unemployment, concentrated in particular parts of the country? In many ways, the 1980s was a pretty miserable time in British life and I just wondered how far there was a sense that the voluntary sector had to pick up where the state was failing and had been failing for, you know, sometime by then...

**Sue MacGregor:** Are you wondering whether we are replicating this now?

**Matthew Kelly:** No, I am wondering about, in the 1980s when you know ...

**Sue MacGregor:** You're talking about the economic situation basically?

**Matthew Kelly:** Yes, and how far that's on people's minds when the need for ...

**Sue MacGregor:** Mary MacLeod.

**Mary MacLeod:** Well, you know, if I think back about what it was, how it was possible to work as a social worker, I am probably going to say something a bit controversial: thirty years ago it was an easier job, it was absolutely an easier job.

**Sue MacGregor:** Because?

**Mary MacLeod:** Because you had fewer cases, you were able to work with people for longer, it felt possible to be involved with a family and manage to change things, and now I am, as Valerie [Howarth] said there are, I don't know, 150 local authorities, a third of them judged by Ofsted to be inadequate.

**Sue MacGregor:** That's in England alone?

**Mary MacLeod:** ... in England alone, and I think partly it's the pressure. I felt less pressured in the 1980s, certainly I get the impression from the Cafcass work that social workers in local authority face now. So I think it's really difficult to work out whether, well what aspects of life then and life now are different and the relationship

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew Kelly is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Southampton.

between these differences and the experience of children and the possibility of intervention. I think the big issue in the 1980s was the discovery of sexual abuse and that was partly Cleveland, it was partly what was happening in Orkney, it was partly Crookham Court, what happened in Wales, lots of things that we are looking at now and thinking, you know, how could that possibly have happened? On the other hand, [Jimmy] Savile was abusing people, children in the BBC, while ChildLine was running. It is just rather complicated to disaggregate all the influences on then and now.

**Sue MacGregor:** When you think that in the last few days we've heard that Birmingham City Council has had to hand over itself to a Trust when it comes to social services, that is quite astonishing in a way. What does that tell us about big city life now in the UK?

**Mary MacLeod:** Well other cities are managing in a different kind of way. There's a kind of postcode lottery if you like about the quality of services across England.

**Baroness Valerie Howarth:** If I can just say briefly, the enquiry that we are running at the moment in the All Parliamentary Group for Children has heard some astoundingly good evidence from the authorities that are doing better, and the interesting thing, Mary will be interested in, is that they are beginning to talk about social workers doing relationship work. Now, how long is it since we've heard that having caseloads that are actually managed and not allowing them to go over that manageable level, putting all their resources at the front line, having managers who are also practitioners? Now we lost a whole, I think the question, we lost a whole generation of social work somewhere where that work could have been developed and we could have saved more children. Something happened post the 1980s into the 1990s, social work lost its way, was hammered by government, blamed relentlessly ...

**Sue MacGregor:** Was this because individual social workers were shown to ...

**Baroness Valerie Howarth:** Well I am the Bedford director for heaven's sake, do I not know what it is to survive a difficult child abuse enquiry? All of that happened and I think that we are just beginning to pick up the pieces and hopefully there are some organisations, I am really touched by Leeds where they say they are really making sure that every department in the local authority, every department, whether it is development, you know, have got to think about children when they are doing the work, when they come together and have a whole-city approach to the work; that's where we need to be.<sup>31</sup>

**Anne Houston:** I do think we've also been through a lot of complex stages in that time, because, the roles of social work, certainly from when I was a social worker, have changed dramatically to be much more case manager and the relationship issue diminished. I think that was a major issue because you could have a relationship with a family, you may have to do something very significant, you may have to remove children but you still went back into that family and you faced their anger and you worked with it because you had built relationships. That's very difficult to do without a pre-established relationship. I also think we've gone through a period where we've put in a lot of processes for the best of reasons like the Protection of Vulnerable

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<sup>31</sup> *Leeds children and young people's plan 2015-19 – from good to great* (2015) <<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/CYPP.pdf>> [20 March 2017].

Groups legislation requiring police checks and approval which unfortunately have been allowed to build up their own myths – for example members of the public often say nobody can give a child a lift in their car unless they are police checked, which is nonsense actually – but they have not been challenged. But I think that’s also made a lot of adults who are not professionals back off which has left even more isolation in communities. When there was a bit more money around for services, the message was if you are concerned about a child, pass it to a professional whereas the bit about ‘is there anything you can do to help, and do you need to then bring in somebody else’, has kind of gone out of it. And now, above that, we’ve got all that’s happening online and sexting and the additional pressures on children and young people and on the workers who are trying to keep up-to-date with an ever-changing environment. We’ve got staff who are expected to respond to emails five minutes after they arrive in their in-tray which adds an amazing amount of stress. And we’ve got austerity and cuts in services. So I think we are in a really, really difficult period at the moment I think that creates a tremendous amount of stress.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you Anne, we’ve got time for one more question before we break.

**Norma Baldwin:**<sup>32</sup> I am Norma Baldwin, Professor of Childcare and Protection from Dundee University. I’d like to pick up some of the points and get to a question about communities and a more social approach to child protection. We are never going to have enough professionals to resolve problems of child abuse. Unfortunately, our policies and our services have been developed around individual cases but very often the causes of abuse, the causes of sexual exploitation, the causes of harm to children have social, economic and cultural origins. My question is what can we do to build on the important work from organisations such as ChildLine, in your partnerships with schools, to give groups of children far more of a voice in identifying where there are unsafe areas, where there are groups of exploitative adults and where they know what is happening to harm other children in their neighbourhoods? Can we extend that work to make sure that it is going out into communities, taking whole neighbourhood approaches, whole city approaches as Valerie referred to? And I would like views, if possible, on whether we can build out.

**Sue MacGregor:** Right, what can we do to spread the word as it were to help children be safe? Colin Butler, would you like to take that one?

**Colin Butler:** Yes, okay, I think ChildLine is already doing this through the schools programme. We are going out into schools, to primary schools, making children aware of what should not be happening to them and who they can turn to for help, not just ChildLine but also other safe places to go for help. We are actually doing that now. It is very important that we do it because of course when ChildLine launched back in 1986, Esther’s show was peak Sunday night television, everybody saw it, everybody suddenly knew about ChildLine. But we have to tell each new generation about ChildLine and make sure that those children are aware of the help that is available to them as well.

As far as being aware in their local communities, I think children do actually have a very good awareness of where is a safe place to go and where isn’t a safe place to go.

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<sup>32</sup> Norma Baldwin is Emeritus Professor of Child Care and Protection at Dundee University.

But unfortunately it doesn't extend to the internet, because they seem to think that if they meet someone on the internet that's probably safe. It probably isn't. That one challenge that we are really facing at the moment, is to get that message across that the sixteen-year old lad who wants to go out with you on the internet and just send me a picture please, is probably sixty-nine-years old, as I am. And may not be quite the person in the photograph that he's sent.

So there is that side to things as well. But yes, we are trying very hard to make children more aware and I think that is one thing that ChildLine has done all the way through, is to make children more aware of risk and of possible channels for help.

**Sue MacGregor**: Thank you Colin. Esther would you like to add a little comment to the end of that? Spreading the word.

**Esther Rantzen**: I think it's a real challenge and I think it's really important, because I take your point that there will never be enough professionals. It is terrific that Leeds is perhaps a shining example that others can follow. I do think that although it is really important that *Dispatches* (Channel 4, 1987-present) shows what's happening undercover in Birmingham, it is not the only picture that's drawn of social services.<sup>33</sup> My daughter is a social worker, it's really important that she has some optimism in her work and that she looks forward to going into work every day. But great though she and great though others are, I still say, and I absolutely take your point that we in communities need to look very carefully at the gap left by the old extended family and the old neighbourhood – I am not idealising it, an awful lot of pain could occur within the family, within the neighbourhood – but at its strongest, it did provide extra pairs of eyes to see when a child was vulnerable and to listen when a child needed to talk. And then there's ChildLine.

**Sue MacGregor**: Thank you very much.

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<sup>33</sup> On 26 May 2016 the Channel 4 investigatory programme *Dispatches* recorded a social worker who was working undercover at the social services department in Birmingham, one of the largest in the country. The programme suggested that social workers were unable to cope with their workloads, and with a departmental reorganisation, which was putting children at risk. The Professor of Social Work at Kingston University, Ray Jones, argued that the programme was 'neither fair nor constructive', particularly given that social workers were facing large cuts on a national scale (Ray Jones, 'Dispatches child protection programme was neither fair nor constructive', *Community Care*, 27 May 2016 <<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2016/05/27/dispatches-child-protection-programme-neither-fair-constructive/>> [20 March 2017]).

## Panel 2: Contextualising ChildLine: Historical Perspectives on New Challenges

**Sue MacGregor:** This is the second part of the event today. We've been looking at the past of course and taking ourselves up to date with ChildLine. The second part is about ChildLine now and what the challenges are in the future. But let me introduce the new panel and I think members of the previous panel are here, so that's good news as well.

On Esther's immediate left is Sue Minto, who is Head of Helplines Transformation in the NSPCC. You are perhaps the first NSPCC representative we've had today which is good news. Next to Sue is Professor Mathew Thomson who is going to start us off, from the University of Warwick. He has written a book called *Lost Freedom*.<sup>34</sup> Next to me, I am very delighted to say is the Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield who has been in post for just over a year. So we will no doubt hear about some of her impressions but also about some of her ideas for the future.

Next to Anne is John Cameron, Head of Helplines at the NSPCC to join his colleague, and on John's left, David Brindle, the *Guardian's* Public Services Editor who can give us, again a sort of overview I think from his point of view as a journalist.

So may I ask you Mathew to start us off please, and tell us what your theme is and expand on it?

**Professor Mathew Thomson:** Okay, what I want to do is I want to try and introduce three ways of thinking about this subject historically, in order to help us to make sense of the history of ChildLine.

First one is I want to throw in a longer term perspective, the second one I want to ask why 1986, and the third one is the kind of history of the future looking back from 1986 to now and, you know, what sort of history does that all add up to?

Okay the longer term perspective. I guess the question here is what thing are we looking at, actually? Well we are looking at two things: we are looking at ChildLine but we are looking at what ChildLine does, yes? It started off with lots of discussion about this history of child abuse but also we sort of merged into what it's doing now, which is to think about childhood unhappiness, actually. If we think about longer term, the history of childhood unhappiness, then clearly it doesn't start in 1986 but there are very interesting historical questions about how it changed over time, I think actually.

The issue of child abuse clearly does not start in 1986 either and clearly you've got the emergence a century earlier of something like the NSPCC to address child abuse in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup> There is a very interesting story of how in a sense the noise about child abuse perhaps dims in the middle of the twentieth century. Some people talk about a 'gap in history', and there I think the importance of the welfare state and the importance of thinking about the family that emerges out of the welfare state is

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<sup>34</sup> Mathew Thomson, *Lost freedom: the landscape of the child and the post-war British settlement* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> The NSPCC was founded in 1884, in a similar period to the establishment of Dr Barnardo's (1866) and Action for Children (1869).

quite important, I think.<sup>36</sup> But certainly at least from the 1960s and the 1970s there is a growing discussion about child abuse and eventually child sexual abuse as well. So I'll come back to that, but 1986 doesn't emerge out of nowhere in that regard.

Okay, why 1986? Four suggestions, there would be more if I'd had more time to think about this. Well the first of them is, as I've said, that I think this is a period, the early 1980s, when there is increasing concern not just about child abuse but about child sexual abuse. There's a Channel 4 MORI poll in 1984 which puts forward one in ten respondents feeling that they had been abused for example. It's certainly in the air by this period.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, and I think this is really, really important, it came out in the previous discussion, this new emphasis on listening to children, the voice of the child. Again this is not wholly new, the greater influence of psychology in relation to thinking about children for over half a century had been putting that on the agenda but it's a very, very difficult thing to do, and what often happened is that it had been sort of invoked but not actually realised. So I think there's a very interesting question about the contribution of ChildLine in that regard and the problems of realising that which are ongoing, I think, yes.

Thirdly, and I think this is quite important, it comes back to one of the questions raised previously, in the sort of early 1980s, perhaps a kind of breakdown of confidence in the state, in professions, in the family actually, as well. I think we've got to think about those as part of a context.

And fourthly, I was going to say new technology, the kind of phone line but it's not necessarily a completely new technology, the phone line, it's there isn't it, the Samaritans I think is 1953, I think?<sup>38</sup> I think it actually might be more to do with what we've discussed previously about the relationship between the media and television and this technology, and the way that *That's Life!* operated and then the emergence of not just of course at this moment ChildLine through *Childwatch* but *Neighbourhood Watch*, and we've got Chris Moores in the audience who is doing work on *Neighbourhood Watch* and *Crimewatch* and a new sort of politics almost of bringing the citizen into being involved in these issues.<sup>39</sup> I think this is a really important part, I think, perhaps of what was going on at that moment.

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<sup>36</sup> Thomson, *Lost freedom*.

<sup>37</sup> Stuart Bell, *When Salem came to Boro: the true story of the Cleveland child abuse crisis* (London, 1988), p. 50, quoted in Thomson, *Lost freedom*, p. 154.

<sup>38</sup> The Samaritans began in 1953 in London, and was founded by the vicar, Chad Varah.

<sup>39</sup> *Neighbourhood Watch* was an extremely popular crime prevention initiative that began in 1982. By 1987, it covered 2.5 million households and its window stickers and signposts become ubiquitous features on many streets. In addition to offering advice on crime prevention and encouraging neighbourly 'surveillance' of household burglaries, it provided a model of the community activism associated with the Conservative Governments' notion of 'active citizenship' by the late 1980s. *Crimewatch* was first broadcast in 1984. A live television programme featuring police officers and broadcast professionals, *Crimewatch* sought to identify and locate criminals through direct appeals to the public as well as providing crime prevention guidance. Thematically and stylistically there were links between the two programmes, but there was also a crossover in terms of production staff. Peter Chafer served as Executive Producer and Editor on both *That's Life* and *Crimewatch*. Sarah Caplin co-founded Childline with her cousin Esther Rantzen and was a producer on the latter (including its pilot episode) and married to its long-time presenter Nick Ross.

So the history looking back from the future. Three points: the first one would be I suppose, would be the turning point question: was 1986 and the advent of ChildLine a turning point? I don't feel equipped to answer that I guess but I think there are certain things happening here of the shift from the state to the voluntary sector. Perhaps, I think, there's very interesting questions about crisis of confidence around professionals here. The child's voice is increasingly important. But there are also, I think, developments, technological developments are very significant beyond 1986. New technological developments has been pointed out which raise new sorts of issues.

**Sue MacGregor:** Can I ask you a question?

**Professor Mathew Thomson:** Yes.

**Sue MacGregor:** It stems from the book that you've written which is called *Lost Freedom*, and that applies to the freedom that children used to have to be able to play safely outdoors then it became by the 1970s and the 1980s less safe for children to, or parents or families perceived it as less safe for children to, be allowed out and a lot of children were then, middle-class children maybe, inevitably were helicopter parented at home.<sup>40</sup> But you make an interesting point in your book that the 1970s were possibly a turning point in what it was to be a child but in the 1980s, the family had begun to change. There were a lot more children who were in single parent families from the 1980s on. I know you are an historian and not a social worker, can you just expand on that a little bit?

**Professor Mathew Thomson:** Well it's a hugely complicated question that one. I mean historians talk a lot about the permissive society as an historical kind of problem nowadays, yes, and sometimes the shifts in the family are related to that, yes.<sup>41</sup> Certainly, and I suppose it related back to something that maybe Esther was talking about extended families, changing family structure is an important element in this history. One of the things I kept on thinking about when I was listening to the early discussion was why did children choose to phone up? Maybe at first that wasn't an obvious thing to do, yes? Perhaps the more obvious thing to do was to turn to someone you knew to talk to them? So I think the history of changing networks of social life is very, very interesting here. At one time people would turn to the church, people in the church or teachers. To the family as well. I can't really answer it in a straightforward fashion but I think the issue was raised actually about changing social structures and how this fits in is very important. This is a longer-term change than 1986, yes. But I think this could be why, having a phone line to call became such an easy thing, an appealing thing for many children to do.

**Sue MacGregor:** And to talk to somebody you couldn't see and who couldn't see you.

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<sup>40</sup> The term 'helicopter parenting' was created by child development and psychology researchers, Foster Cline and Jim Fay in 1990 and refers to parents who 'hover' above their children, looking to monitor and guide their behaviours.

<sup>41</sup> Historians often discuss the extent to which the 1960s in Britain saw the emergence of a 'permissive society'. At this time, there were legislative changes which affected the country's demographics and family dynamics, such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality, abortion, and divorce, and the invention of the contraceptive pill.

**Professor Mathew Thomson:** Yes, and the point about counselling early was very, very interesting because that worked (not seeing) I thought as well. Two lines on the other points I was going to make about the historian looking back. As I said the first one is was 1986 a turning point? The second thing was again a question that was raised earlier really of was this project if you want, a success, you know? Again a very, very difficult question to answer.

**Esther Rantzen:** Could I take that one again, did you say it was difficult to answer?

**Professor Mathew Thomson:** Only in the sense, Esther, that as you pointed out yourself, you know if you were looking at child, child abuse does not disappear, it was that point.

**Esther Rantzen:** Okay, yes.

**Professor Mathew Thomson:** And I suppose if we're looking at it kind of from an eagle's eye view yes, did children's lives get better across this time? Yes, you know, and there were some very interesting points this morning about ...

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you very much. Let us move onto Sue Minto, Sue you are Head of Helplines Transformation at NSPCC. You're going to tell us what that involves and talk about now.

**Sue Minto:** Yes, so first it's really good to be here and I suppose I'd like to start by saying that probably what we all know that ChildLine is as necessary today as it's ever been. At the beginning of the witness seminar Esther was talking and asking us the fundamental question about why are our children so unhappy today? And that's pretty much where I'm going to go in the next five minutes. My perspective on that which is really to do with the online world that now exists for our children, that didn't exist for us.

I've been a social worker for the last thirty years and I've seen a huge number of changes. When I was practising social work, obviously we were looking at sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect; bullying came along and there was a huge debate about whether we should focus on bullying and the impact of bullying in the same way as we did the other areas of abuse and eventually we recognised the sense of putting time and energy into addressing bullying because of the huge impact issues for children and young people.

When I worked directly with children and young people back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I would only ever come across self-harm in young people who we found had been sexually abused. That's not the case today. We've had a massive growth of the internet and our children and young people spend a lot of time online and it will get easier as they become parents but we, as adults, have been so ill-equipped to help our young people to support them and to educate them and so they have been left very much on their own. I've talked a lot in the past about the way in which, as parents, we would teach our children how to cross the road, we would talk to them about the safe places and we would talk to them about the risky places: you don't cross between parked cars, you look left, you look right. We teach them, we'd help them to go down to the corner shop for the first time ever and we would discuss how they keep themselves safe and we would hang out the door and we would watch them disappear around the corner and we would wait anxiously for them to come back, and then we would sigh with relief when they came back safe.

But we haven't been able, the adults of today, to afford children and young people the same support in education with the online world because we haven't caught up. We are so unfamiliar, they know so much more about it than we do and so they have wandered off into cyber space, completely uneducated and unprotected without those sorts of helpful parental guidance that we would have given them if they'd been crossing the road.

There is an unrelenting pressure as a result of the internet for children and young people. It's a 24/7 world that they live in. It brings wonders and challenges, but there are new ways for sexual predators to groom and to abuse. There is no escape, I think Colin, you talked about that, there is no escape. I remember talking to a young girl who said, 'Okay I can turn my phone off, I cannot go on the computer but it will all be there waiting for me when I turn it back on again.' There is absolutely no escape. Bullies can bully you 24/7. In my day you could go home, you could have a weekend, you could have some respite. That isn't the case for our children and young people nowadays. Social media sites can be cruel places and there can be a lot of abuse and bullying on social media sites. Never before have young people had to cope with being incited to self-harm or to kill themselves in a way our young people have to cope with today and sites that give ideas about how you can self-harm, how you could commit suicide and why don't you? That was never a pressure for young people before the internet.

Today's adults and parents have found themselves at a loss to understand these risks. Your child sitting at their laptop in the kitchen, you think they are safe, but how do you know that they are safe just because they are in the kitchen on their laptop? You don't know where else they are, who they are talking to and what danger they may be in. Just because they are in the kitchen at the table doesn't mean they are safe. Equally, we used to talk about making sure that the PC was in the lounge where you could look over children's shoulders. We can't do that anymore with tablets and mobile phones, we can't actually, try as we might, to monitor their usage so we have to catch up with helping to support them and educate them about the risks.

We are also, I think, still a bit naïve about children's world and I still hear people talking about the 'real world' and the 'online world', which is ridiculous because it is all the real world for children and young people and again it is an adult focused notion and we have to catch up.

Then finally, I'd like to finish by just talking about the fact that for me, I mean I ran ChildLine for eight years but I've worked with the NSPCC for a long, long time now, twenty-nine years in child protection, and the most important thing is that we recognise that children and young people will tell us what bothers them, they will tell us what they need for support and we have got to move away from our adult focused idea that we know what is best for them. The confidentiality that ChildLine offers is absolutely amazing, it allows children and young people to take some control and to start to speak out. Let's not forget, children and young people do not tell us about their abuse in easy to understand ways. Yes we have to listen, yes we have to give them a voice but I also remember talking to a young child who had been sexually abused by her uncle. She said, 'But I thought my Mum knew.' I said, 'Well what made you think your Mum knew?' 'Well my Mum saw a photo of me sitting on my uncle's lap.' Now her Mum saw a photo of her sitting on her uncle's lap. That young

girl saw a photo of herself sitting on her abuser's lap and she thought that her Mum condoned that abuse. So it isn't always easy to speak out. At least with ChildLine, you have an opportunity for children and young people to begin to explore those things and to begin to find ways to actually tell someone in their own network. So if I want to leave us with anything today, it would be about not, about really being careful that we don't stay in our adult heads and think that we know best.

Thank you.

[Round of Applause]

**Sue MacGregor:** Sue, that was very interesting and all sorts of questions arise out of it. One of mine is, if I may ask you, do you think the internet and children are forces for bad actually, and not good on the whole? All this cyber bullying that goes on, men of sixty-nine we heard earlier on pretending they are seventeen, setting up meetings and everything, and if so is there anything that can be done to police the internet?

**Sue Minto:** I mean it is the way of things now and it is as brilliant as it is dangerous and risky. I think the issue is about us catching up. As I said I think that children who are coming along, the young people, the young adults who will now be parents themselves will be in a much better position to equip their children and young people. But clearly, we also have to make sure that we put many more resources, we talked today about social workers on the ground and what resources we've got but we probably need many, many more resources to police if you like the internet, yes.

**Sue MacGregor:** And who would be doing the policing? Should the parents be doing some of it? Because you said, the kids sit in the kitchen with their iPad or whatever and Mum's in the kitchen cooking supper, but don't parents have a responsibility to know what their children are doing on the internet?

**Sue Minto:** I think so but I think for those of us who are not yet aware enough ourselves, we are ill-equipped. I think that will get better but I think we're ill-equipped and I think it's a balance. I do believe we need to have more policing if you like. Maybe we should have an army of volunteers who guard the internet. But equally yes it is a balance and we have to take personal responsibility as well.

**Sue MacGregor:** It's harder these days isn't it to know what kids are doing which leads me, thank you Sue, to Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England, just over a year in the job. You've got a huge responsibility here. Tell us more about it.

**Anne Longfield:** Okay, so let's go back to 1986 for me and it was just the year before I started my last job, I don't move very often you will see, which was running a charity.<sup>42</sup> There'd been three names in it but I was there for twenty-seven years before I left and really proud to work with Esther on a Family Commission towards the end of it as well.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Anne Longfield was Chief Executive of 4Children (1994-2015). 4Children was founded in 1983 under the name of The National Out of School Alliance, which in 1992 became the Kids Club Network. In 2004 the charity was renamed 4Children.

<sup>43</sup> 4Children, 'The Family Commission: Happy Families Today and Tomorrow', 2009, was chaired by Esther Rantzen. See its report, *Starting a family revolution: putting families in charge* (2010), <

I wanted to start with where we pitch this in terms of importance if you like because I think that, I think that whilst ChildLine responded to societal change, it also shaped the society we decided we wanted for children. If we had to look at the wonders of the world from just a British lens, actually, I think ChildLine actually is one of those and ask any child over the last thirty years what ChildLine is and I think that most would be able to tell you. And that's for someone who has attempted for many years to try to get through the national psyche, that is an amazing success and actually is a benchmark for all of us who try to get those messages out.

Why then, well I think there's a whole range of things and I think certainly changing family structures, families are getting smaller, families are getting more mobile, less contact with extended families, less the sense of local communities that know each other and feel safe, expanding horizons, the power of the media really important here, but let's remember Esther made it happen. So these things don't just drift along and land. Sometimes someone really needs to make it happen and we are very grateful that she did.

But also I think within this, I think there is a sense that children were claiming more control, there was a growing sense of agency and growing resilience with that so it wasn't just the fact that you, this was the way life was and you had to put up with it, there was a sense there was a place to go. And a really important point, I think, within there that I think we started talking about earlier was that children's voice within there, the thing that we all try to ensure is there and is often so difficult to ensure, absolutely in practice it is. Children would believe ...

**Sue MacGregor:** Because it's confidential?

**Anne Longfield:** Well it was their place you see I think, I think it was slightly more than that. I think children felt it was theirs, they felt they'd be believed if they rang, it was their service, they were trusted adults and they could guarantee that someone there would understand their lives. I think that was a really important part of it and also children were in charge. That gives us many lessons with this increasingly complicated world I think of how we find the breakthrough to really make the difference that we want to make.

So now when we look at the whole phenomenon of difficulties around child sexual exploitation, Rotherham, child sexual abuse and the like, what's the thing in common children say they weren't, didn't feel that they were listened to, they didn't feel that they had a voice in this.<sup>44</sup> I have an advice line for children in care, often they will ring around how they can't control their world around them, they can't shape their care experience, and they can't shape their placements and the like. So there's a really fundamental important and precious thing there which I think is the kernel of what we need to find as a solution going forward for so many other difficult things. When we

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[http://www.thefamilycommission.org.uk/resources/FamilyCommission\\_final\\_report\\_2010.pdf](http://www.thefamilycommission.org.uk/resources/FamilyCommission_final_report_2010.pdf) > [11 April 2017).

<sup>44</sup> Rotherham, in South Yorkshire, was a site of organised child abuse between 1997 and 2013. The subsequent investigations were discussed in an independent report by Professor Alexis Jay Chair of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, August 2016-ongoing at the time of writing). See Alexis Jay, *Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham (1997-2013)* <[http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent\\_inquiry\\_cse\\_in\\_rotherham](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent_inquiry_cse_in_rotherham)> [4 April 2017].

are looking at how we get through the complexity of children's services and the complexity of issues like child sexual abuse, actually looking at it through the view of the child is often a very searing and simple way to start working out what are the important things that need to change. Looking at that in terms of next steps for ChildLine, I think, is a really important next place to go. We've heard about the digital world and how that's kind of encroaching and never-ending, I see it as a positive thing but clearly it's a world that needs some tempering as well. When we are looking at how we actually communicate with children, they demand to us that we do it differently as well. They want us to come to them, they are less likely, I think, to pick up the phone and come to us. They are less likely to diagnose they've got a problem. Actually they want us to be able to come to them in bitesize chunks in ways that they feel that they are communicated with by a whole host of other mediums as well. They don't want to be seen as victims, and I am really pleased to be working with Esther to look at how we might move some of these things on into a next phase for those that definitely don't see themselves as victims but really want to have, you know, a place to go to get advice and help and work out actually if this is okay.

**Sue MacGregor:** If I may just interrupt for a moment, I think you do have special powers that no one person had had?

**Anne Longfield:** I've been telling you about my special powers. [Laughter] Only two. Obviously Esther has many but I only have two, one of which is to collect data. So I can get data without having to seek FOI from public bodies when it's around children.

**Sue MacGregor:** Freedom Of Information.

**Anne Longfield:** That's right, which is really helpful in working out what's going on. Because often you will look at this and you look at this and you look at this, and it's only when you can track the information through, again the life and experience of a child then you can see the difference. I can actually go into places where children are living away from home. I've got powers of entry to ask children themselves how life is treating them, if there's things that need to change. Essentially, I would see that those are very similar to the basic principles of what ChildLine is about. It is about actually going to children and asking them to tell you what's the problem and what needs to change.

**Sue MacGregor:** In what circumstances might that be? How would you reach them?

**Anne Longfield:** Well if children are living in residential care for instance or if they're in long-term hospital, or in a children's home, I can go, I don't have to pre-arrange. It is sometimes polite to do so but you know actually I can go and talk to them, children in prison, and find out actually what their experience is and are there things they feel aren't right and need to change.

**Sue MacGregor:** Children in prison would be mid-teens up to ...

**Anne Longfield:** Yes, twelve and upwards.

**Sue MacGregor:** Twelve?

**Anne Longfield:** There are some children that are a little bit younger, most are fifteen plus. But that's a really important communication channel, to be able to find out what's going on, find out if there are things that need to change and whether

things are okay or not and then actually be able to help them get there. I think those are the basic principles that ChildLine started out with, different communication channel but nonetheless a really important communication channel. And going forward, I think, well I'd say be bold. There's still many things that children want within here. They might describe them differently but actually there's certainly a huge population of children that want adults and others alongside them to help navigate the world and I am really keen to help make that happen too.

**Sue MacGregor:** Could I just ask you for your reaction to the Independent Inquiry into Sexual Abuse. The first two chairs were deemed eventually, to be inappropriate and now it is Dame Lowell Goddard QC from New Zealand and she's going to look at a huge panoply of abused children, including sexual abuse, in a period of five years.<sup>45</sup> Is this something that you actually are hopeful will achieve something?

**Anne Longfield:** Well I am an optimist so I think it will and I think it was an important step. I don't think by any means at all it's a total solution but I think it's one aspect that does a very important job and clearly has all on to report within that timescale with a whole range of things that need reporting on. But it is one aspect I think that possibly, you know, we shouldn't expect everything to be solved by looking through that lens of historical abuse. It allows us to understand better but actually alongside that we need to make sure that the other aspects are in place that means that we are dealing with the situation now and hopefully getting ahead to prevent it happening in the future.

**Sue MacGregor:** Anne Longfield, thank you very much indeed. Let me move on now to the Head of Helplines at NSPCC, John Cameron, what's your view on what's going on now and what could be achieved still?

**John Cameron:** Indeed there's a lot to be achieved in the future. Hello everyone. I have got a fourteen-year old and I was having a conversation with him today about coming to BT and I said I wanted to tell him about all the exciting things I am going to talk about. He said to me, 'Do you know that BT Tower is the same height as the Saturn 5 Rocket?' I just thought to myself, what, what was that? He just cut across me and what dawned on me was this: that we've got to have as adults, sensible conversations with children but relevant conversations with children. Sometimes what we think is important for children, yes, about the importance of ChildLine and everything else and child protection ... for him, no, it's about the size of the Saturn 5 Rocket and BT Tower.

I am a social worker, I am really proud to be a social worker because I think social workers do one of the most exceptional jobs on the planet. I am really proud to be part of the NSPCC because I think the NSPCC punches well above its weight. It's a charity in terms of influencing and protecting children right across the UK. I am also very proud about leading ChildLine because ChildLine, as part of the NSPCC, has a great influence internally along with its sister service or cousin, the adult helpline service that we run in the NSPCC as well, both to influence the direction of travel of society. We want to be able to reach out to more children who are facing adversity, protect more children online and give a greater opportunity for children to speak to us.

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<sup>45</sup> The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), led by Hon. Lowell Goddard, began proceedings in April 2015 after the Home Secretary established a statutory inquiry on 12 March 2015 (under the 2005 Inquiries Act). Lowell Goddard resigned as chair of the inquiry in August 2016.

So we are, in essence, the ideal example of partnerships. I think that one of the ways that we have to go, particularly with ChildLine, is to make sure that we form very, very strong partnerships with the rest of the child protection world. This is not about us orbiting the child protection world, this is about us being part and a very centre of the child protection world which I think ChildLine has the very opportunities to do.

I just want to talk about one new threat or one threat that we've gone on a lot about and that's about online, but I just want to give it a slightly different nuance: that's about access to pornography by children. I think this is very, very corrosive and I think that it is creating a greater gender divide between obviously boys and girls and I think that's going to have a long-term impact for the way that men and women function as adults in the future as well. I think it really is very, very corrosive and as much as we have heard this morning, sorry this afternoon, in regards to the range of threats that are around for children, children actually accessing online pornography and what it does to their heads in terms of their perceptions of gender etc. I think is really important.

To me, ChildLine for the future fits very clearly into the early help agenda, it's absolutely imperative that we put as much effort as possible into ensuring that children have the earliest opportunity to start talking about concerns. We've got to be able to wrap ChildLine around the child and in partnership with other agencies, by wrapping yourself with those agencies around the child, I think you get the very biggest impact on protecting children and advising children about their futures as well.

There are a number of partnerships that ChildLine are already involved in and will be developing in the future. For instance, in Northern Ireland, you are probably not aware of this, anybody from Northern Ireland here? No. In Northern Ireland, ChildLine is being pushed out very heavily across the Trusts. For children who are on child protection registers and child protection plans, this is about being an opportunity if a child wants to talk to somebody outside office hours, what a simple solution. Here's ChildLine that's available for children who are part of that planning system and we have arrangements with those children, with that family and with the local agency on the ground about what information we will and will not share. That gives an example, an ideal example about wrapping around for a child.

The Home Office has recently come to us to say, well look they are not parents, parents of children are a bit worried about what's happening about all these terrorist activities that are around at the moment.<sup>46</sup> We've had something like 400 plus contacts to ChildLine following the Paris atrocities.<sup>47</sup> Children get very worried about their own safety, about the safety of others, what does this mean when the French say they are going to war? One child was saying does it mean there's going to be nuclear war? Well where do children go and what do children know about, is ChildLine positioned in their head as this opportunity to talk about these wide range of

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<sup>46</sup> NSPCC, 'Children's concerns about terrorism – our advice following a rise in calls', 25 November 2015 <<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/fighting-for-childhood/news-opinion/children-calling-childLine-fearing-terrorist-attacks/>> [11 April 2017].

<sup>47</sup> There were a series of terrorist attacks across the city of Paris on 13 and 14 November 2015, targeting a football match, cafes, restaurants, and a music concert. 130 people died, and a further 368 were injured.

safeguarding matters that they have? The Home Office rightly have, and I think it's good news for them, they rightly identified that there is a need for both adults and children to get advice about what do you say to your child etc. in these particular circumstances and where do children get advice. What a fantastic partnership about pushing that out. The Home Office are paying for ChildLine to be promoted to children to remind them that this is an opportunity if you want that type of advice.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), another very specific issue that we are working on in a great amount of partnerships, again with our cousins in the adult helpline with the local authorities on the ground and we are actually making, I believe, a real difference with Female Genital Mutilation amongst a number of communities. A couple of weeks ago, we had a seventeen-year old who called the helpline who was about to be shipped off to Sri Lanka to be cut. We were able to liaise immediately with the agencies on the ground there and get an FGM order to prevent her from being moved out. So there are plenty of opportunities to work in partnership.<sup>48</sup>

I just want to talk about another thing: the development of the way that children want to contact us. I think there is a potential tension here between what children want and what children need. I think there is a tension here. So a lot of children for instance want to contact us online and we know that that is the majority of contacts at the moment. But the growing issue for me for the future that needs clarification is the value of voice, I think there's something about the value of voice that enables children to emotionally engage with some of the issues that they are facing. So I see that we need to engage with children on a journey and the journey might well be that they use, first of all the self-help that they can get from our newly, about to be launched, website service where they can get some initial information. Then they may contact us by chat and online, but I think we ought to start thinking about, and this is a challenge for us, about how we encourage children to have more conversations. Because the worry that I have is that children without those conversations, they are missing out something in terms of the quality of the engagement that they can have.

Now I just want to go on to a few other challenges that are facing us. We've got to reach out to all our communities. We know that boys are underutilising ChildLine and I suspect that there are a number of other groups, we don't know at the moment and we need to work on that but I suspect that there are a number of other groups that are not using our service. I am being rushed here so I will be very, very quick. But I really have got to say this and that is about improving our knowledge for our volunteers as well. Our volunteers make an absolutely essential contribution, not only to ChildLine but to the very message and I can't articulate as well as Anne articulated about the importance of volunteers. But you remember what she said in terms of what they do over and above being volunteers for ChildLine. But it is about improving their knowledge and skills because the complexities and challenges that children are being faced with at the moment, it means that we have to invest significantly into training up our staff, to make sure that we cannot only deliver very, very exciting services, but

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<sup>48</sup> An FGM protection order is a civil measure which can be applied for through a family court under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 as amended by the Serious Crime Act 2015. The FGM protection order offers the means of protecting actual or potential victims from FGM under the civil law. On the NSPCC's report on legislation and policy see NSPCC, 'Female genital mutilation (FGM): legislation, policy, guidance', <<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/legislation-policy-and-guidance/>> [9 April 2017].

also be able to measure, and this is the other further challenge that Arnon [Bentovim] and I were talking about in the break, weren't we Arnon, and that is about how you measure impact, how you measure real impact for children when they utilise our services so they can live a far healthier and safer life both as children and as adults.

**Sue MacGregor:** John, thank you very much. There have been several references during the afternoon to unhappy children, children unhappy in a way that wasn't necessarily so perhaps thirty to forty years ago. You referred to pornography and by implication to sexting. This is something that particularly affects, I imagine young girls? What can be done about it because it is something that's done between kids and does cause untold misery?

**John Cameron:** Yes, the NSPCC did research on, I think it was fourteen to sixteen-year olds a few years back and said have you ever received an explicit message, and if you did receive an explicit message would you report it?<sup>49</sup> There wasn't a single child in that survey who said they would report it and when asked why, simply because they said because everybody does it. That's quite a shocking thing really isn't it? I think that what we've got to do is because people are becoming normalised to this type of stuff and I think it is a link to the kind of pornography that drives it. They do say don't they, the difference between boys and girls is boys don't have to be asked to send an explicit image but girls do have to be. It is about this huge gender difference that we are having here. I think we are being normalised into believing that this is perfectly okay. I think there is a lot of work around Personal Social and Health Education in schools, particularly with younger children and the valuable work the NSPCC school service is doing in supporting those types of activities are a good example. We've got to get into schools much, much earlier and I am afraid to say, boys have got to begin to understand to value girls. I think that's a big, big drive that's impacting, or the lack of it should I say, impacting on children.

**Sue MacGregor:** Who should be doing that? School or home?

**John Cameron:** Well it's a collective, isn't it? It is a partnership. We've heard earlier that a good child protection system is about wrapping services around the child and that wrap-around service means social workers, it means health visitors, it means teachers, etc. They all get involved in this and there's got to be a coherent plan and ChildLine can do a lot more as well about engaging with boys who have got problematic behaviours as well and about trying to direct them in the right direction as well.

**Sue MacGregor:** John Cameron, thank you very much indeed. And now to give us more of a sort of stand back overview, if you can do both those things at the same time, David Brindle of the *Guardian*, the Public Services Editor.

**David Brindle:** Thank you Sue. Coming last is always a challenge and as a jobbing hack, speaking in such illustrious company is a double intimidation, I think, but I will try to add something to this very rich conversation we've been having. I want to look forward by looking back, really, on how the *Guardian* reported the birth of ChildLine

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<sup>49</sup> Jessica Ringrose, Rosalind Gill, Sonia Livingstone, and Laura Harvey, *A qualitative study of children, young people and 'sexting': a report prepared for the NSPCC* (2012) <<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/qualitative-study-children-young-people-sexting-report.pdf>> [20 March 2017].

and what that might tell us about the relationship between the media and what I'll call the 'Public Services establishment' then and how that's changed, I think, in the last thirty years, due in no small part to ChildLine.

If you look back at the files, it is a stretch to say that the *Guardian* welcomed the birth of ChildLine, or indeed noticed it to any great effect. The first article amounted to a grand total of ninety-four words on October 24 [1986], a telephone service blah-blah-blah was announced yesterday by the BBC, then two more paragraphs and the 0800 number. Significantly that news item was written not by any social affairs or policy specialist, but by the media correspondent. It was seen as something coming from the media.<sup>50</sup>

The day after the launch we carried a 'News in Brief' item, and that was just fifty-eight words and saying that ChildLine had received the 50,000 calls that Colin talked about earlier in the first twenty-four hours and quoting Miss Rantzen as saying ChildLine is here to stay and will remain open around the clock.<sup>51</sup> It was another four weeks before we mentioned it again and now that public services establishment that I talked about was starting to mobilise because on the *Guardian's* part this was a much more extensive article written then by the social services correspondent, my predecessor, and on the professional side this article reported criticism from some Directors of social services that ChildLine was, as the article said, sitting on evidence of sexual abuse which should be reported to the police or social services. It quoted Morris Hawker, Director in Essex, saying, 'I am a supporter of a child crisis line, it is a good concept but they haven't got their act together on how cases are to be handled.' Even senior establishment figures not so critical were hardly effusive in their welcome for the service. Bob Lewis, who was then Director in Oldham, and went on to become a President of the Association of Directors of Social Services said, 'I don't think they've found a huge well of child abuse that we didn't know about.'<sup>52</sup>

Well of course controversy is meat and drink to us in the media and a good argument finally gave us reason to give some significant coverage to this new kid on the block and I am sure that's been reflected time and again through ChildLine's thirty-year history. But I think more fundamentally, it reflected how close were much of the media, not all, obviously, given *That's Life!*'s key role in all of this, but how much of the media were close to this public services establishment. And how mutually dependent we were trading stories for profile and reinforcing the prevailing public service model. That was very much the case in 1986. I think it continued to be the case for at least another decade, probably longer. But looking back now I think you can see that the advent of ChildLine represented a critical and ultimately irrevocable breakthrough in the deference of the media and through us, I think the wider public, to this public services establishment. So by providing a wholly new route for children and young people to register their concerns, bypassing the often sclerotic, unresponsive and process-obsessed public services, the formal system, ChildLine I

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<sup>50</sup> Dennis Barker, 'Child helpline launched' *Guardian*, 24 October 1986, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> 'News in brief: child calls pour in', *Guardian*, 1 November 1986, p. 2. This article was published two days after the launch of ChildLine. The launch was reported in an article published on 31 November 1986 detailing that the Social Services Secretary, Norman Fowler had announced a grant of £400,000 'to be spend on combating child sexual abuse': Andrew Rawnlsey, '£400,00 to combat child abuse', *Guardian*, 31 October 1986, p 6.

<sup>52</sup> Peer Hildrew, 'Danger: crossed wires on the crisis line', *Guardian*, 28 November 1986, p. 23.

think in many ways signalled what we now call this Copernican revolution that now sees services as orbiting around the individual rather than vice versa. Ideally as being flexible, personalised and inclusive, and in 2016 I think that's the undisputed model to which the state, the voluntary and public sectors and for-profit providers of services aspire to. I think it's in no small part thanks to the vanguard that ChildLine represented.

As for the media, as Anne Houston mentioned earlier, I think ChildLine pioneered these new ways of working with media that represented just as much of a challenge to the public services establishment, those enormously powerful case studies – even anonymised – backed up by strong data partnering with teen magazines, radio, to reach out to children and young people. Slowly and very often painfully, our public services, I think, have come to adopt those techniques as standard over the last thirty years. Another legacy I think of which ChildLine's founders can be justifiably proud.

**Sue MacGregor:** You made it sound quite clearly that the press, not just the *Guardian*, were a bit cautious about ChildLine. Now it's part of the establishment in a good way, is that what you are saying?

**David Brindle:** Very much so. I noticed that Sue [Minto] said earlier that she was a practising social worker, and then she went on to say she'd done twenty-nine years in child protection. Well I would not see the dividing line anymore between formal social services and a service like ChildLine, I think it's all part of the mix, part of the offer.

**Sue MacGregor:** David, thank you very much indeed. Now over to you on the floor.

**Chris Moores:**<sup>53</sup> Chris Moores from the History department at the University of Birmingham. I've got, I'll try and be really quick, I've got three questions but I'll try and make them really short. So the first one is about the novelty of the internet and whether there are any historic precedents in dealing with the issues around that? So in particular I am thinking about the anxieties about video nasties or the anxieties about sex lines from the 1980s, in particular, and whether there is actually a historical model for thinking through some of those problems?<sup>54</sup>

The second thing is to respond to Mathew's issue about why 1986? I am kind of interested in this as the history of where trust is and ChildLine is in a position where there was trust sapping in a number of institutions including the state, including the family and in some sense communities are being renegotiated at that moment, and whether that can explain why we are relying on charity and the BBC, where there is still a level of trust at that point. I wondered in ...

**Sue MacGregor:** Not in certain quarters.

**Chris Moores:** Well, but then this is then the point that now at a moment where trust in the BBC is diminishing and trust in charities, and I am thinking in terms of Kids

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<sup>53</sup> Chris Moores is a Birmingham Fellow and Director of Modern British Studies at the University of Birmingham.

<sup>54</sup> The medium of home video was first used in May 1982. Later that same year there was media panic about 'video nasties', the creation and distribution of violent videos, and there were prosecutions under the Obscene Publications Act. To read more see Julian Petley, "'Are We Insane?': The 'Video Nasty' Moral Panic", in Chas Critcher, Jason Hughes, Julian Petley and Amanda Rohloff, (eds.) *Moral panics in the contemporary world* (London, 2013), pp. 73-98.

Company, is being questioned. So I am interested in, if we can make sense of that moment, in relation of where and who we trust and whether that might help explain where ChildLine emerges? And of course Mathew flags up my interest in things like *Crimewatch*, where the police are negotiating with the BBC to create a trusting version of the police service at that time, so that's the second one.

The third point is I am interested in the panel's reflection on what ChildLine does and doesn't do, or has and hasn't done well in its history. In particular, what would happen if we had somebody from Child Poverty Action Group in this session and how the issue and paradigm of solving abuse allows us also to tackle questions of inequality and poverty?<sup>55</sup>

**Sue MacGregor:** You were talking about trust and who we used to trust and who we trust now. Is that too broad? Esther, would you like to give your early view on this one? I know you are going to sum up at the end?

**Esther Rantzen:** It's a very, very interesting question. If I take my mind back to 1986 and we are talking about children: this is a self-referring service, there is no way that we can force children to ring us or contact us online so they have to trust us. I think some of the very interesting issues that have been raised have left you the dilemma of the familial abused child and you must recall that most of our children are not suffering from stranger danger. You can run home and tell Mum and Dad what's happened in the park or the playground. But what is happening at home or in the wider family network is almost impossible to tell someone you know. You can't tell someone you know, so therefore you have to find someone you don't know, if you want to talk to anyone.

Now what we did on *That's Life!*, and *That's Life!* had been on air for some time, what we did on *That's Life!* was we entertained people but we also told them stories of serious content and parents actually allowed children to stay up – I cannot tell you the number of people I meet these days who say to me you were, your programme was the only one I was allowed to stay up to watch on Sunday night in my pyjamas eating sandwiches; there's a whole picture of human life I didn't know was there.

So it was a programme people trusted and it was a two-way screen. So we were saying get in touch with us if this has happened to you. Whether it was funny, whether it was serious, and in that context we dropped the idea of them ringing us if they had suffered. And they rang us, as I said, for forty-eight hours. So that made me aware that the television has the power to reach into people's homes and be trusted where we were.

Now, we had the advantage that it wasn't part of their family setting, we had the advantage of not knowing who they were if it was by phone and we had the advantage that they could make the phone call and they could hang up. I think that still obtains. I am going to skip, forgive me, tell me if I shouldn't but: 'What would Child Poverty Action group think of what we think about children's lives?' We are not asking them, we are asking children. And from children's perception and I can only judge by what I hear children say, the important thing is their relationships, that's the crucial thing. Whether it is a relationship with their family, with their friends, that's what hurts

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<sup>55</sup> On Child Poverty Action Group see Pat Thane and Ruth Davidson, *The Child Poverty Action Group, 1965-2015* (London, 2016).

them. It hurts, alright, we know about terrible deprivation but most of the children who get in touch with us are not actually starving, some maybe. I hadn't taken those calls.

But now, talking quickly about the internet, watching a child as I did a couple of days ago, disclosing sexual abuse by her father, online, with exactly the way she would have in speech: 'Oh this is so difficult to say, I am finding this very hard to put into words.' Twenty minutes it took her which is about what it would have taken her in speech, I think Colin, and she got there.

So, it is a new world, the internet is offering new threats, it is offering this amazing way of liberating children who actually take to it more easily than they now do, conversation. It is all very well to encourage children to speak and I believe you are right. I think you can get much more from people talking together but when it is the most difficult thing in the world to describe, once they are passed a certain age, obviously young children still prefer the phone, but once they are passed a certain age they prefer the internet. So in other words they trust us because they don't know us, sadly they trust other people they don't know, we know about that danger. They trust the internet because it allows them to put something into words they can't otherwise describe.

**Sue MacGregor:** Sue Minto, the question also mentioned trust in the BBC or not, and trust in charities or not. Have you noticed any sort of reduction in trust of respected charities? Because the questioner seemed to imply that some charities are not as well trusted as others.

**Sue Minto:** We've had questions about children's contact with ChildLine and things like Jimmy Savile and the BBC and the charities, but most of the time that's not what they contact us about. You know, I said to my two children about Jimmy Savile and they said, 'Who's he?' Because they are talking about what, I think Esther's point, about their relationships and what's happening to them now. And so we don't always, we don't get the contacts. I think as adults we make assumptions that we will get. We don't get huge numbers of children who come through and talk about whether they have got food on the table or not, we do get huge numbers of children who will come through and talk about peer pressure and, you know, friendship breakdowns and exam stress and, you know, whether they are self-harming as a result of those impact issues. So it goes back to where I was really about really challenging our notion of what we think they might come through about and with the huge number that come through we would be silly not to pay attention.

**Sue MacGregor:** Is it mostly girls who ring?

**Sue Minto:** It is mostly girls who contact us and we know that we need to market differently to boys because boys are very action-orientated and if we market we need to say 'Do you want to do something about this and what can you do?' Whereas with girls it's much more about 'How do you feel and do you want to talk about it?' It is harder for boys so we need to focus marketing.

**Sue MacGregor:** What are your thoughts on this Anne Longfield?

**Anne Longfield:** Well I think the three things that kids always say they want out of [us], and what would they see as a useful use of adults: one was if they've got access to them, so we talk a lot about services in schools and the like but often they just

aren't available in a way that children can find their way in and build a relationship with. I think relationships are absolutely key. So first of all they have access to them, secondly that whoever they are talking to understands them and have an element of trust. And then the third one is that the adult does something with it. I think that something with it is a really important part of it, it is not just a service where someone tells you, you know that this happened, this happened and this happened, but actually something comes from it. That's how children always define to me what they want from an adult relationship of this kind: being accessible, understanding and then doing something with it. It sounds pretty obvious but often in their lives they won't have those people who will regularly do all three of those, often through no fault of their own. So parents would be working often, both parents will be out, they won't have chance to have the kind of in depth conversation you need for half an hour to be able to get to it.

**Sue MacGregor:** It's easier to talk to a stranger isn't it?

**Anne Longfield:** It's often easier to talk to strangers, especially about issues which are around your family. I was saying to you earlier, I am doing something about school nurses and great, but they are actually not in school, they are not always there. And then there's lots of people who don't actually feel it's their role to do something with it. So I think the combination of all of those are what children weigh up in their minds. I think they are less worried about whether they trust institutions like the BBC or charities because I don't think they see that. I think they are used to seeing what are offered them in terms of the communication channel. There is a world, I think, of next-stage marketing and communication responsiveness, whatever you call it, for children and virtually every charity I talk to is trying to, you know, fill their rooms with digital people. I've got my one as well. So I think we have to learn how to do that but I think that's there for learning and kids are usually the best way to teach there.

Child Poverty Action Group I think is fine, they recognise the difference between changing everyone's life on an individual basis and being a force for good, there for children at different stages.

**John Cameron:** ChildLine also has a wealth of knowledge that develops. If you think about 300,000 odd contacts, yes, each year, there's that wealth of information there that can actually influence both central government strategic planners, influences etc.

**Sue MacGregor:** And do people make notes that are available to the next generation, if you like, of people on the end of the phone?

**John Cameron:** What we are looking at at the moment, is we are about to introduce a new record database system that will enable volunteers to capture more information more succinctly, be able to analyse that more succinctly and that will give us a greater impact in terms of influencing the direction of service delivery etc. So I think that is absolutely, you know, a valuable piece of information. I think you are quite right Anne, a lot of children want us to take action. It's remarkable to me how children phone up and say, 'I've just taken twenty paracetamol but I don't want you to do anything about it.' Well I think that is a slightly more complicated than that, isn't it? I think children are actually, some children do want us to take action for them. And

working in partnership, can I just very briefly say if I may, about credibility of charities and that is when we worked in Operation Yewtree and the Metropolitan Police, we spoke to a number of twenty-year olds and twenty-one-year olds, twenty-two-year olds who had been subject to non-recent abuse.<sup>56</sup> They said because the other agencies had involved NSPCC/ChildLine in those kind of activities it gave those organisations greater credibility and in fact what you are finding now, post Yewtree, is that more organisations are coming to ChildLine and the NSPCC to work in partnership because of the trust that a lot of public have in this organisations.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you, sorry we've kept you waiting a long time, second question.

**Colin Butler:** I mentioned this morning that over 100 helplines have been set up around the world modelled on the ChildLine original. What advice would the members of the panel give to someone from a country that doesn't have such a helpline but is thinking of setting one up?

**Esther Rantzen:** Yes, absolutely, yes. Be aware that the message about child abuse is not always one that people want to hear and just to cheer David up, alongside what the *Guardian* said, another newspaper, not the *Guardian*, described *Childwatch*, the show on which ChildLine was launched, as the most dangerous show on television.<sup>57</sup> It's understandable, it's a very unpleasant message so if you've got state controlled media and you've got a state controlled ChildLine, I think you need all the good advice you can get and there are people in this room who can give it you.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thanks Esther, another question, right at the back, yes.

**Peter Wanless:**<sup>58</sup> Thank you, Peter Wanless, Chief Executive of the NSPCC. I've done quite well to get this far without being on a panel or saying anything. I am reflecting on the closing remarks at the end of that discussion about ChildLine arriving and being part of the child protection establishment, and very much welcome the sort of sense of partnership and working with others. But there must also be some risks, I guess, and thirty years on, mature organisations could be seen as part of the furniture and taken for granted and yet in order for ChildLine to survive we are having to raise, from the public, because we don't want a state sponsored service, upwards of 12, 13, 14 million pounds a year to fund our helplines. That is not even to meet the demand of all the young people who currently want to contact us, never mind all the wonderful ideas people have got for all sorts of other ways in which we can engage and connect with young people who aren't yet able or willing to contact us. So my question is about is: it all a bit cosy? Is there a need for a bit more jeopardy? Do the panel sense any sort of risk from the public perhaps imagining that because ChildLine has been there it will always be there and is there something that we need to do to raise greater awareness or willingness for people to support this,

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<sup>56</sup> Operation Yewtree was an investigation by the police service into historical sexual abuse cases conducted in the 1970s and 1980s. The investigation started in October 2012, following the growing awareness of the crimes conducted by Jimmy Savile. See David Gray and Peter Watt, 'Giving victims a voice: a joint MPS and NSPCC report into allegations of sexual abuse made against Jimmy Savile under Operation Yewtree', January 2013 < <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/yewtree-report-giving-victims-voice-jimmy-savile.pdf>> [1 September 2016].

<sup>57</sup> Stuart Bell, 'Childwatch: Is this the most dangerous show on TV?', *Daily Mail*, 28 October 1987, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Wanless is the Chief Executive of NSPCC (2013-present).

what has really become an essential emergency service, which if it wasn't here I think we would want to invent.

**Sue MacGregor:** Let me put that question to David Brindle of the *Guardian*. Have people become complacent about charities like ChildLine, thinking that it's all been taken care of?

**David Brindle:** Well I think this does go back in part to the previous discussion we were having about the loss of trust in our institutions and when you think about it, the 1980s was where that started with Hillsborough and the miners' strike, and then the start of the drip-drip exposure of sexual abuse in churches.<sup>59</sup> And then I guess the voluntary sector, the third sector has sort of stayed immune from that until about the last twelve months when there was the exposure of fundraising malpractice and so on.<sup>60</sup> I suppose the danger for NSPCC is perhaps doubled risk, double jeopardy, because it is vulnerable both to our now undeferential attitude to public services but also now our scepticism about large charities. I do recognise that there is a danger for you. Maybe as a solution, maybe ChildLine / NSPCC needs to sort of do something to show its, to show a bit of edge and you can question the establishment.

**Sue MacGregor:** Yes, Jean Seaton.

**John Cameron:** Sorry, can I just very quickly add to that, to Peter?

**Sue MacGregor:** Very quickly if you would, yes.

**John Cameron:** Peter, I don't get a kind of sense of that. Speaking to our partners on the ground, what they actually want is our very independence and I think the messages that they give out very clearly to the public is this is a service, ChildLine is a service, other services that we provide to support them are independent of their activities. I think the public actually get that and you can see that by the amount of contacts that we get when we form these commissioned helpline services particularly.

**Sue MacGregor:** Okay, and they trust.

**John Cameron:** I think we do ourselves a disservice by not recognising the fact that the public get it. They understand the role that NSPCC / ChildLine have and I think there is huge amounts of trust in our services.

**Sue MacGregor:** Okay, Professor Jean Seaton.

**Professor Jean Seaton:**<sup>61</sup> I am a professor of media history, I know about the BBC. Leaving aside the fact that I think 1986 is partly answered by being the BBC and Esther, so there's something about public service values and public service mass entertainment, the bit that the government really doesn't like at the moment. I wanted to ask something a bit more difficult, I think, which is that it took Andrew Norfolk, a journalist working in Rotherham, backed up by a new DPP (Director of Public

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<sup>59</sup> 'Hillsborough' refers to a disaster at Sheffield Wednesday's football ground, in which ninety-six people, primarily Liverpool Football Club supporters, died because there was insufficient space in the stadium. This tragedy was compounded by an attempted police cover-up, trying to blame the fans themselves, instead of the structural issues of the stadium, and inadequate staff response.

<sup>60</sup> The most high-profile case was the closure of Kids' Company in August 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Professor Jean Seaton is Professor of Media History at University of Westminster and Official Historian of the BBC.

Prosecution), Naziz Asfal because he couldn't get any traction with the previous one ...

**Sue MacGregor:** Director of Public Prosecution.

**Professor Jean Seaton:** Yes, in that area, to bring out that particular syndrome, that particular set of hidden things.<sup>62</sup> Was ChildLine receiving calls like that and does it have a way of understanding the sociological groups of grooming as well as the individual problems?

**Sue MacGregor:** Who would like to tackle grooming? Esther?

**Esther Rantzen:** You catch me on a raw nerve, because I sat through reading Professor Jay's report with horror, thank god for her (and I'd say that if she wasn't here).<sup>63</sup> Reading Andrew Norfolk and waiting for a young person to say the word, 'ChildLine'. I am talking about the kids who disclosed. I am not talking about the kids we don't know about, I am talking about the kids who gave evidence or the kids who gave interviews.

So I asked the NSPCC to arrange for me to meet some survivors, and I did. Survivors of various places but survivors of grooming and CSE (child sexual exploitation). I said to them, 'Did any of you think about ChildLine?' And they said, 'No'. I said, 'Tell me why not?' They said, 'We didn't think we were being abused, and it was happening at home, we thought ChildLine was for bad things happening at home.' I talked to another group of young people and they said, 'But you don't think of yourself as a child, you think ChildLine is for people up to the age of sixteen, but after that, and actually before that if you are sexually active, you don't think of yourself as a child and often the term child is used against you.'

So I am wrestling with this and, shall I?

**Sue MacGregor:** I don't know what you are about to do Esther.

**Esther Rantzen:** There are those who do. I have come up with a thought that maybe ChildLine now needs a sub-brand which might be called 'Is it Okay?' That is a title which was suggested to me by the survivors I met. Because that way you're not reporting abuse, you're not saying you're a victim and you're certainly not saying you're a child, you just want to check it out. The reason I think that might be a possibility is because what they said to me is when they got home bleeding, bruised, with horrible memories, at that moment, if not before and not after, there was a moment of self-doubt in which they asked themselves the question, 'Is it okay?'. So I attended a conference which was actually about the lessons learned from Rotherham and I floated that thought and it was greeted by such positive responses to certain people here, that I am sending myself out with help from the Children's

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<sup>62</sup> It was *The Times* journalist Andrew Norfolk who published the first investigation into organised child sexual exploitation in Rotherham. This led to an independent inquiry chaired by Professor Alexis Jay, which found that over 1,400 children were abused over sixteen years. To read an account from Norfolk, see Jane Martinson, 'Rotherham child sex scandal: Andrew Norfolk on how he broke the story', *Guardian*, 28 September 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/sep/28/rotherham-child-sex-scandal-andrew-norfolk>> [20 March 2017].

<sup>63</sup> Alexis Jay, *Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham (1997-2013)*, <[http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent\\_inquiry\\_cse\\_in\\_rotherham](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1407/independent_inquiry_cse_in_rotherham)> [11 April 2017].

Commissioner, to map what young people think and what those working with young people think. Now it may be completely wrong, it may not fit the bill, it may not be anything that these young people are prepared to trust and reach out to and it certainly may not be on the telephone, or not solely on the telephone, it may be in another medium, like [mobile phone] Apps. But my dream at the moment, you haven't asked me this, my dream is that we find a way of reaching out to young people under pressure, could be under pressure of child sex exploitation, it could be drugs, it could be gangs, it could be sexting, it could be cyber bullying but maybe this is the cohort of children who don't now reach out to ChildLine but who could be answered by Colin and his colleagues, by ChildLine counsellors who are so well trained and experienced in producing this sort of non-judgemental child-centred support which might lead them through to the ChildLine service or to other services. So you, Professor Seaton, have asked me the question I didn't want you to ask me.

**Professor Jean Seaton:** You got more than you bargained for.

**Esther Rantzen:** I do think 'lightbulb' moments are somewhat painful and not everybody agrees that it is a lightbulb, so there you are.

**John Cameron:** I think Esther, you know that there's a healthy discussion going on about this, isn't there, and I think there is something we've got to bottom out in terms of the message that we give to children and how you encourage them to come to ChildLine. But interestingly of course there's three times as many older children, fourteen plus who use our services than there are in the whole population. So in terms of proportions of the population, if anything ChildLine is underrepresented by younger people using our services. We had, last year, over 7,000 children specifically speaking about child sexual exploitation. Unfortunately we didn't get their location, we must try to establish that. I think there's a lot more Esther, children who are talking about concerns they have about their welfare but don't specifically talk about child sexual exploitation, or don't recognise it as child exploitation.

**Sue MacGregor:** We'll read the *Guardian* with special interest next week, but let me just ask Mathew as an historian, before we begin to sum up, what you have found interesting about this discourse, because you were looking back to the 1970s when children were children if you like and the 1980s when families began to be different, and now we are well into the noughties, what are your thoughts?

**Professor Mathew Thomson:** Well one thing is, we've not discussed who the child is actually today, and it came up just then actually in terms of Rotherham and people who don't necessarily see themselves as the child. I have noticed the language of 'young people' has been slipping in here as well. I think that's a really interesting thing because, I mean, the history of childhood is about how childhood is a biological thing but it's also a social, cultural construction and it changes over time and we've been talking about some really quite radical shifts across our period. ChildLine is now quite an old institution, thirty years, I suppose and so you know you may need to think about that question of who the child is perhaps. So that's a really interesting suggestion from Esther there.

I guess one of the things that also struck me is that in terms of the discussion about trust, I think the culture of public concern about institutional child sexual abuse has probably had an impact on trust as far as children go in terms of authority figures,

how they might have felt more comfortable in turning to. I mean children are very aware of that actually. And so you know that is an interesting thing. But also I think that it is very, it's fascinating ...

**Sue MacGregor:** Have we reached an age, just to wind up on this, if I may, have we reached an age where it is really hard to know who you trust except possibly the well-established charities to whom we talk anonymously?

**Professor Mathew Thomson:** Absolutely, I think so and I think that is the success of this phenomenon, yes.

**Sue MacGregor:** Anne you wanted to, as Children's Commissioner, have a word.

**Anne Longfield:** Yes, not all connected but [they] are in some ways. I think you bringing Andrew Norfolk into conversation is really important because when you hear Andrew speak at a conference, I think it might have been the same conference, it is actually chilling when he tells you, when he reminds us that this was many, many years and ...

**Sue MacGregor:** For those who don't know, tell us who Andrew Norfolk is?

**Anne Longfield:** Sorry, *The Times* reporter who you know worked tirelessly for six, seven years, whatever it was ...

**Professor Jean Seaton:** He worked for three years on a single story...

**Anne Longfield:** That's right, and was told to go away. A huge default in closed doors for child abuse in Rotherham, chilling, and I just think we should hold onto that because I think that was one of the moments where we all let children down, clearly some more than others around there, but actually we all let children down. There is something about, actually, when ChildLine was formed it was standing up for kids as well, it was about standing up and being willing to play a role here and move forward.

I think in terms of trust, actually children trust other children as well and there is something about word of mouth here being incredibly important and I suppose I am interested in next steps, whether it be around a next step for ChildLine and I am absolutely sure that would be the case, but next steps as well for this group of children who, you know, don't define themselves as children, they are seeing themselves as young, active adults with kind of their own decisions around there, absolutely vulnerable but not seeing themselves as victims. And I think that is a challenge to look at how we can construct support in a way that it isn't being seen as support, and actually help working with them to make that happen is something I think holds some of those answers there.

**Sue MacGregor:** Anne, thank you very much indeed. May I thank the entire panel for being with us today and panel one too, you've been absolutely terrific, and everyone managed to put their own stamp on what they were saying.

Esther, as Founder I'd like to invite you to sum up.

**Esther Rantzen:** Well I've got about forty-five minutes' worth of notes so I'll take it slowly. Sue, I want to thank you, you have handled this, both panels so elegantly as we would expect and I think you've extracted the best from us, wouldn't you agree panellists? So thank you so much for the time you have spent with us. I am going to thank Eve and Jennifer because without you there would have been no seminar and

please thank the sponsors, it really has been worthwhile, from all the participants and I hope those who didn't participate but enjoyed the discussion.

So now I am not going to try and summarise the first panel I was so deeply involved with and it was just lovely to be among such esteemed colleagues; we have such extraordinary memories. And I want to draw attention if I may to Deborah [Glassbrook] who was also there, wave your hand Deborah. She was Deputy Director of ChildLine and she was standing there on that first night, in receipt of those 50,000 calls as we were, so welcome, and it is lovely to see you again.

So looking at the conversation in our second panel: Mathew took me aback by saying 'Was the project a success?', which hit my *amour propre* rather heavily. But nevertheless, he did make it clear that what he was asking was 'Are children happier?', and I do think it's one of the most crucial questions we can all ask ourselves. The comment is, if not, why not?

Sue Minto said, 'Social media sites can be cruel places'. Not always, can be brilliant, she said, but they can be cruel places and she pointed that out.

Anne said, ah bless you Anne because you sort of answered Mathew, you said, 'ChildLine is one of the wonders of the world', which is more than kind, I think it is in 194 other places when I last saw the figures so that is extraordinary. She also said, 'If you look through the child's eyes, you will see what needs to change.' I think that for me is something that I'll take with me. Also children want us to come to them, they don't want to come to us, they want us to come to them in bitesize chunks.

John Cameron talked about the very, very corrosive threat posed by pornography and he says that as ChildLine 'we have to wrap ChildLine around the child by getting into partnerships', and he described them working well in Northern Ireland. He said, 'There's a tension between what children want and what children need', and that worried me, John. Because ChildLine has never dictated to children what they need. It's always asked them what they want and very often, as Anne said, if you look through the child's eyes, you see what they need.

David did some fantastic archive research which I must say brought back bad memories [laughter]. We were blamed for not referring enough children [to social services]. Having been blamed for potentially referring too many children, as you said, but fortunately I appear to be quoted as saying, 'ChildLine is here to stay', and I believe that. I believed that then and I believe it now.

Bob Lewis appears to have said, 'I don't think they've found a huge well of sexual abuse that we didn't know about.' Oh yes we did.

And looking back, David said ChildLine is a breakthrough because it provided a wholly new route for children and that's what we really must continue to do.

In answer to a question, Anne asked whether we are giving our children enough time? And that for me reflects what I am concerned about: this addiction to busyness.

**Esther Rantzen:** You choose. Professor Seaton asked the question I had hoped that nobody would ask because it produced an answer from me about a new thought I've had which may or may not be appropriate. I will continue to try and do a bit of research.

John asked why less younger children ring, and I suggested it's because life gets much tougher as you get older because that's when you start to worry about sexuality, that's when cyber bullying bites, that's when exam stress bites. I think the world gets tougher for children as they get older and it has always been the case. That our core client base was sort of twelve to sixteen/seventeen [year olds] was where we got our most calls. And Mathew finally asked another really tough question: 'Is it time to ask yourself who the child is?' And that makes me wonder whether life has changed so much that children see themselves differently now.

So you have given us all a great deal to think about. There's one other point I would like to make, if you will forgive me Sue and I know it is breaking into drink time. I want just to remind you what Chrissie said before we all get too concerned about the challenges we haven't yet faced.

She said:

I called ChildLine the same year as it was launched, thirty years ago. My story is in no way as awful as some but the support from that one phone call was fantastic. I was a twelve-year-old girl, struggling with a relationship with my mother that was getting more and more physically and mentally abusive. That night, I fled my family home, I wandered nervously around the town in which I live not knowing what I should do next but knowing I didn't want to return home. I came across a phone box which was displaying the ChildLine stickers, entirely due to the initiative by BT. So I entered, I called the 0800 number, and I was answered by a wonderful reassuring lady who made me feel safe, listened to me, believed me and put the wheels in motion to get me some help. She asked me to stay where I was while she took the phone box number. Within minutes I then received a phone call from a social worker. Thank the lord for social workers. The social worker confirmed my details and within ten minutes the social worker was there to talk with me, to determine what I would like to happen next, giving me some options. I chose to stay with a foster family that evening as respite care until further talks could take place with my family etc. in the days that followed. I was then placed with the most wonderful foster family a few days later where I continued to live happily ... and whom I still have an extremely close relationship with. And while being part of the foster family, I continued contact with my maternal family and although detached from them, I formed a mutually happy relationship with my Mum who I love dearly to this day and spend valuable family time with regularly. I'd like to thank ChildLine sincerely for being the cog in my wheel that made it turn at ease at such a difficult time when as a child I didn't know what to do. Because of ChildLine's involvement, it set the way to what went on to be a happy and safe childhood. Thank you all once again.

That's all: that's BT, that's the social worker, all those people that gave ChildLine the support it needed in 1986 and for the thirty years since. To you all, also, thank you for being here, by being here you've proved how much you care and how committed you are to the cause we all care about.

So, thank you Chrissie for putting it into words far better than I could.

**Sue MacGregor:** Thank you Esther.

[Round of Applause]

END OF SEMINAR