



VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION
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PRESS RELEASE

The Number of Calls to SOS 1056 from Children & Parents Tripled in the Last Year!

To commemorate the International Day for Children, SOS 1056, the Greek National Helpline for Children held a press conference today to announce the data collected from the operation of the helpline SOS 1056 in 2009.

Specifically, from May to November 2009 there were 221.396 calls to the helpline, compared to the 87.866 calls that were made last year for the same time period.

Children facing normal everyday problems, teenagers seeking relationship advice or facing problems at school, including problems with teachers and bullying by their peers, parents searching for ways to communicate with their children or to resolve behavioural problems, as well as private and public agencies involved in child protection issues were just some of the callers to SOS 1056.

Based on the message "Some Children are Heroes", 9 social workers and 5 psychologists are available 24/7 to assist the public on literally any issue that involves children. In this way, The Smile of the Child is there to find solutions to every problem big or small that is faced by children or their parents daily.

The National Helpline SOS 1056 has proven to be a useful tool and an invaluable ally to the whole family. The National Helpline is no longer associated only issues involving abuse, abandonment or the disappearance of children. SOS 1056 can counsel and guide both children and parents and support them in any issue they face.

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Children's Voices Being Heard: What the UNCRC means to them



ZAGORI Waters Supports SOS 1056 and "The Smile of the Child". Mr. Hitos of ZAGORI and Mr. Yannopoulos with supporters, big and small.

HARITTINI: Hello everyone. We would like to start off by thanking all of you for coming out to hear us. Thank you for really listening to what we have to say and for hearing us when we describe what's important to us, what bothers us and what our hopes and fears are for the future. For OUR future! The Children's Team for the Rights of the Child has worked together to collect and present our ideas and experiences. We would ask that you join us and help us make our ideas a reality. Once again, thank you.

ANNA: Hello!

My name is Anna. We are all gathered here again, like last year to continue our efforts to improve the lives of children. Our efforts however, did not begin last year. They began on November 9, 1995 when a young boy, Andrea put his thoughts onto paper. His message was simple: "Let's all help; if we all work together we can succeed".

Fortunately for me and lots of other kids, Andrea's voice was heard and his ideas were put into practice. Now it's our turn to help in the only way we know, by lending our voices to children who are too frightened or too embarrassed to speak for themselves.

These children might live next door to you or in the next block or they might be schoolmates of your children. Some have small everyday problems and some face bigger and more serious problems. Usually they choose to stay silent.

But there are some kids who want to share their problems but they don't know who they can trust. Many of these kids choose to trust SOS 1056, The Smile of the Child's Helpline.

I really got how different this helpline was when I got to see it up close. Young people answer the phones which ring constantly; and, they really listen when they talk to kids. Only the kids that are brave enough to pick up the phone and call understand that there are solutions to their problems- real solutions that will help them. Sometimes the advice is simple, like the problems themselves and other times the solutions are very different from what the kids expected.

For all these reasons, SOS 1056 is really the "heart" of The Smile of the Child.

You can only understand this well if, like us, you spend a whole day at the helpline. The first actual call that we got to listen to was from a child immigrant and his problems....

PAOLA: A mother has lost her child but she's in Greece illegally. Her only choice is to call SOS 1056. The organisation's volunteer translated for her so that she could speak to us. As soon as the social workers received the call, they began the procedure needed to help the family and assured the family that they weren't in any danger despite the fact that they didn't have the necessary documents to be in our country.

The next step was to inform the authorities so that they can start searching for the child. At the same time a psychologist went to the family's home and offered support. The child was finally found. He was healthy and safe but upset. He started to describe what he faced from other children: "They make fun of what I'm wearing, my colour, my accent and anything else that has to do with me. I want to return to my country. There they don't make fun of me".

The psychologist helped this child understand that there are solutions to his problems and there are people willing to help. The child understood that he will always have a group of people at his side that will help him whenever he needs it.

In preparing to speak to you, we asked what ended up happening in that case and we were happy to learn that the psychologist also arranged to go to the school in the area and speak to the children attending the school about racism in the community. The psychologist also spoke to the teachers so that they could speak to their students and help other kids that might be different.

ANNA: Unfortunately the next call that we got to listen in on was about child abuse and we all became really upset.

NOAH: Right from the beginning, I knew that some calls to the helpline were more difficult than others.

A 13-year-old kid called and asked for advice on how to get his dad to stop hitting him. The day that the kid called, he had just been released from hospital. You know the reason he was there in the first place? His dad's beating up on him.

At first the kid wouldn't say much but once he started talking he couldn't stop. He kept saying that it was his fault because he was a trouble-maker and that he didn't want his dad to go to jail. It was really tough.

The social worker who spoke to the kid kept explaining that none of it was his fault and that nobody had the right to treat him in this way. The social worker told him that she understood that he loved his father but he also had to protect himself. Everything was explained to the caller and I too understood

that the police and the public prosecutor aren't there to throw people in jail. They are there to help.

After listening to the social worker I was happy thinking that a solution could be found. I learned later that the social worker met the kid in person and that the kid is much better now.

ANNA: The next call that the helpline received was from really far away and was a matter of life and death.

DESPINA: The next call to SOS 1056 was from a family with a child who had a really serious illness. The family lived on a small island where the doctors didn't have the special training or equipment they needed to treat the child.

Because of the seriousness of his child's illness and the fact that he couldn't afford to pay for the costs of getting medical care for his child, the father was desperate and called SOS 1056. Immediately the team that handles medical cases went to work and began supporting the family and the process necessary to help the child. The social worker contacted a children's hospital in Athens that could treat the child and arranged to have the costs of bringing the child and his family to Athens covered!

The social worker told us that one of The Smile of the Child's ambulances along with a social worker went to the airport to pick up the child and take him to the hospital; and the social worker took care of all the paperwork that was needed for the child to be admitted into the hospital so that the mom could devote all her time to the child.

The seriousness of the child's illness meant that the child had to stay in hospital for a really long time so the helpline staff arranged for volunteers to go and visit with the child and draw, play games and do other activities that would help pass time.

The child's dad had to stay behind on the island and work in his fields and take care of his farm animals. But whenever he had to come to Athens, the helpline found a place for him to stay as long as he needed to be in Athens.

ANNA: The next call was about a place that we are all really familiar with...school. And problems that most of us couldn't even imagine.

ELLI: When the social worker answered the call she heard a child's voice and he sounded really shy. He said that his name was Angelos and that he was in grade 7 and really worried because his family didn't have money to buy notebooks, pencils and other things he needed for school. He said that he felt inferior to his schoolmates because he believed that they were all staring at him and making fun of his clothes. He said that he thought that sometimes even his teachers would intentionally ask him to bring school supplies that he couldn't afford.

First, the social worker explained that there was no need for him to feel inferior because what really counts is what's inside your head and your heart, not the clothes you wear. She also assured Angelos that The Smile of the Child could provide him with all the school supplies and clothes he needed.

The next step was to get Angelo to help the social worker communicate with his parents. With Angelos permission and help, the social worker spoke to Angelos' parents and explained how Angelos was feeling. She arranged for a meeting with the family so they could offer counselling and support to everyone and at the same time help them with whatever stuff they needed for the family.

Later, the social worker told us that they contacted Angelos' school and proposed a series of presentations to parents, teachers and students so that they could help them communicate and understand each other better and avoid making any kid feel alone.

ANNA: The last call was the most shocking, at least for me...

STEFANOS: A police officer from the Cyber Crime Unit called and spoke to one of the psychologists. He said that they had located a 13-year-old boy who wanted to commit suicide. The reason for this was that he lost all his weapons on some internet game and someone else won everything. Some adult who was also playing in the internet game noticed the kid's despair and contacted police. The police located the child and wanted advice on how to approach the parents of the suicidal child and what ways could the child and family be supported.

The psychologist spoke to the police and we learned that he then went to the family and helped them understand why their child wanted to kill himself. Then he advised them on how to approach their child and to make him understand that the whole family needs professional help. The psychologists then met with the child and eventually the child started to trust him and talk to him.

ALEXANDROS: You've listened to all these stories that are not copied out of some storybook or taken from some research paper. They are the reality of

some children and the way that things around them work- their family life, their school, their neighbourhoods...

The UN Convention for the Rights of the Child has lots of articles which we have studied, both last year and this year. They are all important and at some point they have to become known and accepted by every adult and every child. Every child needs to know their rights and that these are the rights of every other child. Only by knowing our rights will we also understand our obligations.

In the end this is what the Convention for the Rights of the Child and all its articles mean: Behind the word "child" there is always an actual person with a name and a unique and individual identity. Each person behind the word "child" must first respect themselves and then every other person around them. Finally, each person has to understand that when someone does not give them the respect they deserve, there is help and they must ask for it. Isn't this the real message of the Convention? The Convention is not some complicated, academic theory- it is a simple set of principles that should help us in our everyday life and to reach our maximum potential. What do we want from you? Please respect children: respect their opinions, their problems, their dreams and their ambitions. Remember what it was like to be a child.

Today we have joined our voices with those of all children so that we can be heard. Some of the problems may be big, others may seem small to you but please try to remember what it was like to be a child.

Once again, thank you for listening to us.