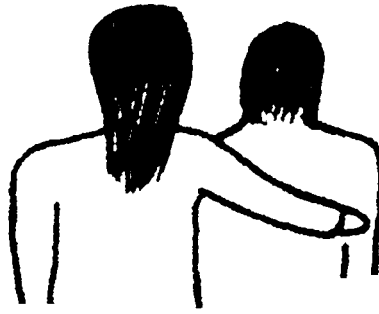




SupportLine Helpline

Annual Report

2020-2021

Telephone, Email and Postal Support

Registered Charity No. 1097419

**Providing vital services for those who are vulnerable, at risk, isolated
and victims of any form of abuse**

Member of the Helplines Partnership

Member of the Survivors Trust

SUPPORTLINE

VISION – That every person in the UK can find the help and information they need to support their emotional and physical wellbeing.

MISSION – SupportLine provides help by providing confidential emotional support and information and referral service working closely with other agencies and professionals.

OBJECTIVES – That those who are vulnerable, isolated, at risk, and victims of abuse will feel supported and cared for, will have increased self esteem, will be able to develop positive healthy coping strategies and an inner feeling of strength leading to happier, healthier and more emotionally balanced individuals in the community.

AIMS OF THE SERVICE

- To provide a telephone helpline offering confidential emotional support to any individual, children, young adults and adults, and in particular those who are socially isolated, vulnerable, at risk and victims of any form of abuse.
- To provide emotional support and information by email and post.
- To listen, support and respond to callers in need of emotional support.
- To support callers in a non-directive way and empower and encourage callers to take control of their own lives and come to their own decisions.
- To help callers to develop healthy positive coping strategies rather than negative destructive ones.
- To help callers to learn to value themselves in order that they may walk away from abusive situations.
- To provide accurate information on other support groups, agencies and counsellors throughout the United Kingdom.
- To provide a high quality and reliable service to all users.
- To provide continuous support, training and development for staff members/helpline workers.
- To continuously assess and review the service provided and to be committed to providing any improvement necessary in the service.
- To be committed to Equal Opportunities in all aspects of the service.
- To encourage feedback in order to evaluate the service provided to callers.

PATRON

Glen Murphy MBE

Welcome to our Annual Report covering the period of our work from 2020/2021, and I hope the following pages will help in understanding some of the work carried out by SupportLine.

The last year has seen heightened fears, anxieties, confusion, disruption of lives, breakdown of families, isolation of the elderly and most vulnerable, unexpected deaths of loved ones, and a decline in mental health and well being for many.

I am extremely proud in the way in which our small national charity was able to respond to the crisis to be here for those who were struggling when they most needed us and especially in light of so many other services closing or being put on hold for a period of time. Never before have Helplines such as SupportLine been more important in supporting the vulnerable and I am very proud of the way in which staff have responded and coped so admirably with the additional stress and workload.

I know that Peter will be mentioning those who have supported the charity throughout the year and I too would like to give a big thank you to our supporters. Some have been supporting the charity for many years and that support has been crucial in enabling our work to continue and grow over the years. We also very much welcomed new support from Charitable Trusts and Foundations and all this support is vital and so needed for the smaller charities who so often struggle when competing for funds against the larger high profile charities, many of whom refer callers to SupportLine.

Making a difference is why we are here and feedback shows we are doing that and long may our work continue.

Glen Murphy MBE **Patron**

SupportLine provides emotional support and information to children, young people and adults on a wide range of issues including child abuse, bullying, self harm, eating disorders, exam stress, rape and sexual assault, bereavement, domestic violence, mental health, depression, anxiety, family and relationships.

The Helpline specialises in providing support to adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse and victims of rape and sexual assault.

This help is provided by a telephone helpline, email and post and through our website.

The service is particularly aimed at those who are vulnerable, isolated, at risk and victims of any form of abuse.

CHAIRMAN

Peter Barrell BEM

Thank you, Glen, for introducing us to the Annual Report which gives a snapshot of the work SupportLine has undertaken over the last financial year.

As Glen has said, a very challenging year, impacted largely by Covid with lockdowns, social distancing, shielding, and a year none of us anticipated. When we first saw the emergence of Covid none of us expected that it would last so long with the impact still having such an effect today.

Covid has in many ways touched upon our lives and affected most of us in some form or another and none more so than those who SupportLine help, those who are vulnerable, at risk, isolated and victims of any form of abuse.

I am pleased in the way our service was able to adapt and respond to those most in need. We are a small team who are all very passionate about our work in supporting others, empowering people to feel stronger in themselves and promoting positive wellbeing.

Feedback we receive shows how the work we do can make a real and positive difference in the lives of those who are struggling. This is why we believe so much in the importance of Helplines like SupportLine as we see how people feel cared for, become stronger in themselves, more confident, more able to express their feelings and emotions, become more integrated into their communities, have a better quality of life, and feel an overall improvement in their mental health and wellbeing.

I would like to give our thanks to all of those who have supported us by providing funding over the past year and we were lucky to have been successful in receiving some of the Emergency Response Funding which had been set up. We were facing increased demand for our service with very low funding so cannot thank the following enough for so kindly supporting our work and believing in what we do.

My grateful thanks to Archer Trust, The Jessica Mathers Trust, Crisis, National Lottery Awards For All, Marsh Christian Charitable Trust, The Edward Gostling Foundation, City of London Response Fund/Bridge House Estates, Groundwork UK, Leach Foundation, The Broughton Family Charitable Trust, N. Vassiliou Charitable Trust, I Vassiliou Charitable Trust, J. Vassiliou Charitable Trust, The Fairness Foundation, The Annette Duvollett Trust, The Tula Trust, London Catalyst, and to all those who have donated to our charity and also to those who have supported us and wish to remain anonymous.

Thank you to my fellow Trustees, Mike Knell and Jaiyesh Patel and Co-ordinator/Support Worker Geri Burnikell and volunteers who have helped the charity throughout what has been a very challenging year for us all. My grateful thanks also to Kirit Shah for the auditing of our accounts.

Peter Barrell BEM
Chairman

CORONAVIRUS

With the emergence of Covid-19 which dominated the headlines from March 2020, SupportLine saw at first hand the massive impact this had on people throughout the UK and how it affected people's health and wellbeing and created so many difficulties and fears among the nation.

SupportLine was quick to respond to this emergency situation and extended its email support service to be open every day due to the increased demand it was seeing for its services.

We quickly gathered as much information as we could and a new section was added to our website which gave information relating to covid-19 including information from Government, NHS, listing support organisations, practical coping strategies for depression and anxiety, information for survivors of abuse and those who had been bereaved, information relating to working from home, relaxation time, how to keep children busy, etc.

We know from feedback that this addition to the website was well received and used by the public and professionals referring clients to it for information and support.

The charity also put in for grant funding and was fortunate to receive some grants and donations to enable its work to continue and this was essential as we were able to be here to support those affected by covid-19 and without the funding received this would not have been possible.

OLDER PEOPLE & PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES & SEVERE HEALTH PROBLEMS

It became evident throughout the year that there were vulnerable people out there who were feeling isolated and people who were shielding being left without food and had somehow been missed for delivery of food parcels or only received one food parcel instead of receiving them on a regular basis. This mainly affected older people and those with disabilities and those with severe health problems which meant they had to shield and they were turning to the Charity for help particularly as they had no family or friends local to them who could assist them in getting food and other help they needed.

SupportLine was able to respond by engaging with the local Covid19 volunteer groups which had been set up throughout the UK whereby volunteers could collect and deliver food to the vulnerable and also help with errands such as collecting medication, and also providing some telephone befriending to local people in their areas. We were able to put people in touch with local volunteer services who could assist them on a practical level and this was a great relief to those who had been left without assistance. We also engaged with a number of Councils who ran helplines for those who needed practical assistance in their local areas to arrange help for those who contacted us and ensure that nobody was left without food and were also able to give details of Government related services.

Those who were advised to shield and not to leave the house reported a massive decline in their overall health and wellbeing. Not being able to get out to carry out their usual day to day activities led to a lot of depression and anxiety, low mood, and not being able to get around as they did before led for many to a decline in physical health and mobility and also feelings of hopelessness and despair and worry for themselves and their families. Sometimes going out to the shop may be the only time an older person living on their own may have the chance to talk and engage with others as this is so important for overall mental health and having this taken away and feelings of being left alone certainly took its toll. Families have reported seeing a decline in the mental health and physical health of their loved ones who were living in Care Homes or in their own homes and worsening of conditions like dementia, increased confusion and not understanding why their families could not visit them as they usually would. Not being able to visit Day Centres, not being able to socialise and see loved ones hit people very badly and sadly many had to cope with deaths of friends, particularly those who were in Care homes. When people were able to go out some of the older population and those with severe health problems were too afraid to go out and many seemed to despair and lost hope for their futures and felt they had nothing to live for.

In addition to putting vulnerable people into contact with practical means of help SupportLine also arranged call backs to those who were most isolated to check in with them periodically to see how they were doing and if any further help was needed.

***'I am so very grateful for your intervention in getting the food parcels sent to me and for checking that I was alright. Your kindness meant a great deal to me when at my lowest ebb and I had no idea of who to contact.'* (feedback)**

SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD ABUSE AND ADULT SEXUAL ABUSE

With the country put into lockdown and Government restrictions on meeting up, social distancing etc., meant that survivors of abuse were unable to access their usual methods of support with Day Centres and Support Groups closed, counselling services closed, family unable to visit and being unable to visit family and friends due to travel restrictions and the need to stay at home, meant that survivors were left isolated and struggling to cope. They reported a decline in their mental health, increase in flashbacks and panic attacks, overwhelming feeling of being unsafe, and a general decline in their overall health and wellbeing and increased feelings of isolation.

Survivors of abuse found the restrictions and controls put in place very hard to cope with as loss of freedom in being able to do what they chose brought back for many recollections of being abused and controlled by others. Some reported great difficulty in wearing masks which meant that some who were exempt from wearing masks had to endure abuse directed at them from members of the public and some felt forced to wear them in order that they did not get abuse directed at themselves and in doing so suffered increase in panic and anxiety attacks.

SupportLine was able to work with survivors to give them practical coping strategies and information on online resources to help them cope more easily and gave a lot of self help initiatives they could try and were always on hand to give emotional support when needed.

***'The abuse was horrific and had a major impact on my life and I thought I was starting to move forward but this whole pandemic has brought me crashing right down, and experiencing a lot more flashbacks and constantly feel in a state of panic. With my support group stopped, your support has been amazing and kept me going.'* (feedback)**

SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Survivors of domestic abuse reported that their situation worsened during the Covid-19 restrictions. Those who were living with their abuser felt trapped and had their usual means of support taken away with day centres, support groups, closed and unable to access family and friends support, unable to leave the house to have some respite from the abuse, and feeling trapped and isolated. Children who are often the hidden victims of domestic abuse were increasingly witnessing abuse in the home and the restrictions of staying at home often triggered increasing anger and aggressiveness in the abusers.

SupportLine was able to work with survivors of domestic abuse in helping them to create safety plans in case they needed to leave the home urgently, to ensure that they knew ways in keeping themselves as safe as possible and how they could access support outside the home if they needed to leave for their safety.

***'So glad I found you online and forever grateful for letting me know where I could get emergency help if I needed to leave. I have been through hell and back finding it more and more difficult to deal with my partner's aggression.'* (feedback)**

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

As with adults SupportLine also has seen an increasing number of children and young people turn to its service for support during the pandemic. It was very hard for them to make sense of what was going on around them. Some had concerns over their future as university courses had stopped, some who had recently started jobs had had those jobs stopped, many were concerned about their parents dying, some had to cope with their grandparents dying, and there were feelings of isolation as not being able to get the support they usually did from their friends.

Young people often keep their feelings hidden from parents, and not having the support from their friends in the same way that they were used to led to feelings of isolation. As a way of trying to express their feelings and cope with feelings many young people turned to self harm and some coped by not eating or bingeing and turning everything inward.

Some reported difficulties in returning to school when the lockdown restrictions were eased and adjusting to the school routine after such a long absence. Many reported being consumed with fears over the future in general and concerns for their families.

SupportLine has been able to work with children and young people to address their worries and fears and to provide reassurance where we can and ways of coping which

do not entail harming themselves and have helped with boosting their confidence and self esteem and giving them healthy positive ways of coping with the uncertainty and overall fears and anxieties.

'I've spoken to my mum about making a Safe Box to use when I feel stressed and anxious and she will help me get it together, a great idea, thank you'. (feedback)

BEREAVEMENT

Those who have lost loved ones during the pandemic were not only traumatised by their loss but then having in many cases to deal with the fact they were not allowed to see their loved ones before they died, in many cases those who had lost loved ones were not able to attend funerals, some were traumatised at the way their loved ones were dealt with in Care Homes and not being physically able to be with their loved ones when ill and dying. This all added to their loss and living with their loss was much more profound. There were a lot of feelings not only of loss but also of anger and frustration and helplessness and feelings of letting their loved ones down by not being able to physically be with them at the end of their lives and this was very difficult for them to make any sense of and made their grief and pain even harder for them to bear.

During restrictions and lockdowns, the bereaved were unable to have their family and friends support they so desperately needed and once again that brought up terrible feelings of being alone and SupportLine was able to offer emotional support, in some cases telephone befriending and giving information on support groups to use online when they were opened.

'Thank you for the coping strategies, these are so helpful, especially the memory box and writing a letter to granddad to say all the things I never got a chance to say.' (feedback)

HOMELESSNESS

During the pandemic Local Authorities and services were doing their best to help homeless people into emergency accommodation. Some fell through the net and needed help with contact numbers and details of local services. Some of those who were homeless were already struggling with poor mental health and some who contacted us were survivors of abuse. Being homeless during such strange and worrying times caused considerable distress to those who were on the streets or sofa surfing and without permanent accommodation who also had problems with accessing services which had closed and therefore struggling to find the support they needed.

In addition to all the emotional upset and upheaval, those who were homeless had additional stresses of where to stay, not easily having access to masks or facilities to wash their hands, and this section of the community were at higher risk of becoming ill.

SupportLine was able to support people who were homeless by providing emotional support and advice and also directing them to emergency and local sources of help

and directing them to sources of practical help where needed and specialist services.

‘Thanks so much for all the time you gave me, not knowing which way to turn I was so glad I found details of your service and for all you have done for me. Just knowing someone out there cares makes a difference.’ (feedback)

MENTAL HEALTH

During the year Covid-19 had a considerable impact on mental health and wellbeing with those who were already struggling with mental health difficulties reporting a deterioration in their overall mental health. People who never before had experienced any problems with their mental health were now reporting mental health difficulties such as severe anxiety and depression. Those who were already suffering with extreme anxiety conditions found the anxiety surrounding the pandemic and what was safe and not safe and trying to keep distance from people and being locked down totally overwhelming. Those who already had fears about going out were hearing it was not safe to go out and when restrictions eased found the anxiety of going out all consuming and that their recovery had been set back due to their heightened anxiety and fears.

Those who were doing well in recovery and visiting day centres regularly and seeing support workers, found those services no longer accessible to them and felt totally alone at a loss what to do. Having spent a long time on working on their wellbeing and confidence and engaging in activities in the community and gaining confidence in socialising with others, suddenly this all came to an end and it was very difficult for people to adjust to that lack of support.

Families and friends are often those who provide a lot of support to people suffering with mental health and this too was disrupted and not so easily available which also had a great impact on people who were struggling to get through the day with their conditions. People who had no trouble with their mental health and wellbeing before were reporting feelings of panic, feeling unsafe, constantly feeling anxious and unsettled, low moods and depression and overwhelmed by feelings which were alien to them. In addition to providing emotional support, we were able to direct people to online resources and information on services they could use when restrictions were eased and were able to offer call backs to those most vulnerable and isolated.

‘I will definitely try a few of the techniques you have listed until I get through to one of the counselling sessions, thank you so much for all your help and for being there.’ (feedback)

SUICIDE

Sadly, we had an increase in people contacting us for help with suicidal thoughts and some had already made attempts on their lives. Some could not cope with the decline in their mental health, some saw no hope in their future, some could not bear the pain of loss of loved ones, and some were totally consumed with anxiety and depression so much so that they saw no other way out for them but to take their lives.

SupportLine worked with those with suicidal thoughts to help them to see there are alternatives to suicide and that having support is so important rather than try and cope alone with overwhelming feelings. As well as providing emotional support and helping people to adopt healthy positive coping strategies to help with anxiety and depression and suicidal thoughts, we also provided telephone/email befriending to those most isolated and at risk and encouraged people to share their thoughts with others if they could. So often people feel they have to be strong all the time and if they are not coping it is a sign of weakness. We always impress upon people that recognising when you are not coping and reaching out for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

‘Thank you from the bottom of my heart, I was going to do it and you helped me see there was a way through without killing myself. Having your support has made so much difference and given me hope which I did not have before’.
(feedback)

GENERAL

Covid-19 impacted on the population in so many ways and in addition to the above there were people who were laid off from their jobs, people who were not furloughed and finance was a major worry for many individuals and families many of whom were already struggling before the pandemic. This led to all kinds of financial difficulties for many individuals and families with all the added stresses and worries that that entailed.

Having structure and routine in one's life is very important and when that was totally disrupted for many it was very difficult to re-establish it with so many overwhelming thoughts and feelings going on.

During lockdowns where partners and families were spending so much time together it often led to strained and fractious relationships, people feeling they were trapped and unable to get some space on their own, and parents trying to juggle work with children being at home and for some they were overwhelmed with the situation they found themselves in and having our Helpline to talk to was for many a life saviour and helped those who were struggling to keep things in perspective, to keep positive, to have ways of coping which were healthy and not self destructive.

As with many other charities we have seen an increase in people contacting us for help and also an increase in people viewing the information on our website. This reinforces the importance of Helplines such as SupportLine who are able to be there for those who are vulnerable and struggling with life and we feel the uncertainty that continues and the impacts of covid-19 we have seen on people's mental health will be ongoing for some time.

People will need a lot of support to get their recoveries back on track, and to help people to regain confidence and feel safer in themselves and more able to engage with others in their communities.

FEEDBACK

The abuse I went through has affected me for so many years, years which I can never get back. I feel a glimmer of hope after speaking to your Helpline, I feel more positive than I have ever been and will use your coping strategies every day. Talking to myself like I would talk to a good friend has already helped me enormously and I no longer feel like a frightened child but a grown woman more able to deal with my past and be in control of my life. Thank you for all your support.

I have already imagined my abuser getting small and smaller until he is so small like a tiny ant who holds no power over me anymore. It feels really good to know there is something I can visualise where he has no control over me. I am starting to see I am not helpless but have control over my own life and choices. My family have noticed I am coping better and sleeping better too.

Really love the idea of creating safe places in my mind, I think a lot of beaches where I went on holiday and focus on feeling safe. It is helping me to feel calmer and knowing that there is something I can do practically to help myself. Your Helpline has really helped me to feel stronger in myself, thank you

I have already created a Safe Box and added lots of things which make me feel happy and safe and have lots more to add. It makes me feel less anxious when I use it and much better than cutting myself like I was doing before I contacted you. Thank you for being there when I need you and when I have the odd wobble, it means so much.

Thank you so much for all the helpful tips and advice especially those which help with flashbacks. After all the times I reached out to others and felt like a lost cause it feels fantastic to find ways I can cope. It truly has saved my life contacting yourselves as was so close to giving up. Thank you so much for all your kindness and support.

Totally shocked at how detailed and personal your email was in response to my cry for help. Never before have I been given so much information from anyone I went to for help. The way you replied made me feel you really cared; it was not the usual general response I normally get when contacting others for help! Just wish I had known about your agency years ago as I know this will help me and just the way you replied made me feel worth something! From all my heart thank you.

SOME OF THE ORGANISATIONS, PROFESSIONALS & PROJECTS WHICH SUPPORTLINE HAS SUPPORTED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Information and leaflets given to North Tyneside Social Prescribing Service Primary Care Network to support young adults with mental health difficulties who are struggling with anxiety and isolation.

Information on local sources of help given to Oxfordshire MIND to support one of their clients.

Information on local resources given to Nottingham City Council, Adult Duty Team, Whole Life Disabilities North, to help an elderly client who was isolated

Information on support services given to Social Prescriber Wokingham Borough North Primary Care Network in relation to a client who had been through domestic abuse.

Information on support services given to Camden Carers Service to support a young man who was self harming.

Information on coping strategies and local resources given to Bromley, Lewisham & Greenwich MIND for adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse

Inclusion of SupportLine details into database of Maytree Suicide Respite Centre

Inclusion of SupportLine's details into NHS Choices website

Resources and coping strategies given to Integrated Mental Health Practitioner Epping Forest North, Primary Care Network to support a male survivors of childhood abuse

Local resources given to support male survivor of childhood abuse to Social Prescribing Link Worker Wolseley Trust, Plymouth

Big Life Group Manchester provided with information on local resources to support a bereaved client.

Information on local sources of support given to Knowsley Mental Health Social Work Team to support adult survivors of childhood abuse

DWP Falkirk information on SupportLine services to be used for their vulnerable clients

Local resources given to Hillingdon Talking Therapies Central and N.W. London NHS Foundation Trust for supporting a young person who was struggling to cope

Information on local services and SupportLine literature provided to British Transport Police Vulnerability Unit to support people who are suicidal and those with mental health difficulties.

Information on SupportLine and local resources given to Avon & Somerset Police to support vulnerable member of community

Information on SupportLine and local resources given to Kent Police to support vulnerable individual in the local community who was much in need of support.

SupportLine regularly assists students with their Projects on many of the issues we cover.

SupportLine is frequently contacted by sections of the media for contacts and help for articles which are being written and this has included a number of nationals and ITV News Network.

SupportLine is used on a regular basis by agony aunts who write for national papers and magazines.

SupportLine continues to be used as a source of referral by television companies and radio stations where it is thought support would be needed for viewers and listeners.

This has included Channel 4's programme relating to Victims of Crime and also Bullying & Harassment.

BBC Scotland's programme River City which is a drama series set in a tight knit community in Glasgow and covered a wide range of issues.

SupportLine empowers people to develop their own inner strength, and to adopt healthy positive ways of coping so that when they are faced with difficulties in the future, they are more able to cope without harming themselves.

SupportLine works with victims of abuse to help them to increase their confidence and self esteem, to learn to value themselves, to believe in themselves and to stop blaming themselves for abuse which was not their fault. Freeing themselves of guilt and blame can lift an enormous weight from their shoulders and help them along the way in their journey to recovery.

Men often struggle with talking about feelings, believing they have to be strong all the time. SupportLine encourages men to reach out to others, and that recognising when you are not coping and getting support, is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Children and Young People often are suffering in silence, scared to tell their parents their worries and fears and often turning to harm themselves. SupportLine encourages all young people where possible to reach out to their families to support them and help them address the concerns they have.

CORONAVIRUS CRISIS: THE SUN ARTICLE 14 MARCH 2020
A GLIMPSE INTO SOME OF SUPPORTLINE'S WORK HELPING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Abusers use coronavirus isolation to gain power... I would be dead by now, says survivor Roxy

IT is only 11am and SupportLine's inbox is already filling up.

An email drops from Lauren, a woman in her fifties, who is in shock.

Last night, she was attacked by her partner — a horrifying first that left her shaken and scared, trapped in her home. Her partner has been emotionally and verbally abusive before. But now it has turned physical. Losing his job while in lockdown has "tipped him over the edge", she writes.

Due to the ongoing crisis, she has been unable to get out of the house to seek support. She is anxious her situation will escalate further. And her situation is far from unique. As we read her email, another five appear — making similar pleas for help.

As families across the country stay home to keep safe from Covid-19, for women in abusive relationships those four walls feel like a prison. Domestic Abuse charity Refuge reports a 25 per cent rise in calls to its helpline since lockdown began in March. Avon and Somerset Police, meanwhile, say domestic abuse incidents rose 21 per cent in the first two weeks of lockdown. Many women are now isolated with their abuser, unable to escape or find respite.

Charities have taken their helplines and meetings online but getting in contact is difficult when abusive partners often monitor their victim's every move. A spokesman for Women's Aid says: "Perpetrators of abuse may use restrictions due to Covid-19 to exercise power and control over their partners — further reducing their access to services, help and support from formal and informal networks." "They might do things like restrict access to necessary items such as soap and hand sanitiser, or exert control by spreading misinformation about the disease to confuse and worry partners."

'THINGS GOT BAD'

SupportLine is a national helpline for those at risk of any form of abuse. Over a period of 24 hours, its team gave us a chilling insight into the scale of abuse behind closed doors.

The next call comes from Sarah, a woman in her twenties who managed to phone while alone on her designated walk of the day.

Her partner has been abusive before, is becoming more agitated due to staying inside and is increasingly taking out his aggression on her. Sarah is concerned not just for her own wellbeing but the safety of her three children. Previously, she could stay elsewhere when "things got bad". But now she feels trapped. SupportLine staff talk through her fears and advise Sarah to keep a mobile phone close by at all times — and to contact the police immediately if the situation escalates.

Sarah, who grew noticeably calmer during the call, feels reassured she has the support of those at the end of the line. But the situation for women like her is graver than ever with the imposed lockdown.

Sarah Davidge, of Women's Aid, says: "If you live with an abuser, home is not a place of safety. Women will be in lockdown with their abuser, unable to get any breathing space." "It will be harder to text or phone to get support. Child survivors no longer have the respite of school or nursery, which can often be a safe place to access help." It is not uncommon for periods of social isolation, such as Christmas, to worsen cases of domestic abuse.

Roxy Freebury, 23, from Newport, Gwent, is a survivor of domestic abuse who believes she would not have lived through the lockdown in her violent previous relationship.

'A WAY OF GAINING POWER'

The nursery worker says: "When Britain went into lockdown, my heart went out to all the women and men living in abusive relationships. As a former victim, I know how perpetrators use isolation as a way of gaining power."

"I met my ex-partner John* in March 2018. As soon as we had our own flat, things dramatically changed. He slowly stopped me seeing my family and became increasingly aggressive." "During winter weekends, when it was snowing and people weren't going out, he would be agitated with everything I did and, in such a small space, the violence came easily. Christmas is another example." "Everyone is at home with their families for a week or so and victims are often stuck inside with the abuser at a time of increased alcohol consumption and financial struggles and there isn't anywhere for them to go to find an outlet for their anger. So they take it out on their partners."

On December 28, 2018, life for Roxy changed as the violence peaked. She says: "We were in bed when a friend from work texted me and my ex flew into a rage. He beat me so hard I could barely breathe — punches to my face, knees, to my ribs and he repeatedly tried to choke me." "He ripped out my hair and smashed my head on the floor. It was only when he stopped to catch his breath that I managed to run out on to the street and flag down help from a neighbour outside, who bundled me into their car and called the police." "My ex was charged with assault by beating on March 6, 2019, and given a 12-month community service order, a restraining order and had to pay me £200. That is nothing for the damage he caused."

The authorities are aware of potential damage lockdown could do. Last week the Government announced domestic abuse services in the UK will receive an extra £2 million, alongside the Home Office's new support campaign during the coronavirus lockdown. Priti Patel launched the You Are Not Alone initiative in which people are encouraged to share a photo of a heart on their palm on social media with the hashtag #YouAreNotAlone. Other countries in lockdown are facing a similar rise in abuse cases.

The French government said it would pay for hotel rooms for victims of domestic violence after cases rose 36 per cent in Paris during lockdown week one. In China's Hubei province — the one-time centre of the coronavirus outbreak — domestic violence calls to police tripled. Spain has a scheme that sees women visit pharmacies and request "Mask 19" — a codeword alerting the pharmacist to call the authorities and report domestic abuse. Women's Aid says such initiatives are vital.

Sarah Davidge, of the charity, adds: "We have been telling women to familiarise themselves with the Silent Solution. This is a system for victims of domestic abuse who might be afraid of further danger if they are overheard calling 999."

'HEARTBREAKING'

"If you need to call 999 on a mobile, an operator will ask which emergency service is required. If you are not able to ask for help, your call will be forwarded to a police system. If you then press 55, the system will transfer the call to the relevant police force, who can arrange for help."

The helplessness of victims' families is made all too clear in a call to SupportLine at 7.15pm. It is from David, a man in his seventies. He has called because he is extremely concerned about his daughter who is living with an abusive partner.

He is angry that he can no longer visit her to check on her situation and tells staff he feels at a loss. He knows her local support group has closed due to the lockdown and is worried for her safety because online services cannot replicate the work of one-to-one contact.

It is heartbreaking to hear a dad so frightened for the safety of his daughter. SupportLine urges him to use video calls to make regular contact with her so he can see his daughter and send a clear message to the abusive partner that people are checking in on her wellbeing. He is told he should tell his daughter to keep her phone close at hand and call 999 if she ever feels her life is in danger. Sarah adds: "Three women are murdered by their partner or ex-partner every fortnight in England and Wales."

"With reported domestic abuse cases rising worldwide during the pandemic, there is a real risk that murders may rise further. It is critical to remember, however, that Covid-19 will not CAUSE domestic homicides." "Only abusers are responsible for their appalling actions. The pandemic does, however, threaten to escalate abuse and close down routes to safety for women to escape."

*Names of all those who contacted support agencies have been changed

FEEDBACK

I am moved by your reply and that you have taken time over Christmas to get back to me. I was in such a state when I emailed you and your reply helped me to calm down and see there is a way forward. Never been given these practical strategies before from all the professionals and counsellors I have seen, and ways in which I can help myself. Makes me feel less helpless and worthless and already seeing improvements in my mental health.

Thanks so much for being there. It was hard reaching out but glad I did. Everything you said made sense and great to hear what someone had to say who does not know me and someone who doesn't judge me. The work you do is amazing and cannot thank you enough for all you have done for me.

I don't think you will ever realise how much it meant that you were there this evening. I was close to giving up and just wanted the pain to go away. I struggle so much with flashbacks of my ex attacking me and knowing that the children saw it and the guilt that I did not leave sooner. You gave me ways to cope with that and for that I am forever grateful. I cannot turn back the clock but know there are ways to move forward and thank you so much for letting me know about the programme to help women who had been through domestic abuse, I will certainly sign up for it.

I didn't know which way to turn, whether I was coming or going, covid covid covid is all I was hearing, it was stressing me out so much and just didn't know what to do. Thanks for calming me down and letting me know what I could do to help myself if I get in that state again. Great service.

I was haunted by what happened to my dad, not being with him when he needed me the most. Covid has a lot to answer for. I don't know what to say other than thank you for being there, for helping me to see through everything that went on, for helping me to focus not only on dad's death but his life, all the happy years I had with them. You are right, that is what he would have wanted. The guilt is slowly easing, miss him like mad but so thankful for your help and support.

FUNDRAISING

Covid has had a great effect on the fundraising activities of many charities, of which SupportLine is no exception.

A fundraising Celebrity Charity Cricket Match we had been planning had to be put on hold due to the Covid restrictions and hopefully this is something that we will be able to take up once again in the future.

We have always been very grateful to the celebrities who freely have given up their time to support our charity over many years of Celebrity Charity Football Matches, Gold Days and Cricket Matches and it will be good to meet up with them all again at some stage and raise vital funds for the Charity.

Due to covid restrictions and increased demand on our services fundraising has very much had to take a back seat but we hope in the near future to be able to organise an Online Auction which has proved to be successful in the past and also when restrictions permitted resume our Celebrity Charity events which have proved so popular over the years.

SupportLine also continues to receive some funding by people choosing our charity on the website Give As You Live whereby a percentage of what people spend is donated to the charity and also when people spend on Amazon.

Lack of fundraising opportunities over recent past has made the funds we have received from Charitable Trusts and Foundations and donations even more invaluable and we are so grateful to all our supporters who have believed in the work we do and given us financial support, some over many years. The support we have received has kept the charity going and hopefully we will be successful in securing more funds which are needed to enable our work to continue over the coming year.

WEBSITE

We are very proud of our website which continues to receive very positive feedback from people who use it and also from professionals to refer people to it for resources, information and support. We very much welcome feedback and often include new sections and additional information to existing sections when we hear that people are struggling to find information on specific issues.

For some time, we have wanted to work on a new site which will encompass a lot more of the practical coping strategies we give to people which they find really helpful and is a way in which people are able to regain some control over their lives and help themselves.

Due to increased demand on the service and especially in light of covid and spending more time helping people in relation to the virus, we have not been able to get the new site up and running. This is something we will be working on over the coming year and hope to be able to have this up and running as a complement to our existing site in the near future.

SUICIDE

Over the last year our Charity has noticed a marked increase in the number of people contacting us with suicidal thoughts and in many cases some have already made attempts on their lives.

Suicide is a significant national social issue in the United Kingdom. In 2019 there were 5,691 registered deaths by suicide in England and Wales, equating to an average of 18 suicides per day in the country. Suicide is the **single biggest killer of men under the age of 45** in the country.

Men are three times more likely to take their own lives than women. Boys are often taught and have instilled in them that they need to be strong, that boys don't cry, and men often see it as a weakness if they cannot cope and deal with things themselves. They often find it more difficult to talk about their feelings to their friends and families and may cope by turning to alcohol, withdrawing into themselves and isolating themselves.

We are often contacted by partners of men who are suffering with depression and suicidal thoughts and they always tell us their partner refuses to get help and the loved ones of a person who is suffering feel very helpless and at a loss what to do.

Thankfully in society in general we are seeing a slight change and this has been helped by high profile celebrities speaking out about their own depression. This has included members of the Royal Family, celebrities from the world of entertainment and sport and this is a very positive move in encouraging men and others to see that reaching out for help is a sign of strength and not weakness.

People can be suicidal for all kinds of reasons where they feel overwhelmed in what is going on in their lives and sadly see no other way out of their situation.

Rates of suicidal thoughts have increased during lockdown, especially among young adults, a longitudinal study has found. Research published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* found that women, young adults, socially disadvantaged people, and people with pre-existing mental health problems reported the worst mental health outcomes in the initial six week period of national lockdown.

Example of some of the calls and emails we get in relation to suicide

'I want to end my life today'

'Feeling so low and want to hang myself now'.

'I've let my family down, since breakdown of relationship never get to see my kids, can't cope with the pain anymore. Better for everyone if I was not here'

'I cannot see a way out and am ending my life tonight'

'My sickness and poor health makes me a burden to my family, the guilt is eating me up inside, there is no point in carrying on '

'I don't want to live any more, better for everyone if I kill myself'.

'Can't cope with this anymore, it's all too much, taking an overdose tonight.'

'Our son has made another attempt on his life. He doesn't see a future and we are at a loss how best to support him'.

'I am not going to be able to face another lockdown, I am seeing nobody and this is not the way I want to live. I've had enough and now want to die.'

We are also seeing that the age of **young people** presenting with suicidal feelings is getting younger and not uncommon for young people who contact us to have already made serious attempts on their lives.

We find that young people often are reluctant to talk to their families through fear of upsetting them, not being believed, families not caring about them, parent ill, tried to talk to them before and not listening, dismissing what they have said.

Example of some of the calls/emails we get in relation to suicide from young people

'Feel so depressed, constantly crying and so sad since my nan died, just want to end it all'

'My friend is suicidal; I don't know what to do and am begging you to help him.'

'I feel like a failure, everything goes wrong, everyone hates me, nobody talks to me at school and a boy is spreading rumours about me, I hate life, I'm taking the pills.'

'I feel alone and I'm sick of struggling, I really don't want to be here anymore,'

Again, this demonstrates the importance of Helplines such as SupportLine where people who are struggling can feel safe and not judged, where they can be open and honest about how they are feeling. Thankfully very often people do see an alternative to suicide and recognise that with the right support they can get through difficult times and that they are stronger than they think. Sadly as we know some people in society do go on to take their lives and the more work that can be done about encouraging people to seek support the better.

SupportLine also supports survivors of bereavement by suicide. It is never easy to cope when a loved one ends their life and survivors are left with so much confusion, often struggling with the guilt of whether they could or should have done more, how things could have been different and many survivors blame themselves. Some will, feel anger towards their loved one for leaving them. So many raw emotions to deal with when grieving for their loved one is never easy.

FEEDBACK

I contacted you about help for my son but you saw I needed support too. Thank you for all the information you gave me and your care. I didn't know where to get help for him and you have made an old lady very happy that now I know where to get that support locally for him and will be sure to contact the Carers group too.

I just had to contact you for saying a big thank you for sorting out the food parcels and volunteers to help me. It is very lonely living alone and not being able to have family and friends around and was feeling very forgotten about. Thank you for the befriending service you gave me too and I can see myself making use of that. Knowing there is someone out there to turn to is a help in itself. Thank you

Thank you for believing me, that meant a lot. It is hard for a male survivor of abuse to reach out, men are supposed to be strong aren't they! You know I have actually taken your advice and confided in a close friend and he has been astounding in his support. I know I should have told him before but talking things through with you gave me the strength to do that. I know I can't bury my head in the sand forever when this has such a negative impact on my life, and the support group you told me about seems like exactly what I need. Keep up the good work.

I was glad my friend told me to contact you and thanks for helping me like you helped her. I have not self harmed for some time and using distractions you suggested and also working through the online course you told me about. Things are better at home and less arguments and feeling a lot happier in myself all thanks to your help. I did not expect to get so much support and understanding.

My deepest thanks to SupportLine for keeping me sane and helping me keep it together when I couldn't see my counsellor or get to support group as everything closed down because of covid. I thought I would be ok coping on my own but it all got too much as you know, I felt I was going over the edge. If you had not been there, I don't know what I would have done but I will always be grateful for your help. You do a great job for people like me and given your number to a few people at the support group too.

ACHIEVEMENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

SupportLine has provided help, emotional support, advice, information, advocacy, befriending to some 6,734 people. This has been an increase on the previous year's figures of 6,036.

This has included direct services to people who are vulnerable, at risk, isolated and victims of abuse who request help for themselves, family members or friends.

Information and support given to Professionals, Statutory services, other charities and voluntary agencies from our database in respect of local and/or specialist services in order that they could pass to their clients' local sources of face to face support.

Advice and a listening ear given to Professionals, other charities and voluntary agencies over issues of concern and the best way of handling cases.

As can be seen on the section 'Some of the Organisations, Professionals, and Projects SupportLine has supported throughout the year', there is an ever increasing demand for help and advice from our service supporting people throughout the UK and those who work with them.

SupportLine was able to respond with speed to the Covid Pandemic. This happened at a time when the charity was getting low on funding and a lot of time needed to be spent in trying to secure funds. Thankfully we were successful in securing emergency funding to help charities support people in relation to the Pandemic in addition to securing funding from Charitable Trusts, a number of whom had supported our charity in the past and this was a tremendous help to us and enabled our work to continue.

In response to Covid we extended opening hours for our email support service, did a lot of research to find out about different covid-19 support services throughout the UK. We adapted some of our work to involve helping vulnerable people more on a practical level in liaising with local covid-19 groups and local Councils ensuring that people who had been left without food were given access to food parcels and volunteers to collect food and medication to those who were shielding.

Our work supporting people in relation to covid also involved call backs to vulnerable and isolated people giving befriending and checking they were coping and if they needed any further assistance.

Some of the content on our website in relation to Rape & Sexual Assault was used by a young lady in a You Tube video which she made to help victims and families of rape victims. Her own mother had been beaten and raped visiting the grave of her son on the anniversary of his death. The young lady told the story of the trauma that had happened to her mother in the hope it helps those who are going through similar trauma. She highlighted the courage and fight of her mother throughout and how it had impacted on her as her daughter and the importance of getting support.

We continue to receive good feedback about our website from people looking directly for support for themselves and their loved ones and it is well used by Professionals and other agencies who frequently refer their clients to it. We regularly include new content which is often based on feedback from people we support where they have found difficulty in accessing information on certain issues which we include on the site.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2021

SupportLine raised £55,365 and incurred an expenditure of £44,157 for the year ending 31 March 2021.

SupportLine had a surplus of £4,003 from the previous financial year leading to a total surplus as at 31 March 2021 of £15,211.50

Accounts prepared by an independent Accountant.

Kirit Shah BSc. FCCA
CS Property & Consultancy Services

TRUSTEES

Peter Barrell
Mike Knell
Jaiyesh Patel

Co-ordinator Geri Burnikell

SupportLine

PO Box 2860, Romford, Essex RM7 1JA

Tel: Admin: 01708 765222 Tel.Helpline: 01708 765200

Email: info@supportline.org.uk

Website: www.supportline.org.uk

SUPPORT LINE

Charity Registration no. 1097419

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

Support Line

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Chairman

Peter Barrell

Vice Chairman

Mike Knell

Treasurer

Jayesh Patel

Co-ordinator

Geri Burnikell

Bankers

Natwest
Wanstead Branch
51-53 High Street
Wanstead
London E11 2XX

Accountants

CS Property & Consultancy Services
Kirit Shah BSc FCCA

Support Line

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Support Line

Forward to the Financial Statements

These Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with CC64 SORP 2000 as issued by the Charity Commission in October 2000.

Since Support Line's Income for the year has been less than £100,000, it is classed as "small" and hence is eligible to produce the accounts on a receipts and payments basis.

K. Shah, B Sc, FCCA

Independent Accountant

Support Line

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The Trustees are responsible for:

- keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the funds held on trust and to enable them to ensure that the accounts comply with requirements in the Charities Act 1993 and those outlined in the directions issued by the Secretary of State;

- establishing and monitoring a system of internal control; and

- establishing arrangements for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption.

The Trustees are required under the Charities Act 1993 and under the National Health Service Act 1977 to prepare accounts for each financial year. The Secretary of State, with the approval of the Treasury, directs that these accounts give a true and fair view of the financial position of the funds held on trust, in accordance with the Charities Act 1993. In preparing those accounts, the Trustees are required to:

- apply on a consistent basis accounting policies laid down by the Secretary of State with the approval of the Treasury;

- make judgements and estimates which are reasonable and prudent;

- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the accounts.

The Trustees confirm that they have met the responsibilities set out above and complied with the requirements for preparing the accounts.

By Order of the Trustees

Signed

Chairman



Date

29/21

Trustee



Date

31/08/21

Support Line

Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 March 2021

	Notes	Total Funds £
Incoming resources		
Fundraising		634
Donations, Legacies and similar resources		177
Grants - Restricted Funds (Please refer to the note below)		54,554
Other incoming resources		
Total incoming resources	2	55,365
Resources expended		
Costs of generating funds		3,301
Grants paid		-
Activities in furtherance of charity's objectives		1,199
Management and administration		39,657
Total Resources expended	3	44,157
Net incoming/(outgoing) resources		11,209
Fund balances brought forward at 31 March 20		4,003
Fund balances carried forward at 31 March 21	4	15,211

Support Line

Consolidated Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2020

Fixed Assets	Notes	£
Intangible Assets		—
Tangible Assets		—
Current assets		
Stocks		—
Debtors		—
Cash at bank and in hand	4	15,211
Creditors/Overdraft: amounts falling due within one year		—
Net Current Assets		15,211
Total Net Assets		15,211
Funds of the Charity		
Unrestricted		—
Restricted		15,211
Total Funds		15,211

Signed:

Baney

Date:

29/21

[Signature]

Support Line

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

1 Accounting policies

1.1 Accounting convention

The financial statements are prepared under the historical cost convention and in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard for Smaller Entities.

1.2 Compliance with accounting standards

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards

2 Total Incoming Resources

All incoming resources are included in full in the Statement of Financial Activities as soon as the following three factors can be met: Entitlement, Certainty and measurement.

This represents the total income received during the financial year ending 31st March 2021

3 Total Resources Expended

Cost of generating funds comprise those costs directly attributable to fund raising activities.

Grants payable are included in the Statement of Financial Activities when approved by the Trustees.

Management and administration comprises costs of running the charity.

Training/supervision is provided to the "Support Line" by a volunteer hence nil expenditure.

4 Cash

The financial year had started with a credit balance of £4,003. A surplus of £11,209 increased this credit balance to £15,211

The current authorised overdraft limit with the bank is £6,000.

**FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2021
FROM INDEPENDENT AUDITOR**

SupportLine raised £55,365 and incurred an expenditure of £44,157 for the year ending 31 March 2021.

SupportLine had a surplus of £4,003 from the previous financial year leading to a total surplus as at 31 March 2021 of £15,211.50

Accounts prepared by an independent Accountant.

Kirit Shah BSc. FCCA
CS Property & Consultancy Services