



listening to children  
: an overview to CHIIDLINe

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The children who call CHILDLINE across the country

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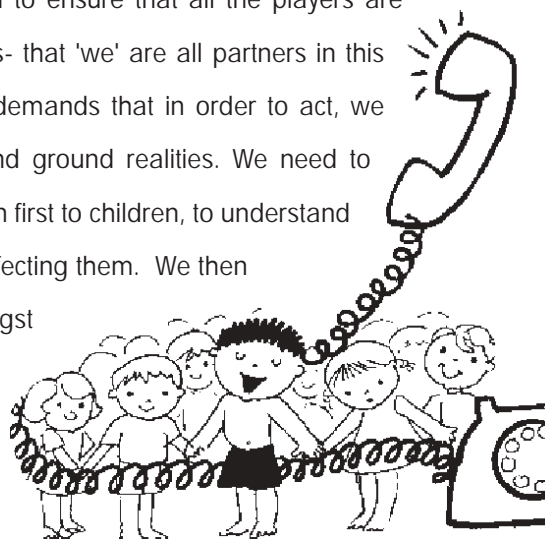
*CHILDLINE Kiska? (Who does CHILDLINE belong to?)*

*CHILDLINE Mera, CHILDLINE Tumhara (Me, You)*

*CHILDLINE Hamara, CHILDLINE Hum Sab Ka (All of us!)*

At every meeting with street children, at every party, picnic, encounter, or street play, this slogan is thundered by a hundred young voices. It is more than just a slogan however; it is a philosophy. CHILDLINE does not only belong to the organisations that constitute it or to the partners who fund it or to the Ministries that support it. It belongs primarily to the children who are the reason for its existence. CHILDLINE belongs to them and they belong to CHILDLINE.

The multiple ownership of various sections of society to CHILDLINE is at the crux of every CHILDLINE to be effective. It reflects CHILDLINE approach to bring about change. An approach that states- to implement programmes, we need to ensure that all the players are involved in this process- that 'we' are all partners in this process of change. It demands that in order to act, we first need to understand ground realities. We need to listen. We need to listen first to children, to understand how they see issues affecting them. We then need to listen amongst ourselves, to dialogue with each other- to place children on our agenda.



## What is in this book?

This book seeks to give the reader an overview of CHILDLINE. It outlines the key aspects of the service that have evolved over the five years of CHILDLINE across India. The CHILDLINE India Foundation (CIF) in compiling this book has used 'we' in this manual to indicate all the CHILDLINE partners across India that are implementing the service, committed to bringing about change and have contributed towards evolving the national CHILDLINE service. CIF hopes the views/opinions of the partners have been adequately reflected.

Each section of this book, outlined below, attempts to highlight the importance of listening to children:



Evolution of CHILDLINE where children were actively involved in the planning process and continue to be involved in every new CHILDLINE

Emergence of the CHILDLINE credo amongst CHILDLINE partners



Understanding of CHILDLINE's Mission to protect the rights of children.

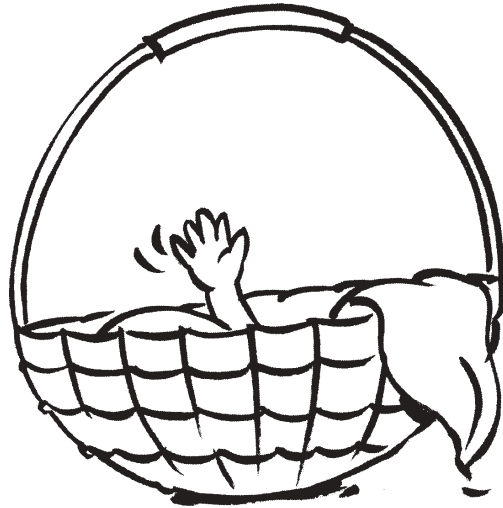
Development of the Management Model : *sadak chaap Istyle*



Growth of a partnership to place children's voices on the national agenda

## EVOLUTION OF CHILDLINE

For a long while, street children expressed the need for a phone service



that belonged to them.

They wanted a service that was available when they were ill or injured, when they were frightened or angry, when they needed to talk or they needed to complain.

To them CHILDLINE was their service, to use, to

talk about to other friends, and to abuse, if they were not happy with CHILDLINE.

Why do you need a CHILDLINE when there are so many other services?

We asked this question to the street children, especially since they seemed to know what was available and where. (In fact, many could easily compile a resource book on services for street children and free food places)

The answer they gave us was simple, yet insightful. "When we have a problem, especially at night we have to call at the residence of uncle/

didis and at times it is difficult to contact them. Who do I call when I'm feeling lonely in the middle of the night, or just feel like chatting, or when the centres are closed? We want a service that will be ours. We want a service which we can call *day* or *night*."

And so CHILDLINE emerged and with it the slogan:

*"Jab bhi koi zaroorat ho*

*CHILDLINE ko phone karo"*

Or the English equivalent: "Someone who cares is a phone call away."

It would be CHILDLINE's responsibility to be available 24 hours to the child

To prove a point

The children of the streets wanted a CHILDLINE but who was listening?

Many people scoffed at the idea. "Do street children know how to use a phone?" they asked. "How will they call when they are illiterate?" they wanted to know. "Who will allow them to call?" CHILDLINE, they said, was a fancy elitist idea, not the voice from the street!

But that wasn't what we were hearing. We were hearing the sounds of anger.

The street children were angry because was no one listening. To prove their point, they thought of drastic solutions: a dharna even a hunger strike in front of the minister. These were the only ways they could think, of getting the attention of an adult world which at best was indifferent; at worst, hostile. But some of the boys who had participated in rallies



and demonstrations remained skeptical. No one had listened once the children went back to the anonymity of the streets.

The debate continued - and after a series of discussions a plan emerged. The Telecom Department would be approached to allot a special number for children.

The street youth wanted to prove that a helpline for street children was necessary. In order to prove this beyond any doubt, they decided to conduct a study. A pictographic questionnaire was evolved and the children hit the streets and asked their friends some key questions. Would they call? When? Why?

They ticked the right answers alongside the pictures.

After this, they learnt the art of coding and coded their responses using a simplified research analysis model. This was so successful that one of them asked: *"Yeh kaam karne ke liya aap ko paisa milta hai? Yeh to hum bhi kar sakte hain."* The analysis of the data was written with the active participation of the boys.

Advocacy backed by street level data - a strategy which continues to



date. Before initiating CHILDLINE in any city/district, a Need Assessment Study is undertaken to plan the CHILDLINE according to the local needs.

What next?

Whilst starting CHILDLINE it seemed simple. Get a phone number. Install it at a shelter. Tell the children to call. Many other organisations also had something similar - so the concept of a phone service seemed so simple.

Simple. Only the children didn't think so.

*"Hum dus shaher ghoomte to dus number kaise yaad rakehenge? Aap log apna hi sochte hai - kabhi hamara bhi to suno."*

(We roam ten cities. How will we remember ten numbers? You people think only about yourselves - try to listen to us from time to time.)

*"Phone lagane mein paise lagega - aur jab kadki ho to paise kahan se layenge - kuchh to socho."*

(It costs money to make a phone call. And what happens when we're broke? Where do we get the money? Try and see it from our point of view)

Hence the demand for a common toll free number, from the Telecom Department.

Our first challenge

The director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences sent a letter to MTNL. It clearly stated that as India had ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). This meant that the Department of Telecommunications was obliged to provide a special toll-free number for children. The

communication went on from 1993 to 1996 - till the number 1098 was allotted for children in difficult circumstances.

Subsequently, toll free numbers were allotted for an HIV-AIDS helpline 1097 and for a woman's helpline 1099.

Can we cope alone?

The study clearly indicated that the phone line would fail because children would call for many reasons. It would be beyond the capacity of one organisation to cope. We were in a quandary until Hafeez, a street youth suggested there were many uncles and didis working for street children. Everyone's involvement was needed to make CHILDLINE successful. Thus the concept of networking evolved and with it the groundwork for the Resource Directory. The Tata Institute of Social Sciences students assisted in the compilation of the Resource Directory and the first draft emerged.

A core group of NGOs working with street children committed themselves to the project. This group brainstormed, discussed, debated amongst themselves to design an effective strategy to ensure that a child calling from anywhere in the city, could be reached quickly. The implementation of CHILDLINE was also discussed with other networks for children. Thus a partnership evolved between academics, NGOs and NGO networks to strengthen the service.

This philosophy of networking, anchored by an academic organisation or an NGO network is visible today in all CHILDLINES across the country.

We had the numbers - but the name ?

We had the number - the boys wanted to celebrate so they thought of a picnic.



Yet others were angry - three years to get one number. *Didi, aap to kuch kaam ke nahin - yeh nahin chalenga - sab hamare naam ke paise se tankha kamate hai.*

So we decided on an overnight camp to discuss our differences. A series of camps and meetings later we had some consensus on what the children considered key issues.

The name

Several names were suggested. The hot favourite for a while was *Charline* for the four-digit number. But no one could agree. Finally Father Placie, who is respected amongst most street children suggested *CHILDLINE*. The children approved and the name was selected.

How did that happen? *"Bade log ka sunna hi chahiye,"* said one boy. (We should listen to our elders)

It's an advice we take seriously. We listen to the children first but we listen to our elders too.

It was only after a year into *CHILDLINE* that we learnt about our namesakes in UK and even though the nature of service differs - our bond is very strong.

The logo

The street children did not care about a logo because the word meant nothing to them. When it was explained, to them that a logo meant giving CHILDLINE a look, one that every child could identify with, they had some very definite ideas.



They wanted a child in it - someone whom they could identify with who would be *"apun ke jaisa"* (like us). This meant a child who was *bindaas* (carefree) and filled with *masti* (street smarts).

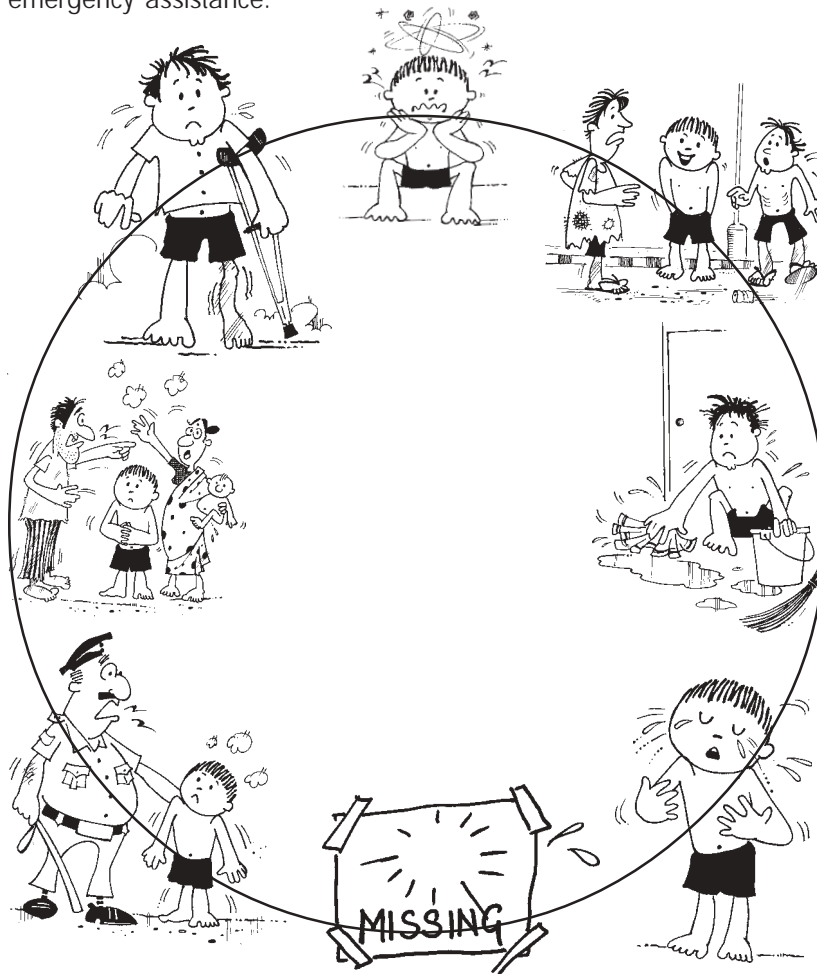
The next question was: should that child be happy or sad? After all s/he would be calling in distress? The unanimous response? A happy child! "Why?" we asked. *"Humko rote huey dekha hai? Gham chhupaana jaante hai hum."* (Have you ever seen us crying? We know how to hide our grief) *"Kya CHILDLINE humko phone karne par kushi nahin degi? To phir kyon phone karenge?"* (Won't CHILDLINE make us happy when we call? And if it doesn't, why would we call?) And then there was the simple: *"Hamara sunna hai to suno. Nahin to kyon poochte ho?"*

With a range of similar arguments and comments, we understood the sentiment. The tone of CHILDLINE was set and with it, its spirit: a belief in the smile of a child, in the indomitable spirit of India's street children.

The CHILDLINE logo would smile!

## The target group

The street youth also had certain questions about starting the new service. The primary concern was, who was CHILDLINE's target group? They emphasized the need for CHILDLINE to be a service for the most marginalised children who had no support systems and in need of emergency assistance.



## The scope

Street youth/children needed to know the scope of CHILDLINE. Would CHILDLINE help them if they were caught by the railway police for ticketless travel? Would CHILDLINE help if older boys were harassing them? Would CHILDLINE give them money or provide them with employment? They discussed, deliberated and finally outlined the situations where children could call 1098 :

when a child is ill



when a constable beats a child

when accidents happen

when bhais beat a younger boy

when a child wants to go to an asharam/institution



when a new child has arrived and needs help

when a girl or a small boy are lost on the streets



when de addiction is needed



when a child wants to go back home

when a child dies and has no family to perform the last rites



It was clarified that they could call 1098 whenever they wanted to speak to someone. While CHILDLINE would not be able to rescue them if they were caught without tickets or pickpocketing, CHILDLINE would ensure that their rights were not violated. It was also stressed that CHILDLINE did not want to limit their independence and problem solving initiative but was there whenever they wanted.... it was their CHILDLINE !

### The operational strategy

The youth listed their roles as street volunteers and team members in reaching out to their peers. This included :

- Befriending children, especially those new to the Mumbai
- Providing crisis assistance
- Spreading the message about the service
- Volunteer to stay with children in hospitals
- Volunteer to bring children to centers/take children to shelters

The youth were keen to answer the phones as well...they wanted to reach out to other children to understand their concerns and issues without preaching to them. They listed the information they would require to be effective volunteers and team members; like:

- Hospital procedures: how to contact doctors, call an ambulance
- Police policies and procedures: how to tackle situations where children are rounded up and beaten



- ❑ NGO addresses, phone numbers and services
- ❑ Tips to avoid trouble while living on the street
- ❑ Inputs on administration of first aid

It was decided that a training programme would be organized on the topics suggested above for the team of street youth who would answer calls.

### The awareness strategy

At a meeting with children to discuss the launch of the service, one of the street youth came up with the ultimate advertising technique to ensure memorization of the number 1098: by publicizing it as Ten - Nine - Eight.... that was subsequently incorporated into all CHILDLINE awareness campaigns and materials.

Every CHILDLINE before it starts, undergoes a similar process- of involving children's participation in planning the service. This is essential in adapting the CHILDLINE to the needs of children. The manual, *laying the foundation : getting started and taking off* details this process.



## EMERGENCE OF THE CHILDLINE CREDO

While responding to calls from children, CHILDLINE team members across the country had varied experiences. Children calling 1098, had various expectations from CHILDLINE. The team had faced a variety of problems in responding to these calls. The CHILDLINE team shared their observations at national workshops.



These were put down and it was noticed that there were important learnings for the team that were applicable to all CHILDLINES in the country. These learnings reflected CHILDLINE's overall stands on issues and its beliefs. The CHILDLINE credo thus emerged.

Every call is important

*Aapun ko izzat milna chahiye.* (We should get respect)



What the boys hate is the dismissive flick of the hand,

the scornful dismissal of the public or the closed doors at restaurants, hospitals and even shelters. Their demand was simple: CHILDLINE should treat us with respect when we call, it should listen to us, even if we give *gaalis* (abuse). *Kyunki CHILDLINE apna hai.* (Because CHILDLINE is ours) Hence, the first credo of CHILDLINE - every call is important, even if the child has died. *CHILDLINE hain to koi bhi baccha raaste par akela marna nahin chahiye* (CHILDLINE should not allow even a single child to die on the street alone) The greatest fear of the street child is to die, unloved, uncared for, forgotten. CHILDLINE had to reassure them that the death rites of every child would be performed, according to his or her faith. Hence the concept: *death with dignity.*

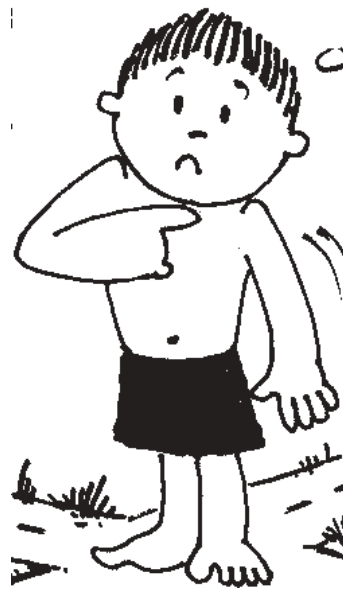
As the service evolved, the team members started looking on CHILDLINE as a job, the passion decreased and with it the commitment to quality intervention. The boys felt cheated. How is CHILDLINE different? Why is this happening? How can we change it? At a team members meeting the service credo emerged: *Socho dimaag se, Kaam karo dil se.* (Think with your head; work with your heart)

This continues to be the spirit of CHILDLINE.

For CHILDLINE every call must be responded to at the earliest and rehabilitation should continue till the very end.

CHILDLINE believes that the child must play a role in his or her intervention.

“Many social workers don't listen to us. They tell us to go home, to study, do this, do that. If we wanted to do all that, why would we have run away from home? When we want to do those things, we'll do them. Or else we'll run away from the shelter. Damn your CHILDLINE.”



This angry sentiment contained the germ of CHILDLINE's core belief. We listen to the children we are helping and we work with them while deciding follow-up. CHILDLINE is often criticised for this. We are accused of taking the soft stand, the easy way out - but these voices still resonate in our minds. We know that every time we impose a value system, the child agrees only, to please us or to end an unwanted

intervention. When we force a child to get on a train and go home, he gets off at the next station and returns to the streets, leaving the escort stranded. Others reach home and run away, yet again. So we talk, explain, cajole but let the child decide. It is this that makes the child believe in CHILDLINE and call.

However, our moral dilemma continues. A 16-year-old is beaten up by the police. He refuses to file a First Information Report. We tell him that this will not allow the officer to beat up other children. He shrugs. His life will be hell if he complains. He will not be allowed to live on the station. He does not want to file an FIR. We talk to him but he is adamant. Finally, we give in. We complain to the authorities without disclosing the identity of the child.

A child runs away from a shelter, back to the streets. Is this a statement on the child, or on us, on the quality of service the shelter is providing?

The Juvenile Welfare Board returns a child to the family. The father of the family has been abusing the child. The father has promised never to do it again. The child also insists on going back. We know that the abuse will begin again. Have we failed the child, by insisting on his right to decide? Will close surveillance of the family and regular meetings with the child suffice?

Each time we feel that we are letting down the child. But we hold on to our principle because we believe that it empowers children, that it

imbues them with dignity, that it fosters an atmosphere in which child rights will be recognised and encouraged.

And we continue this painful delicate negotiation between what we perceive as right and what the child perceives as right.

CHILDLINE recognises that it cannot work alone:

A CHILDLINE team member was placed in the lock-up by the police. His only crime was that he was out at 2 am, looking for a child who had called in asking for medical assistance.

A child was removed from a hospital and placed at the gate. He was a street child and he had HIV/AIDS and the hospital workers didn't want to look after him. We were forced to place a 12-year-old mentally challenged child in the depressing atmosphere of a remand home because every organisation we called, refused.



As word about CHILDLINE spread, more and more children started calling. We needed more shelters, more services. Very few NGOs volunteered. And, our sense of failure and frustration increased.

Where were the services? How could we convince the authorities to let us use the services, even those meant for children?

Hence, the recognition that CHILDLINE cannot work alone. For CHILDLINE to deliver an effective service we needed to network with the government, the police, the health care system, the corporate sector, the transport system, the owners of Public Call Offices, the NGOs...and every person who is a concerned individual.

Our strengths arise from their strengths. Our responsibilities to the child are tied up with theirs. Our ability to serve children in difficult circumstances arises out of their duties to the child.

This led to the evolution of the CHILDLINE Child-friendly City initiative in which every person would be responsible for children. And the government would provide for greater access to resources.

CHILDLINE is transparent and accountable.

*Aap to tankha lete hai aur humko kya bachta hai?*

(You get paid a salary. What is left for us?)

The question was asked of us, with a distinct touch of self-righteousness. This shocked us. We were not being paid. We were volunteering. And a street boy asks this?



That was when we sat back and thought it out. The question was valid. The money had been raised for children, in the name of children. The street child therefore has a right to ask where it goes and what it's being used for.

Since then CHILDLINE has evolved a totally transparent system of accounting and children are encouraged to ask us questions on how we spend our money?

Accountability goes beyond money to every aspect of the service.

*Tumhara CHILDLINE bekar hai. Phone kiya to koi bola ki koi nahin hai. Aadhe ghante ke baad phone karo.*

(Your CHILDLINE is useless. I called and someone told me that there was no one around; call after half an hour)

The next time our volunteer went to the streets to do outreach, he was beaten up by children who said that CHILDLINE was a fraudulent service. This helped us realise that we have to respond immediately. If there was a delay, we had to explain why and offer reasons.

We all make mistakes. The only way to rectify them is to apologise. The street children make sure we do. Two years into the functioning of CHILDLINE Mumbai a street youth was very sick. CHILDLINE team members took him to hospital but the youth refused hospitalisation. After giving him his medicines, the team member asked him if he wanted to stay at the shelter. The boy refused. He asked the team member to take him back to the railway station. The team member left the boy at the railway station - unfortunately unattended. The boy died. The street youth in the railway station were outraged. They felt betrayed. An immediate meeting was called. The team members apologised, and



offered to resign. But the boys decided to give him one last chance on one condition. That CHILDLINE should have monthly bal adalats at which these children are made aware of the functioning of CHILDLINE. And a new tradition of accountability began.

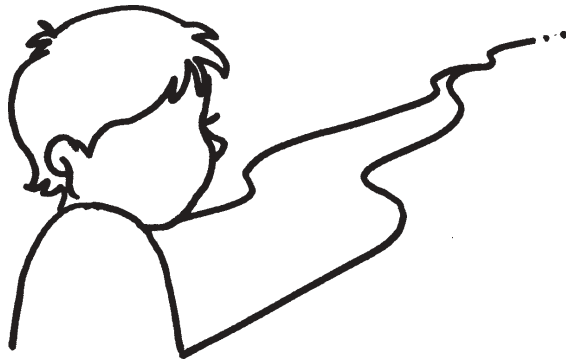
We are accountable to the children. It is their right to receive quality service and CHILDLINE's responsibility to deliver it. Any thing short of the best means that we are depriving the child of his/her rights.

The CHILDLINE credo needs to be practised. It has to be reflected in CHILDLINE interventions. The manual, *CHILDLINE at my finger tips: a resource book* attempts to translate the CHILDLINE credo into action for all of us at CHILDLINE.



## UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHILDLINE MISSION

Are we taking on more than we can chew?



Are we trying to  
play God ?

Are there enough  
services for every  
child needing  
assistance?

Are we absolving  
the community of its responsibility towards child protection?

These are some of the questions posed to the CHILDLINE team. Answers to these questions are essential as they reflect our ideological stands. Our Mission.

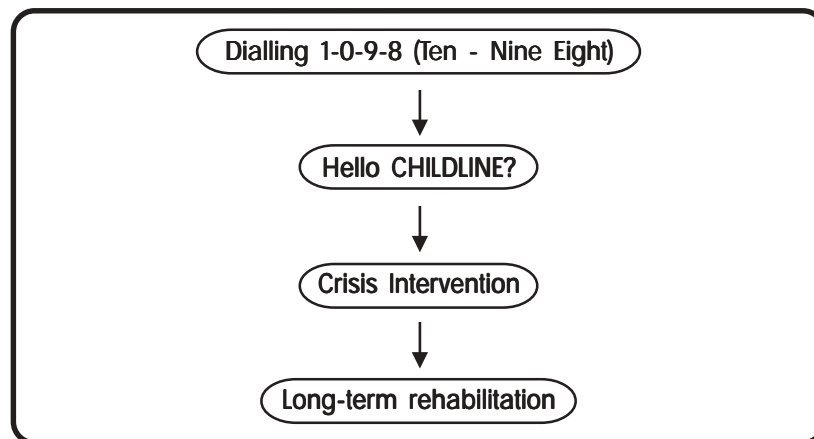
- Ravi, a 12-year old boy on the streets is hemophilic. He urgently requires blood. A total of Rs 12,000 needs to be realised. Should CHILDLINE intervene?
- 14-year old Gita, a domestic worker in Mumbai was being abused by her employers. She was rescued by CHILDLINE and her father has taken her home. Does the role of CHILDLINE continue?
- Raju, a street youth injured himself while working and has been hospitalised by CHILDLINE. He wants to learn driving. Can CHILDLINE help him?

A concerned adult informs CHILDLINE that an adult forces a child to beg at a signal. Can CHILDLINE do anything?

The answer to the above is YES. The mission of CHILDLINE is a reflection of the credo that has emerged. The CHILDLINE mission can be understood from looking at the following aspects:

Responding to every call : CHILDLINE will not say 'No' to any call of a child requiring assistance? As every call is important, CHILDLINE responds to each and every call, based on CHILDLINE's credo. A 24-hour service therefore becomes essential. It takes courage to call 1098 and share a problem. Even a silent call to CHILDLINE is important because it may be a child testing the service, hoping to hear a friendly voice.

CHILDLINE intervention : CHILDLINE is a service for the most marginalised child and is accountable to the child calling 1098. CHILDLINE has to intervene as long as the child needs us. Hence, evolved the CHILDLINE's response to rehabilitation continuum approach.



Linking children : CHILDLINE aims to link children to long term services, depending on the need of the child. The CHILDLINE team at the phones gives options to the child as they want to ahead. Without providing these options, CHILDLINE would remain a 'band-aid' service.

However are there enough services to link children based on their needs. If these linkages do not exist. What is the role of CHILDLINE? Does CHILDLINE abandon the child?

CHILDLINE realises that it is not always possible to have happy endings. However where there are no linkages the role of CHILDLINE is to build bridges with allied systems, to identify gaps in services and advocate with the CHILDLINE Advisory Board. It also demands that we network with other CHILDLINES across the country to link the child.

Follow-up after linking : Does CHILDLINE's role end after linking the child to long term care? CHILDLINE role is only in the short term after linking up the child i.e. to ensure the child has adjusted in his/her setting. Therefore even after Gita had been repatriated, CHILDLINE was in contact with her family and located an NGO near her residence to sponsorship to the family.

The CHILDLINE mission is to respond to every call from marginalised children, to address their emergency needs and link them to long term services. Hence our mission – to be a friend to every child in need of care and protection.

DEVELOPMENT OF A MANAGEMENT MODEL  
*SAADAK CHAAP ISHTYLE*



CHILDLINE's management model emerged from the streets. For each question posed by the children, we referred to existing management models - no single one fitted so we evolved our own! We believe that it has worked because it is so symbiotically linked with our realities. However, the lesson we did learn out of it was that a model applied without modification is probably going to fail.

The core concepts on which the model evolved, are closely linked to thoughts pre-dominantly in the street child's mind:

The brand

*Aapun saara India ka badshah. Aur CHILDLINE hai hamara. To jidhar bhi jaye CHILDLINE dikhna chahiye.*

How do we achieve this? Won't having the number do?

The children didn't agree. They felt that the only way to have a truly *sadak chhaap* service, it must have one brand image through the country. Hence we started the process of institutionalising the brand. Which is:

- a common number
- a common name
- a common logo
- a common image in terms of colour, look etc.

This has been further elaborated in the manual Spreading the word CHILDLINE awareness strategies



## Launching the brand

Subsequently, advertising companies encouraged us to change the logo to a child with a smiling face, since this would be more gender-sensitive than the little boy. The new logo was introduced. Feedback from across the country showed that the children did not like the new logo. The children simply did not identify with it. Finally, after several discussions at various levels, starting from the street and ending in the boardroom, the old logo was retained.

We went back to the streets and asked the children: do you like the new logo? Some of the old boys were there and their response was yet another lesson : *Aap ne phir se dhoka diya, wo naya baccha kyon rakha? Sab uncle didi aise karte hai?*

(You cheated us again. Do all social workers behave like this?)

Another lesson learnt: It is easy to begin with children's participation. But as institutionalisation sets in, we forget the voices of and from the streets. We stop listening. The promise we made then was simple: we will keep listening to the children.

Our existence: an add on

*Uncle, didi aate aur jaate. Hamara kaun sochta hai? Aaj CHILDLINE hai - kal bandh ho jayega. Aise kuch socho jisse hamara CHILDLINE hamesha chalega.*

The reality of the NGO sector expressed by the children. Many projects start and shut down, due to lack of funds. How do we make CHILDLINE

sustainable? We went back to the board room to work out a way to keep CHILDLINE alive. The best way to do this, according to us, was to use the services that already exist, to tap into organisations that were ideology-driven, not donor-driven. The idea is not to stretch strained resources further. Hence all CHILDLINE needs is a table, two phones and four chairs. And no swanky offices: its location must be accessible to all children. CHILDLINE centers across the country are located out of children shelters, government hospitals, near railway stations, near bus stops- places that are approachable to children.

#### Our zero-budget philosophy

*Hamara naam pe aap log paise kamate aur duniya ghoomte ho. Aap to raatko ghar jaake so jaate - hamara ghar to sadak hai.*

This bitter statement also rang true. We began to work with the idea of keeping costs low. Each item of expenditure had to pass an acid test: do I really need to pay for this service. Can't I get it free? If I pay, is it at the cost of another service to the child? Could this money have been better used?

And as difficult as it may seem, we get every service free of cost or at minimal cost because it is not for children but for the child on the street. It is his/her right and due from society.

From these emerged CHILDLINE's own brand management model. What is the brand-add on management model - as defined by CHILDLINE. The



model draws from the corporate franchise model (in which the organisation develops a prototype and clearly delineated standards are set by the franchiser) and the catalytic model (in which the organisation mobilises, engages others to address the problem). The model which was evolved for the CHILDLINE service has been called the brand add-on model.

The salient features of this model are:

- ❑ There is a common brand image presented to the public. Hence the logo, phone number, colour scheme, and awareness campaign are the same on a national level.
- ❑ The organisations implementing the service must adhere to common quality standards such as transparency and willingness to participate in periodic networking and facilitation meets.
- ❑ The organisations focus on issues related to a common agenda: Child Rights This agenda must reflect in all the activities of the organisation.
- ❑ The overall structure of the CHILDLINE service in the organisation is the same. However implementations differ based on the cultural context.
- ❑ All organisations partnering to implement the service commit to the core beliefs of the service and have to sign a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding), outlining their roles and responsibilities.

## GROWTH OF PARTNERSHIPS

Every child has the right to food, clothing, shelter, self-determination, a



family, education and happiness. It is society's duty to work towards providing these rights. This is the core philosophy that underlies CHILDLINE's existence and its approach to

partnerships. Hence, at every step of the way CHILDLINE has worked towards building bridges with partners. However the emphasis has been on the *rights of the child*, not on a plea for charity.

This philosophy again emanates from the street child's need for *izzat* (respect). It also emanates from the philosophical context of "*Sarva deva kutumbh*" -- the whole world is a family. For the street child who has no one, the world is his/her family. CHILDLINE sees it as its mission to convey this message to everyone.

## Partnership with children

CHILDLINE's original motto was of the streets, for the streets, by the streets. But as we grew, different types of calls started coming in and the scope of activities started expanding. From calls for medical intervention, repatriation and shelter we had calls for sexual abuse to students suffering from the middle-class disease of examination stress.

With each case we listened and learned and re-affirmed our belief in our credo - every call is important.

- listen to the child
- work jointly for rehabilitation
- learn from our mistakes, and grow.

Children as volunteers : The war over Kargil was at fever pitch. The papers were filled with tales of the heroism of our soldiers. Inspired by the spirit of the soldiers at the border, street children's volunteer force crystallised around the desire to emulate the warriors.

The children said again and again, "We want to be like our soldiers. We are the CHILDLINE fauj (army), the CHILDLINE sena (army)."

The name was never settled but the spirit was retained and began to show results:

- ❑ volunteer groups at railway stations now call CHILDLINE if they see a new boy getting down from a train or looking lost.

- ❑ A street youth from Mumbai, now a rickshaw puller in Alwar, calls daily to check the service, give tips and refer children
- ❑ Street children go on outreach programmes, telling people about CHILDLINE, and encouraging people to start calling in.
- ❑ Street children travel from one city to another telling children about CHILDLINE and comparing the quality of services and offering feedback.

Our volunteers keep us on our toes - for *Dil Se* is their motto!

Street/Community youth as team members : The CHILDLINE team members in several cities are youth who have lived life on the streets and want to reach out to their peers.

Joining hands with the Ministry

The key partnership CHILDLINE has built is with the government. CHILDLINE has project of the Department of Family and Child Welfare of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, it approached with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to take on CHILDLINE as a project. This set the stage for CHILDLINE's expansion to other cities. Each city is only a step in fulfilling the dream we inherited from the streets: *jidhar bhi jaayen, CHILDLINE hamara saat rahein.*

Building bridges with the Allied Systems

The number of tasks CHILDLINE found itself dealing with was huge: to

make life less difficult on the streets, to ensure that a domestic labourer is not abused, to stop trafficking, to help find missing children, to repatriate them, to stop the trafficking of children, to help children find education, medical health or even a family to take them in, to name just a few.

Thus it became evident that CHILDLINE could not function alone. We needed partners who could be our allies or friends at anytime - this cohesive group we called the Allied Systems. These include: Police, Healthcare, Judicial System, Juvenile Justice System, Education System, Transport System, Labour System, Media, DoT, Corporate Sector, Elected Representatives, The community.

To make the Allied System more responsible CHILDLINE launched the National Initiative for Child Protection, as a governmental programme. With the active support of the ministry, doors opened and a few first steps were made.

This partnerships have been strengthened based on CHILDLINEs documenation. This has been discussed in the manual recording children's concerns : documenting CHILDLINE.



## Building bridges with the corporate sector

It is always easy to get the corporate sector to donate money. It is always difficult to get them to donate anything more than that. Involvement costs much more than a donation. However, CHILDLINE believes that they need to understand the lives of street children, the problems faced by children in need of care and protection.

For CHILDLINE writing a cheque is not enough. We wanted izzat for the children, for CHILDLINE. So started a process of corporate partnerships in which we spoke differently, tried to involve them more integrally. This was worked out as partnerships should be, by a process of argument and debate until consensus was reached. Today Tata Consultancy Services has evolved our computer programme called ChildNET which enables us to document our calls nationally. Ogilvy & Mather has designed our brand image campaign. McKinsey & Co. takes us into the 21st century by enabling us to strategise and plan. Anderson taught us the basics of accounting. Price Water House Cooper has help us develop indicators which will help evaluate ourselves.

These partnerships have changed the way we see our world and have, we hope, helped the corporate sector to see the street child differently.

## TO EVERY CHILD A CHILDLINE

The CHILDLINE experience has reinforced our commitment and belief to actively listen to children.

At CHILDLINE listening to children is the first step, the foundation on which the service is built. We then need to act on these voices of children. We need to respond to their needs. Our interventions should be planned with children, based on their needs.

We also need to ensure that children are not afraid to speak. We need to work towards a society that perceives children as having the rights to speak, to determine how they see the future, to participate in planning services for them.

We need to prove that children's voices are not being taken seriously, that children calling CHILDLINE are asking to be heard. We need to take voices of children to policy makers, and decision makers.

CHILDLINEs role is therefore to facilitate the process by which children's voices are heard and acted upon. A society where children are encouraged to speak, a society that acts on the concerns of children and involves them – a society where there is no longer a need for CHILDLINE.

That is our dream.