

The first 10 years

'The journey of even a ten thousand miles starts with a single step.'

Our first step took almost 3 years in the making - 3 years of understanding the needs of children on the streets of India, of figuring out how to reach them effectively, of putting in place the structure that could take the child in distress and mainstream his or her life.

What was coming across in those early days was the need for a toll free , 24 hour service, that could work across cities, which children could access from anywhere at anytime!

CHILDLINE was founded by Ms. Jeroo Billimoria, who was then a professor at the Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS), Mumbai. Initiated in June 1996 as an experimental project of the department of Family and Child Welfare of TISS, CHILDLINE has come a long way today, to becoming a nationwide emergency helpline for children in distress.

A Sneak Peek

- 1997-2000: Smt. Maneka Gandhi, then the Union Minister, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment agrees to fund CHILDLINE at the national level. The Government committed that by 2002, CHILDLINE would be in every Indian city with a population of 10 million.
- 2000: CIF was appointed evaluators of the Ministry's Integrated Program for Street Children Scheme: Annually, CIF conducts an evaluation of 110 organizations.
- CHILDLINE service has been reported as a critical intervention of the Government of India in response to its CRC commitments; instrumental in bringing Prof Jaap Doek, Chairperson of the UN committee on the Rights of the Child on an orientation visit to India involving 2 dialogues and submission of a recommendations paper.
- CIF receives special mention in Juvenile Justice Act, 2000 as a separate entity that can refer children to Child Welfare Committees. CIF was also involved in drafting the model rules of the Central Government for the JJ Act, 2000.
- CIF was appointed on the committee that helped draft the 10th five year plan with to bring focus on children related services and Child Rights.
- National Missing Children's Tracking System recommended after research on missing children. Partnership with MSJE& UNICEF, and the Ministry to create a virtual tracking system for missing children.
- CIF and Government of India collaborated with CHILDLINE UK, and with support from Ashoka Innovators for the Public, British High Commission International Forum for Child Welfare, Save the Children, UK and UNICEF, organized the International

Consultation on Protecting Children - the role of Telephone Helplines and other outreach services for children and young people at Pune in August 2001.

- Pune Declaration - this consultation provided the ground for international replication of helplines for children.
- Since 1999, every year, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJ&E) allocated Rs 3 crores as grant-in-aid to CIF and CHILDLINE partners across India.
- In 2000, CHILDLINE partnered with the National Institute of Social Defence (NISD), an autonomous training body of the Government of India, and UNICEF to launch the National Initiative for Child Protection (NICP).
- Following a Price Waterhouse study, CIF facilitated a group of organizations including CAF, VANI and other NGOs to form the Credibility Alliance initiative for greater transparency and standardization of accounting norms in the voluntary sector.
- Founder of CHILDLINE India, Jeroo Bilimoria, moved on to a new role of catalyzing child protection globally through the initiation of Child Helpline International (CHI) a global network of children's helplines. CHILDLINE is a founding member.
- Sharing of CHILDLINE India model of outreach with other nations: Vietnam, Mongolia, Egypt and other countries.
- Network of Non-profit Helplines: initiated CIF; Helpline Workshop "National Helplines Consultation on the role of Telecommunication in reaching the marginalized" conducted at Infosys city, Bangalore, 'Center staging The Role of Non-Profit Helplines in Advocacy', Delhi, 2005.

CHILDLINE is treated by the government as its very own service. That is in itself an incredible achievement. From Government's perspective the ideal GOI- Civil society partnership that allows the service to deliver service to the last mile while GOI funds it. Let's not make any mistake about it- in India- no other organisation but the GOI can fund to the scale of the problem- we are a part of the GOI's solution. This shows how effective CHILDLINE has been in our advocacy efforts. What has gone into the building of that relationship is plain hard work, complete transparency and close interaction with well intentioned good bureaucrats. The result is that CHILDLINE is amongst the most credible names in GOI corridors. And that has helped our partners tremendously.

Motivation behind setting up CHILDLINE



Ms Billimoria always found time to interact with children staying on railway stations or Mumbai's night shelters. Children started calling her in crisis at her residence at any point of day and night.

The seeds of CHILDLINE were sown by the urgency of such calls and the fact that all of these were late in the night; after all other voluntary services were closed for the day. Each time, Jeroo had to rush out to take these children to hospitals, police stations, shelters, anywhere to get help.

"Each call was a validation of my work with them," says Jeroo. **"It meant they trusted me to do something"** but do what, was the big question! She could not answer every call for help, or do everything for the thousands of street children who call Mumbai, home. A tele-helpline could!

It was the need expressed by the children on the streets that drove Jeroo to take this initiative. The need to have instant support when they are ill, injured or just needed to talk to someone. The need for care and protection when un-reached by any other service. To have a one-point contact that would quickly connect children to services that they need during or after a crisis.

Once the urgent emergency services were provided, the helpline would counsel the child further and ask if she needed more support. It would open up an array of long-term rehabilitation services for his/her to avail.

These were the reasons that prompted Jeroo to launch CHILDLINE, India's first 24-hour emergency telephone service, to provide assistance and care for homeless street children.

The birth of the magical 'Dus....Nau....Aath....'

"We roam ten cities. How will we remember 10 numbers?"

"It costs money to make a phone call, what happens when we are broke?"

"The helpline couldn't limit itself to a city, its users are not bound by territory"

These were amongst the few questions thrown by the kids.

The solution was simple! What they were asking for was a toll-free number, a service that would travel across the country, just like the children it would serve!



It was only after a long wait of three years, two dharnas by the children, and the threat of a hunger strike, the national toll-free number 1098 of CHILDLINE, was inaugurated on 20th of June 1996 by Mr. Tyagi, the then Commissioner of Police of Mumbai.

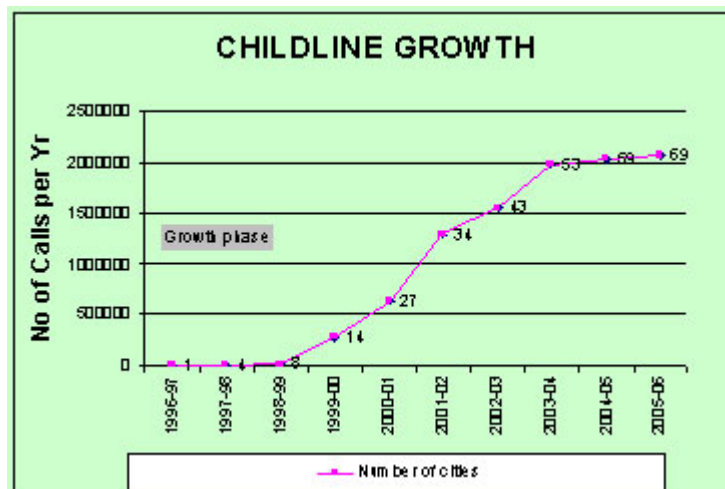
'One-Zero-Nine-Eight' did not resonate with Jeroo. She was looking for a teaser, a catch line that would excite the children. A number that would ring a bell in their minds and be easy for them to memorize.

As usual the solution came from the children, one of the children saw what all grown-ups had failed to see. And then it seemed so obvious!

"Dus-Nau-Aath!" "Didi, it's an easy number to remember," they said.

There it was. We decided to publicize the number as dus-nau-aath (ten-nine-eight) instead of calling it one-zero-nine-eight. The numbers were in descending order and easy to remember.

The Journey from 1 to 73!



- **A humble beginning in 1996, has now become a national Child protection service.**
- **A project initiated in Mumbai is now operating in 22 states & 73 cities across India.**
- **CHILDLINE has responded to almost 1 crore calls since its inception (June 1996-June 2006).**
- **We aim to reach 10 million children annually**

The critical question

How many children are a part of our target audience?

How many children do we effectively touch each year?

The scale of the problem is staggering - almost 200 million children need help. Ideally we should be targetting to reach 10 million children a year- that would represent a do-able goal and also end up ensuring a wide and positive impact on India's children. Needless to say, children who grow up with the security of knowing that help is a call away might grow to be more productive members of society.