

NGO and Talian Nur join forces to tackle child abuse

By pekwan

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Dedicated helpline for reporting such cases

[Pauline Almeida](#) [1]

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HEALING TOUCH: Wong, the force behind assistance and counselling for abused youth

KUALA LUMPUR: In view of the recent reports on child abuse cases, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) is teaming up with Talian Nur — the government helpline for the distressed— to further improve its effectiveness in addressing such cases.

Malaysian Children TV Programme Foundation, an NGO set up six years ago to work out programmes for children together with other NGOs, wants to form the Childline Malaysia (CLM) as a dedicated helpline for children. It will take advantage of the existing infrastructure within Talian Nur — which can be reached at 15999 — through landlines and mobile phones.

"After first level counseling, through this helpline, the client will be linked to a network which can comprise anybody, like individuals, childcare centres or welfare homes. By doing so, we aim to maintain international standards and comply with principles and values of child helpline international," said Childline Malaysia project director P.H. Wong at a five-day Workshop on Peer Exchange Training Programme in Kuala Lumpur, which began on Monday. The workshop's objective is to train counselors and partner-link organisations or call operators, needed to facilitate CLM. In explaining the need for a comprehensive helpline for children, Wong stressed the current system works within the framework of the Social Welfare Department.

"Cases are escalated to just the welfare department. But, with CLM, we want to be the NGO working with the government to put in place an integrated child protection system," she explained. While she acknowledged that such a facility will not solve every child abuse problem, she nonetheless appealed for government support to make Talian Nur a toll-free line accessible via all modes of phones, including public phones. Currently, calls to Talian Nur are charged. Introduced in 2007, Talian Nur was extended last year to assist abused maids.

Schools targeted to popularise helpline

KUALA LUMPUR: Several nations have chosen schools as the critical awareness link to make abuse report hotlines, like Talian Nur, known to its target groups — the children and their parents. *The Malay Mail* spoke to several international representatives to find out how the programme works in their countries.



Plan International Indonesia representative, Jipy Priscilia Nugroho:

"Our 129 Helpline call centres were established in 2006 and run by the government and supported by non-governmental organisations to cater to more than 40 per cent of children aged 18 and below in Indonesia. We make this service known to children of all ages; particularly in schools and at education fairs. For the 129 Helpline, we have 10 call centres in cities. Even parents can call in regarding children's problems and reach trained counsellors. Calls from landlines, including public phones, are toll-free, meaning a call is free if made within the Jakarta zone. A child will then be referred to the respective government-run welfare centres, depending on their need for intervention. We get more than 1,000 calls a year reporting abuses like school bullies, rape, sexual abuse, trafficking and kidnapping through the helpline."



Childline Thailand Foundation executive director, Ilya Smirnov:

"Also known as Sai dek, which means Thailand Childline in Thai, we have been in service for six years and have a four-digit number – 1387. The number are toll-free and can be called from landlines, including public phones and from two mobile operators. Those up to 18 years of age can call in regarding problems with families, schools, scholarships and if they're victims of physical violence. We highlight the service through our outreach programme in schools and have covered more than 30 schools, both primary and secondary over the years. We rarely advertise the helpline on TV. Of the 100,000 calls we get yearly, an estimated 300-500 have proven to be genuine abuse cases requiring prompt intervention."



Child Helpline of Switzerland managing director, Urs Kiener:

"Our service can be reached at 147 - which are numbers appearing straight down in the mobiles, to make it easy for children to remember. Our 24-hour service has been in operation since 1999, as our country has ratified the United Nation's Convention of Rights of a Child, and is widely known in the country. We have three helplines – in German, French and Italian. Although it is meant for children below 18, we also attend to older callers. We have about 100 counsellors and 80 per cent of them are psychologists with years of practice with an institution, while the rest are social workers. Some 42 European countries will be launching a common child helpline at 116111 on May 17. This is in addition to the existing numbers each European country already offers for its community. So every European child would know this number to call for help."