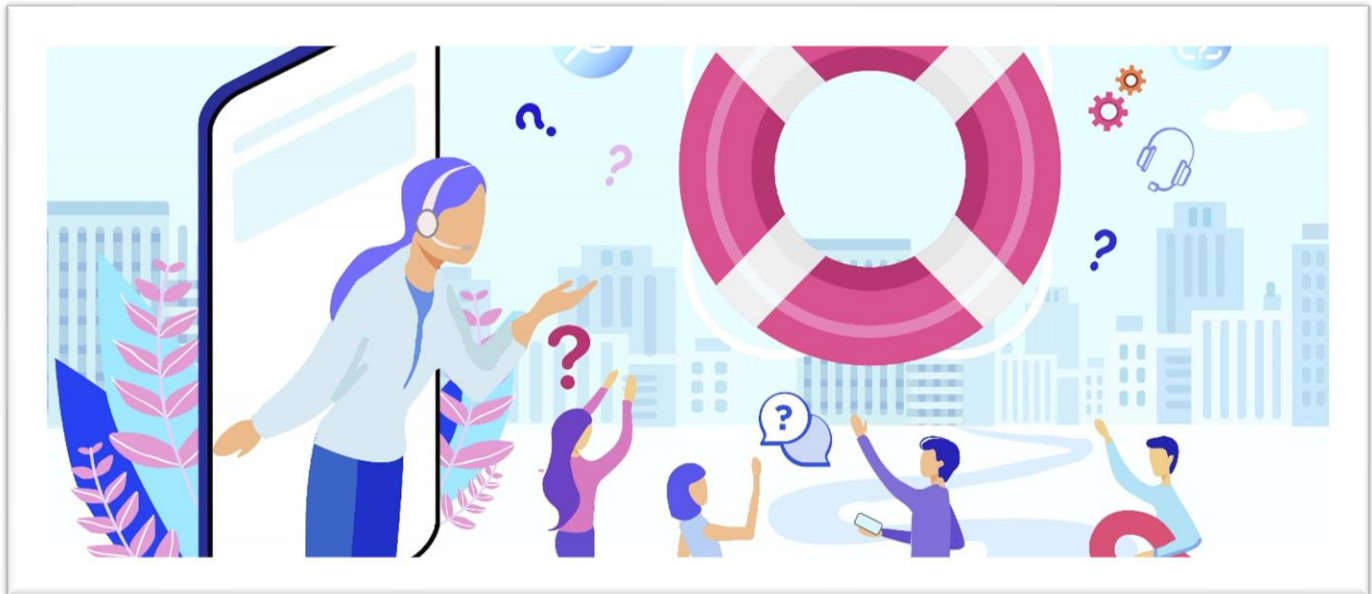


HEARING THE HELPERS

2023 CHILDHHELP PACTECH FOCUS GROUPS



Introduction



Supporting the mental health of our crisis counselors and helping professionals is a big priority. These helpers are necessary to answer the distressed calls, texts, and chats of our youth, parents, and community members.

In 2018, Childhelp partnered with Arizona State University's Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center (SIRC) for the Childhelp Prevent Abuse of Children Text and Chat Hotline (PACTECH) Project.

The PACTECH intervention offers text and chat services for help-seekers looking for information, support, and resources related

to child abuse. The objective of PACTECH is determining best practices and protocols for the use of text and chat in the crisis helpline environment. This project is supported by Grant No. 90CA1855 from the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

Exclusively, this brief reports on the 2023 PACTECH counselor/supervisor focus groups, a continuation of focus groups that began in 2019. The first focus group was held in the summer of 2019 and this last group was conducted in March 2023. Each focus group brief provides feedback on professional quality of life (Stamm, 2010) and gives examples of authentic experiences

of Childhelp hotline counselors and supervisors as technological improvements were made to the hotline. The prior focus group topical briefs are accessible at the Childhelp website:

<https://childhelphotline.org/research/>

2023 Focus Groups



The goal of the 2023 PACTECH focus groups was to hear from Childhelp counselors and supervisors how hotline changes, notably new Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) standards and the newly implemented PACTECH Practice Model, have impacted their professional quality of life.

SIRC team members conducted a 90-minute Zoom focus group with 7 Childhelp counselors on March 21, 2023, and a 90-minute Zoom focus group with 5 Childhelp supervisors on March 23, 2023. Focus group participants were either Childhelp hotline counselors or supervisors. Analysis of the 2023 focus group discussions brought forth three prominent themes discussed in both focus groups: **(1) Impact, (2) Challenges, and (3) Training and Development.**

Impact

The counselors and supervisors uniformly agreed about what they found most rewarding in their position; the ability to

make a positive difference in someone's life by effectively helping them manage a crisis. The opportunity and challenge to reframe adverse circumstances with *no judgment* was mentioned repeatedly as a skill used consistently to help them connect with those help-seekers looking to explore solutions and problem solve. The quality of *no judgment* is a requirement due to the need for honesty and transparency when realistically considering the help-seeker's safety and needs.

"I think it's the idea of someone calling, not knowing what to do next, and you being able to sit and kind of like, explore the options with them, and you know, help them come to those next steps. So, they go away with something to move forward with, and you make an impact."

Childhelp Counselor

The introduction of text and chat has opened a new way to impact help-seekers, particularly youth seeking help. Counselors and supervisors expressed how digital conversations are easier to guide and navigate for youth, especially when they need to provide resources or next steps. It was also emphasized by all that youth prefer text and chat to communicate and this has

increased the number of young adults looking for support. The services of offering text and chat assistance makes crisis resources far more accessible which increases the amount of people aided.

Challenges

Childhelp recently implemented a technology software change to help streamline the many different technology platforms used to facilitate a conversation with a help-seeker. Discussion on this change was unanimous in that the crossover has brought challenges for counselors and supervisors. Many agreed this may have been expected with the implementation of new technology in a fast-paced environment.

"The technology has definitely kept us on our toes. But I think with the new additions of like, adding in the features, so we can practice, like searching for resources, is really going to help build that confidence that some people are still working on. And so, things I think will keep improving, and we'll be able to see all the benefits of this changeover."

Childhelp Counselor

While the transition has been stressful, many understand that the merging of tools will be innovative and will serve everyone better once the kinks are worked out. It is important to note the differences between counselors, supervisors, and those who work part-time compared to those who work full-time. Counselors did not want to burden their supervisor with questions and were spending valuable time trying to figure out technological issues. Supervisors were also struggling to know the changes so they can help their counselors.

"And there's been a lot of difficulties for people to work out. And sometimes, you know, as supervisors, we don't always have the answer because it's not available. It's a new system that's being created. So, it might not be until two or three days later that we have an actual answer or like a workaround. So, it was really tricky and working from home."

Childhelp Counselor

Childhelp has also added a new Quality Coordinator role to monitor high quality standards. The counselors were less familiar with this new position and how the new coordinator could be a resource for them. There was also a difference in familiarity based on whether the participant was

full-time versus part-time. The supervisors on the other hand appreciated the addition of the quality coordinator and having an extra pair of eyes to be able to identify when a counselor is having issues. Thus, the supervisors felt that the CQI coordinator can help raise awareness and be a positive influence on counselor performance.

As remote work status was discussed, the counselors and supervisors were grateful for the ability to do their job remotely. Although communication is not as streamlined as before, when everyone was in person, most of the participants enjoyed the ability to work from home, especially as many of them have more than one job. One issue discussed concerning remote work was that counselors and supervisors used their own personal laptops for work which can be difficult for them to shut work off.

agreed that the training was well-received, however retaining all of the elements of the model and being able to apply them remains a challenge.

“The training itself is fantastic, but actually applying it, I think, definitely involves some practice, some rewatches definitely, you know, reminders from, from supervisors. And, you know, kind of like we do the, you know, the year or the annual HIPAA thing, maybe even doing like a rewatch every 90 days or something along those lines.”

Childhelp Counselor

Training and Development

Numerous participants voiced positive aspects about the Childhelp training, specifically training on the PACTECH Practice Model. Both supervisors and counselors

“I so appreciated all the little training nuggets along the way. But you know, you have to have that regular training, because it's just too much to digest.”

Childhelp Counselor

Thus, refreshers, more practice, and role-play were encouraged by participants. Many expressed wanting a binder with all the trainings that they can easily access and look through.

Further, counselors and supervisors brought up the fact that previously, trainings used old transcripts or de-identified transcripts to show how responses can vary and it would be helpful to go back to this type of training especially for text and chat.

In addition, the PACTECH Practice Model has been a good guide for certain types of text and chat conversations. Many of the counselors and supervisors agreed that it

helps cover all bases when assisting a help-seeker. However, participants expressed needing another model for the help-seekers who are repeats or outliers, as no model can be a solid fit for all needs.

"That's exactly why I was emphasizing the crisis part of the hotline and how the PACTECH model is so effective with that specific part. But yes, there are very much other aspects of the hotline that I think it becomes essentially useless. You know, for some help seekers."

Childhelp Counselor

Counselors and supervisors agreed that for effective communication, there should be transparency and a two-way road of relevant information to be successful and consistent. Often counselors feel that supervisors are just repeating things that they're told rather than providing clear reasons for new policies or decisions.

Conclusion

The words and stories of the Childhelp counselors and supervisors are rooted in valuable experiences and expertise. They have a pulse on the nation's needs related to child abuse and the struggles of families and individuals. These are important insights

as more hotlines and agencies start increasing access and support, including new digital technology like text and chat.

"I'm just excited to see where all this practice that leads us into validating it into as a unit just really helping this whole industry grow. And with the schools and with counseling and seeing how we can help better, better help families."

Childhelp Counselor

Each PACTECH focus group brief provides feedback on the counselor and supervisor's professional quality of life and examples of authentic experiences of Childhelp hotline counselors and supervisors as technological improvements were made to the hotline. These focus groups are used to inform Childhelp practices and can be used to help other hotlines build and grow in these technological and innovative areas.

References

Stamm, B. H. (2010). *The concise ProQOL manual*. https://nbpsa.org/images/PRP/ProQOL_Concise_2ndEd_12-2010.pdf

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