

Proposal for Heartline Hong Kong

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1. The Problem and Target Beneficiaries

Mental health issues are prevalent among university students in Hong Kong. This has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent social unrest. However, this growing need fails to be addressed by current public and private healthcare services due to its lack of emphasis on young adults and expensive costs. There exists a gap in the current mental health service in Hong Kong - targeted support for adolescents and young adults.

2. Overview: Proposed Solution

My proposed solution is a reference to Nightline UK, a **confidential, anonymous, non-judgmental, non-directive and non-advisory support** service run by university students for students. I hope to adopt a similar model in Hong Kong to offer some mental support for teens nowadays through the provision of a listening service. By offering a peer-to-peer service, **listeners, who share a similar background, can better understand the problems faced by the caller and offer early-stage support**. Since December 2020, a few committee members working at Nightline UK has been supporting my initiative.

3. Unique Value Proposition and Innovativeness

3.1 Peer-to-peer nature of the listening service

Recruited volunteers would be university students. They are familiar with university culture, academic pressure and share a sense of belonging to the community, therefore enhancing their sense of empathy and understanding. They are well-situated to listen to callers' mental health concerns, just as medical doctors based at university campuses are well situated to deal with student's mental health issues (Lo *et al.*, 2020). What's more, a similar model - Nightline has been successfully implemented in the United Kingdom. Nightline is a student-led organisation offering through-the-night confidential and anonymous support service. There are currently 36 Nightline associations in the UK supported by over 2,100 student volunteers, offering listening services to 1.5 million students. Their success provides evidence for the feasibility and efficacy of our peer-to-peer listening service.

3.2 Emphasis on **anonymity** and hence the non-stigmatising nature of our service

According to Lo *et al.* (2019), one of the three main barriers to mental health service utilisation by young adults in Hong Kong is attitudinal barriers including stigmas, fears and/or embarrassment related to the identity of being a mental patient (in view of the negative perception towards mental illnesses in Hong Kong). Existing helplines targeted at adolescents and young adults require personally identifiable information from callers. This would constitute an attitudinal barrier and discourage them from using such services due to concerns of data security. Indeed, one of the organisations suffered from a data breach in September 2020, eroding public

confidence in the service. Therefore, one of our main emphases would be to ensure the anonymity of callers to protect them from the stigmas and fears related to mental illnesses. No personal information will be collected when callers seek help from our hotline or telegram account.

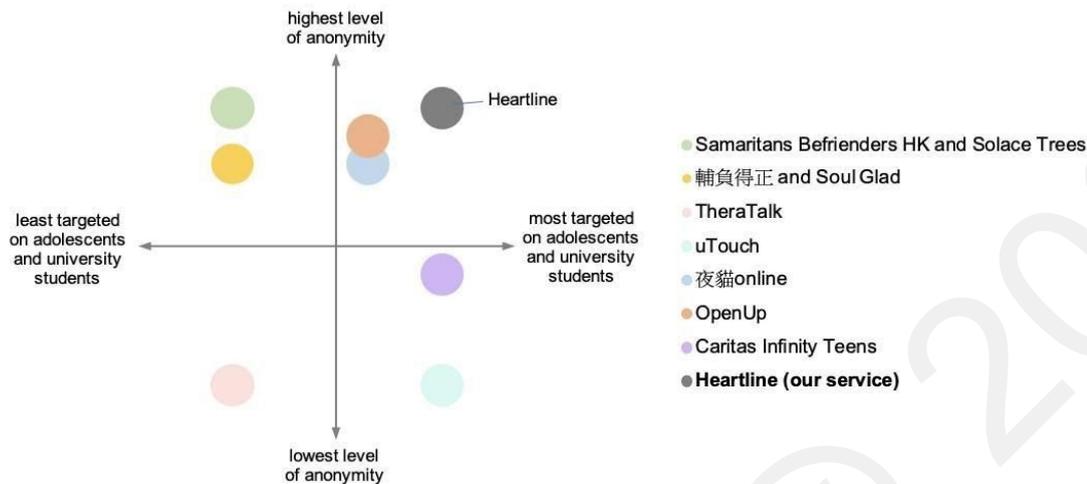


Fig. 3.1 Comparison of different helplines in terms of the level of anonymity (measured by the no. of personal information required) and targeting adolescents and university students

4. Implementation plan

The service will operate from **7pm to 7am every night**, through **anonymous hotlines and messaging channels**. I will recruit volunteers from local universities, devise training materials with what we have learnt in psychology class, and deliver the training, which will be reviewed, approved and supervised by trusted professionals.

4.1 Operations

The model is a replication of Nightline UK. I, along with other committee members and the support of professionals, aim to train 2 batches of volunteers, composed of 30 university students, per year. Training materials will be drafted by the founding members of the administrative committee, which will be reviewed and approved by the advisory board. After the volunteers undergo a certain amount of training, our listening service will begin operation.

A hotline will be set up, and a telegram number to receive text messages. There will be a signup system for volunteers, with the expectation of volunteering once per month until they graduate. There will be 3 volunteers per shift, subject to public reception after actual implementation.

An office will be rented for training, as a call centre and for volunteers on duty to rest when needed. I seek to look for grade B offices.

4.2 Timeline

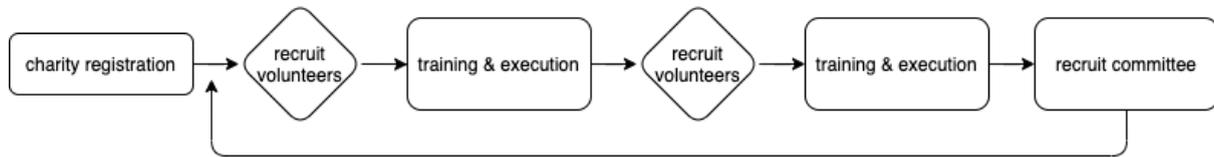


Fig. 4.1 Overview of the timeline

Jan 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seek advice from professionals <p><i><u>Progress Update: Different organizations and professionals from HKU and CUHK have indicated their willingness to support our programme. Organizations: Coolminds HK, Mindset HK, Treehole HK Professors: 8 professors specialized in the fields of social work, psychiatry and clinical psychology</u></i></p>
Mar 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Update our social media pages (IG, Facebook, LinkedIn) that share self-help tips regularly (<p><i><u>Progress Update: @heartlinehk has 800 followers as of now</u></i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Register as a charity
April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design training materials - Seek supporting organisations to advise and review the training materials (e.g. universities, MindHK etc.) - Invite professional practitioners in joining the advisory board - Recruit campus ambassadors from local universities
Jun 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design website - Launch the fundraising campaign - Draft contract for volunteers - Finalise training materials with the advisory board
Jul 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First drive of volunteer recruitment - Draft legal documents to protect volunteers and the organisation
Aug 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train the first batch of volunteers, with the support of professionals
Nov 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up the office and launch of the service officially - Second round of volunteer recruitment
Dec 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train the second batch of volunteers, with the support of professionals
Feb 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing daily listening service, and training every 6 months

5. Expected Impact

5.1 General Aims:

Training university students into listeners: This project will bring good, active listeners into the community, so they can help their friends in need in their daily lives.

Promoting mental health awareness at the university level: Campus ambassadors are involved in spreading positivity and delivering relevant information. Teens tend to take in wellness advice given by their peers instead of grown-ups.

Alleviating the social stigma: We provide support to people suffering from mental health problems at a preliminary stage. We promote the message that everyone should get support as early as possible, to prevent problems from worsening.

5.2 Expected Beneficiaries:

On average, each volunteer takes in 3 callers per shift. Assuming 10 callers per night in our first year of operation, we serve 3,650 callers in the first year. This is expected to increase as the number of volunteers increase and our service reaches a wider audience.

6. Why Me

I am a third-year psychology student at CUHK. I have been a core member of Treehole @ CUHK uBuddies for more than 2 years. Through the experience, I noticed that many students have been suffering from varying degrees of mental health problems. I am hoping to help them with my academic knowledge, and my wide network of connections.

As mentioned, a few committee members at Nightline UK have already agreed to support my project. I am currently leading a team of 20, with most members from CUHK who are currently pursuing various specialisms, spanning Psychology, Law, Computer Science, Business and Medicine, to actualise this project.

7. Frequently Asked Questions

I have pitched my idea to various stakeholders in society. I have listed their common concerns and my respective responses below.

7.1 Are youngsters qualified to offer the listening service?

Heartline HK only recruits young people who are aged 18 or above, with ongoing training, provided by the administrative committee with the support of professionals, to improve and assess their capabilities to offer the service. Our model is referenced from Nightline UK, a very successful student-run organisation that allows students to develop their own training materials and offer listening service themselves. We believe this model can be replicated in Hong Kong.

There is a difference between listening and advisory service. While persons offering the latter require a professional licence, i.e. a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology, none is required for the former. Most listening services in Hong Kong recruit volunteers from different backgrounds, regardless of their possession of professional qualification.

7.2 How to secure enough volunteers and clinical professionals to help?

Many local universities require their counselling and psychology major students to take part in internship experiences as a graduation requirement of their studies. Heartline HK plans to collaborate with the departments in different universities and plan to become community partners. Volunteers are expected to work for at least a year and will obtain credits from their institutions.

I also plan to reach potential volunteers via different campus ambassadors. Many of my friends are popular student KOLs with over 8K followers on IG, Facebook and YouTube channels. Their followers are mainly secondary school and university students, which is our target group.

As for professionals at the advisory board, we understand that it would be time-costly for them to draft the guidelines and training materials for volunteers. Hence, practitioners are predominantly involved in reviewing and approving the important documents aforementioned only. Training and other administrative work will be conducted by the administrative committee.

7.3 What if a caller is in frequent need? Does the caller have to repeat his or her problems to different volunteers on duty?

A regular caller list will be devised. If a particular caller uses our service frequently (i.e. once a week), their concerns and problems will be put in a data logbook to provide a reference for subsequent volunteers. Volunteers are expected to indicate whether a call requires extra concern, especially when abusive calls, silent calls are received.