



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

## Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

June 14, 2023

**Priority: HIGH**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **New 24-Hour Suicide Prevention Hotline now available to ALL persons in need of emotional support**

Port of Spain--- A new 24-Hour Suicide Prevention Hotline is now available from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. This Hotline which is free of charge, is intended to efficiently provide support to persons with crisis issues related to suicidal ideations, abuse, anxiety and as well as help to those in need of emotional support. This new service was formally launched, under the auspices of Senator the Honourable Donna Cox, earlier today, June 14, 2023 at the Maraval Community Centre.

This 24-Hour Hotline is confidential and will serve as a counselling and intervention facility, supported by follow-up interventions to promote healthy, functional individuals and families. This service will also comprise of a Live Web Chat facility which is a real-time web based communication, that allows persons to contact the helpline line via online messaging support.

Senator the Honourable Donna Cox, Minister of Social Development and Family Services, launched her feature address stating that the Ministry recognises suicide as a global public health concern, which requires urgent and immediate attention. According to the Minister, “Coupled with the mental strain experienced by several families, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry recognises the critical need to support those struggling with suicidal thoughts or those bereaved by suicide-related circumstances.” Emphasizing the need for the Suicide Prevention Hotline, she noted that there is a gap in the social response mechanism to effectively deal with the issue of suicide and crisis issues.

According to Minister Cox, “The Ministry anticipates that 800- COPE would save lives and allow access to counselling services online and on the phone to a larger number of persons. This initiative would facilitate data collection and data quality regarding the number of persons that attempt suicide and those that experience suicidal ideation as well as family crisis issues. This would allow for social changes to be identified, through the monitoring and evaluation component of the helpline, which would inform policy development and other initiatives to assist with suicide prevention and family crisis issues.”

The Minister further stated that the Hotline serves as a lifeline that pulls individuals from the depths of their darkest moments, providing solace, understanding, and the opportunity for healing. “We at the Ministry believe that behind every saved life lies a story of redemption, resilience, and the triumph of

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the human spirit. It is a testament to the power of compassion and support, reminding us there is a way forward, even in despair. The evidence, both locally and internationally, suggests that digital interventions such as hotlines are increasingly being seen as one way in which effective treatments for self-harm and suicidal thoughts may be improved” said Minister Cox.

In closing, she reminded those present that there are other strategies that can be enforced to provide support. “If you think someone is at immediate risk of self-harm or hurting another person including-reaching out to a trusted friend, family member, or healthcare professional; removing any harmful items, or other things that may cause harm and listening without judging, arguing, threatening, or yelling” said Minister Cox.

As the Ministry offers this additional support to individuals and families, it intends to use a whole of Government approach in managing cases presented via this Hotline. The Ministry will be collaborating with several stakeholders, through its referrals system. Among these include the Family Court, the Children’s Authority, Trinidad and Tobago Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago.

Persons will be able to access the Hotline by calling 800 – COPE (2673). As much as possible, persons are encouraged to call our trained, Active Listeners who will be ready to listen, support and provide necessary assistance. Persons may call 800-COPE or access online service via the Ministry’s website at [www.social.gov.tt](http://www.social.gov.tt).

Also in attendance were Permanent Secretary at the Ministry, Lenor Baptiste-Simmons; Deputy Permanent Secretaries- Ryan Ramcharan and Wendy Guy-Hernandez; Assistant Director of the National Family Services Division- Kathleen Sarkar; and various non-governmental organizations.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services remains committed to promoting healthy, functioning families through the provision of preventive, developmental and remedial programmes and services.

Contacts for Agencies providing similar support are as follows:

- ChildLine – contact: 800-4321
- Lifeline - 645-2800, [life@lifelinett.com](mailto:life@lifelinett.com)
- Children’s Authority – 800 – 2014 or 996 - 2014
- Families in Action – contact: 628-6333
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800- 7283 (SAVE) Available: 24 hours
- Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad
- o North Office: 627- 7273
- o South Office- 657-5355

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**For more information:**

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**Minister Cox delivers remarks during the launch of the Suicide Prevention Hotline**



**(l-r) Lenor Baptiste-Simmons, Permanent Secretary at the MSDFS; Senator Dr Varma Deyalsingh; Minister Cox; Kathleen Sarkar, Assistant Director of the National Family Services Division at the Ministry and Aisha Corbie, Manager, Victim and Witness Support Unit**





**Permanent Secretary Lenor Baptiste-Simmons at the MSDFS and Minister Cox tour information booths present at the launch of the Suicide Prevention Hotline**