

STAMMA

HELPLINE WEBCHAT & INFORMATION SERVICES

2020 END OF YEAR REPORT

Helpline & webchat open weekdays 10am-12pm, 6pm-8pm



HELPLINE

Call **free** on 0808 802 0002



WEBCHAT

BEGIN →



EMAIL

Email us at help@stamma.org

I have 50 years experience working both as a Registered Social Worker and a Counsellor . From a professional perspective I have been very impressed with the level of support offered to volunteers in terms of training, supervision, team meetings, communication and up to date information. I have also been impressed by the willingness of the paid staff to listen to volunteers (and of course to the membership). It is a very safe volunteering environment . As an "older" person I am naturally engaged in life review & am aware of the influence that stammering has had on my life choices ; the "paths I didn't take" because of fear or embarrassment. It has been a privilege to be part of the helpline team and to feel that listening to callers and encouraging them to look at options and giving information has helped me to feel that my experience of stammering might be of use to younger people and parents

Ann Thompson
Helpline Volunteer

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Kirsten Howells, Programme Lead, 'Is it my fault my child stammers?'

ABOUT OUR SERVICES

In 2019 we overhauled our helpline service, moving the helpline across to a virtual platform, expanding opening hours, and brought in structured support and training for volunteers. The service is now headed up by our Programme Lead, Kirsten Howells, a qualified Speech & Language Therapist with a specialism in stammering. Kirsten is supported by our Helpline Manager, Lee Millam, who has a background in supporting helpline staff from his work at GamCare and by Beth Wright who provides admin support. All three work part time.

The staff coordinate a team of 50+ volunteers who work on the helpline, the webchat service, and on projects related to the helpline work streams - leaflets, downloads, a project around work, supporting older people, supporting parents, supporting younger people and so forth.

One To One

Our helpline **service is free** for anyone who stammers in the UK, or those around them, be they parents, teachers, employers, colleagues or HR professionals. We provide confidential, anonymous support, information, advice and signposting. In May 2020 the helpline service was expanded to include webchat, so we now provide a helpline, webchat or email service every weekday.



The service is staffed by volunteers who stammer themselves, who are parents of someone who stammers, or who are a speech and language therapist (or training to be so). Calls and chats take place via a virtual call centre platform, which means that calls can be taken by someone working from home, and who is supported online by our staff. Access to the supplier of our online virtual call centre is provided through the Helpline Partnership. Over the next 18 months we will be applying for Accreditation for our services so that those using it can be assured of high quality, reliable support and information.

ADVOCACY & PROJECT WORK

Advocacy

Some who contact us may have complex issues, and where we can and when it is appropriate Kirsten will lead the team on trying to find solutions for the individual. This might be talking to an employer or a teacher, consulting with a Speech and Language Therapist or reaching out for specialist advice. This work tends to expand to fill all free time, so we are looking at ways to formalise such support and find ways of underpinning it, so we have specialist advisors in place.

Covid Outreach Service

When the pandemic broke we were concerned that some of our older members may have felt isolated under lockdown, especially members who wanted to be kept in contact by post only. Most, if not all of these members, had been on our mailing list for some years and are now in their 70s, 80s and older. We wrote to all those on the postal contact list, sending return envelopes, asking members if they'd like to be contacted for a chat. We also emailed online members offering the same service. We then set up rotas, and worked with volunteers, to call members at pre-arranged dates and times for 20 minute chat sessions

Workshops

By International Stammering Awareness Day 2020 we were clear about some of the needs that parents of children who stammer have, and were keen to talk to Speech & Language Therapists about approaches around stammering, about how the words used can impact upon those who stammer. So Kirsten and the team set up a series of free workshops on 22nd October, which were attended by [35] parents and [60-70] speech and language therapists.

TAKING CALLS

"I absolutely love answering the calls" Clare R, Feb 2021

By the end of 2020 we had 50 plus helpline advisors trained up and fully supported, taking our helpline and webchat calls. They also support the staff on a variety of other projects. The selection and training process of volunteers is thorough and delivered in modules, via conference calls and phone. The modules include:

- Active listening skills and chat structure, including chat ending, difficult chats.
- A deep delve into the causes of stammering and the kinds of support out there.
- Using the technology to record data and communicate with advisers and supervisors.
- Assessed paired practice session.
- Safeguarding issues.

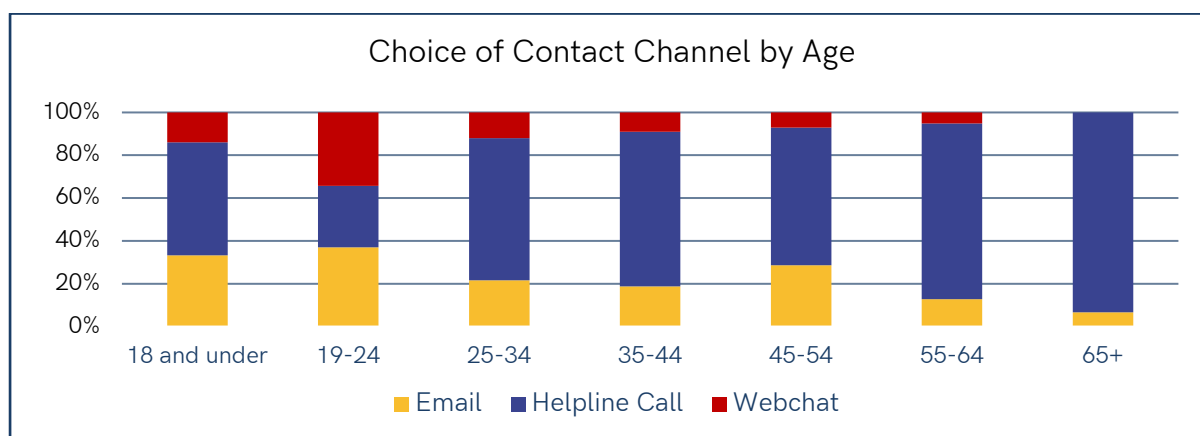
Given the sheer number of volunteers, the need to keep careful records, we recruited an extra pair of hands in 2020, Beth Wright, and keep on top of the administration and the helpline rota.

Volunteer Numbers & Hours

	2020											
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
No of Vols	16	16	20	17	24	24	28	38	48	40	44	38
No of Hours	78	73	88	88	160	176	184	168	212	206	206	135

Our front line volunteers are well placed to see how and where we can improve our services, for example, callers blocking at the beginning of a helpline call. Once pointed out, the team shared suggestions on how to reassure callers with a comment on the 'Talk to Us' website page to let callers we understand what's happening. The helpline team also hear about the everyday frustrations of people who stammer, such as the caller who struggled with blocking when facing a doorway intercom, and came up with practical suggestions for the website.

Through our services we offer conversation and discussion, to explore the person's concerns or to provide a supportive conversational environment. Our volunteers are able to identify with many of the issues highlighted - they know what it is to stammer, or to be the parent of a child who stammers, or to work with people who stammer. Along with their training, the volunteers bring personal experience to these conversations and offer emotional support alongside signposting to reliable information, resources and contacts.



Contact

A strike rate of 1 would mean that for every call attempt, the caller has got through. Our strike rate is 1.01, so if you need help, you are likely to get straight through as we have capacity across all our services. Average length of a helpline call is 12 minutes. On webchat, we see around 9 exchanges per user per session, they can range from 2 up to 27. We try and respond to emails within three working days, inevitably they are complex and take longer to respond to.

Service	2020											
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Calls	44	32	36	59	67	65	60	61	51	62	62	29
Emails	33	23	35	35	43	44	49	27	24	22	31	26
Webchats					14	23	21	21	20	28	28	14
Downloads	1,665	2,010	1,807	1,817	2,020	2,403	2,195	3,137	2,796	4,400	1,981	1,222

"I enjoyed speaking with you. You were so helpful and really admired your patience and good understanding of my situation."

"I'm impressed with the fab service".

*Just had the most supportive online chat with P*** from @stammer Thank you*

'Excellent video. Glad I came across it' How to Help a Child who Stammers.

' Thank you ever so much again for your advice and suggestions, they have been so helpful to me and I am very grateful.'

ABOUT OUR CALLERS

People are more likely to contact us on their *own* behalf via webchat and email, which isn't surprising, for many people who stammer, using the phone can be really tough. Those calling on behalf of someone else - especially their child - will ring the helpline. Most of those contacting us were female; of parents calling the helpline 68% were mothers.

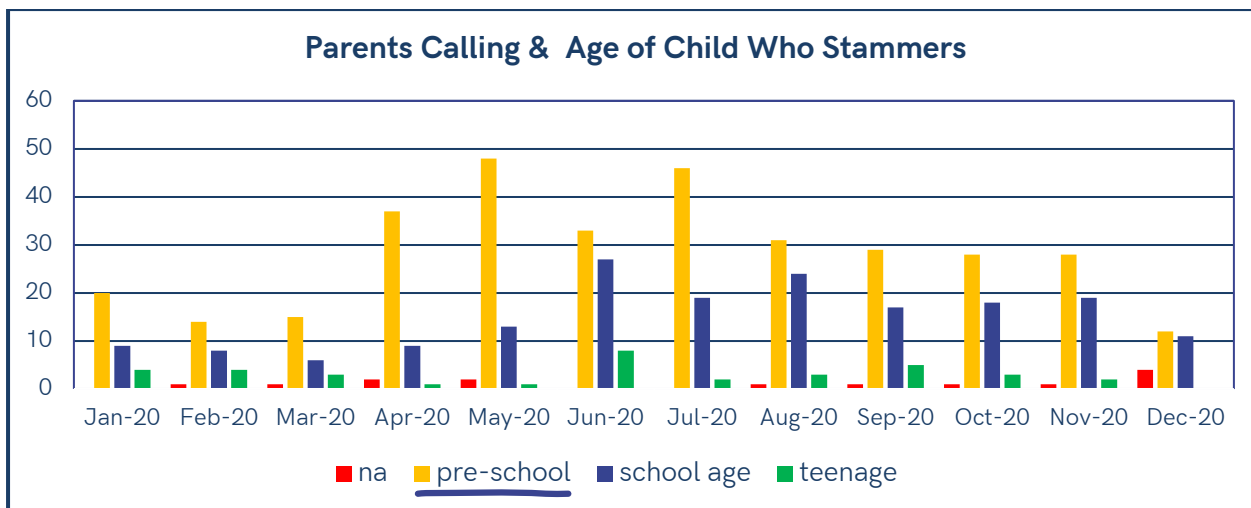
Gender	Female	Male	Other
Helpline	63%	37%	-
Webchat	59%	41%	5%
Email	53%	46%	1%

Users	Webchat	Helpline	Email
Have a stammer	50%	27%	46%
Parents of children who stammer	40%	62%	29%
Aged 18 or under	7%	6%	11%
Aged 19-24	33%	6%	20%
Aged 25-34	36%	41%	34%
Aged 35+	24%	48%	19%

Parents

62% of calls to the helpline are from parents. As stammering is often hereditary, many parents who contact us about their child will have experienced stammering themselves, and fear that their child will face the same lack of understanding that they endured. Our volunteers are able to highlight the wealth of positive approaches to stammering found on our website, which is new to many parents, and encouraging for them as well as their child.

Of the parents calling, most are worried about very young children, 341 of calls from parents were about pre-schoolers. The videos aimed at pre-school children provide tailored information and suggestions for parents. This was particularly important over the lockdowns, as speech and language therapists have been pulled across to support hospitals and Covid related support. This shortage of available help was matched in the spring by a spike in calls from worried parents. Of the parents using the service, last year 61% called about pre-schoolers, 32% about school kids, 5% about teenagers and 2% about adult children.



Helping parents become more confident in coping is a theme in many calls. The lack of therapy available when a child starts stammering can be particularly distressing, with calls from tearful parents struggling to access services. Our videos and the 'Parenting' resources on STAMMA's website are a key resource here.

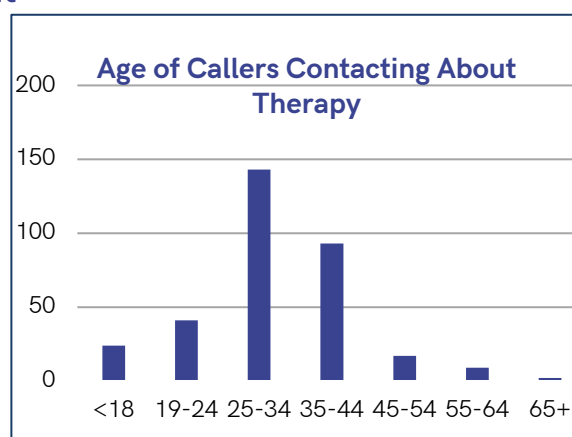
Our work includes dispelling a common myth that the stammering has been caused by the parents. How to respond to a child's stammer is a common theme. Our volunteers field a huge variety of questions here. A recent query was: 'Should I tell my child to take a deep breath?' It takes someone who is close to stammering, as are all our volunteers, to appreciate how that well-meant advice can take the fun out of talking for a child.

Help sought	Webchat	Helpline	Email
Therapy	51%	56%	45%
Emotional support	25%	28%	19%
Employment	12%	5%	6%
Education	4%	6%	3%
Legal enquiries	1%	1%	1%

Young People, Education & Employment

The academic year saw a pick-up in young callers approaching university. We took 74 direct queries or requests for support related to employment. These normally come in via webchat.

Younger callers, under 25 were calling looking for information about therapy, 19% emotional support, 10% contacting about employment issues and 6% wanting support around education and stammering. Looking for therapeutic support peaks in the 25 to 35 age group.



First Time v Repeat Callers

Over 80% of calls are from those calling or using the service for the first-time. A second or third call is typically for a follow-up discussion, or to give feedback on how an issue evolves. People may call back months or years later with a different issue or just to say "Thankyou." On rare occasions, an individual may become dependent on calling the service, in which case which will steer the situation to a resolution. We've developed our practices so volunteers can support the psychological welfare of the caller while ensuring that our service is available for other users.

Advocacy

Where we can we take up case work to support those contacting us resolve particular issues. There are, at any given time, a handful of such cases. Here are some examples from 2020:-

- We worked with a student who started at university where the institution required some form of documentation around stammering for accessing reasonable adjustments for tutorials. We outlined to the university the student's contact with STAMMA, that stammering is covered by the Equality Act and set out how people who stammer may be disadvantaged by some methods of facilitating discussions and tutorials, and suggested ways of discussing reasonable adjustments with the student.
- We worked with a health professional whose communication skills in the workplace were being questioned by management. We liaised with the employer and the GO to facilitate reasonable adjustments at work and in accessing GP support.
- We worked with a person who was trying to discuss a case with a legal firm, but the lawyer repeatedly hung up on the caller believing it was a 'bad line', rather than recognising that the person stammers. The company did not provide an alternative method of contact. We followed-up with the law firm, discussing the issue for this particular individual and also related to access to their services more widely.

Webchat Feedback

Star Rating	Numbers feeding back
1 star	2
2 star	0
3 star	4
4 star	6
5 star	40

After every webchat the webchatter is asked to rate their experience. 35%, or 57 people, completed these questionnaires. Five completed the questionnaire but didn't use the rating section. We review all webchats and discuss with the volunteer concerned, if appropriate, any chats rated as 3 or less, and follow up comments and investigate any criticism.

Feedback Questions	No	Yes
Did you get the support or information you needed?	4%	96%
Did you feel you were listened to?	4%	96%
Did you feel more positive after the chat?	9%	91%

We also ask for feedback on the form presented to the web chatter following a thread. This has been invaluable in providing our volunteers with encouragement about the value of the work they do, and giving us insight into any technical issues raised by the webchatter eg *"Also... the end chat button is located in a very rubbish place! I went to hit it several times. Maybe you could have a "send" button above it instead."*

STAMMERING



IN THIS SECTION

- What is Stammering?
- Life With a Stammer
- Stammering Causes & Cures
- Is Stammering a Disability?
- Variations & Complications
- Talking With Someone Who Stammers
- Research

INFORMATION

We launched our new website in June 2019. This falls broadly into three areas:- 1. information about stammering, causes, therapies and impact, along with downloadable resources 2. community information and news, about local groups and events 3. Your Voice articles. All three areas are fundamental to empowering and connecting people.

Downloads & Leaflets

There is an ongoing process of reviewing and updating the information on the website and our downloads and our leaflets. In 2019 we reviewed all of our information and printed literature, populated the new stamma.org website, and have gradually replaced and added to the information we physically send out. This includes a series of leaflets for parents of children, preschool, school age, young people, a leaflet for teachers and one for adults who stammer.

Leaflets posted	#
Pre-school	685
School-age	540
Young Adult	300
Adult	120
Teacher	330
Postcards	110

We post up to 10 leaflets free to anyone that asks, above that we ask for donations towards the cost of printing, giving them information about the costs of printing and postage. We also send out facemasks, I stammer cards, wristband, stickers and badges.



The greatest demand we have is for our downloads; this includes versions of our printed leaflets, plus additional information about bullying, Reasonable Adjustment at work or education, about the Equality Act, discrimination at work, education and service provision. We provide materials for therapists for their clients, and cards for people to use to let others know that they stammer. These resources are downloaded in their hundreds every month.

Finally, we have information about stammering and the causes, variations, prevalence, stammering and therapy, stammering and work, stammering in children, stammering and education, stammering and the law. These are for our members and for professionals out there, be they employers, HR professionals, teachers, lawyers.

Some of our website document downloads	#
Parents pre-school leaflet	6,083
School-age leaflet	5,246
Young people leaflet	2,414
Adults leaflet	2,338
Teachers leaflet	1,851
Palin Parent Child Interaction Therapy	3,284
Stammering Discrimination and the Law	2,208
Education reasonable adjustments	1,150

The pandemic brought a wash of parents calling in about their child starting to stammer. In response Kirsten launched a series of short videos for parents, about how to be with their child who stammers.

Online Views of Videos for Parents March - Dec 2020	#
Has your pre-school child started stammering?	985
Should I be worried?	1676
Is it my fault my child stammers?	561
How you can help Pt1	1024
How you can help Pt 2: talking to a child	898
Becoming more comfortable with your child stammering	341
One-to-one time with a child	361
How to talk about stammering	406

Your Voice Articles

Our 'Your Voice' articles are hugely popular, with 63,267 views of these and our articles last in 2020. There was a 28.4% increase in views from 13th June 2020 compared with the same period in 2019, when we launched the website, comparing like with like.

Top 6 articles from 2020	Views
My speech during the covid-19 pandemic	5156
Growing a beautiful new shell for all to see	646
My job interview at Disneyland	557
Not the King's Speech, my speech	434
Face masks and my I Stammer card	409
A Father's Advice	393

REFLECTIONS

The pattern of demand on the helpline has changed since the launch of the new website in 2019. We believe this is because we've made information easier to find, download and print. The new site coincided with a drop in emails and a corresponding increase in downloads, calls and now chats.

2020 was all about consolidating our helpline services and getting the people, the processes and reporting in place to take, and learn from, those contacting us. To understand the needs of those contacting us, track patterns, and discover who we aren't reaching, to plot how to reach them, and look at what we need to improve.

Because our helpline platform is virtual, and had been in operation since June 2019, we were practiced at working with and training volunteers remotely. So when the pandemic hit, we took it in our stride and were able to step-up volunteer recruitment to meet the greater demand from parents, and implement webchat in May 2020.

2021 AMBITIONS

On the administrative side, we've still some way to bed all the processes in place. We want to extend the training and support we give the volunteer team so that we can further improve the consistency and quality of the support the service provides. We want to promote webchat more broadly so that more people become aware of the service and improve the webchat experience. And finally we want to reassess the service opening hours of all the services.

Our calls and chats have highlighted needs that we want to fill this year. We want to develop a monthly clinic to support people who stammer facing employment and discrimination issues.

The pandemic has left many older people who stammer struggling with loneliness and with the technologies of Zoom. We are looking at how best to support older members and have been working with our community to develop ways of supporting members.

Our workshops in October with parents of children who stammer were well received, and we can see a clear and urgent need to support parents, and teenagers, who cannot access NHS support. So, we've more workshops in the pipeline.

We campaigned in 2020 for people to avoid negative language around stammering, this led to workshops in October for to look at how to present therapy. We will repeat this work in 2021.

Finally, we'd like to provide a 'window' into the world of speech and language therapy, so we are looking at a series of Zoom interviews with practitioners and those in the field.

THANK YOU

We are hugely thankful for support from our grant-makers. Without your grants we simply would not be able to have provided support for thousands of people who stammer, and to parents of children this year; we would not have been able to launch our new webchat service. The feedback shows the profound difference that this service can make to the lives of people who stammer. Thank you ❤️

APPENDIX

SOME OF OUR FEEDBACK

Webchat

"Helpful and informative chat. Very kind responder. "

"Really quick and helpful thank you. "

"Wasnt told anything i hadnt read on the website. "

"Wonderful service, thank you"

"Made me feel less worried"

"Thankyou for being here. "

Helpline

"I enjoyed speaking with you. You were so helpful and really admired your patience and good understanding of my situation. (adult who stammers)"

"Thank you very much. I feel much better after talking to you." (Parent of a 6-year old who stammers)"

"Thank you so much for the chat today. I feel much better informed after talking to you."

"Thank you - a real treasure trove of information which I will pass on to my employee." Employer of an employee who stammers.

"It's so good to know that, even if this is her forever, she could turn into a person as good as you." Parent

"I found it really useful speaking to you this morning."

"What a fantastic helpful and informative phone service and I feel reassured about our next step as a family to help our Granddaughter".

Website - Your Voice

"I have found your series so powerful over the last few months and look forward to each new article. Your work is very important."

"I love these stories about not letting our stammer hold us back, very inspiring. Well done 🙌"

"Really good read-thanks. My son is considering a career in the RAF, will show him your article- inspiring & encouraging 🙌"

"Can't believe the article has resonated as much as it has with the public. I've only you and your team to thank."