



# **The Nacoa Helpline**

## **Review of 2001-2020**

A report produced for Nacoa by  
Dr Anne-Marie Barron

October 2021



**The Queen's Award  
for Voluntary Service**

*The MBE for volunteer groups*

## *Acknowledgements*

Nacoa would like to thank all the many volunteers who have contributed to the success of the helpline, generously providing their time and energy to ensure that there was a friendly helpful voice for people to hear.

We would also like to thank in particular Frances and Peter Irwin for designing the database and collating and transcribing all the information provided during every helpline contact. We would like to thank Dr Katy Lobley and Cassandra Ohlson for providing previous evaluations of the helpline which have been invaluable in compiling this review. Thanks to Alan Leigh for additional analysis of the database.

With special thanks to Hilary Henriques for her leadership, encouragement, and generosity.

We also thank those who have provided their services free of charge to ensure that the helpline could exist, and without whose help the financial burden would be too great. In particular, Colt Telecoms, Modular Digital, and our various internet and web hosts.

## The Nacoa Helpline 2001-2020: A Review

### **Introduction**

The National Association for Children of Alcoholics (Nacoa) is a registered charity founded in 1990 by Hilary Henriques, Valerie McGee, Maya Parker, Diana Samways and David Stafford. Hilary has been the Chief Executive since the inception of Nacoa and continues in that role today. The charity was established to address the needs of children growing up in families where one or both parents are alcohol-dependent. This includes children of all ages, many of whose problems only become apparent in adulthood.

Nacoa has four broad aims:

- 1 To offer information, advice, and support to children of alcohol-dependent parents.
- 2 To reach professionals who work with them.
- 3 To raise their profile in the public consciousness.
- 4 To promote research into the problems they face and the prevention of alcoholism developing in this vulnerable group.

To achieve these aims, Nacoa has become a multi-faceted and proactive organisation. Nacoa operates a free national telephone, email, letter, and social media helpline. This provides a listening ear to children and young people to help them understand what is happening around them and empowering them to make informed and positive choices for themselves. The helpline is also available to concerned others, including family members and professionals. In addition Nacoa collects information regarding other voluntary and statutory agencies and, when appropriate, the helpline refers callers to additional sources of support.

In order to provide a confidential service to individuals who find it difficult to ask for help by phone or email, Nacoa has established a website which has been relaunched in 2013 and 2020. This has been extremely successful in reaching out to those who perhaps would not have engaged with the helpline service. The website also provides information and support to professionals and others concerned with children's welfare. In recent years it has established a presence on social media to supplement the methods by which it can reach people, and for them to learn about Nacoa.

Nacoa produces a range of publications, including leaflets and information packs, to support and inform callers, and maintains strong links with researchers working in the addiction field so that these materials remain accurate and up-to-date. It has co-ordinated numerous campaigns, such as the annual awareness campaign COA Week, to bring into the open the often hidden issue of children affected by their parents' alcohol problems. Nacoa is a lifeline for many children and others affected by their parents' drinking, and it continues to deliver the message that it is not their fault, and they are not alone.

## **About this report**

The objective of this report is to provide an overview of the activities of the Nacoa helpline service for the last twenty years. The helpline is at the very heart of Nacoa's activities, and there is no dispute that the helpline is beneficial to those who have used it. By the nature of our work we are unable to provide information on the outcomes of our help. However, it is necessary to periodically consider whether there is anything that can be done to develop and improve the helpline service. We need to consider how the development of other forms of communication, in particular the world wide web and social media, affects the operation and performance of the helpline. The helpline continues to evolve to deal with the changes in the way that people communicate. We will have to consider how to ensure that those who seek our help are provided with the most suitable methods to access it.

This report is structured in a way that provides narrative and statistics to reflect who is contacting the helpline, why they do so, and the support they receive as result of it. Information resulting from the contacts are recorded and then stored on a relational database that includes a vast amount of information. There has been a number of reports summarising this information for individual years, which includes references to preceding years and timescales. Now that the database has been in operation for twenty years, we believe that this is a good time to take a complete overview of this entire period. This should provide a clearer view of any changes that have occurred over time. We therefore provide statistics for the last twenty years in total, but also provide statistics for the four constituent five year periods, and finally the individual statistics for the last two years, ie 2019 and 2020 covered by this report.

## **Analysing the Helpline Database**

From the year 2001 the recording of the activities of the helpline has been based on the notes and report forms completed during and after the contacts (whether these be phone or email). The details from these have then been transcribed into a Microsoft Access database, and it is this data which forms the basis for this report. Other technical data to inform the overall total of contacts has been gathered from the telephone billing records, website traffic data, and other internet data analysis.

It is important to understand that the helpline reporting process is designed to help us understand who is contacting us, what their concerns are, and how we can help them. We do not elicit information from contacts on their name, location, and other personal details. On the call sheets we record only that information which is presented by them. It is not designed to generate research data on the issues relating to the children of alcohol-dependent parents (COAs). The contact reports contain only the information provided by those seeking our help, and we do not elicit information in order to compile profiles or complete questionnaires.

We can of course provide totals for each type of information collected (there are 80 fields in the main call information database, with many more in related sections dealing with specific issues, such as the relationship and history of the person with alcohol problems). The difficulty with these details is that the information for each contact is very fragmented, with some areas covered, for example, age, but not location. When it comes to the more complex issues, this is even more fragmented. There is also inevitably replication of data for those with whom we have multiple contacts.

To minimise the distortion of all these factors, we have designed an analysis that provides a realistic profile of those contacting us. We have been able to apply an algorithm to identify a representative sample for each year. We have identified approximately 300-500 people from each year's database, selected using the algorithm to minimise the impact of duplications of ongoing calls, and looking at those data entries that contain a suitable amount of information to analyse. We believe that this provides the most realistic view of who is contacting Nacoa and enables us to provide accurate percentages to understand the overall nature of the issues dealt with by the helpline. By sampling the data that is collected, we believe we now have a clear understanding of how the helpline has developed over the years, how it has helped people, and the issues that they face.

Please note: due to rounding up and down percentages, totals might not add up exactly to 100%. Also there are multiple-choice categories on some tables which means that totals will be well in excess of 100%.

## How many times has the helpline been contacted?

The number of times Nacoa has been contacted, directly or through the increasing impact of the internet, has increased substantially in the last decade. This is discussed in further detail later in this report.

The figures presented here are based on the information provided by the call sheets produced by helpline counsellors, the phone companies, plus other records. It includes phone calls, emails, and letters. However, there is a small proportion of contacts that are not logged in this way, and together with personal contacts and other indirect methods we can confidently state that the Nacoa helpline has been contacted directly over 370,000 times.

|                 | All Years<br>2001-<br>2020 | 5 Year Periods |                |               |                | Recent Years  |               |
|-----------------|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
|                 |                            | 2001-05        | 2006-10        | 2011-15       | 2016-20        | 2019          | 2020          |
| <b>Contacts</b> | <b>367,416</b>             | <b>41,059</b>  | <b>121,155</b> | <b>83,086</b> | <b>141,136</b> | <b>23,729</b> | <b>25,419</b> |

This does not take account of the number of people who now utilise the Nacoa website directly instead of contacting Nacoa as before. Reviewing the server reports, we believe that the Nacoa website traffic has been relatively steady throughout the last few years, with currently anywhere between 5,000 to 6,000 visits per month (figures for the last five years are provided in the section on social media). This equates to approximately over a million website visits for the past twenty years.

The figures we provide above use the same processes we have used in recent evaluation reports. However, we can now add some further metrics that are available to us to provide a more comprehensive view of the most recent five-year period. These are provided in detail in the section on social media, and cover online message boards, blogs, as well as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. With these we can identify a further 220,000 visits to Nacoa's web presence.

This means that we have 370,000 direct contacts with Nacoa, combined with the one million website visits, and now the additional 220,000 visits to other web-based media. Therefore, we can state with confidence that Nacoa helpline services have had over **one and a half million** contacts in the last 20 years.

## How do people find out about Nacoa?

There are a number of ways that people have found out about Nacoa. There is print and digital content created by Nacoa, referrals by other agencies and schools, and broadcast and print media. What is most clear from the figures below is how important the Nacoa website has become.

In the five year period leading up to 2015 just under 62% of those contacting us found out about Nacoa by searching and accessing its website. This is nearly five times higher than 13% it was in between the years 2001 to 2005. Since 2010 the overall figures suggest that most people now contact us through the use of the website. This is obviously mirroring trends in society, and this theme continues with the growing importance of social media.

| Source of contact       | 20 YEARS  | 5 Year Periods |           |           |           | Last 2 Years |      |
|-------------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|------|
|                         | 2001-2020 | 2001-2005      | 2006-2010 | 2011-2015 | 2016-2020 | 2019         | 2020 |
| Nacoa website           | 44%       | 13%            | 50%       | 62%       | 45%       | 43%          | 48%  |
| Support agencies/groups | 8%        | 13%            | 4%        | 10%       | 3%        | 7%           | 10%  |
| School                  | 3%        | 3%             | 2%        | 2%        | 5%        | 2%           | 10%  |
| Other People            | 4%        | 2%             | 4%        | 7%        | 2%        | 7%           | 5%   |
| Print/Broadcast Media   | 29%       | 42%            | 28%       | 12%       | 44%       | 38%          | 24%  |
| Social Media            | 2%        | 0%             | 0%        | 4%        | 1%        | 2%           | 5%   |
| Other                   | 11%       | 26%            | 12%       | 3%        | 0%        | 0%           | 0%   |

It must be noted that the table above records what the people contacting Nacoa through the more 'traditional methods' of telephone, email, and letter, tell us about how they have found out about Nacoa. It is notable that even in 2020, only 5% of people indicated that they first learnt about Nacoa through social media. However, this distorts the real number of people who learn about Nacoa in this way. There are obviously many people who use social media, find out about Nacoa, view the Nacoa website, and then do not contact Nacoa by the traditional methods. This is why the impact of social media appears relatively small in the table above.

While there are sophisticated ways to identify how links between different social media platforms connect, none of these would provide definitive answers to how people first hear about Nacoa. All we can do is record the relevant traffic data from the various social media platforms. We will of course continue to refine our approach to this, but must always be wary of not breaching Nacoa's commitment to maintain the anonymity of helpline callers.

## How do we communicate?

The largest number of contacts made to the helpline over the last 20 years consists of telephone calls with Nacoa volunteers, either live calls or answerphone messages. In addition, volunteers provide written responses to emails and other social media contacts, plus distribution of printed and digital content. What cannot be counted is the number of personal contacts that Nacoa volunteers, trustees, and other supporters have had with other people throughout the years, including many contributions to national and local print, broadcast, and social media.

The time taken to respond to each person can vary enormously, from hours on the phone or responding to emails, to just a few minutes to respond to brief enquiries.

| Type of contact        | 20 YEARS  | 5 Year Periods |           |           |           | Last 2 Years |      |
|------------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|------|
|                        | 2001-2020 | 2001-2005      | 2006-2010 | 2011-2015 | 2016-2020 | 2019         | 2020 |
| Live call              | 58%       | 41%            | 68%       | 63%       | 59%       | 39%          | 37%  |
| Answerphone            | 11%       | 29%            | 14%       | 9%        | 2%        | 2%           | 2%   |
| Email                  | 24%       | 3%             | 12%       | 25%       | 39%       | 59%          | 60%  |
| Fax                    | <1%       | <1%            | 0%        | 0%        | 0%        | 0%           | 0%   |
| Letter                 | 1%        | 2%             | <1%       | <1%       | <1%       | 1%           | <1%  |
| Promotional Activities | 7%        | 24%            | 5%        | 3%        | <1%       | 0%           | 0%   |

Looking at the statistics we can see that calls (live and answerphone) have fallen from 70% (2001 – 2005) to 61% in (2016 – 2020), while emails have risen from 3% (2001 – 2005) to 39% (2016 – 2020). In 2019 and 2020 phone calls accounted for 40% of contacts and emails 60%. The increasing popularity of emails has led to an impact on our resources, as it often takes longer to read emails and write a response than it does to answer a query by phone. However, it also has advantages in that emails do not have to be answered immediately and do not depend on having a volunteer answering the phone at a particular time.

A common pattern emerging is an initial phone call to the helpline, followed by an email exchange where further counselling and more detailed information is provided to the caller, including web links to Nacoa and other organisations and attachments of digital copies of Nacoa publications. Physical publications are sent out, but these are relatively small in number. As such the Nacoa website forms a valuable resource during the contact, and may contribute to a reduction in multiple phone calls from individuals. There is no reason to see this trend diminishing in the future.

## The Impact of Social Media

The growth of social media during the last decade has provided more opportunities for Nacoa to help COAs. The changing pattern of social interaction brought about by the internet and the prevalence of social media continues to have an impact on how Nacoa develops and operates the helpline.

We can say that whatever the specific entry point, the internet is now clearly the most important environment for people to find out about Nacoa. Within this complex environment, the Nacoa website is beyond doubt the single most important method for communicating information to people. It continues to provide resources for COAs, their families and friends, professionals and many others. In effect social media now acts as a major gateway to the website. As a result Nacoa has adapted its website to accommodate this, and it has been upgraded twice in the past decade. In addition to its website, Nacoa now has a presence on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and other platforms. Young people increasingly use these channels to contact Nacoa.

In the table below we reproduce the information supplied to us by the main providers hosting Nacoa internet outlets. As can be seen the numbers for the main social media sites have increased, and the overall picture for the last three years shows a sustained level of growth. We will be seeking to establish more differentiated data in order to identify the most appropriate ways of reaching those who could benefit from Nacoa resources. What is clear is that Nacoa's internet presence has generated 530,000 contacts over the last five years, and of this, the Nacoa website provides just over 311,000 contacts and other social media platforms provide 220,000 contacts. This adds significantly to previous figures that were based on the contact methods available for 2001-2015.

| <b>Nacoa helpline internet services</b> |                | <b>2016-2020</b> | <b>2016</b>   | <b>2017</b>    | <b>2018</b>    | <b>2019</b>    | <b>2020</b> |
|---|----------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| Website                                 | 311,767        | 51,660           | 61,949        | 61,789         | 61,969         | 74,400         |             |
| Online message boards                   | 51,496         | 0                | 2,528         | 28,600         | 7,868          | 12,500         |             |
| COAisathing (blog)                      | 123,130        | 10,269           | 19,942        | 36,880         | 24,989         | 31,050         |             |
| Facebook                                | 17,565         | 2,359            | 3,009         | 3,423          | 4,159          | 4,615          |             |
| Twitter                                 | 21,031         | 2,180            | 3,250         | 4,200          | 5,554          | 5,847          |             |
| Instagram                               | 6,598          | 0                | 0             | 1,100          | 1,998          | 3,500          |             |
| <b>Totals</b>                           | <b>531,587</b> | <b>66,468</b>    | <b>90,678</b> | <b>135,992</b> | <b>106,537</b> | <b>131,912</b> |             |

These additional channels represent a new way of reaching out to COAs. This does not diminish the importance of the helpline itself, as anyone can still either call or email Nacoa for more help. The importance of having a person who takes the time to listen to people's concerns and to provide appropriate support cannot be reflected in these figures.

Social media is now the predominant place to share ideas or take part in discussions, but it also has the potential to be corrupted by misguided or even malicious content. Nacoa protects its social media users by having content rules appropriate to the different platforms being used. It reminds those using social media that their messages might be viewed by other users, and provides advice on how they can stay safe online. However, Nacoa does not underestimate the challenges facing those using these new channels of communication. The work required to develop and maintain these channels is significant and Nacoa has a Communications Lead to progress its communication strategy.

## Who is contacting us?

While we cannot be sure about the number of specific individuals who contact us, we do collect a large amount of information about them. It is important to reiterate that we do not elicit personal information from those who contact us, and only record the information that is volunteered by the person during the course of the interaction. On very rare occasions we might have a more detailed understanding of their circumstances if they wish Nacoa to actively intervene on their behalf. Each point of contact is logged and any details emerging from it are recorded and incorporated into the helpline database.

### Sex and Gender

Since the beginning of the database, approximately three quarters of those contacting us have been female, and a quarter male. This has been very consistent throughout the years. As Nacoa does not elicit information about categories of sex and gender, we can only provide an indication of this based on an overview or impression provided from the information given to it by callers. Nacoa has recently added a new category of self-described, but unless this is volunteered by the caller we will have no idea of whether the caller prefers a particular description of their sex and gender.

| <b>Sex and Gender</b> | <b>20 YEARS</b>  | <b>5 Year Periods</b> |                  |                  |                  | <b>Last 2 Years</b> |             |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                       | <b>2001-2020</b> | <b>2001-2005</b>      | <b>2006-2010</b> | <b>2011-2015</b> | <b>2016-2020</b> | <b>2019</b>         | <b>2020</b> |
| Female                | 75%              | 76%                   | 74%              | 77%              | 74%              | 70%                 | 73%         |
| Male                  | 25%              | 24%                   | 26%              | 23%              | 26%              | 30%                 | 27%         |
| Self-described/Other  | <1%              | <1%                   | <1%              | <1%              | <1%              | <1%                 | <1%         |

## Age

Nacoa records age using six age ranges. Approximately two thirds of the people contacting Nacoa have been under 35. This has been remarkably consistent throughout the years, although the percentage of callers over 35 has increased more recently with 46% of callers over 35 in 2019.

| Age   | 20 YEARS  |  | 5 Year Periods |           |           |           | Last 2 Years |      |
|-------|-----------|--|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|------|
|       | 2001-2020 |  | 2001-2005      | 2006-2010 | 2011-2015 | 2016-2020 | 2019         | 2020 |
| 0-11  | 3%        |  | 3%             | 4%        | 2%        | 3%        | 1%           | 1%   |
| 12-18 | 24%       |  | 43%            | 21%       | 18%       | 12%       | 10%          | 14%  |
| 19-24 | 13%       |  | 10%            | 12%       | 15%       | 17%       | 16%          | 18%  |
| 25-35 | 22%       |  | 17%            | 25%       | 25%       | 25%       | 27%          | 28%  |
| 36-49 | 26%       |  | 20%            | 28%       | 30%       | 28%       | 31%          | 24%  |
| 50+   | 9%        |  | 7%             | 10%       | 7%        | 13%       | 15%          | 13%  |

A small percentage, between 1 and 3% per year, has been under the age of 12. We know that the figure under-represents those in this age group who are affected by the problem of parents drinking. This might be because it is very difficult for young people to identify their parents or others as having a drink problem per se, as this requires them to recognise that this behaviour is problematic. It is another reason why Nacoa is so committed to raising awareness of this issue and for children to have access to support for themselves. This also illustrates both the problem of using the data generated by the database for research purposes, and the challenge of reaching out to younger children of alcohol-dependent parents.

## Location

We believe that those contacting us reflect a good geographical spread. As one would expect given that Nacoa's offices are based in Bristol, and with the impact of events such as UpFest, the South West is well represented, albeit that in its early years 17% of those contacting us were from the South West (which overall is still the case), but in the last five years has slightly reduced to 12%. Those contacting us from London have also been at similar levels throughout. Perhaps the biggest growth is those contacting us from the Midlands.

| Location  | 20 YEARS  | 5 Year Periods |           |           |           | Last 2 Years |      |
|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|------|
|           | 2001-2020 | 2001-2005      | 2006-2010 | 2011-2015 | 2016-2020 | 2019         | 2020 |
| Anglia    | 3%        | 4%             | 0%        | 3%        | 4%        | 3%           | 3%   |
| London    | 15%       | 15%            | 14%       | 14%       | 14%       | 15%          | 15%  |
| Midlands  | 7%        | 3%             | 0%        | 11%       | 12%       | 10%          | 13%  |
| N Ireland | 2%        | 1%             | 0%        | 1%        | 3%        | 3%           | 3%   |
| NE        | 9%        | 10%            | 10%       | 9%        | 8%        | 7%           | 4%   |
| NW        | 11%       | 11%            | 12%       | 7%        | 13%       | 12%          | 13%  |
| S Central | 10%       | 13%            | 12%       | 8%        | 7%        | 6%           | 3%   |
| Scotland  | 4%        | 3%             | 0%        | 5%        | 7%        | 8%           | 7%   |
| SE        | 11%       | 14%            | 11%       | 8%        | 11%       | 12%          | 12%  |
| SW        | 16%       | 17%            | 19%       | 13%       | 12%       | 12%          | 16%  |
| Wales     | 6%        | 7%             | 7%        | 4%        | 4%        | 7%           | 3%   |
| Overseas  | 8%        | 2%             | 14%       | 15%       | 5%        | 5%           | 8%   |

Finally, there are a significant number of people who contact us from overseas, whether they be UK citizens living abroad, or foreign nationals seeking relevant information for their situation. Again, the impact of the internet cannot be underestimated here.

## Why are people contacting us?

The specific reasons why people contact Nacoa vary, but are primarily as a result of the relationship they have to one or more people in their lives who have an alcohol problem. This is best summed up with a few categories, whether they are the child of alcohol-dependent parents (COA), a family member, friend, or a professional having to deal with the impact of this problem on family and friends. As can be seen, the percentage of COAs contacting Nacoa has gone up substantially (from 33% 2001 - 2005 to 57% 2016 – 2020). This might partly be due to the people being less reticent about why they are calling, as the number relating to ‘not known’ contacts has fallen. The percentage of professionals has also gone down, but this might be due to the increasing use of the internet. Professionals have a different type of connection to those affected by the issue of alcoholism, and their needs might be met sufficiently by being able to access structured information on the web.

| <i>Who is contacting Nacoa</i> | 20 YEARS  | 5 Year Periods |           |           |           | Last 2 Years |      |
|--------------------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|------|
|                                | 2001-2020 | 2001-2005      | 2006-2010 | 2011-2015 | 2016-2020 | 2019         | 2020 |
| Child of alcoholic (COA)       | 44%       | 33%            | 39%       | 51%       | 57%       | 57%          | 57%  |
| Family member                  | 17%       | 8%             | 21%       | 22%       | 23%       | 23%          | 24%  |
| Other                          | 3%        | 3%             | 4%        | 3%        | 2%        | 2%           | 2%   |
| Not known                      | 20%       | 36%            | 20%       | 8%        | 7%        | 6%           | 5%   |
| Alcohol Dependent Person       | 3%        | 3%             | 4%        | 3%        | 4%        | 6%           | 5%   |
| Professional                   | 13%       | 18%            | 12%       | 13%       | 7%        | 6%           | 7%   |

**Who is the problem drinker?**

The database includes over 130 categories of people mentioned, but for the purposes of this report we have reclassified them into a smaller number of broader categories. Without doubt most people contacting Nacoa are doing so because they have a parent who has a problem with alcohol. The category mother or father, if stated by the caller, could include anyone taking on a parenting role, whether that be by biology, familial relationship, or adoption. The category 'parents (other)' includes anyone other than stated father/mother who has a parenting role (biological, familial, adoption etc).

| <b>Problem drinker</b> | <b>20 YEARS</b>  | <b>5 Year Periods</b> |                  |                  |                  | <b>Last 2 Years</b> |             |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                        | <b>2001-2020</b> | <b>2001-2005</b>      | <b>2006-2010</b> | <b>2011-2015</b> | <b>2016-2020</b> | <b>2019</b>         | <b>2020</b> |
| The caller themselves  | 7%               | 12%                   | 9%               | 6%               | 6%               | 8%                  | 6%          |
| Child                  | 4%               | 3%                    | 6%               | 4%               | 3%               | 2%                  | 3%          |
| Father                 | 34%              | 50%                   | 29%              | 31%              | 33%              | 32%                 | 32%         |
| Mother                 | 41%              | 46%                   | 39%              | 40%              | 40%              | 40%                 | 39%         |
| Parents (other)        | 3%               | 2%                    | 4%               | 3%               | 4%               | 5%                  | 5%          |
| Sibling                | 4%               | 3%                    | 6%               | 4%               | 4%               | 3%                  | 3%          |
| Current Partner        | 6%               | 5%                    | 7%               | 5%               | 6%               | 7%                  | 6%          |
| Ex-Partner             | 11%              | 8%                    | 11%              | 10%              | 12%              | 12%                 | 14%         |
| Other Family member    | 10%              | 6%                    | 11%              | 9%               | 12%              | 14%                 | 13%         |
| Friend or acquaintance | 3%               | 1%                    | 5%               | 3%               | 2%               | 3%                  | 2%          |
| Other                  | <1%              | 0%                    | <1%              | <1%              | <1%              | 0%                  | 1%          |

It is important to remember that the percentages above are instances of a contact referring to a particular relationship; because more than one relationship can be mentioned by one contact, the percentages will not add up to 100%, for example between 2016 and 2020 nearly 73% of callers referred to a father or mother, but in total nearly 50% of those calling also referred to other relationships. Overall the totals add up to about 120-130% indicating that more than one person is mentioned.

**What help are they getting from other people?**

The role of Nacoa is to provide help and information for people to understand the challenges that they face and to support them in making positive choices to respond to them. People may have told other individuals about what they are facing. Obviously who they talk to depends on who the person is that has the problem, so given that most of the people contacting us has a parent as the drinker, then clearly they will often go to other family members for help.

| <b>Who has been told</b> | <b>20 YEARS</b>  | <b>5 Year Periods</b> |                  |                  |                  | <b>Last 2 Years</b> |             |
|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                          | <b>2001-2020</b> | <b>2001-2005</b>      | <b>2006-2010</b> | <b>2011-2015</b> | <b>2016-2020</b> | <b>2019</b>         | <b>2020</b> |
| Father                   | 4%               | 2%                    | 5%               | 5%               | 4%               | 3%                  | 6%          |
| Mother                   | 8%               | 6%                    | 9%               | 10%              | 7%               | 4%                  | 11%         |
| Sibling                  | 9%               | 6%                    | 8%               | 9%               | 11%              | 10%                 | 12%         |
| Spouse/partner           | 4%               | 1%                    | 1%               | 2%               | 9%               | 11%                 | 9%          |
| Other family member      | 21%              | 14%                   | 19%              | 31%              | 22%              | 24%                 | 18%         |
| Friend                   | 10%              | 8%                    | 10%              | 10%              | 13%              | 16%                 | 12%         |
| Teacher                  | 3%               | 3%                    | 3%               | 4%               | 3%               | 1%                  | 2%          |
| Other                    | 16%              | 21%                   | 19%              | 10%              | 14%              | 16%                 | 11%         |
| No-one                   | 25%              | 38%                   | 26%              | 18%              | 18%              | 14%                 | 19%         |

One of the most consistent findings is that a quarter of those contacting us over the last 20 years have told nobody else about their situation. Given that these people have only disclosed the issue to Nacoa, it is probable that a significant number of people who have to deal with this problem do not tell anyone about it. However, it is encouraging to note that this figure has reduced from almost 40% (2001 – 2005) telling no one to 18% (2016 – 2020). Another figure to highlight is that approximately 9% of partners are told (2016 – 2020) whereas the figure was only 1 – 2% (2001 – 2015). This suggests that a growing number of people now feel more open about discussing the issue with others. We believe that this has been significantly due to the ongoing work of Nacoa, the formation of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Children of Alcoholics (see below), and extensive media campaigns, in particular COA week.

**What help are they getting from agencies?**

In addition to other individuals, there are other various agencies that people can approach for help, including social services, the police, and other health and social care agencies.

| <b>Other agencies involved</b> | <b>20 YEARS</b>  | <b>5 Year Periods</b> |                  |                  |                  | <b>Last 2 Years</b> |             |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                                | <b>2001-2020</b> | <b>2001-2005</b>      | <b>2006-2010</b> | <b>2011-2015</b> | <b>2016-2020</b> | <b>2019</b>         | <b>2020</b> |
| Social Services                | 11%              | 15%                   | 13%              | 9%               | 8%               | 11%                 | 10%         |
| Police                         | 3%               | 0%                    | 0%               | 5%               | 5%               | 7%                  | 7%          |
| Counsellor                     | 8%               | 0%                    | 0%               | 9%               | 14%              | 12%                 | 15%         |
| School                         | 4%               | 0%                    | 0%               | 7%               | 6%               | 8%                  | 8%          |
| GP                             | 11%              | 0%                    | 0%               | 23%              | 15%              | 22%                 | 20%         |
| Drug/Alcohol agency            | 5%               | 0%                    | 0%               | 8%               | 8%               | 3%                  | 4%          |
| Self-help/fellowship           | 16%              | 44%                   | 8%               | 8%               | 7%               | 4%                  | 4%          |
| Other services                 | 16%              | 24%                   | 33%              | 7%               | 10%              | 15%                 | 19%         |
| None                           | 26%              | 17%                   | 45%              | 23%              | 26%              | 19%                 | 14%         |

The number of GPs and schools being involved has risen in the past decade; this may be due to the information materials provided by Nacoa to inform them of the issues and to provide support. Nacoa is currently working to secure additional funding to provide more support to schools in the future.

## How the Helpline responds

The Nacoa helpline is there to provide support in various forms to help COAs deal with the challenges they face. The role of the helpline volunteer is to listen to what people are saying. This is supportive listening; we listen to what people say, and acknowledge and reflect their experience. Contacts often remark that discussing the issue can prompt further insights into their situation that they might not have arrived at on their own. Providing callers with time and empathy can reduce their stress and promote mental wellbeing.

There are other practical ways Nacoa helps, which is to guide contacts towards different sources of information, including Nacoa’s own website, finding information on specific resources which may help them, and sending out information by post or email.

| <b>Actions</b>           | <b>20 YEARS</b>  | <b>5 Year Periods</b> |                  |                  |                  | <b>Last 2 Years</b> |             |
|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                          | <b>2001-2020</b> | <b>2001-2005</b>      | <b>2006-2010</b> | <b>2011-2015</b> | <b>2016-2020</b> | <b>2019</b>         | <b>2020</b> |
| <b>Non-Professionals</b> |                  |                       |                  |                  |                  |                     |             |
| Listening                | 82%              | 74%                   | 86%              | 86%              | 81%              | 75%                 | 80%         |
| Website                  | 5%               | 1%                    | 2%               | 7%               | 7%               | 9%                  | 7%          |
| Find resources           | 6%               | 11%                   | 7%               | 5%               | 4%               | 7%                  | 5%          |
| Sending Literature       | 7%               | 14%                   | 6%               | 2%               | 8%               | 9%                  | 8%          |
| <b>Professionals</b>     |                  |                       |                  |                  |                  |                     |             |
| Listening                | 16%              | 5%                    | 30%              | 29%              | 45%              | 40%                 | 48%         |
| Website                  | 2%               | <1%                   | 2%               | 8%               | 15%              | 18%                 | 15%         |
| Find resources           | 4%               | 3%                    | 5%               | 8%               | 8%               | 13%                 | 4%          |
| Sending Literature       | 77%              | 92%                   | 63%              | 55%              | 33%              | 29%                 | 32%         |

As outlined earlier, a significant number of those contacting Nacoa are professionals (13% 2001 – 2020, see earlier). Over the years we appear to be sending out less literature to professionals, but spending more time listening to them and pointing them to sources of information. Clearly the impact of the web has had a significant impact on what they require from us.

## Issues Faced by COAs

It is well established that COAs are a vulnerable group. Research consistently reports that COAs can be affected in all areas of their lives and the problem does not disappear when they leave home. Many callers live with parents who do not acknowledge or seek help for their problems. The fear of being judged and stigmatised means that the problem is hidden. Alcohol problems are a family secret and COAs, both as children and as adults, often feel shame and isolation.

The Nacoa helpline database includes sections where details of different facets of people's experience living with a parent who is dependent on alcohol are recorded, including mental wellbeing, abuse, and other presenting problems. As part of this report we have explored this data to provide further information about the concerns of people contacting Nacoa.

Due to the nature of this information, these issues are not usually raised during initial contacts, whether they be by phone or text-based communications. Compared to other less sensitive data analysed above, the helpline users who provide this type of information tend to be those that regularly contact the helpline. As a result, the data that forms a sample for analysis here is smaller than the sample size used in the rest of this report. Nacoa's primary approach of 'supportive listening' means that we are less confident that the data actually captured represents Nacoa users and COAs as a whole. For that reason, we do not provide detailed analysis of these issues in table form, as they are not comparable to those in the rest of the report.

### **Presenting Problems**

Callers identify the following as the five areas causing them most concern: relationships (70%), mental wellbeing (55%), physical health (31%), bereavement (29%) and abuse (26%). These figures have been consistent throughout the past 20 years.

The data on mental wellbeing was further analysed and the main concerns identified as follows: anxiety (60%), stress (51%), depression (41%), fearfulness (40%) and loneliness (25%). Again, these figures have been consistent between 2001 - 2020 although callers mentioning stress has doubled since 2010. Of course, it is not possible to know whether callers have been experiencing more stress over the past decade or whether they have become more confident about identifying the signs of stress.

The data on abuse was also further analysed. Where abuse was mentioned by callers it was identified as: emotional (40%), physical (35%), neglect (18%) and sexual (7%).

Nacoa supports callers who have been abused by listening to them and encouraging them to seek additional support to access specialist services.

### **Alcohol is the key issue**

Underlying all the issues discussed above, alcohol abuse is the key factor raised by callers. COAs are living in a difficult environment and use a range of strategies to survive. Alcohol affects every area of family life, relationships, living conditions, and their financial and social environment.

While it is well established that there are many COAs, different research studies cite different figures due to methodological differences, statistical limitations and inconsistent results. Nacoa has been keen to establish reliable figures to provide a credible picture of the problem. Nacoa engaged Professor Martin Callingham (2002 – 2005) to work on this issue in order to explore the relevant data and to investigate the impact of growing up as a COA.

Professor Callingham found that more adults grew up in a home with an alcohol-dependent parent, than grew up in a home with severe mental illness. His research established that the characteristics of these two groups (in comparison with a control group) were very similar, showing considerable distress in their childhood, and how these circumstances affected their personality and behaviour as adults.

From this and other research, Nacoa determined the figures that we use in our literature:

1 in 5 children live with an alcohol dependent parent and COAs are:

6 x more likely to witness domestic violence

4 x more likely to develop an eating disorder

3 x more likely to consider suicide

3 x more likely to develop alcohol dependency as adults

2 x more likely to experience difficulties at school

2 x more likely to be in trouble with the police

Nacoa does not claim that these numbers are definitive. However, they do concur with Nacoa's experience and align with other wide ranging prominent studies. For example, the National Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (NPMS) of 2000 indicated that 28% of children lived with a hazardous or a dependent drinker. In 2009, Professor Victoria Manning and colleagues at Kings College produced a meta-analysis of several national survey studies. Manning's analysis generated consistent estimates suggesting that around 30% of children under-16 years in the UK lived with at least one binge drinking parent.

Nacoa continues to use the estimates provided by Professor Callingham as we believe they reflect the numerical impact of this issue. The Nacoa figures are summarised and presented in a format that provides a clear message for COAs, their families, supporters, professionals and policy makers.

Although Nacoa is confident that the figures we use provide a helpful guide to the scale of the problem, we fully appreciate that figures do not reflect the experience of being a COA. Every COA has their own experience of the problem that is unique to them.

## Nacoa Moving Forward

Nacoa is an organisation where people in different roles such as staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders work together to produce an extremely effective body which exists on extremely limited funds. Nacoa has the support of a large number of people, and the gratitude of countless more. There is no doubt that Nacoa is impressive for its size, and a model of good practice. This is supported by the many awards it has received over the years and the feedback from the users of the helpline.

Hilary Henriques MBE has been the Chief Executive of Nacoa for 30 years and continues to work and campaign for COAs, bringing huge commitment and dedication to achieving Nacoa's aims and objectives, and leading it through difficult times, including the Covid-19 pandemic. In the five years since the previous major review of the helpline, Nacoa has created some unprecedented opportunities, but it has also had to face some major challenges. In this environment, Nacoa has continued to thrive and enabled it to reposition itself to provide more people with the help and information that they need to deal with the issue of alcohol abuse.

In September 2016 the first meeting for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Children of Alcoholics took place. This was chaired by Member of Parliament and Nacoa patron, Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP. Nacoa has been central to the creation of the Parliamentary Group which aims to 'champion the cause of children of dependent and hazardous drinkers'. The APPG launched the *Manifesto for Change* in February 2017 to support children affected by their parent's drinking. It is thought to be the first such manifesto in the world.

The advocacy of Nacoa and Liam Byrne was crucial for informing government and media attitudes and concerns for the children of alcoholics. As a result, in April 2018, a £6 million innovation fund was jointly announced by the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, and Rt Hon Jonathan Ashworth MP "to help identify at-risk children more quickly, and provide them with rapid access to support and advice". Jeremy Hunt, said of the announcement:

"The consequences of alcohol abuse are devastating for those in the grip of an addiction, but for too long, the children of alcoholic parents have been the silent victims. This is not right, nor fair. These measures will ensure thousands of children affected by their parent's alcohol dependency have access to the support they need and deserve."

The major part of this fund was allocated to local authorities and other organisations. Taking inspiration from Nacoa's work, funding was set aside to expand resources for a national 'children of alcohol-dependents helpline', raising awareness in the public consciousness, and providing high quality support, advice, and signposting for the growing number of children asking for help in homes where a parent has a drink problem. On the successful tendering of Nacoa for this finance, it

received close to £390,000. Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, announced his pleasure that the government would be supporting “an amazing charity who do so much to help the hundreds of thousands of children in the UK growing up with alcohol-addicted parents who are robbed of a happy, stable home”.

Since 2017, Nacoa’s resources have twice been commended by the British Medical Association (BMA). The Nacoa.org.uk website was ‘commended’ in 2018 for providing broad and accessible information and advice for anyone affected by their parent’s drinking. In 2019, Nacoa’s flagship leaflet, ‘Some mums and dads drink too much’, was ‘highly commended’, the BMA praising how the publication (widely disseminated to schools and doctor’s surgeries across the UK) is “non-judgemental of either the parent or the reader and provides comfort and support with sign posting to how to find further help”.

In 2019, as a result of the impact of Nacoa’s work, the BBC produced two documentaries relating to our work. In the BBC Radio 4 programme *The Monster Downstairs*, Nacoa Patron and *Telegraph* Deputy Editor, Camilla Tominey, visited the Nacoa offices to interview Hilary Henriques and to hear from “young people and adults about their own very personal experiences of growing up in a house full of secrets”. BBC Radio 5 Live broadcasted a programme which was focused on an interview with Hilary, relating to the increasing number of young adults contacting Nacoa for help about a parent’s problem drinking.

During the Covid 19 pandemic Nacoa continued to provide support to COAs. The helpline remained open throughout the lockdowns, establishing new shift patterns and safe working practices, to ensure that this vulnerable group were not forgotten. The Nacoa Helpline counsellors worked consistently as a team to respond to more complex calls, emails and queries throughout 2020. Nacoa developed the ‘COVID-19 Online Resource Pack’ for professionals and others concerned for young people affected by their parent’s drinking during social distancing. The pack remains available online and at no cost.

Nacoa supporters responded to the pandemic by providing additional services. There were two poster campaigns for Nacoa, ‘We’re here to listen’ in Bristol (2020) and Brighton (2021). In addition, a lockdown book was published online and lockdown films were produced. All these initiatives highlighted the particular needs of COAs at this difficult time.

Forward into 2021, Helpline services have now been enhanced by the use of SMS texting, message boards, and online chat functionality. This provides increased accessibility to children and young people for whom using the helpline may be problematic or may feel that making a call is too intimidating. The new Nacoa website was launched for the beginning of 2021 and the new Nacoa database which is needed to deal with the increased number of communication channels will launch in the Autumn.

Nacoa has been able to develop its work to provide information, guidance, and support to COAs, their families, professionals, and concerned others. Central to all its activities is the Nacoa Helpline. The helpline has evolved before, but during the last five years in particular, Nacoa has had to adapt to changes in the way that people communicate. This has enabled it to continue to provide a much valued and confidential helpline service to COAs by phone, email, through its website, and increasingly social media.

Nacoa demonstrates that the world can be different and, with help and support, children of alcohol-dependent parents can live fulfilled lives and break the cycle of addiction so that they can look forward to a more positive future. Nacoa is a lifeline for many children and others affected by alcohol, and it continues to deliver the message to children that their parent's alcohol problems are not their fault and they are not alone.