

# AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS** **2021**



# Best Public Information Campaign



ALONE's National Support Line was set up to offer advice and additional supports for older people who have concerns or are facing difficulties relating to COVID-19. Professional staff are available to answer queries and give advice and reassurance where necessary. The support line is open seven days a week, 8am – 8pm, by calling 0818 222 024.

## Campaign

ALONE National Support Line

## Description of Campaign

Limelight Communications worked with ALONE, the organisation which supports older people, to launch ALONE's National Support Line. The Support Line is open seven days per week, 8am-8pm, on 0818 222 024, and was set up to offer additional support to older people who are facing difficulties relating to COVID-19.



## Public Relations Consultant

Limelight Communications



## Client

ALONE

## Background to the Campaign

ALONE's National Support Line was established in response to the increased need for supports for older people as a result of the arrival of COVID-19 in Ireland. As a member organisation of the National Public Health Emergency COVID-19 Subgroup for Vulnerable People, ALONE worked in collaboration with the Department of Rural and Community Development, Department of Health and the HSE on a coordinated national response to support older people who have concerns, may be at risk or who have contracted COVID-19.

The supports offered included additional outreach activities, coordinated supports and a new national support line launched on Monday 9th March. This Support Line was set up to complement the clinical advice and information being provided by the HSE through its website and helpline.

Limelight Communications faced a number of challenges when preparing this PR campaign:

- ALONE had to work quickly to establish the Support Line as a national resource for older people in need during the pandemic and we had to work quickly to communicate this number to their target audience, older people.

- Some individuals raised concerns about the cost of calling the National Support Line for older people – calls to the Support Line cost no more than a local call to a landline. Calls from Vodafone or landline bundles, PAYG bundles, and mobile contracts are free.
- We needed to reach as many older people as possible while competing for real estate when it came to coverage, with the high concentration of COVID-19 related stories and campaigns by other charitable organisations.

The campaign had three clear messages to communicate:

- ALONE's National Support line has been established to offer advice, assistance and support to older people struggling amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Support Line is open Seven days a week, 8am-8pm, by calling 0818 222 024.
- The Support Line is open to all older people in need, whether they have previously used ALONE's services or not.

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## Statement of Objectives

Limelight Communications overall PR objective was to use traditional media and tools of communication to raise awareness of the National Support Line and to reach out to vulnerable older adults in need of support following the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland.

Objectives outlined for this campaign were:

- To spread awareness of ALONE's National Support Line among the primary target audience, older people, and relevant groups.
- To inform the public of the Support Line's opening hours and days.
- To work with the media to reach as many older people as possible.
- To reach out to various other organisations to ask them to share the Support Line information.
- To achieve significant and consistent media coverage for the Support Line.

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## Programme Planning and Strategy

The campaign's primary target audience was older people. Every communication had to keep that in mind in terms of placement, messaging and reach.

Traditional media was our primary focus – broadcast and print, as these were deemed the main focus of our audience's reach.

Messaging had to be clear, informative, unambiguous and supportive.

Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE was the primary spokesperson with back up support from Corinne Hasson, Services Manager in charge of the Support Line. Individual older people, long term ALONE service users, were identified and approached as case studies for media placement on an ongoing basis and as required.

ALONE's National Support Line received an early boost. The Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and Minister for Health Simon Harris visited ALONE's head office on Monday 23rd March to receive a briefing on the Support Line, how it was being operated, the profile of callers and to see it in action. This was followed by a full press briefing by ALONE CEO Seán Moynihan, the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health in the ALONE head office courtyard culminating in wall-to-wall media coverage on both national television broadcasters main news, all radio news bulletins – national and local, online coverage and a full complement of print coverage.

Weekly online comms meetings were held for the purpose of ongoing communications planning and evaluation, updates on what was happening within the organisation and constant review of the communications plan as the national situation was ever changing. The concerns and issues affecting older people were constantly changing.

The PR campaign for ALONE's National Support Line was designed to be informative and raise awareness of the newly established service. To achieve this, we carried out media relations activities to include national and regional media – print, broadcast and online.

A weekly themed press release was issued to national and regional media. The theme was determined by either the concerns being raised by callers and/or the national discourse. Each release contained details of the National Support Line, featured weekly statistics such as the number of calls received and the number of calls made by ALONE. As a result of their initial call some older people would receive a daily or weekly call to check in on how they were coping.

The weekly press release resulted in ongoing media attention. High profile national broadcast interviews, daily local radio interviews nationwide, ongoing print features. ALONE spokespeople would always make a point of mentioning the Support Line number and opening hours.

Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE was pitched to print and broadcast media outlets as a spokesperson on issues affecting older people amid the pandemic, which resulted in numerous national and regional radio, television and print interviews on a range of issues such as the impact of cocooning measures mental and physical health, loneliness and isolation among older people and the support received from various organisations and ambassadors. Coverage included *Ireland on Call*, the RTE television show commissioned to provide up to the minute information to guide viewers through the Coronavirus crisis, regular interview on both RTE TV and Virgin Media's main evening news bulletins, and a wide range of current affairs radio shows including RTE's Morning Ireland, Today with Seán O'Rourke and Drivetime.

Corinne Hasson, Services Manager at ALONE who was in charge of the Support Line, was interviewed on The Brendan O'Connor Show, RTE Radio 1, speaking about the numbers and nature of calls being made to the Support Line as older people across the country struggled with cocooning measures.

The raised profile of ALONE and the support the organisation was providing older people during the pandemic resulted in an invitation for Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE to appear on The Late Late Show with charity Ambassador Gavin James performing live on 3rd April: [https://youtu.be/\\_d2bQhKmsds](https://youtu.be/_d2bQhKmsds)

In excess of €350,000 was raised that evening thanks to the generosity of The Late Late Show's viewers.

Under government restrictions, people were unable to attend religious services in person. RTÉ started airing a daily mass service. We were aware that viewers profile was predominantly older people. We reached out to RTÉ to ask them to display ALONE's Support Line details after their live stream Mass services and also on the RTÉ News Now app, in order to reach greater numbers of older people who were cocooning in order to protect themselves from COVID-19, and to reach members of the public who may be concerned about an older person in their lives. This number is still on display.

Each month an email is sent to all Church Parish Offices nationwide to thank them for their ongoing support, to ask them to include Support Line information in communications with their parishioners and to mention the support line at virtual masses where applicable.

A similar reminder email is sent on a monthly to all national and regional news desks requesting that Support Line information be included in any stories relating to older people, health or social affairs.

## **Marketing collateral**

An offer of poster placement in a chemist chain was turned down during the period older people were cocooning. Instead a limited placement of leaflets in prescription bags was utilised and proved to be far more effective.

### **Online**

- Support Line featured at the end of RTÉ's Live Mass broadcasts since March 2020.
- Support Line featured on RTÉ News Now in the side column since March 2020 to-date.
- Support Line has been featured in numerous online publications and news sites.

### **Print**

- The Support Line was included in a series of full page ads for Community Call in national newspapers April 2020.
- News International provided a complimentary full page ad in The Sunday Times (26 01 21).

### **Radio**

- Limelight organised radio ad placement for one week on RTE Radio 1 in May 2020.

To date the National Support Line has received over 50,000 calls, with volunteers continuing to take calls from older people who have concerns relating to the pandemic, require practical assistance, or are lonely and simply just want to talk to someone.

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## Measurement

### Achievement of Objectives:

- Positive editorial in both national and regional print media culminating in thousands of print cuttings.
- Broadcast segments on national television and radio, current affairs and light entertainment. Also regular local radio interviews nationwide.
- Online articles.

The National Support Line received positive coverage in print, online and broadcast media, which resulted in an increase in calls from older people struggling amid the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, ALONE's National Support Line has received in excess of 50,000 calls from older people. In addition to this, ALONE staff and volunteers have made more than 138,589 calls to older people who needed supports, and provided more than 12,000 units of practical support, including collecting groceries and prescriptions and linking people in with local community services in their area.

The support line continues to be mentioned in national and regional newspapers, in community bulletins and on news sites all over the country on a daily basis. In addition to this, the Support Line number and opening hours are continually mentioned by ALONE spokespeople in all radio and TV interviews. It is also regularly mentioned in Parish newsletters nationwide and RTÉ's Live Mass Broadcasts display the ALONE Support Line graphic daily after services. The graphic also appears on the RTÉ News Now app throughout each day.

Seán Moynihan CEO of ALONE, stated, *"As a charity organisation we were initially worried that the arrival of COVID-19 in Ireland would have a severely negative impact on our day to day activities. Limelight have been instrumental in keeping ALONE's work top of mind and spreading awareness of the services we offer in a number of innovative ways."*

PARAGON



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