

Blossom Inc.

End of Year Report January to December 2018

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End of Year Report
January to December 2018
Fiscal Year 2018

Blossom Incorporated is a registered, non-governmental organization based in Guyana. The aim of the organization is to provide evidence-based interventions to children affected by trauma and their families. This is accomplished through partnerships with the Childcare and Protection Agency and other entities that seek to strengthen the child protection system in Guyana. Blossom Inc. manages Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) in regions 2, 4, 7 and 10. These centers deliver high-quality, mental health services to clients in a family and child friendly setting which encourages clients to participate and play an active role in their recovery. This report highlights the activities undertaken by Blossom Inc. during the period January to December 2018.

The work that Blossom Inc. has accomplished in 2018 could not have been possible without the steadfast support and involvement of our donors. These include – The Ministry of Social Protection, Childcare and Protection Agency, UNICEF, Emerge BPO, Guyana Goldfields, Digicel and other independent stakeholders. On behalf of our staff and the children and families who benefit from our services, we thank you wholeheartedly for your continued partnership!

Retrospective Summary

The year 2018 marked several key changes, challenges and successes for Blossom Inc. It was a transitional period which saw the departure of Ms. Shaundell Shipley as Program Manager and ushered in a young, emerging professional, Ms. Michelle Amsterdam as her replacement. Ms. Shipley, who was with Blossom from the inception, contributed a wealth of knowledge and experience which set the tone for the organization to be established as a reputable entity that delivers high-quality services.

Building on its momentum, Blossom Inc. extended its reach to Bartica and Linden, regions which recorded high incidences of child sexual abuse. This accomplishment means that a greater number of children and families affected by trauma can now access mental health services which caters to their needs in a supportive environment. Blossom Inc. continued to improve on its service delivery of trauma-informed therapy, forensic interviews and victim support advocacy. The result of which has helped to reduce trauma and produce positive outcomes for many victims of abuse. In 2018, Blossom Inc. served over 800 clients! A number which has more than tripled in comparison to the previous year!

A key milestone for the organization involved our strong advocacy efforts to build key partnerships to better serve our clients. These endeavors led to Blossom Inc. gaining increased financial support from the Government of Guyana through the Ministry of Finance and now can be categorized as a “Subvention Agency”. This is a major feat considering funding challenges and the progress Blossom Inc. has made in a relatively short time span.

Overall, 2018 was a year of great expansion for Blossom Inc. in several areas – our services, our staff and our vision. Moving forward, we intend to strengthen our sustainability strategy by developing our brand, building on our reputation, increasing visibility, engaging stakeholders at all levels and using innovative methods to improve our services so that clients can best benefit from their interactions with the agency.



Founder & Managing Director

Table highlights the total number of clients served in 2018.

Programmes / Activities	Number of clients
TF-CBT	
No. of referred cases	175
No. of Parents/Caregivers	200
Forensic Interviews	
No. of clients in all regions	125
Court Support Service	
No. of clients in all regions	26
Reunification Project	
No. of children recommended for reunification	324
Mentorship Programme	
Young adults	5
TOTAL	855

Note – the total figure does not highlight clients served through outreaches and other activities where numbers were not sufficiently recorded.

Child Advocacy Centers

A CAC is a safe place where vulnerable children and their non-offending family members can find support and learn coping skills to handle traumatic life events. It operates under a Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) framework whereby professionals from several disciplines work together to make team decisions about the best approach to the treatment, management, investigation and prosecution of child sexual abuse cases. Blossom Inc.'s CACs provide evidenced-based trauma informed therapy, forensic interview services and victim support advocacy services, case review and case tracking services.

Clinical Intervention

For the period January to December 2018, Blossom Inc.'s regions 2, 4, 7 and 10 CACs received a total number of 154 referrals from the Childcare and Protection Agency. Additionally, 17 cases were brought forward from 2017 and 4 cases were referred to the center by individuals familiar with Blossom's services - 2 of which were Special Victims. Special victims include persons with disabilities and developmental challenges, adult clients and other victims outside of our target group. The number of parents/caregivers were approximately 200. The child victims ranged in age from 3 to 18 and 97% of the population is female.

For each client, the therapy process began with an initial meeting with the therapist. In that meeting, information was provided to the child and caregiver about Blossom Inc., the CAC concept, available services, the therapeutic process, goals and intended outcomes. Clients were also given the opportunity to ask questions and express their concerns and expectations. Most clients were unfamiliar with the counselling environment and asked a lot of questions about the process. Many parents were also curious about the CAC intervention in the court process because that was a source of frustration and confusion for them. All clients (children and caregivers) were encouraged to be consistent in visiting the centers for therapy sessions as this would determine the effectiveness of the treatment.

Before the start of therapy, all children were screened using the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) scale. Children under 11 were screened using the Birlson Depression Self-Rating Scale and children over 11 were assessed with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).

Children who have been sexually abused typically develop self-esteem issues and experience symptoms of PTSD and depression. The results of these assessments are used as a baseline to measure the effectiveness of the clinical intervention. Post screening is done once clients have completed therapy. Therapists have observed that 90% of children reported moderate to high scores of PTSD. Some, however, reported trauma related to family or personal issues that more adversely affected them than the sexual abuse. Having this awareness, therapists worked closely with parents to improve family relationships and settle unresolved conflicts. Blossom's Therapists also worked with clients who were suffering from grief associated with losing a loved one.

The next step involved administering Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT) to clients. TF-CBT is an evidence-based treatment model that has proven to reduce emotional and behavioural symptoms of trauma in children ages 3 to 18. It involves using trauma-informed interventions along with humanistic, behavioural, cognitive and family principles. The fundamental aims of TF-CBT are to correct inaccurate thoughts/feelings and maladaptive behaviours associated with trauma, teach parents how to support children at home and enhance safety to protect against re-traumatization. It is most effective when delivered in 12 to 16 consistent sessions.

As TF-CBT was developed for children in the Western world, therapists adapted the framework and techniques, where necessary, to suit the needs of clients in a Guyanese context – making the therapy culturally sensitive! Various strategies were utilized when working with clients – journaling, music, physical exercises, outdoor activities, artistic expression and reflective sessions. Other important tools used during therapy included the “Dealing with Trauma: A TF-CBT Workbook for Teens”. The purpose of the workbook is to allow teens to express their thoughts about therapy, themselves, their family, trauma, coping strategies and other topics that follow the TF-CBT content. This tool is effective because there are many children who prefer writing as a form of expression rather than talking a lot during therapy. Other materials used during each session were the “feelings thermometer” and “cognitive triangle” which help therapists to explain the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour to younger children in an appropriate

way. Technology was also a great resource because the use of interactive videos during therapy captivated the younger children as well as the older adolescents. The videos made the sessions livelier and increased the clients' understanding of topics in a fun way.

Therapists tried to keep caregivers and children engaged in the process by working with them to develop practical solutions that they could maintain once the therapeutic relationship ended. For some clients, their caregivers could not attend all therapy sessions because of work and other personal obligations but frequent calls were made to these persons to follow up on the clients' progress. Therapists also communicated regularly with Police Officers and the Childcare and Protection Agency (CPA) Caseworkers to provide them with updates on clients' cases and discuss approaches to problematic behaviours exhibited by clients.

Challenges to Therapy

Therapists experienced many challenges associated with working with a diverse population with complex needs. These challenges led to a backlog of cases and many clients still ongoing therapy after the expected timeframe. These challenges included the inconsistency of clients in attending sessions. Some clients reported that this was due to financial constraints while others had work/academic obligations which interfered with their attendance. Still, there were some who disengaged from the process and stopped attending sessions. In the first half of the year, 80% of clients were fairly consistent in attending therapy sessions. More time needs to be spent on investigating the reasons for client disengagement.

Another factor which prolonged the therapeutic process was the level of trauma experienced by clients. Clients who were more severely traumatized progressed at a slower pace than those on the lower end of the spectrum. A majority of clients had additional issues that arose during therapy which therapists had to deal with separately, apart from administering TF-CBT. These challenges were compounded with other external factors such as clients returning to unhealthy, dysfunctional home environments which may have caused them to regress and hinder their progress. Hence, these factors lengthened the CACs' engagement with clients. For 2018, more than 50% of clients did not complete their therapeutic treatment.

However, the task of keeping TF-CBT clients engaged is a universal challenge for mental health professionals. Several studies had a low retention rate in the TF-CBT group. For example, a study

published in 2011 involving children exposed to interpersonal violence had a retention rate of 67% (Coen et al., 2011), which indicates a relatively high level of dropout. Other active treatments for PTSD showed similar findings (Gillies et al., 2012). In a field trial in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina of clinic-based TF-CBT compared with school-based Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools, participants randomly assigned to TF-CBT were much less likely to attend their intake or complete treatment than those receiving the more easily accessible school-based treatment, suggesting that accessibility may be an important factor in treatment retention (Jaycox et al., 2010). Another study found significant individual differences between completers and non-completers, with the attrition group being older and exposed to more traumas (Jensen et al., 2014).

For clients who did complete therapy, their post assessment scores indicated a moderate decrease in symptoms. All things considered, success with clients was also measured by clients' testimonials and self-reports. A number of children and parents reported improvements in school, enhanced family interactions, the development of prosocial behaviours and optimism for the future.

Forensic Interview

Forensic interviews (FIs) are conducted with child victims of sexual abuse. It is a structured conversation with a child designed to gather detailed information about a possible traumatic event that the child may have experienced or witnessed. The information collected from the interview may be helpful in a criminal investigation and can be used to either verify or refute allegations of abuse or neglect. Another primary goal of a forensic interview is to minimize trauma by allowing children to tell their story once in the presence of a MDT rather than multiple times which can cause further trauma. In some instances, children may not disclose all the information in one forensic interview, so an extended interview must be conducted. The extended forensic interview model recognizes that some children may require more than one session to talk about their experience because of the significance of the trauma or developmental challenges.

For the reporting period, 125 forensic interviews have been conducted with child victims of sexual abuse and special victims from regions 2, 4, 7 and 10. This is equivalent to 2.5 forensic interviews

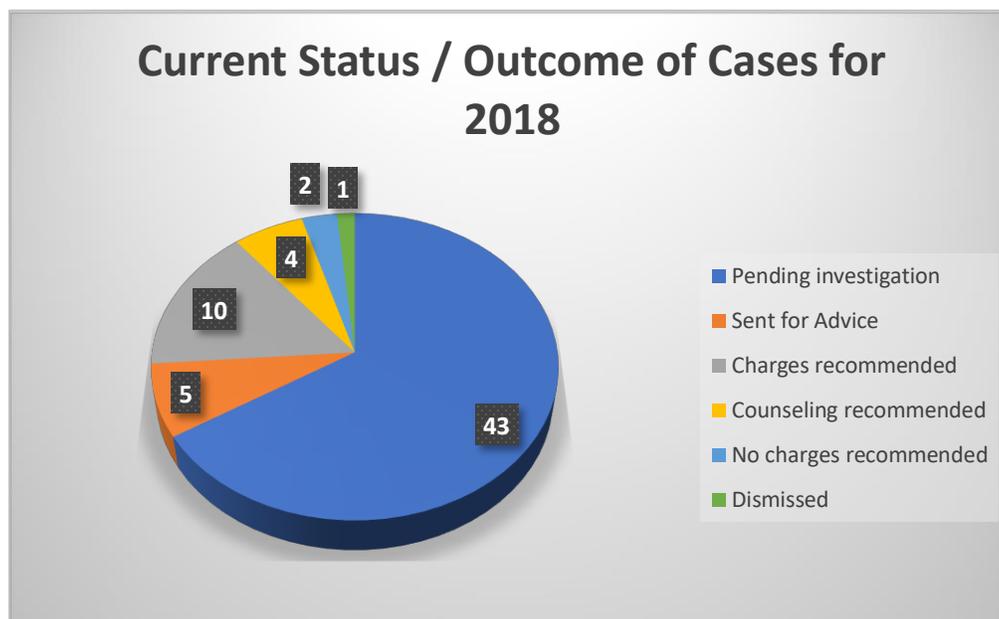
being conducted per week at Blossom Inc. Victims disclosed in 90% of the cases and forensic interview clients were referred to the CACs to receive further support. A Child Protection Officer, Investigating Rank and Parent/Guardian was present during all interviews. After the interviews were conducted, the victim's statement was transcribed and submitted to the relevant police station along with the Forensic Interviewer's statement.

Table 1.1 highlights the total number of FIs categorized by region and Police Stations.

Region / Police Station	Number of Forensic Interviews
Region 2	
Anna Regina	28
Charity	5
Aurora	1
Region 4	
Ruimveldt	34
Brickdam	4
Alberttown	4
Juvenile Branch	1
Cove & John	10
Timehri	18
Region 7	
Bartica	8
Kamarang	3
Region 10	
McKenzie	9
TOTAL	125

At the time of this report, Investigating Ranks from the police stations stated above provided feedback for 65 cases out of the combined total of 125. Out of the 65 cases, DPP did not recommend charges for 4 as the victims and perpetrators were young children and close in age therefore counselling for both parties was recommended.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the current status and outcome of 65 cases for 2018



Victim Support Advocacy Services

For 2018, Blossom Inc. has provided court representation for 26 clients of which 13 matters were heard in the Sexual Offences Court and 13 in the Magistrate Court. These clients benefited from victim support and advocacy services which made the court process a little less daunting and frustrating. Blossom's Victim Support Advocates (VSA) prepared clients for the court process by providing information which helped to manage their expectations, accompanied clients to court, reminded them of court dates, followed up on cases with the investigating ranks and collaborated with State and Police Prosecutors in the best interest of clients.

VSAs also supported clients in writing their impact statements and in some cases read the impact statement in court when the clients were unable to do so because of fear, shame or anxiety. The Impact Statement is written by clients and details how the sexual abuse impacted them socially, emotionally, psychologically and/or physically. For cases heard in the Sexual Offences Court, 7

major convictions were meted out to perpetrators which ranged in severity from 8 years to life imprisonment. There was also 1 acquittal, 1 hung jury and the other matters are ongoing. For matters heard in the Magistrate Court, 2 matters have been transferred to the High Court, 3 dismissals, one perpetrator was fined and convicted of a summary charge while another received 6 months imprisonment. The other matters are ongoing.

Prevention Outreach

Blossom Inc. once again partnered with the Childcare and Protection Agency to support Child Protection Week which was commemorated under the theme, “Supporting Families to Prevent Child Abuse through Education and Community Involvement”. Blossom Inc. engaged hire car and minibus drivers and conductors in “Street Gaffs” to educate them on the Sexual Offences Act and their role in protecting children against sexual abuse. This activity was conducted in regions 2, 4, 7 and 10. This population was targeted because bus and hire car drivers encounter children on a daily basis and many children have reportedly been “bus riding”. Thus, bus and car drivers have a responsibility to recognize and report any incidences of child abuse. Based on conversations with drivers and conductors in region 2, it was evident that frequent public education campaigns need to be conducted to change the view that children are responsible for sexual abuse. Many conversations were had that adults are responsible for children and need to be the protectors and hence must be accountable for their behaviour. Awareness sessions were also held with the Deputy Touchaos, health workers and senior staff from the Secondary school in Wakapow.

Advocacy and Community Outreach

Clients at Blossom’s Region 2 CAC were assisted with gaining membership at the Bacchus Library, with a waiver on late returns as Blossom Inc. recognized that the majority of clients that came to the CAC exhibited reading and vocabulary deficits and our goal is to enhance children’s overall development. A US based donor – Yeah International – also partnered with Blossom Inc. to donate 100 pairs of footwear to the residents of Lake Capoey. It was titled, “The shoes that grow” project as the shoes are adjustable and will accommodate the children for at least 4 years. A group of students from Washington DC University visited the Region 2 CAC to explore the concepts – race, sexuality and gender at the community-based level. Meetings were held with the

Toshaos in Region 2 to sensitize them on their roles and responsibilities as it relates to child protection. A presentation was made by Blossom's Founder and Managing Director, Mrs. Ayo Dalgety-Dean and Board Member, Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Nathilee Caldeira. Senior Childcare and Protection Officer, Ms. Rennata Ifill and Blossom's Region 2 Coordinator, Ms. Bibi Barakat also participated in this activity. A Caribbean/US based medical outreach Team visited Blossom Inc.'s Region 2 CAC and donated clothing, footwear, books, crayon, markers and other stationery to clients. Another stakeholder also donated books, clothing and footwear. An end of year social was held for clients in Region 2 and each child received a gift which was funded by the Maranatha Assembly of God church.

Multi-Disciplinary Team Meetings

Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings were held quarterly in Region 2 and bi-monthly in Region 4. The meetings in Georgetown were chaired by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the meetings in Essequibo were chaired by Blossom Inc. These MDT meetings focused on developing approaches and strategies to safeguard children from abuse and prevent further victimization. Issues discussed were appropriate consequences for youth offenders, training of police officers to sensitively deal with trauma victims, ways of enhancing forensic interviews and coordination of logistics for distribution of victim support list to NGOs. Systems were put in place to realise a more effective and efficient collaboration between the agencies. High risk cases were also reviewed to find solutions and to ensure that a "good enough" support package was placed around the victim.

Key Stakeholder Engagement

Blossom Inc. understands that the work we do requires a collaborative effort. We supported and engaged key stakeholders to strengthen relationships and build networks to better serve our clients. The Management Team met with the Minister of Social Security, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan to discuss the work done by Blossom Inc. The Minister mentioned that he had heard of Blossom Inc. and was intrigued by our efforts. He said that he would provide support by promoting Blossom Inc. among agencies and groups that he interacts. Blossom Inc. also participated in a Victim

Support Unit meeting, which was hosted by Ms. Akilah Dorris, Manager for the Sexual Offences & Domestic Violence Policy Unit. This meeting focused on selecting the best reporting practices to capture the experiences of VSAs. Blossom Inc. also conducted a sensitization session with 15 Doctors at Suddie Hospital in Essequibo to provide education on the Guidelines for the Medical Forensic Examination, Sexual Offences Act and the appropriate way to handle underage pregnancy cases in relation to prohibiting the discharge of patients before the matter has been reported to the Childcare and Protection Agency.

In the second half of 2018, Blossom Inc. attended a meeting with Senior Prosecutor Ms. Gooding, Ms. Williams, Lawyer, Childcare and Protection Agency and Ms. Perry from ChildLink to discuss plans to improve the medical examination certificate issued to victims. Blossom Inc. also participated in a forum under the title, “The Child Rights Alliance” which was hosted by ChildLink. The gathering was an initial step in forming a community of practicing professionals who work together to implement community-based child abuse prevention programmes. Blossom Inc. facilitated a workshop hosted by the Justice Education Society that sought to educate Magistrates on managing cases involving children and other vulnerable witnesses and victims. The Magistrates were informed on how to cultivate trauma-formed courtrooms which are sensitive to the emotional and psychological needs of clients and, even child perpetrators, when presiding over matters. The organization also attended 2 events hosted by UNICEF, one of which was to celebrate World Children’s Day and the other, a discussion on the “No Tolerance Policy” implemented by UNICEF which highlights their stance on regulations regarding the age of consent which all partners are expected to abide by.

Staff Development

Blossom Inc. is committed to building staff capacity and continuous professional development. Staff members participated in several training sessions throughout the year which helped to enhance staff competency and skills. These training sessions included a workshop funded by USAID, Community, Family and Youth Resilience (CFYR) Program. The objective was to build the capacity of NGO Managers in project design and planning using specific techniques and procedures to achieve greater success when applying for grants. UNICEF in collaboration with the

Supreme Court of Judicature also hosted a training on improving Psychological Skills to work with victims of sexual violence in the court system, the facilitators were Dr. Diane Douglas and Ms. Natalie O'Brady. Blossom Inc.'s staff also attended Sexual Abuse Sensitization sessions for Prosecutors facilitated by Ms. Bonita Harris. The workshop was primarily focused on making Prosecutors aware of the impact of sexual abuse trauma on victims and how they can provide support at their level of involvement.

Other workshops focused on monitoring and evaluation and NGO advocacy. The monitoring and evaluation workshop was hosted by the Ministry of Finance and highlighted the theory of change. The theory of change can be used to track the work done by NGOs by gathering relevant data which provide the evidence that speak to the impact of the organization. Evidence which is needed when approaching donor agencies. The Advanced NGO Advocacy workshop was funded by USAID and hosted by the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC). The facilitators provided information and strategies on how NGOs can effectively advocate to garner funds, change policies, create an impact and enhance their sustainability. Blossom Inc. staff also benefit from a staff development session facilitated by Ms. Bonita Harris. Ms. Harris educated the staff on how to work with traumatized children, the stages, signs and symptoms of trauma, physiological, psychological and emotional reactions to trauma, counselling techniques and professional ethics and etiquette.

Reunification Project

Blossom Inc. was engaged by the Childcare and Protection Agency (CPA) to continue the Reunification Project for 7 Children living at the Ruimveldt Children's Home located in East La Penitence, Georgetown. Blossom Inc.'s Review Officer (BRO) started by visiting the children's home and reviewing files, as well as talking with the children and their caregivers, to gather information. At this initial stage it was revealed that all the children did not know who their Caseworkers were. In addition, 6 out of the 7 children did not have a CPA intake form at the time of admission to the home and it was discovered that the children were admitted to the home via the Care Home's admission's process rather than through the CPA. Unfortunately, for this reason, the project was halted.

Consequently, Ms. Langford, Deputy Director of CPA gave Ms. Henry, Child Protection Officer, the task of visiting the home and gathering as much information possible to start the process of re-admission and intake for each child through the CPA's process so that a Caseworker could be assigned. Because Caseworkers were not assigned, BRO did not have the authority to work with the children or recommend reintegration. Ms. Henry gathered the information and used it to create admission and intake forms for each child, but Caseworkers still could not be assigned to the children because their addresses are unknown, which further hindered the process. Ms. Langford and Ms. Henry worked together to rectify this issue. After which the project would recommence. Blossom's role in the reunification project ended in the mid-2018 and all relevant documents and files were handed over to the Childcare and Protection Agency.

Mentorship Programme

Blossom Inc.'s Mentorship Programme catered to young people who were transitioning from Children's Homes to semi-independent living. The programme provided them with support and opportunities to enable them to achieve their full potential. Blossom Inc.'s Mentors helped 5 young adults in their journey to becoming responsible and productive members of society by ensuring that they were not isolated and that they developed the skills and experience necessary to lead independent lives by affording them access to education, training and employment, health services and other support services. These young people have been assisted to develop interpersonal skills, problem solving and negotiation skills, independent living skills, communication skills, the ability to plan and travel alone, budgeting skills, personal care and menu planning skills. They also acquired their TIN certificates, opened bank accounts and participated in self-esteem building activities. Three of the young persons are currently employed at Emerge BPO, one is gaining work experience at the Guyana Red Cross Society and one at the Ambulance Brigade.

Challenges

Apart from challenges to therapy, Blossom Inc. encountered other obstacles related to funding and staff development.

As previously noted, Blossom Inc. became a Subvention Agency in 2018 but the funding received from the Government of Guyana, Ministry of Finance was less than half of the budgeted sum requested. Thus, the organization has to continue its efforts to secure sustained funding by applying for grants and engaging stakeholders in the public and private sectors.

Staff capacity building is also an area for improvement. Though Blossom's staff is committed to their work and display initiative and creativity in accomplishing their tasks, the activities of the CAC require specialized training and the Management Team at Blossom Inc. has been promoting continuous professional development by supplying training and supervision to help staff develop the required competencies that they need to be most effective. This practice will continue in 2019, facilitated by qualified and experienced consultants, so that our clients can benefit from the best possible package of care.

Projections for 2019!

For 2019, Blossom Inc. is committed to improving our current services to better meet the needs of our clients and strengthening our advocacy efforts by building strategic partnerships to enhance the organization's sustainability.

Outreaches/Public Awareness

- Implement 4 public awareness campaigns that runs throughout the year. These campaigns will address child sexual abuse prevention and related topics that seek to improve the environments where children live – 1 at each center.

Intervention

- Provide TF-CBT to 240 children and families affected by trauma.
- Provide therapeutic support and parenting education to 300 parents/caregivers.
- Advocate and provide support to 40 victims of abuse at court.
- Conduct 180 forensic interviews.

Advocacy

- Increase the visibility of Blossom Inc. and the work that we do by engaging the media – television and newspaper.
- Form key partnerships with stakeholders in the public and private sector to strengthen our advocacy efforts and improve the services offered to clients.

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Appendix

Table 1.0 highlights rough figure of total number of clients served in 2019 – see page 5

Programmes / Activities	Number of clients
TF-CBT	
No. of referred cases	175
No. of Parents/Caregivers	200
Forensic Interviews	
No. of clients in all regions	125
Victim Support	
No. of clients in all regions	26
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No. of children recommended for reunification	324
Mentorship Programme	
Young adults	5
TOTAL	855

Table 1.1 highlights the total number of FIs categorized by region and Police Stations – see page 10

Region / Police Station	Number of Forensic Interviews
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Aurora	1
Region 4	

Ruimveldt	34
Brickdam	4
Alberttown	4
Juvenile Branch	1
Cove & John	10
Timehri	18
Region 7	
Bartica	8
Kamarang	3
Region 10	
McKenzie	9
TOTAL	125

Figure 1.0 illustrates the current status and outcome of 65 cases for 2018 – see page 11

