



NEWS

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UNITED WAY 2-1-1 HAS EXPANDED SERVICES TO INCLUDE CRISIS AND SUICIDE COUNSELING

ORLANDO, Fla. (January 20, 2010) – Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) today announced that the United Way 2-1-1 and Elder Helpline has expanded to include a crisis hotline for people facing suicide or other life crises that render them unable to cope. HFUW was awarded the contract to provide local crisis hotline services through the Florida Department of Children and Families. While the contract is for Orange & Osceola counties, all callers – regardless of where they live – will receive appropriate services.

Much like 9-1-1 or 4-1-1, 2-1-1 is a free, multilingual, 24-hour resource that helps people find critical assistance with everything from food and rent to elder care and disaster relief. Now by dialing 2-1-1, residents can also find immediate help if they are feeling suicidal or dealing with family violence, drug and alcohol addictions, sexual assault or any overwhelming life crisis.

“Rising unemployment, reduced work hours, foreclosure and other serious problems are taking a terrible financial – and emotional – toll on local families,” said Robert H. (Bob) Brown, United Way President/CEO. “We must be ready to help.”

Since 2-1-1 began handling crisis and suicide calls on December 26, 2009, 6,869 calls have been received, with nearly 150 qualifying as “crisis calls.” Of that number, nearly 20 required suicide intervention services.

Noting that 2-1-1’s overall call volume has increased 47% over the past two years, Patty Maddox, chair of the United Way 2-1-1 Advisory Board and President/CEO of the Winter Park Health Foundation, said

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2009 was the busiest year ever for the call center, which helped 119,630 people in need. “Food, rent and utility assistance are the top three reasons people dial 2-1-1, so we know that thousands of residents are already facing extreme situations.”

As part of 2-1-1’s expansion, six full-time senior crisis specialists have been added, bringing 2-1-1’s total staff to nearly 40. All senior crisis specialists have extensive backgrounds or advanced degrees in social work and related fields. In addition, all 2-1-1 volunteers and paid staff alike have completed 50-plus hours of training in crisis de-escalation, risk assessment, suicide prevention and intervention through the American Association of Suicidology, a recognized leader in suicide prevention, counselor training and crisis-center accreditation.

Although suicide is the most serious situation the hotline will address, Maddox re-emphasized help is available for any situation that overwhelms a person’s ability to cope. “For a single mother struggling to make ends meet, a crisis could be the added stress of having a sick child or unexpected car repairs; for a family facing foreclosure, it could be the fear of homelessness; for a low-income senior, it could be the prospect of having to go without medicine or electricity,” she said. “Bottom line: Whatever the need or situation, 2-1-1 is ready to respond in a caring, compassionate way.”

For more information about United Way 2-1-1 & Elder Helpline, visit www.hfuw.org. To give or get help, simply dial 2-1-1.

About Heart of Florida United Way

Heart of Florida United Way is Central Florida’s most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region’s most critical health and human service programs. The organization partners with local businesses, government, other charities and individuals to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options, and create possibilities for the people in our community. HFUW also operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida’s community information and referral helpline; a Volunteer Resource Center; a Gifts In Kind Center; a Stewardship program that works with agencies to provide emergency assistance; and the Ryan White Part B program, which administers nearly \$2 million to much needed HIV/AIDS services and referrals. The organization impacts more people annually than any other charity operating in the tri-county area. For more information, visit www.hfuw.org.

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