

2-1-1 DAY ON FEBRUARY 11 CELEBRATES HUMAN SERVICE HELP LINE

February 11 is 2-1-1 Day. What better time to recognize this new call service making a difference in Schuylkill County!

2-1-1 is the free, confidential, 24-hour information and referral service that connects Schuylkill County with all the health and human services available to help.

“People called to find information on basic needs, like heating or utility assistance, eldercare, or to find the closest food bank,” said Kelly K. Malone, Executive Director, Schuylkill United Way. “But they also called for everyday information like where to take their child for developmental screening, or how to locate job training or how to schedule free tax filing support through local services.”

“Without 2-1-1 assistance, the average person would make numerous phone calls to many different agencies before finding what they’re looking for,” said Toni Gainer, 2-1-1 Director. “And even then, it may not be the right answer. 2-1-1 information and referral specialists are specially trained to listen, assess the situation, ask the appropriate questions, and then refer the caller directly to the human services that will address their problems.”

Schuylkill United Way has been providing referral services since October 2015, and became part of the national 2-1-1 program launched by United Way over 20 years ago. The user-friendly, three-digit 2-1-1 number now serves more than 283 million Americans—more than 90% of our population—in all 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico.

So what happens when someone calls 2-1-1? The call is routed to the regional 2-1-1 call center based in Lancaster County. There it is answered by a trained, bilingual information and referral specialist, who discerns the need, then searches a comprehensive database of relevant human service referrals. The 2-1-1 specialist then explains how to access those services, availing a translation service for over 170 different languages, if needed.

Here are just two examples of lives touched locally by 2-1-1:

A veteran recently reached out to 2-1-1 in need of housing assistance for his family. United Way’s 2-1-1 trained referral specialists were able to serve as the vet’s first point of contact so that he and his family maintained a roof over their heads. Although housing was the vet’s most pressing need, the trained, information and referral specialist assessed the family situation and learned that he and his family also needed utility and food assistance. He was also connected with utility assistance programs, local food pantries, a place to apply for SNAP/Food Stamps, and how to file their taxes for free.

A mother, calling from a rural area, needed help for her son. Treatment for a workplace injury had escalated into an addiction to pain medication. Her 2-1-1 specialist connected her with the substance abuse professionals he needed. She was also referred to assistance programs such as support groups for herself and her son.

United Ways have been long-standing supporters and the national leader of the 2-1-1 movement in Partnership with AIRS (Alliance of Information and Referral Services). As the largest private funder of the 2-1-1 network, United Ways continue to strengthen and support 2-1-1 as another way to build stronger communities and create opportunities for all.

