



The Herald Bulletin

BECAUSE LIFE CHANGES DAILY

The Herald Bulletin e-Edition



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Published April 07, 2007 09:50 pm - For some reason, the calls to our office usually occur after 4 p.m. The person on the line needs help and doesn't know where to go.

TAYLOR: Give 2-1-1 a try

For some reason, the calls to our office usually occur after 4 p.m. The person on the line needs help and doesn't know where to go. When we reply, "Call 2-1-1," we usually get a confused response. "That's all?" We assure the caller that it's just those three digits and he or she will be able to discuss their circumstances with a real live person who has a comprehensive database of available services at hand any time of the day or night.

April marks the first anniversary of 2-1-1 service for east central Indiana: Blackford, Grant, Jay, Delaware, Henry, Randolph and Madison counties specifically. During that time, more than 11,000 calls have come into the call center operated by LifeStream Services, a certified agency of United Way of Madison County. During the week of April 16, LifeStream will be celebrating its first birthday with the public in each of the counties served by 2-1-1. Madison County's event, complete with birthday cake, is Thursday, April 19, 2:30 p.m. at The Anderson Center of Saint John's Health System.

2-1-1 is the national abbreviated dialing code for access to health and human services information and referral. It has been a key public policy initiative for both United Way of America and the Indiana Association of United Ways for

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several years. Modeled after the 9-1-1 calling system, but for non-emergency needs, the service provides callers with immediate answers to questions about services by connecting them to a local call center with trained staff and a comprehensive local database on hand 24/7. The need for such service was especially apparent during the Gulf Coast disaster, which has created a renewed bi-partisan push for expanded coverage through telephone regulatory changes and financial support.

Today, 2-1-1 service covers more than 65 percent of the U.S. population, including 80 percent of the population of Indiana. There are 14 active call centers in Indiana that are supported by the local communities, including United Ways throughout the state. The cost to get a center up and running is estimated at \$1 to \$1.50 per person for the area served. There is no fee to the caller for service (normal usage fees and taxes apply to cell phone calls), which is completely confidential.

Madison County residents made 540 calls to 2-1-1 in the fourth quarter of 2006 and 587 calls in the first quarter of 2007. During the fourth quarter, the 10 most frequent needs were general information, financial assistance, food, home health service, housing, legal service, transportation, holiday assistance, employment and clothing. In the first quarter of this year, top 10 needs from county callers included home health/homemaker services, general information, housing/utility assistance, medical assistance, transportation, tax assistance, food, financial assistance, legal assistance and clothing.

Of the calls from Madison County this year, 907 needs were identified and 883 of those needs were met. The top unmet needs were transportation, housing and education. The No. 1 reason for a need being unmet is lack of resource, either because a caller has exhausted all available services or because the specific type of service is not available in the area.

2-1-1 eliminates many barriers to service by providing easy access to information, allows social service agencies to focus on their core missions, relieves non-emergency call traffic to 9-1-1 (especially during disasters), and provides a method to track both demand for and gaps in social services in a community. The LifeStream 2-1-1 call center is accredited by the Alliance of Information & Referral Systems, and provides a uniform and fairly applied policy for information distribution to all callers.

One of the best ways to support 2-1-1 is to let lawmakers know that the service is important. Sens. Evan Bayh and Richard Lugar are already co-sponsors of S.211, "Calling for 2-1-1 Act," that will add \$700 million in matching federal dollars to the financial support of United Ways and other organizations that

contribute to the system. There is an identical bill in the House of Representatives (H.211). At 80 percent coverage, Indiana is a leader in this effort. These bills will help us get to 100 percent.

For more information about IN211, log on to www.in211.org. For more information about the local service, log on to www.lifestreaminc.org, or call 2-1-1 directly and see firsthand how it works.

Nancy Taylor is president of United Way of Madison County Inc.



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More from the Local News section

11:40 p.m.: [Walkathon to aid homeless](#)

7:38 p.m.: [Court denies appeal in Wash case](#)

7:13 p.m.: New building, same management

6:23 p.m.: Court denies Alex man's appeal

TAYLOR: Give 2-1-1 a try

The advertisement is a horizontal banner. On the left, there is a logo for 'dot Photo' with the text 'Order photo reprints here!' below it. In the center, there is a photograph of a man in a light green shirt looking at a newspaper, with the text 'Try Us FREE for two weeks!' overlaid. On the right, the words 'COUPONS' are written in large, yellow, outlined letters, and 'The Herald Bulletin' is written in a smaller, black font across the middle of the coupon letters.

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