

news release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 9, 2009

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SURGE IN 2-1-1 CALLS CAUSED BY ECONOMIC CRISIS NATIONWIDE AND IN EAST CENTRAL INDIANA

The newly unemployed, underemployed and those just anxious about the economy and its impact on their family are creating a surge in calls to 2-1-1 call centers around the country and after more than two years of effort on the part of local officials and organizations, people in Fayette, Franklin, Rush, Wayne and Union counties are finally able to call a local call center.

2-1-1 is an information and referral line that connects people to vital social services provided by a range of nonprofit and government services. Nationally, 2-1-1 experienced the highest single year increase in its 11-year history last year, recording 14 million calls—a 42% increase above 2007 – nation-wide.

The local 2-1-1 Call Center became a reality on December 1, 2008. “When this initiative was undertaken over two years ago, none of us knew how even more desperately this unserved region of Indiana would need 2-1-1 for our citizens,” said Tony Shepherd, an ex-officio member of the local 2-1-1 Advisory Board. “The three mayors and county government officials, along with a variety of community agencies and partners, came together and supported the 2-1-1 initiative. At that time Visteon, MasterCraft and other now closed businesses had not announced their closings. Economically it has only gotten worse and the need for the 2-1-1 service has increased exponentially. Thank goodness it is up and running to assist those in need.”

So what happens when a person calls 2-1-1? The call, routed to the local 2-1-1 Center, is answered by a highly trained 2-1-1 information and referral Specialist who listens carefully to the need, searches a comprehensive database of human service programs and explains how to access those services. For each of these potential services, the 2-1-1 Center maintains a detailed record of their location, hours of service, eligibility, intake process, and other important details. . In the case of the worker recently laid-off or facing a reduction in hours, the 2-1-1 Specialist may talk with them about job search options, food stamp programs, food pantries, mortgage or rent help, utility assistance, and counseling.

“While it’s been a long time coming, the service is now available to our region and at a time when Whitewater Valley citizens need it most. We are encouraged by the information that has been gathered and entered into the data base and look forward to serving the people in our community,” said Rachel Hughes, 211 Advisory Board chairperson.

Staff and volunteers of local 2-1-1 call centers continue to stretch their limited resources to meet the increasing needs created by the recession, lay-offs and business closings. Locally, 2-1-1, which is a free call, is currently supported by each of the counties served by the center. Continued local, regional and state support is necessary to continue the 2-1-1 service.

Currently, legislation is being considered that would provide for financial support of 2-1-1 Call Centers. This legislation is contained in Senate Bill 211, of which Senator Richard Lugar is a co-sponsor, and House Bill 211. Those involved in the local Center are hopeful that Senator Evan Bayh and U.S. Representative Mike Pence will also sign on as co-sponsor/supporters in their respective chambers of Congress.