



NJ 2-1-1 Partnership

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NJ 2-1-1 PREPARES TO "SPRING" INTO ACTION FOR NEW JERSEY RESIDENTS WITH NEW PROGRAMS WHILE CONTINUING TO SERVICE NEEDS CAUSED BY HARSH WINTER

East Hanover, NJ – After a winter that provided more than its share of hardship on residents of New Jersey, spring has finally arrived, but for many in the state, specific human service needs continue to mount and 2-1-1, the user friendly phone service is there to meet them, as it prepares to launch new services for the spring and summer months.

2-1-1 serves 90% of America's population, and connects some 16 million people a year to critical resources, information and services. In New Jersey, more than 210,000 people turned to 2-1-1 for help last year.

The severity of the winter conditions led thousands of residents to seek heating assistance. Since the beginning of this year's heating season, 2-1-1 has spoken to over 60,000 callers about how to apply for heating assistance; supplied information on the status of their application; and referred callers to weatherization programs sponsored by State agencies and private sources.

"Every day we hear stories of extraordinary heating bills and the monthly struggle to pay the bills on time," said Laura Zink Marx, Executive Director of the NJ 2-1-1 Partnership. "Assistance from both the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Universal Service Fund (USF) is still available so anyone who finds they need help should continue to call 2-1-1 to see if their household may qualify."

Another important seasonal initiative still underway is the free Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs throughout the state. NJ 2-1-1 maintains the listing of hundreds of VITA sites throughout New Jersey and also works closely with the United Ways in key communities where residents are not always knowledgeable about the benefits of having their taxes prepared at a

VITA site. NJ 2-1-1 makes appointments at United Way VITA sites for residents in Passaic, Hunterdon, Mercer, Atlantic, Camden, Cumberland Counties and Montclair in Essex County. Information about VITA sites is available at www.nj211.org and by dialing 2-1-1 until April 13, 2014.

As spring begins, NJ 2-1-1 focuses on preparing for life's emergencies (big and small). The NJ 2-1-1 website's news page <http://www.nj211.org/latestnews.cfm> will offer links on wildfires and floods this spring. As weather gets warmer 2-1-1 will highlight information on warm weather safety. This section of the site will offer all sorts of tips including those related to energy savings, food safety, cooling resources (which will include a full listing of cooling centers during extreme heat conditions), water safety, car safety, and sun protection.

Also being launched will be the 2-1-1 summer camp page, which will be posted shortly. Spotlighted on this page is information about activity programs for school age children. The programs are organized by county and listings are enhanced as new information becomes available.

At the close of school 2-1-1 will offer information about summer meal programs and in August, readers will find postings about area school supply drives.

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, the United Ways of New Jersey, in partnership with the State of NJ continue to strengthen and support 2-1-1 as another way to build stronger communities in our state and to create opportunities for all.

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Tours of New Jersey's 2-1-1 Center in East Hanover is available upon request. For additional reports about calls handled by 2-1-1 contact Laura Zink Marx at 973-929-3704 or visit www.nj211.org.