

Need help? It's only a phone call away

In these troubled times, more and more people are in need of and seeking assistance of all forms, from finding employment to help putting food on their table. When you're in trouble, knowing where to turn for help is sometimes the hardest part. But it's easy to navigate the maze of health and human services available to New Jersey residents thanks to 2-1-1, an information and referral system, run by the NJ 211 Partnership.

2-1-1 is a single, simple, statewide phone system that all residents can use to get information on any number of social and government services as well as community resources. Callers can find out where to go and how to apply and locate services they may need.

Instituted in Atlanta, Ga., in the late 90s, 2-1-1 is a universally growing national model. Today there are over 190 million Americans in 45 states who have access to 2-1-1.

The benefit of 2-1-1 is that it is an easy to remember telephone number for people to call when they need access to community services, the same way that 4-1-1 and 9-1-1 are universally recognized. It also streamlines access to services by eliminating often confusing and frustrating searches. It's an efficient and accurate database and referral system for existing services.

Organizers say 2-1-1 helps vulnerable people (the elderly, disabled, non-English speaking, incapacitated by personal crisis, illiterate, etc.) to help themselves with one single call.

Callers can find guidance in such areas as: financial assistance, general information, housing, mental health services, health and medical care, food, legal assistance, elder care, child care, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, depression, rent and utility assistance, and transportation.

Anyone who calls 2-1-1 will reach a referral specialist who has an extensive database of services at their fingertips. New Jersey's United Ways, the state, county grants and the Verizon Foundation have generated more than \$2.2 million in resources to support 2-1-1 operations in New Jersey. 2-1-1 can also be reached at www.nj211.org, where a live chat is available as well as a searchable database.

The beauty of 2-1-1 is that it's free, con-

fidential, and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's good to know that when you need help, it can be a simple phone call away.



