

Information line is making impact

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ISSUE: First anniversary of 2-1-1 service locally

OUR VIEW: United Way program addresses need

Making good choices depends on having good information.

For many people addressing the issues of life requires guess work, trial and error or stabs in the dark. Without knowing how to find competent guidance, advice or assistance, they flounder from one mistake to the next.

One year ago, United Way of Central Kentucky implemented 2-1-1 locally.

The information database directs callers to public and private resources ranging from schools and health care to benevolence organizations and social services.

Like 4-1-1 directory assistance number or the 9-1-1 emergency service line, 2-1-1 often provides critical information, which can be a lifesaver. The easy-to-remember number functions in much the same way.

Since its inception, the local United Way recently reported it made 3,000 referrals from across its five-county service area. This service is free and confidential. As awareness grows, usage should as well.

Realizing you need help often is a first step toward improvement. The 2-1-1 users and the innovative nonprofit which decided to bring this resource to its five-county service area should be commended.

Kentucky is one of the few states without a statewide 2-1-1 network. UWCK made it available here through a collaboration with Metro United Way, United Way of Kentucky and Louisville's Center for Women and Families.

Looking at the most requested services in 2017 provides insight into the nature of needs locally — particularly unmet needs. It includes rent assistance, food pantries, housing, basic needs support and academic programs.

Unmet needs are defined as a call received by 2-1-1 where there are no agencies or resources available to address the caller's expressed needs.

That's sad, but it's also valuable information not previously available in a quantified way.

Megan Stith, president and CEO of United Way of Central Kentucky, recognizes the value of that information.

"By organizing and publicly sharing data from our 2-1-1 system, we are able to help organizations, service providers and government officials provide targeted responses to these issues," she said in a recent interview.

This ease of information provided through the helpline benefits not just the users but also helps nonprofits, public agencies and volunteer-based services. There's more time available to serve instead of using staff energy fielding misdirected or irrelevant questions.

Also, no service has a value unless it is used. Connecting people with a problem to the appropriate, available service is the central element of 2-1-1's success.

This editorial reflects a consensus of The News-Enterprise editorial board.