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First Call for Help system gets overhauled

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PHILLIPSBURG -- NORWESCAP's First Call for Help is no longer accessible by calling 2-1-1.

As of July 1, NORWESCAP and New Jersey 2-1-1 Partnership have parted ways.

"It was not our choice," said Terry Newhard, executive director of NORWESCAP.

Newhard said the New Jersey 2-1-1 Partnership put out a request for proposal to consolidate 11 local call centers into two regional call centers, one located in Parsippany and the other located in Southern Jersey.

NORWESCAP decided not to participate in the request for proposal as "the logistics did not make sense."

"Our main concern is providing assistance and advocacy to the community," Newhard said.

He felt that with the change in 2-1-1's structure -- to spend two minutes or less per client -- that 2-1-1 would not be capable of the same follow-up as before.

"Most of our clients are not a two minute call," Newhard said. "They are a 40-minute call and required a lot of follow-up."

In order to provide the community with the same care and level of service, NORWESCAP is offering an alternative to 2-1-1.

Residents in need should contact 877-661-HELP (4357) where a NORWESCAP representative will be able to answer questions regarding social service programs, eligibility or a concern about navigating human services.

The new help line will provide the same full service callers are used to receiving.

"We are trying to minimize the community impact and avoid confusion in the community," Newhard said.

NORWESCAP has been experiencing a steady stream of phone calls and they have not experienced a whole lot of change, but it could get worse as the heating season starts.

Newhard said residents should not be discouraged from calling 2-1-1 for instances such as obtaining a phone number.

2-1-1 has also agreed to provide a "warm transfer" of phone calls to NORWESCAP so residences in need of further assistance can call 2-1-1 and be transferred -- on the spot -- to a NORWESCAP representative.

Unfortunately, with the loss of 2-1-1, NORWESCAP has also lost about \$48,000 in United Way funding.

However, the board has diverted resources to keep the help line open and is continuing to find funding from other sources.

Newhard said Warren and Sussex counties and the State of New Jersey provide funding for the help line and that NORWESCAP would just need to make up the United Way funding, which is what they are working towards.

"We cannot let the community fall down," Newhard said.

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