

News Release 2011

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FEBRUARY 11 MARKS FIRST DECADE OF 2-1-1

Bellingham — The community resource line, 2-1-1, will celebrate a decade of connecting people to health and human services in local communities around the nation. Our local 2-1-1 will also celebrate 5 years of service in Washington state and Whatcom County.

United Way took the lead in bringing 2-1-1 to Washington, where it became available to residents in 2006. In the first week, call volumes in our region broke records every day as callers began using the easy-to-remember number. “It was incredible to see so many people using this new service and it was great to know that they were getting connected to the resources that they needed,” said Peter Theisen, President of United Way of Whatcom County.

In a time when budget cuts reduce services and accessibility, 2-1-1 helps fill the information gap by providing a cost-effective, efficient way to connect people with services and can also help during a disaster by taking the burden off 911, allowing police officers, firefighters and paramedics to focus on those who most need emergency help. In addition, 2-1-1 stores an efficient and accurate database of community resources and can track gaps in services to better determine what services the community needs.

“We are closely involved in disaster service responses in Whatcom County and always work to stay current in order to refer callers to the appropriate places to get the help they need. Our goal is to be an active part of the solution,” said Bill Brackin, Director for the North Sound 2-1-1

Our local 2-1-1 call center, North Sound 2-1-1, serves Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom Counties. In 2010 calls from Whatcom County residents accounted for over 2,150 of received calls and needs ranged from food assistance to tax preparation. There was a rise in individuals who requested assistance with emergency shelter, 7% of all calls in 2010 and only 4.7% in 2008. A positive trend was seen in the drop in the numbers of individuals requesting food assistance, 2.4% of callers in 2010 down from 3.8% in 2009. There continues to be a high demand for utility assistance, spiking up to 15.7% of all calls when it was only 11.9% in 2008.

Callers requesting legal services has been on the rise on the statewide level but has dropped in Whatcom County from 5.7% of all callers in 2008 to 4.8% in 2010. Requests for low cost housing assistance has been rising rapidly in Washington State overall but has held very steady in our community with only a slight increase in calls from 2009 to 2010. Some of the top local organizations that 2-1-1 made referrals to in 2010 were:

- The Opportunity Council - 545 referrals (for their Community Resource Center and Energy Assistance Program)
- Free Tax preparations sites – 302 referrals
- St. Pauls’ Episcopal Church - 228 (for emergency services/financial aid)

- Salvation Army - 183 (for utility assistance, food pantry, clothing vouchers)
- Project Hope - 139 (for emergency services/finance aid)
- Sea Mar of Whatcom County -134 (for health services and behavioral health services)
- Associates in Mental Health – 103

“United Way of Whatcom County is proud to be a partner and sponsor of this incredible service and watching it grow and succeed in just a few years is remarkable,” said Theisen. To find out more about the national 2-1-1 movement visit: www.211us.org. To find out more about Whatcom County 2-1-1 statistics for 2010 visit: http://prod-voawww.syscomservices.com/211stats_whatcom

United Way of Whatcom County has worked for over 50 years to increase financial resources for local health and human service needs, and to seek and invest in community-building opportunities to improve the health and welfare of Whatcom County residents.

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