



EveryMonday is a weekly publication of the Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Florida Chamber of Commerce, Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitor's Bureau and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.



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United Way 2-1-1 Assistance Calls Show Double-Digit Increase

While Central Florida's housing values, economic productivity and job growth continue to decline, calls to the United Way 2-1-1 resource and referral helpline are showing a double-digit increase over the same period last year.

Last month, 2-1-1 operators fielded 8,027 calls from tri-county residents seeking assistance with food, shelter, medical care and other basic necessities. The number represents a 46 percent increase over March 2007, according to Heart of Florida United Way Community Services Vice President Larry Olness, who noted that April call volume is tracking 62 percent higher than this time last year.

Help in paying utility, rent and food bills rank as the top three reasons people are dialing 2-1-1, which is a free 24-hour-per-day resource that links those in need with services provided by more than 800 community agencies

"At the same time many people are losing jobs, the price of everything from food to gasoline is rising," said Olness. "It's creating a new level of hardship for many in our community, including some middle-income residents who are seeking help for the first time."

Chamber member Patty Maddox, President and CEO of the Winter Park Health Foundation and a member of the 2-1-1 Advisory Committee, said increased demand for 2-1-1 assistance is consistent with what she and others in the local non-profit sector are witnessing.

"It's pretty clear that the economic downturn is having the greatest impact on those who were already living close to the edge," said Maddox. "When people are seeking help with basic elements like food, it's an indication of the challenges we're facing."

Staffed by full-time operators and highly trained volunteers, United Way 2-1-1 received 105,762 last year. Given early indicators, Olness said he expects

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United Way 2-1-1 Assistance
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Where in the Region is Jacob
Stuart?

2008 to be a busy year for the center, which was
established in 2003 and is accredited by the Florida
Agency for Health Care Administration.

If you have employees or know others who need
community assistance, tell them to dial 2-1-1 for free
information and referrals. Volunteer operators are
needed to meet increased call demand. To learn more
about 2-1-1 and volunteer opportunities, visit www.hfuw.org.

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