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Contact: Jerilyn Stowe | United Way of Salt Lake | 801-736-7709, jerilyn@uw.org

February 11th is National 2-1-1 Day!

United Way Celebrates Crucial Statewide Service that puts Utahans on the road to self-sufficiency

Salt Lake City – Thursday, February 11 is National 2-1-1 Day, in recognition of the free, user-friendly phone number that serves 90 percent of America's population, and connects some 16 million people a year to critical resources, information, and services. Without 2-1-1, it is estimated that callers with critical needs can make an average of eight phone calls to different numbers before finding the services they need.

In Utah, nearly 85,000 calls were made to United Way 2-1-1 last year and more than 135,000 referrals were given to those callers. The majority of the referrals were for individuals seeking housing and income support, health care, utility assistance, and family services. More than 62% of the calls came from families with children, and 41% from someone with a disability. Callers dial 2-1-1 for information about everything from where to take children for developmental screenings or how to locate job training, to finding free tax filing support. In addition, callers dial 2-1-1 to get connected to meaningful volunteer opportunities.

Recently, a veteran called 2-1-1. He had been medically discharged from the army with a 100% disability. His overwhelming transition back to civilian life in Utah was compounded by the knowledge that five of his fellow soldiers who had recently returned from serving had taken their lives. Fearing for his own future and feeling nowhere else to turn, he reached out to 2-1-1. The representative connected him with a partner agency that specializes in these exact issues. The veteran said the service literally saved his life that night.

“There are so many services available to those in our communities dealing with crisis,” said Chiara Cameron, United Way 2-1-1 Director. “Without hope for helpful resources or a listening ear, too many of those in dire need make poor and permanent decisions, when what they may be going through is only temporary if they knew how to access help. These services are not a handout, they are resources that give those in need a hand up – a simple call that ultimately can change the course of their life.”

A young Utah woman credits 2-1-1 for turning her life around. She had been abandoned by the father of her three children, didn't have a job, there wasn't money to pay rent or utility bills that were due, and her family needed food. She received information about accessing the resources she needed most, and the caring she received empowered her to take the steps necessary over the next two years to gain employment, transportation, and the ability to care for her family.

When an individual dials 2-1-1, the call is answered by a trained information and referral specialist. Specialists discern need and search a comprehensive database of nearly 9,000 relevant human service referrals. Specialists then explain how to access those services. In the case of a worker who has recently been laid off or whose hours have been reduced, the 2-1-1 specialist may share information about unemployment benefits, job search options, food pantries, mortgage or rent help, utility assistance,

counseling, and other available resources above and beyond the caller's original need. Calls are answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Individuals seeking assistance can also chat live with an information specialist and search the online database at 211ut.org.

United Way of Salt Lake continues to strengthen and support 2-1-1 as a way to build stronger communities and create opportunities for all. In 2013, legislation was passed creating a public-private partnership allowing for a single strong state 2-1-1 system, and over the past couple years, United Way of Salt Lake, United Way of Utah County and United Way of Northern Utah have worked together to reduce duplication and save money. United Way 2-1-1 and its partners are seeking ongoing funding this legislative session to help ensure this free, statewide service can continue to provide quality, up-to-date information to Utahns in need and those seeking opportunities to volunteer.

For more information about United Way 2-1-1, please visit uw.org or 211ut.org.

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United Way of Salt Lake is working to advance the education, income, and health of our neighborhoods and communities to ensure that every child succeeds, every step of the way, from cradle to career. We invite everyone to be a part of the change. You can give, you can advocate, and you can volunteer. That's what it means to LIVE UNITED. Join the conversation by visiting our blog at uwslhub.org, or find out more at uw.org.