

2-1-1 links those in crisis with resources

Value of service has been proven as economy slumps

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Gov. Bill Ritter has declared today "2-1-1 Day" in Colorado, a recognition of a vital but under-recognized link in the state's human services chain.

With a free call to 2-1-1, people in crisis can be quickly directed to needed resources. In Larimer County, the 2-1-1 system is handled by the United Way.

In addition to handling everyday calls for health, human and government services, United Way of Larimer County has used the 2-1-1 system in some innovative ways, like directing consumers to free tax preparation sites and informing them about the Earned Income Tax Credit; collaborating with spay/neuter programs for dogs and cats; and serving as a central call center during disasters such as May's Windsor tornado.

Larimer County's 2-1-1 system also served as the call center after the airing of the recent documentary "Crystal Darkness" about methamphetamines, drawing nearly 600 calls for more information.

As the economy has slumped, usage of the 2-1-1 system has increased. Last January, the Larimer County 2-1-1 took 2,204 calls. This year, the service saw a 50 percent increase, to 3,303 calls.

Statewide usage of 2-1-1 increased by 44 percent in 2008 over 2007.

The 2-1-1 system was established nationally in 2000 and in Colorado in 2002, with the intent of keeping social service calls from going to the 911 emergency system. The 2-1-1 system is funded by a public-private partnership, including governments, corporations and foundations.

The value of 2-1-1 has been proven since its creation. Unfortunately, the need will probably only increase this year.

To learn more, go to 211colorado.org.