

Community Impact in Action

2-1-1 Infoline, United Way of Connecticut, Rocky Hill, CT

Initiative Name and Year Established: 2-1-1 Infoline, established 1999

Vision and Mission

Mission: “Connect people in need of health and human services with appropriate resources in their community that will help meet those needs.”

Catalyst

Connecticut's Infoline program was established in 1976. Despite outreach and marketing efforts, many people were still not aware of the information and referral service, and were therefore not finding services in their communities in the most effective way. When United Way of Connecticut heard about the use of 2-1-1 elsewhere, they saw it as an opportunity to leverage and build upon the Infoline program in the community. The statewide 2-1-1 program was activated in 1999, incorporating the Infoline program under the name 2-1-1 Infoline.

Initial Activities

By 1990, Infoline comprised 5 regional offices and subcontractors statewide and offered 24 hour service in 3 regions. Its structure had been reconfigured several times, and was consolidated into one organization in 1990. Infoline began offering 24 hour service statewide in 1994.

Key milestones in the activation of 2-1-1:

- Phase I(1997-1998): 2-1-1 business plan was developed and accepted by the state Office of Policy and Management, funding was included in the governor's budget and approved by the legislature
- Phase II (1998-1999): New telecommunications and computer system was implemented and additional space secured; additional staff were hired and trained; marketing campaign was developed
- Phase III (Jan-Dec 1999): Marketing campaign was implemented and 2-1-1 telecommunications activated

Partners and Roles They Played in Strategies

The following individuals and organizations have championed and advocated for 2-1-1:

- Governor
- Health and Human Service Commissioners
- Office of Policy and Management
- Department of Public Utility Control
- Consumer Counsel
- Attorney General
- Legislators

- Emergency Telecommunications (9-1-1 system)
- Chiefs of Police
- Local Officials
- Corporate Leaders/CEOs
- United Way CEOs
- Funders

Target Population

Any Connecticut citizen, or any individual in Connecticut, who needs health and human services. The target population is a continuation of the population served under the existing Connecticut Infoline that was established in 1976. Activating 2-1-1 was a means to improve outreach and raise public awareness of Information and Referral services for this target population.

Strategies and How Chosen

Connecticut was the first state to initiate a statewide 2-1-1 initiative. The number is used as an access point for media campaigns to inform the public about various health and human service programs including: energy assistance, child care, teen pregnancy, health care prevention, mentoring initiatives, and campaigns to reduce gun violence.

This program also entails follow up on certain types of calls (crisis calls, prenatal care, mental health, eviction) and 15% of other types of calls which are selected on a random basis.

Data collected through 2-1-1 is used for community needs assessments and to identify available resources. The state uses this information as an early warning detection system. For example, state planners learned that there would be a need for increased energy assistance, due to a high number of calls asking about this service. This data is also used by United Way of Connecticut to produce "social barometer" reports that focus on specific issues. For example, reports were produced on substance abuse services needed and what type of treatment callers were seeking, housing needs, childcare requests and availability. These reports were distributed to 400 organizations, including legislators, local government, social services providers and planners.

Implementation

United Way Roles

United Way of Connecticut administers the program and funds for the program come from the state and local United Ways in Connecticut. The CEO provides leadership to promote and advocate for the 2-1-1 initiative. Each local United Way promotes 2-1-1 through local activities, campaigns and brochures.

Governance

The United Way of Connecticut Board of Directors has legal and fiduciary responsibility for the program. The Strategic Planning Committee conducted long-term planning for 2-1-1 and initially developed a business plan for the initiative with help from the corporate sector.

Volunteer Involvement (Besides UW board)

Negligible. While 2-1-1 has utilized some Master of Social Work students as interns, the level of commitment and training required does not lend the initiative to taking on volunteers.

Media Coverage

The state uses 2-1-1 as its access point for media campaigns that inform the public about programs such as energy assistance, teen pregnancy, health care prevention, mentoring initiatives, and campaigns to reduce gun violence. As such, the initiative is well publicized. TV news and radio talk shows reference 2-1-1 during coverage of social service issues. Radio talk shows and public access TV feature interviews with 2-1-1 spokespersons.

Communication Strategies

The initial marketing and communications plan for 2-1-1 was multi-faceted, employing billboards, poster boards, bus posters, radio advertising, TV PSAs, McDonald's tray liners (in-kind donation by McDonalds), inserts in payroll envelopes for state employees and widespread distribution of brochures, bookmarks, wallet cards and phone stickers to libraries, agencies, United Ways, schools, churches and government offices.

Additionally, there are four regional liaisons who are located in the community and represent the program locally by participating on local task forces, committees and coalitions. They conduct presentations on 2-1-1 to groups, participate in visibility events and distribute marketing materials widely. A video was produced on the fifth anniversary of 2-1-1 which is used in waiting rooms of social service agencies and distributed to public access TV for airing. Press releases are sent out to the media around special events, and there is an annual 2-1-1 Infoline Day at the Capitol.

In-kind and Financial Resources

United Way's Financial Commitment

United Ways in Connecticut have been contributing financial resources to support 2-1-1 Infoline (formerly Infoline) since 1976. Currently, each United Way is asked to contribute 1% of its adjusted campaign production (0.8% in the case of Metro 1 United Ways). Funding from local United Ways is approximately 15% of total budget with 83% from state contracts and the remainder from miscellaneous sources.

Annual Budget of the Initiative

Currently \$3.7 million

Resources Mobilized Beyond Money

Business planning services and in-kind support from Deloitte and Touche, General Electric, Northeast Utilities (electric company), Aetna Corporation, local telephone company. For example, GE and Northeast Utilities both provided technical assistance and consultation in setting up the call center. Aetna Corporation donated work stations and furniture when they closed down their own call center. The local telephone company printed stickers and other marketing materials.

Lessons Learned and Implications for United Way

Key Success Factors

Key success factors include:

- State-level commitment expanding partnership and funding: in addition to providing a grant for 2-1-1 to upgrade technology after 6 years, the state continues to offer opportunities for new services that are accompanied by more funding for 2-1-1
- Longstanding relationships with the state and local United Ways
- Quality staff, who are committed to customer service, quality and continuous training
- Current and appropriate technology (software and hardware) to assist staff in efficiently searching for service referrals and document case activity

Changes in Roles and Responsibilities for Staff and Volunteers

Staffing levels at the United Way of Connecticut increased to accommodate calls. New technology also led to an increase in IT staffing; the IT staff at United Way devotes 50% of their time to 2-1-1.

Staff Skills and Competencies Developed

Greater attention to customer service and quality, technology skills and ability to advocate and train others

How the Initiative Has Evolved or Matured Over Time

State agencies increasingly use 2-1-1 to disseminate information, rather than set up specialized information and referral systems. For example, the Connecticut Department of Public Health uses 2-1-1 in its bio-terrorism plan, the Department of Social Services includes 2-1-1 as a key part of its human services infrastructure, and utility companies use 2-1-1 in their literature and advertising for customers about energy assistance.

What Didn't Work or Should Have Been Done Differently

N/A. Leveraging 20 years of Infoline experience, the United Way of Connecticut has been able to implement 2-1-1 very smoothly.

Advice to a United Way Looking to Establish a Similar Initiative in Their Community

- Partnering is key to generating sufficient support and funding for the operations of the program.
- Commitment to sustainability is critical, especially in a tough funding environment. Need to help community recognize that 2-1-1 is part of the social services infrastructure, enabling social services to work effectively in the toughest of times.
- Promote 2-1-1 as a community service in addition to being a service of the United Way.

Exit Strategy

None; United Way of Connecticut is committed to finding the necessary means to keep the program viable in Connecticut.

Additional Community Impact Catalyzed

United Way of Connecticut/2-1-1 Infoline has become a key resource for state government in raising public awareness of critical government programs and for disaster/emergency preparedness.

Lessons Learned About Community Initiatives and Their Relationship to Achieving Community Impact

2-1-1 has helped to integrate and improve the effectiveness of multiple community initiatives. For example, 2-1-1 interfaces with programs relating to early childhood development and others, supporting the information referral component of those initiatives.

Results

Community Changes

Health and human services professionals in Connecticut (counselors, case managers, psychiatrists, legal services providers) increase knowledge of available services for their clients

Indicator: Number of calls by Connecticut professionals to 2-1-1 Infoline to obtain information on services for their clients

Data Source: Call database

Data Collection Method: Documentation by 2-1-1 Infoline call specialists

Data Collection Tool: Case records

Results:

From July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004

- 23,321 cases of professionals calling 2-1-1 Infoline for services for their clients, this was (9.5%) of callers identified in records

Social planners and agencies in Connecticut have increased information about local and statewide service needs

Indicator: Number of organizations in Connecticut (including United Ways, state agencies, non-profit coalitions, local government agencies, foundations and legislators) that access information collected by 2-1-1 Infoline

Data Source: Report log that documents requests for reports

Results:

From July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004

- 43 reports on data collected from calls to 2-1-1 Infoline were provided to external organizations
- A major report on housing issues was produced and sent to over 700 organizations for their use

Additionally, a summary of services needs by United Way service area is posted on internet monthly

Intermediate Outcomes

Callers to the 2-1-1 Infoline in Connecticut have new knowledge of available services in their communities and receive needed services

Indicator: Number and percent of follow-up contacts in which callers received services from the agencies to which they were referred

Data Source: Call database

Data Collection Method: Follow up calls by 2-1-1 call specialists

Data Collection Tool: Case records

Results:

From July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004

- 373,546 referrals were made to community services
- 87,607 (23.5%) of callers agreed to follow up
- 41,560 (47%) were successfully followed up, of which 23,572 (57%) had received services

People in Connecticut experiencing emotional or mental health crises, or suicidal ideation, have their crises averted through help from 2-1-1 Infoline

Indicator: Number and percent of mental health crisis calls to 2-1-1 Infoline in Connecticut in which an intervention occurred or a crisis was defused

Data Source: Call database

Data Collection Method: Documentation by 2-1-1 call specialists

Data Collection Tool: Case records

Results:

From July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004

- Infoline 2-1-1 responded to 5,450 mental health crisis calls
- Caller's status at end of call was documented in 2,005 of these calls. In 2,005 of the calls (80%), the crisis was defused or interventions completed.