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NEWS RELEASE

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2-1-1 Big Bend Celebrates Ten Years of 2-1-1 Services on 2/11

TALLAHASSEE – Ten years ago the three digit 2-1-1 number was publicly launched in Tallahassee as an easy to remember number for the local 24/7 community hotline program. The agency providing this hotline was created in 1970 and was known as Telephone Counseling and Referral Service. However, when it launched the 2-1-1 number, it also changed its name to 2-1-1 Big Bend as a strategy to improve its community awareness. Thousands of people now rely on Helpline 2-1-1 to get information about community services, find referrals to local resources and receive support for a variety of emotional needs.

Since the agency changed its name and launched the 2-1-1 number on February 11, 2003 calls to the hotline have doubled from about 1,000 calls to 2,000 each month. “Before our implementation of the 2-1-1 number, many people didn’t know we existed,” said Randy Nicklaus, President of 2-1-1 Big Bend. “The 2-1-1 number and our name change have made it easier to explain and promote our services. Human service agencies often share the 2-1-1 number with their clients and tell them to call us when they need additional community help or emotional support.”

2-1-1 Big Bend frequently partners with different groups of agencies to promote seasonal initiatives. In many cases, the 2-1-1 number is promoted as a starting place to call to access services such as the Summer Food Program, the Cold Nights Shelter or the Voluntary Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites coordinated by the United Way of the Big Bend.

As part of its mission, 2-1-1 Big Bend provides suicide intervention and prevention services. A two-day ASIST Class (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) is offered to the community at least twice a year. 2-1-1 Big Bend is a member of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Network (1-800-273-TALK) and answers calls to that number if they come from North Florida. Its trained counselors offer suicide intervention and prevention services on both the 2-1-1 and Lifeline numbers on a 24-hour-a-day basis. In 2012 more than 1200 calls related to suicide were answered and fifteen percent of them were assessed as “high risk”.

2-1-1 Big Bend, Inc., along with hundreds of 2-1-1 centers across the U.S. will celebrate National 2-1-1 Week February 11-16. 2-1-1 Big Bend staff and volunteers are canvassing the community with yard signs and 2-1-1 promotional materials to increase awareness of this valuable service. Board members are hosting a 10th Anniversary party to help raise funds and an ASIST training session is scheduled for February 15-16. Registration is now closed for this class but interested people can call to be put on the list for the next class.

“A call to 2-1-1 can be someone’s first call for help or a last resort,” said 2-1-1 Big Bend Board of Directors Chair Al Pasini. “Our trained hotline counselors can help a family access services after a disaster, such as the flooding that occurred in Wakulla County last summer, or they can support a person with crisis intervention services after a personal tragedy affects them. We are a community safety net that helps thousands of people each year.”

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2-1-1 Big Bend, a United Way Agency, is a gateway for area residents who need help with everything from paying their utility bill to finding legal aid to getting help with parenting stresses. This community information clearinghouse saves time and money by connecting people with the most appropriate service based on their needs. Nearly 600 local organizations and more than 1000 human service programs are cataloged in the extensive 2-1-1 Big Bend database. More than 28,000 referrals were provided in 2012 and about 1,000 visitors used the online searchable resource directory each month. For easy access there is now a free iPhone App for this directory. Search "2-1-1 Big Bend" on iTunes to download it.

2-1-1 Big Bend answers more than 50,000 calls each year through its four hotline programs. Anyone can dial 2-1-1 in the eight-county Big Bend area to talk with someone when it may be difficult to talk to friends or family. So look for the yard signs popping up around town to remind all to call 2-1-1. Several volunteer and internship opportunities are available and the agency is always eager to accept cash or in-kind donations to support its services. For more information about 2-1-1 Big Bend or to access the on-line database, visit www.211BigBend.org. Because Life is 24/7, so are we.

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