

## ***Services for disabled still lacking, survey shows*** **2-1-1 awareness campaign aims to make disability services easier to find**

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A coalition of community leaders in northeast New Jersey are working to make disability services easier to access through a public awareness campaign launched in mid-October.

211 First Call for Help, the Parsippany-based nonprofit agency that handles 2-1-1 calls for Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic and Union Counties, was a co-sponsor of the initiative, along with the New Jersey Association of County Disability Services. Participating were United Way representatives and county disability services directors from those same six northeast New Jersey counties as well as the New Jersey Division of Disability Services.

Early in the development of the campaign, the team surveyed 650 northeast New Jersey disability service providers and caregivers. Respondents to the mailed questionnaire said suitable housing, transportation and jobs were the three top unmet needs for people with disabilities.

Almost half of the respondents, 49 percent, cited a lack of appropriate housing for people with disabilities. Many who completed the survey specifically mentioned a shortage of affordable and accessible housing for the disabled.

About 43 percent of those who responded said not enough transportation services are available for the disabled population to get to work and to handle day-to-day activities.

Ranking third on the list of unmet needs, about 17 percent of respondents said job placement opportunities were inadequate to meet the needs of the disabled population.

In addition to identifying key service needs, one of the objectives of the study was to identify how 2-1-1 can help relieve some of the frustration by making available services easier for people with disabilities to find out about.

The coalition developed an information campaign to raise awareness of 2-1-1 as a shortcut to finding not only disability-related services but also solutions for a wide range of needs, from food, housing and healthcare to legal services, drug treatment, childcare, mental health services, financial assistance and others.

“We can’t offer our callers services that don’t exist, but we can direct them to the best sources for the information they need, and that can often save people a lot of wasted phone calls,” said Fran Palm, Executive Director of 211 First Call for Help. “Our 2-1-1 Helpline Specialists work with a database containing information about thousands of agencies, programs and community resources that offer help.”

2-1-1 is TTY-friendly and any language can be accommodated. For more information about 2-1-1 or the disability services survey, please call (800) 435-7555, ext. 4109.

