

How We Help: Stories from the Call Center



Electricity shutoff endangers woman on oxygen machine

Our caller had an adult daughter with one lung who relied on an electric oxygen machine. Her electricity had been shut off, and she didn't realize their medical certificates had expired. I asked how long it would be until her daughter ran out of oxygen. She said the battery had two more hours left. I gave energy assistance referrals and then the disability helpline. I told her to call back if she didn't get help. We ended the call quickly so she could contact referrals.

I called back the next day, and one of the referrals had paid and the electricity came back on the same day. "Isn't that great?" she said. "Thank you so much for your help and caring."

Call for heating assistance leads to other services

A caller asked for heating assistance. He, his wife and daughter were all unemployed, although he'd never had trouble finding work before. In the course of the conversation, he mentioned that his wife had ovarian cancer, and while her medical bills are covered by her former employer, she feels bad about being bald and sick. In addition to the utility assistance numbers, I gave the caller a number for a couple of cancer resources that got her access to a wig and other related services.

Parents seek help with student's college application

A Spanish-speaking caller was seeking help in understanding the admission and scholarship application process so she and her husband could help their son go to college. They went to a college program, but none of the information was in Spanish. "We want to help our son go to college," she said. "It is important that we help him." I gave her phone numbers to three agencies that help Latino families with language and education issues; I also gave her the phone number to an administration office that has Spanish-speaking staff.

Trying to stop foreclosure

I talked with a man in central Oregon who was in foreclosure and heartbroken. He had lost his job and missed four mortgage payments. He had since found another job with a different company, although it paid less. It was going to take him a while to catch up on the missed payments. His lender started foreclosure proceedings, and he said he could never have a productive conversation with anyone when he called the bank. He kept saying, "You would think they would want to work with me." I was able to give him referrals to a couple of free foreclosure assistance programs that got him the answers he needed.



401(k) or food stamps?

A woman called and very timidly asked about WIC, which her family qualified for. She and her husband had both lost their jobs in the previous four months. I talked with her about food stamps, since people who qualify for WIC generally can obtain food stamps, and she hesitated. She and her husband have a 401(k), and she thought they would have to cash out and exhaust the 401(k) before they could collect food stamps.

It's not uncommon for people new to social services to have misconceptions about food stamps that keep them from applying for what is perhaps the most accessible of all the basic forms of assistance. Gladly, I was able to give her this vital information.

Dental help means keeping job

A man on a firefighting crew called in March to see how he could get help with a severe dental problem. He had an estimate from a dentist at a great discount, but he couldn't even afford that because he wasn't working. He said he had to take care of it, or he couldn't go into the job when the season started. After determining there weren't any free services in his area, I asked if he felt OK talking to the local fire department and asking them if they could loan him the money (under \$200), or perhaps donate it to him as a young and upcoming firefighter who worked in their rural area. He was optimistic about getting help and thrilled that I suggested a loan from the department. He would be glad to pay back the money once the season started and he could work.

One call, many services

A Hispanic male called from Hillsboro requesting assistance to pay some bills. I clarified with him which bills he needed to pay. He needed to pay his electric bill because he had a 72-hour shut-off notice; he was behind two months already. The reason was that his employer had drastically cut back his hours and he hadn't been able to find another job that demanded his skills.

I suggested he contact a program to get trained in a different industry. I also offered him a phone number for a job connection and food pantries, but he said he preferred not to take food from churches. His voice indicated he was ashamed of his situation. When I asked him if he had applied for food stamps, he didn't really know about the program. He stated that he was a legal permanent resident but not a U.S. citizen. I pre-screened him, and since he had more than five years of legal permanent residency and two children who were born in the U.S., he would qualify. He was thankful about getting the numbers.

211info 



Get Connected. Get Answers.

*In strategic
partnership with:*



**United Way of the
Columbia-Willamette**