

Yamhill County will join 211 information system

Social services – Hotline provides agencies assistance in reaching people throughout the county; follows lead of counties in the Portland area

By David Sale – The Newberg Graphic -- August 15, 2009

Yamhill County residents in search of assistance have a new resource that's only a phone call away.

The 2-1-1 phone system - an established, bilingual social-services referral network in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties - expanded its reach to Yamhill County July 27.

"We'd found that many people were unaware of the services in their area," said Marilyn Kennelly, director of Yamhill County's Commission on Children and Families. "There needed to be a 'one-stop shopping' service."

While the commission had taken steps to create a Web-based directory, "not everyone has access to the Internet," Kennelly added.

By calling 2-1-1, area residents are connected to a Portland call center with operators trained to assist callers in finding the services they need from a pool of nearly 150 Yamhill County agencies and nonprofits.

Among the services provided are referrals to food banks, shelters, health care, legal services, employment resources and counseling.

"It's not case management, but operators are trained to follow through and make sure that callers have their needs met - not just on the particular issue they're calling about, but to be sure they're not underserved in other areas as well," Kennelly said.

While the service is anonymous, callers are asked for demographic information and zip code, and operators note which needs could, and could not, be met.

"This allows us to track emerging trends and formulate policies to better serve the public," Kennelly said. "It's very helpful."

The 2-1-1 network was also used during last month's heat wave to provide directions to "cooling-off spots" at libraries, malls and other spaces - and could be used to provide similar information in the event of a natural disaster or emergency, Kennelly said, adding "It relieves congestion on the existing 9-1-1 network."

2-1-1 services are available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays from most residential and cell phones. (PBX systems, a type of office switchboard, may present difficulties.) If dialing 2-1-1 fails, the service can also be reached at 1-866-698-6153.

For more information, visit www.yamhill211.org.