



2-1-1 Big Bend
P.O. Box 10950 ♦ Tallahassee, FL 32302-2950
Administration 850.617.6348 ♦ Fax 850.561.3443
Hotline 2-1-1 or 850.617.6333
www.211bigbend.org

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Randy Nicklaus
Phone: 850-617-6317
rsnicklaus@211bigbend.org

2-1-1 BIG BEND EARNS RE-ACCREDITATION

Tallahassee, FL – 2-1-1 Big Bend, Inc. (formerly known as Telephone Counseling & Referral Service – TCRS) was recently awarded a five year re-accreditation by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS). Furthermore, its volunteer recruitment and hotline counselor training program was recognized by AIRS as a national “best practice”. The agency is one of 98 similar programs that are accredited by AIRS in the United States and Canada. The national accreditation program added several new criteria since 2-1-1 Big Bend first became accredited in 2003, including standards related to disaster preparedness and crisis intervention.

“Our staff spent the past year completing extensive documentation and implementing program enhancements to earn this re-accreditation. I am very proud of our agency’s accomplishment and the recognition of our volunteer program,” said 2-1-1 Big Bend President, Randy Nicklaus, “As a result of this process, we are more prepared than ever to help our community, especially in the area of suicide prevention and disaster response,” he adds.

To prepare for the AIRS re-accreditation, 2-1-1 Big Bend implemented a new suicide risk assessment protocol based on national research and in accordance with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Network. 2-1-1 Big Bend also answers crisis calls through this national Network (1-800-273-TALK) in addition to its own 2-1-1 regional number. Annually, the agency answers more than 500 calls related to suicide prevention.

New disaster response protocols have been used extensively during the past two months and the agency has recently joined with other local disaster response organizations to create a Community Organizations Active In Disaster (COAD) entity as well as a Long Term Recovery committee. Several hundred people have called 2-1-1 since August seeking help with disaster recovery issues related to flooding, wind damage and basic needs assistance.

2-1-1 Big Bend answers more than 65,000 calls each year through its five hotline programs. The regional 2-1-1 helpline program is a 24/7 service that helped more than 24,000 callers last year, a 40 percent increase in calls over the previous year. A major factor contributing to the increase in call volume was related to the declining economy. Thousands of people have sought help for unemployment, utilities, food, rent, and mortgage payments. Mental health counseling and domestic violence calls have also increased significantly.

For more information about the agency and its programs, visit www.211bigbend.org. 2-1-1 Big Bend provides several hotline programs including the 2-1-1 helpline for 24-hour human service information, referrals, counseling and crisis intervention. Throughout the eight county Big Bend region, people can dial the three-digit 2-1-1 number for these services. 2-1-1 Big Bend is a United Way Agency.

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