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People & Places

Help line promotes mission with 2-1-1 Man

By RANDY ABRAHAM
 Special correspondent

The nonprofit organization 2-1-1 Broward recently joined a national observance to raise awareness for the local help line.

The National 2-1-1 Day event featured stops around area businesses with a board member dressed up in a superhero costume as "2-1-1 Man," a proclamation by the Fort Lauderdale City Commission in support of the group.

"A lot of people are not aware that we exist, but we are a gateway to about 4,000 basic services," said Sheila Smith, president and CEO of 2-1-1 Broward. "We are available 24 hours a day and we manage more than 100,000 incoming calls a year."

Established in 1995, 2-1-1 Broward is a 24-hour help line that offers support services to individuals and families seeking crisis intervention assistance or information to available health and human services and programs.

During a natural disaster, the organization - which receives much of its funding from United Way, the Children's Services Council, the Broward County Commission, and private donations - moves temporarily to the county Emergency Operations Center to maintain continuity of its service.

About half of the calls to the help line are from peo-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Board members dressed as mock superheroes during a recent awareness effort for 2-1-1 Broward.

ple who need assistance with basic needs such as food, housing, and rent assistance.

Pompano Beach resident Betty Watkins was referred to the organization in 2008 while trying to find help and services for her daughter, Jasmine, who was born with a mental disability.

"I was searching out programs. I wasn't aware of what was available and I didn't know what to ask for until I called 2-1-1," she said. "They were wonderful, so knowledgeable, personable, caring and available."

Rose Roth, a Coconut Creek resident, signed up for the service when she retired in 1998. She gets a call every day from a counselor who checks up on her to make sure she is alright.

"They're wonderful. They call me every single morning to see if I'm still

alive and still in my home, and if I don't answer they call back or call my neighbor to make sure I am OK," Roth said.

Kathleen Cannon, president and CEO of United Way of Broward County, which has funded the group for more than 20 years, said, "They are like the best-kept secret, but people should know about 2-1-1; they are vital to the community and to the safety net."

"It's good for a parent to know that when something happens that they are not alone, that there is help for you, to relieve a parent from having to call around and drive around," Watkins said. "They really are the first call for help."

For information about 2-1-1 Broward, call 954-390-0493 or visit www.211-broward.org.