



“IT’S OUR BUSINESS”



Bergen County’s United Way Compassion Fund provides safety and security for those hard hit by the worsening economy

After 50 years as one of the largest charitable organizations in the community, Bergen County’s United Way is making a new name for itself as the direct service provider of choice for people struggling with the fallout of the current economic downturn.

“Bergen County’s United Way is here to help, whatever is needed – it’s our business” said Tom Toronto, President of the United Way.

Most recently, that help has come in the form of the organization’s Compassion Fund – a direct financial assistance program that Bergen County’s United Way provides to insure that people’s most basic needs are met during these hard hit times.

“We are turning lives around,” explains Toronto. “When you’re faced with an eviction or utilities shut off notice, you need help that is concrete, direct and timely. And that’s what we provide.”

The anguish caused by the current economic crisis is widespread and pervasive, and the headlines only obscure the suffering families are experiencing behind closed doors day after day. In the past nine months, the number of people in desperate need of help has increased dramatically because

their severance package, health insurance coverage, or entitlement -- short term protection from job loss -- has now ended, and they are still out of work.

Need Help? Start Here – 2-1-1

Since last July, the United Way’s 2-1-1 system has responded to 82,037 calls for assistance from people throughout New Jersey; 5,455 from Bergen County alone – a 29% increase.

“We have experienced unprecedented increases in requests for financial assistance to prevent foreclosures and evictions,” states Toronto. “The calls have come from every corner of the community -- and from people who had never before ever needed to ask for help.”

2-1-1 is the United Way’s statewide service for people who don’t know who to contact or where to get the help needed to solve their problem. 2-1-1 connects callers to health and human services, government assistance, and local community resources. There is a LIVE connection to caring professionals who make an assessment and help to navigate what is often a complex and overwhelming array of programs and services for everything from healthcare to housing; shelters to food banks; employment and training to transportation assistance; child care to counseling. 2-1-1 is free, easy to use, confidential, multi-lingual, accessible to individuals with disabilities, and available 24/7.



Making Help Happen When It Is Most Needed

“Callers need immediate help,” explains Tricia DeBartolome, Bergen County’s United Way Compassion Fund Manager. “They need a personal response, with the highest quality

“IT’S OUR BUSINESS” (continued)

of service, every time and we give it to them.” DeBartolome works with callers to resolve their urgent financial needs—everything from paying utility bills when a family is faced with shut-off, helping with medication and healthcare costs when there is no insurance, making mortgage and rent payments to prevent eviction or foreclosure, and helping with the increased cost of basic necessities for those who have lost everything.

Bergen County’s United Way first established the Compassion Fund in 2004 to provide direct help with basic necessities for people in crisis after a natural gas explosion in Bergenfield left 18 vulnerable adults homeless.

“With Compassion Funds we have succeeded in keeping families in their homes whether the struggle is personal, or the result of a community-wide crisis,” states Toronto

However, because of the depth of the current crisis, requests for help have tripled, and spending has jumped from \$19,000 month to \$29,000 a month and continues to accelerate. As a result, Bergen County’s United Way is forecasting continued growth in demand and has reached into its reserves so that more can be done for those in need in the coming year.

Not Your Grandfather’s United Way

Contributing to the increase in demand is the return of the 3,475 members of the Teaneck based, 50th Battalion National Guard who were re-deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Many are finding that the jobs they left last year are no longer here – casualties of the worsening economy.

“The National Guard and their families have made great sacrifices for our freedom. Extended deployments, combat injuries and lost household incomes have put them in emotional, physical and financial peril,” states Annette Hill, Director



If you or someone you know needs help, a call to 2-1-1 or click onto 211.org is all it takes to make the critical connection to help when it is most needed.

of Community Outreach for Bergen County’s United Way.

The United Way works closely with the Family Assistance Center located at the Armory in Teaneck to help soldiers and their families resettle. The Compassion Fund and its staff make it possible for families to get immediate assistance for the financial and emotional burdens they face reentering life after active duty.

Toronto, who has led Bergen County’s United Way through its remarkable transformation, often quips “We’re not your Grandfather’s United Way” when referring to the organization’s move away from management of federated giving campaigns to creating preventative and long term solutions to our community’s most critical problems.

“The full impact of the economic downturn is only now being felt,” says Toronto. “It may worsen as we get closer to the new school year. Most of us believe this crisis will continue to impact the lives of our neighbors for at least another year or more.”

To contribute to the Compassion Fund, visit us on the web at www.bergenunitedway.org or contact Cheryl Moses, Director of Development, directly at 201.291.0368 or by e-mail at cmoses@bergenunitedway.org. Our operating costs are remarkably low at 8.4%, so your gift helps more people in more ways.

Please join us in this important work.



www.bergenunitedway.org

