

COMMISSIONER PAULA BROOKS AND COMMISSIONER STOKES

- THE AVAILABILITY OF A UNIVERSAL 2-1-1 EXPANDS THE POTENTIAL ROLE THAT FIRSLINK CAN PROVIDE IN THE COUNTY'S DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS.
- 2-1-1 PROVIDERS PLAYED VITAL ROLES IN RECENT EMERGENCIES IN FLORIDA WITH THE 2004 AND 2005 HURRICANES, AND IN THE GULF COAST AND TEXAS AREAS IN 2005. ALTHOUGH HUNDREDS OF MILES FROM THE DISASTER AREA, FIRSLINK WAS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN ASSISTING WITH THE LOCAL HURRICANE KATRINA REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND RELIEF EFFORTS, INCLUDING LINKING PEOPLE TO MENTAL HEALTH AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES. PRELIMINARY NUMBERS ESTIMATE THAT FIRSTLINK'S STAFF HANDLED MORE THAN 1,200 KATRINA-RELATED CALLS LOCALLY.
- 2-1-1 CAN FURTHER BE USED AS A LONG-TERM COMMUNITY PLANNING TOOL. BASED ON AGGREGATE DATA ON THE TYPES OF CALLS A LOCAL 2-1-1 CALL CENTER RECEIVES, COMMUNITIES ARE IN A BETTER POSITION TO ANTICIPATE DEMAND FOR SERVICES AND MOBILIZE RESOURCES TO MEET CHANGING NEEDS.
- ALTHOUGH THESE ARE KEY REASONS TO CONTINUE PUSHING FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO 2-1-1, WE MUST NOT FORGET ABOUT THE VERY REAL PEOPLE WHO ARE HELPED BY CALLING THIS SERVICE.
- PEOPLE LIKE CHRISTINE STUNTZ WHO HAS JOINED US TODAY. MRS.

STUNTZ IS AN AMAZING STORY. SHE IS CARING FOR 4 GRANDCHILDREN, 2 WHO ARE SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN, COPING WITH OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANCE DISORDER, ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER AND SPEECH APNEA, WHICH HINDERS THEIR ABILITY TO EFFECTIVELY FORM WORDS.

MRS. STUNTZ LEARNED ABOUT FIRSTLINK THROUGH A NEIGHBOR. THINGS WERE GETTING TOUGH FOR MRS. STUNTZ AND HER HUSBAND. THEY HAD JUST TAKEN IN TWO ADDITIONAL GRANDCHILDREN, AND WERE ALREADY HAVING A HARD TIME MAKING ENDS MEET, THEN MRS. STUNTZ LOST HER JOB.

MANY GRANDPARENTS OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES IN THE ROLE OF PARENTING AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME IT'S DIFFERENT. THEY MAY BE LIVING ON A LIMITED INCOME, AND FACED WITH SHRINKING INCOMES THEY OFTEN HAVE A HARD TIME MAKING ENDS MEET. PLUS, JUGGLING WORK AND CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, OFTEN THE DEMANDS BECOME TOO MUCH.

BY CALLING 2-1-1, SHE HAS BEEN LINKED TO AGENCIES, SUCH AS CHARITY NEWSIES FOR SCHOOL CLOTHING, FOOD ASSISTANCE THROUGH FOODLINK, AND HOLIDAY ASSISTANCE FOR MEALS AND GIFTS FOR THE CHILDREN AT CHRISTMAS. THROUGH THE KINSHIP CARE NAVIGATOR PROGRAM, CHRISTINE WAS ABLE TO GET HER YOUNGEST GRANDCHILD IN TO FRANKLIN COUNTY HEAD START.

MRS. STUNTZ HAS TOLD FIRSTLINK THAT SHE IS HERE TODAY

BECAUSE SHE HAS SEEN FIRSTHAND THAT THERE ARE PLACES TO TURN AND CARING, RESPECTFUL PEOPLE WHO HAVE POINTED HER IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. SHE HAS SAID THAT IF SHE HAD WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR OTHERS IN HER POSITION, SHE WOULD TELL THEM “DON’T TRY TO DO IT ALONE.”

THANK YOU MRS. STUNTZ FOR SHARING YOUR STORY AND FOR REMINDING US THAT 2-1-1 ISN’T JUST A PHONE NUMBER – IT’S A CONNECTION TO MANY HELPING HANDS.