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Oregon 'warm' line goes daily, named after mental health advocate

Oregon's statewide mental health information line has expanded its service hours and changed its name in honor of a champion for people with mental illness.

The David Romprey Oregon Warm Line –800-698-2392 – is now open for business five hours each day with peer operators answering phones from offices in seven counties. The free service began modestly in January, operating five hours a week on Fridays from an office in Fossil.

This week the phone service received an Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) 2008 Mental Health Award for Excellence, as did the operator of the service, Kimberly Lindsay, director of Community Counseling Solutions (CCS).

"People just want to be heard" is the phone service's motto. Unlike a hot line, which is for people in crisis, the warm line is for individuals with mental illness who want to talk to someone with a similar background.

To expand the warm line program, seven counties contributed \$3,000 apiece and each is responsible for operating the line five hours a week. More than a year ago CCS received a \$24,000 startup grant from the DHS Addictions and Mental Health Division and it continues to run the expanded program. CCS represents Morrow, Wheeler, Gilliam, and Grant counties.

David Romprey honored

The service was named in honor of long-time Salem mental health activist David Romprey, who died recently at age 42. He is credited with starting Oregon's warm line program.

“We chose to name this phone service after David so he would always be remembered,” said Angel Moore, CCS warm line coordinator. “David spoke out for others, some who were afraid to speak out. Now the warm line named after him is giving these folks an opportunity to be heard.”

Warm line operators are peers who are trained to listen in confidence without judgment or criticism. At any time, an operator may help someone through a difficult time or situation, or share in a caller’s positive experience.

CCS’s Lindsay said use of the warm line may keep mental health costs down by decreasing doctor visits, and reducing crisis calls to community mental health programs, emergency room visits, and involvement with law enforcement.

Moore is enthusiastic about circulating the warm line number around the state – aiming at all Oregonians who wish to use it. She said that means shut-ins, people in institutions, jail, treatment centers, homeless shelters, retirement homes, schools, drop-in centers, and other places.

“This warm line is for anyone who wants to talk about anything,” Moore said. “We all have times of challenge. Sometimes we feel lonely, or feel so happy about something with nobody to call and tell our great news to. That’s what warm line is all about.”

The line’s sponsors are: CCS, Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc., and Benton, Clatsop, Columbia, Deschutes and Douglas counties. Peer operators work for CCS, but are funded and selected by their home counties. Each employee receives 16 hours of peer-to-peer training, a day of individual training, and regular follow-up evaluations.

Warm line operators are available during these hours: Monday, 3 p.m. to 8 p.m.; Tuesday, 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.; Wednesday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Thursday, 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.; Friday, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.; and Sunday, 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.

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