

## PF3 Celebrates Four Years of 2-1-1 Serving Polk County

by Linda Greensfelder

Happy 4<sup>th</sup> Birthday, 2-1-1!! This summer marks the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2-1-1 Helpline serving Polk County. You've seen the information all around the community - *Help When You Need it Most - Dial 2-1-1 - Free - Confidential - Referral specialists available 24 hours per day, seven days per week - Any Language - and available online at [www.nc211.org](http://www.nc211.org).*

For years prior to 2013, various groups in Polk County talked about the importance of bringing the 2-1-1 Helpline to our county, but there were never funds available to make it happen. Most other counties in North Carolina funded their 2-1-1 services through United Way or local government agencies, but Polk County had no United Way and local government agencies were wary of the expense. Desperate to make this referral service available to our citizens, Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly reached out to the community and a unique coalition of government and non-profit agencies answered our call. Eight funders - Rutherford Polk McDowell Health District, Region C Area on Aging, Region C Workforce Development, Western Carolina Community Action, Hospice of the Carolina Foothills, Thermal Belt Outreach Ministry, Steps to Hope and Seasons of Life Home Care - pooled their resources to make 2-1-1 available in Polk County. And they have continued their generosity for each of the past four years, and through to June 2018.

Like any vibrant service, 2-1-1 continues to grow and expand. In 2016, 2-1-1 became NC 2-1-1 and expanded to cover all 100 counties in North Carolina. While United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County continues to be Polk's call center, all other functions are now managed at the state level.

What kind of services can callers find information about when they call 2-1-1? A partial list includes **housing and shelter, utility assistance, healthcare, food assistance, mental health and addiction, homelessness assistance, prescription assistance, heat relief and summer programs**. But this is just a partial list. Generally, any service provided by a non-profit or government agency is eligible to be listed with 2-1-1, so if there's something you're looking for, make the call! If you're interested in a breakdown of calls being received by NC 2-1-1, go to [www.nc211counts.org](http://www.nc211counts.org). Data is reported by county, zip code, congressional district, state house district, state senate district and region. If you look specifically at Polk County data, you'll see that over the past 12 months, **the most frequent call requests have dealt with housing and shelter, healthcare, mental health and addiction**. Unfortunately, the new NC 2-1-1 system can currently track website requests only by town of origin, so as yet we have no reliable aggregate data on website inquiries from all of Polk County.

A little known but important application of NC 2-1-1 deals with emergency preparedness and help in time of disaster. NC 2-1-1 played an important information sharing role last fall during Hurricane Matthew, and continues to provide information about recovery and rebuilding services to those counties affected. See <https://www.nc211.org/hurricane-matthew>.

Another important function of NC2-1-1 involves linking community volunteers with agencies in need of volunteer services. All resources included in the NC2-1-1 database have the option of listing volunteer opportunities. To learn where you may be needed, call 2-1-1 and tell the referral specialist about your area(s) of interest. Or visit <https://www.nc211.org/find-help> and type in “volunteer” and your area of interest. Be sure to indicate the county or town where you would like to volunteer.

Questions about NC2-1-1? Ideas about how NC 2-1-1 can be even more effective in serving Polk County residents? While significant information is available on the NC 2-1-1 website, we at Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly are happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns. Just send an email to [pf3coordinator@gmail.com](mailto:pf3coordinator@gmail.com).

Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly (PF3) is a group of 80+ community members, leaders and health professionals, all working together to plan and implement effective strategies to promote wellness in our community. We welcome any individual who is interested in joining us to make our community a healthier place for all. For more information and a list of our 2017 meeting dates, please visit our website at [www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org](http://www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org) .

Linda Greensfelder is a former PF3 board chair and current PF3 board member. She also serves on the 2-1-1 Committee of the United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County.