

# Blue Zones

“Healthy citizens are the greatest asset any country can have.” – Winston Churchill

## United Way of Collier County provides needed support with 2-1-1



The Community Coronavirus Fund allows donors to support 2-1-1 and funnel aid right back into their community. SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS



**Steve Sanderson**  
Guest Columnist

When a person gets sick, they go to a doctor to understand why and find out what they can do to get better; but when it comes to diagnosing the health of a county, things can get a bit tricky. We know our community is ailing - in the month of March, the call volume at our 2-1-1 non-emergency helpline skyrocketed to 200% of normal, and that rate has continued to grow exponentially.

Callers were looking for information on the virus, but we also saw an increase in need for the basics like food, rent and utilities, access to medication, and supplemental education for their quarantined children to name just a few. These callers aren't just coming from the most vulnerable populations in our community like East Naples and Immokalee - data has shown that our neighbors all over Collier County are calling and asking for help. This is the unprecedented response to

an unprecedented crisis, and we can't react in the traditional ways we would for a hurricane or economic recession.

The problem is only exacerbated when you realize that over the past month, the local non-profits and service agencies we consider partners have either been stretched to the capacity of service, or the limits of social distancing and quarantines have barred them from continuing their work. We have taken part in numerous conference calls with our partners all across Collier County to assess the damage to our community and best determine how to address it. What we realized was that the data we were receiving from 2-1-1 was invaluable for recognizing the effects of COVID-19 and where we needed to start helping. We even established a Community Coronavirus Fund where donors can support 2-1-1 and funnel aid right back into their community.

2-1-1 has evidenced a need for quality case management that can work with residents to navigate and understand the many social services and programs available to them as a result of COVID-19. We have developed a platform which allows for case management

to be provided without risking the client or case manager's well-being, called the Remote Crisis Case Management (RCCM) system. Clients can apply for assistance from the safety of their own homes and case managers are now able to continue working remotely from a safe and secure location. The RCCM system will allow us to see all the data and specifics of each county's greatest needs and work with real time numbers to help with our distribution of services and funds.

Even now, nearly a month after the pandemic became official, the future is uncertain. What is certain is that United Way has been helping the Collier community since 1957 and we will continue to provide services based on informed data from the experts and our community through 2-1-1. If you or someone you know is struggling, whether as a result of COVID-19 or not, please call 2-1-1 today and find out what we can do for you. To help support 2-1-1, consider donating to our Community Coronavirus Fund at [unitedwayofcolliercounty.org/community-coronavirus-fund/](http://unitedwayofcolliercounty.org/community-coronavirus-fund/).

*Steve Sanderson is President and CEO of United Way of Collier and the Keys.*