

# HEALTH

## BAYSIDE

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# Have a question about Medicaid changes? Call 211

 BY TONY RUSSO  
 STAFF WRITER

SALISBURY – When the 211 program was initiated nearly 10 years ago the United Way, the entity that initiated the program, needed to make sure it had regional secure call centers throughout the country and enlisted the help of the Life Crisis Center to be its 211 clearing house on the Eastern Shore.

Although the program is nearly a decade old, it's possible you've never heard of it. Like 911 or 411, 211 is a public service aimed at helping people get information in case of public or private emergency. They maintain a database with over 5,000 entries of different governmental and non-profit agencies that can help residents navigate the sometimes complicated bureaucracy associated with getting assistance.

To demonstrate, Live Crisis Center executive director Michele Hughes picked up a government directory from her desk and counted the numbers listed for "Medical Assistance." There were seven.

"None of these can provide you information about Medicaid," she said. "It's not even the right department."



TONY RUSSO/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

Life Crisis Center hotline director Rob Rotar and executive director Michele Hughes anticipate a spike in 211 calls as word about the non-profit public service number spreads.

The folks at Maryland 211 can even pre-screen applicants so people know the exact information they'll need to provide for assistance with everything from getting their lights turned back on to finding appropriate healthcare.

Another example is if you need help for someone on the Western shore – say you know

someone who's suffering spousal abuse – they can direct you to the proper county government department for any Maryland county.

But although that's what they're most known for – this week Gov. Martin O'Malley endorsed using the 211 system to learn about Medicaid changes – providing guidance is just a part

of the service the 211 system provides.

Hughes, who also oversees the 211 program on the Eastern Shore, said one of the lesser known functions is to act as an information clearinghouse in case of emergency.

As an example, Hughes pointed to assistance provided during the California wildfires of

the past few years and the fact that people used it during the September 11 terrorist attacks to find out about missing loved ones. She said 211 works directly with emergency management services to provide residents up to the minute information as a catastrophe unfolds.

If you need to know what evacuation routes are open, which shelters accept pets, where gasoline supplies along the evacuation routes are or any other question you might have about an emergency dial 211.

Hughes said the premise of the service is both to help people in need and to take the pressure from 911, which is for reporting emergencies more than it is for coping with them.

The Maryland 211 program is part of a miracle of non-governmental organization cooperation available in 48 states. It isn't directly government-sponsored but rather the result of a conglomeration of non-profits spearheaded by the United Way to provide a community service.

For now, only a small percentage of the more than 22,000 calls the Life Crisis Center answers annually are 211 related but Hughes said she expects the number to grow as word gets out.

## FITNESS ADVICE

### Believe, and you can



By David &amp; Lisa Long

Encouragement and having someone believe in you can be the turning point in anyone's life. I had the pleasure of running the 2009 Baltimore Marathon and was surprised by the strength and motivation that absolute strangers can convey just by being there.

You do need to decide what you want/need out of life, and once you figure that out you may need some assistance getting what you've decided on. We specialize in helping people feel better, look better, and perform better.

Proper exercise and nutrition is a great way to

start your journey to feeling, looking and performing better. We sometimes take for granted that people should just know how and what to do for optimal results. We have worked long and hard to find the right tools so our clients will achieve maximum results.

We had the pleasure this year to train the Stephen Decatur field hockey team, what a great bunch of girls! For the last couple of years they've had a hard time scoring goals, let alone winning.

Their confidence was a bit wrecked, but they were definitely willing to work on their conditioning and strength building (they even looked forward to it once they experienced the results). While working with them they got stronger, more agile, and most importantly, they gained the confidence that comes with being fit.

The coaches commented on the team injuries being down, and many of the parents on the side-

lines were happy to see their girls having energy well into the second half of the game. It was absolutely wonderful being on the sidelines to see them score and then win their first game this year!

It definitely raised our spirits and made our jobs enjoyable to hear thanks from folks on the sidelines. We would like to thank the girls and coaches Mandi, Gwen, Julia, and Alicia for letting us be part of their season.

We hope you had as much fun as we did – you girls have what it takes to achieve anything you want, but you've got to believe.

"What I need is someone who will make me do what I can." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

David and Lisa Long are personal trainers and owners of Live Long Fitness in West Ocean City. 410-213-1078 [www.livelongfitness.com](http://www.livelongfitness.com)