

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



CONTACT:

Chris A. Hays
chris@blenderadv.com
412-709-6149
412-389-1385 (cell)

United Way of Allegheny County launches 'I Care' pilot initiative to help vulnerable neighbors
Community leaders and employees asked to offer a helping hand to identify those who might be struggling

Pittsburgh, Pa. (March 25, 2015) – On April 1, United Way of Allegheny County, in partnership with Familylinks, will launch the 'I Care' initiative. 'I Care' is a community-based pilot program designed to encourage everyday contacts, such as postal carriers, newspaper delivery personnel and others, to be aware of vulnerable neighbors who might be in crisis and provide them with tools to gently offer assistance. The three-month pilot will be introduced in McKeesport and Wilkinsburg, with possible expansion to other neighborhoods in the coming months.

“Too many of our elderly and vulnerable neighbors feel isolated, and struggle to cope with the challenges of everyday living,” said Heather Sedlacko, United Way’s director of programs for seniors and people with disabilities. “They may not be connected to or aware of available resources. We hope to encourage the folks who are the eyes and ears of our community to be their guardians, providing them with ways to identify those in need and offer support.”

United Way has developed workplace posters and handy pocket cards that outline the signs to be aware of when a vulnerable individual might be in distress. The goal is to encourage those who have regular contact with the people in their neighborhoods to note anything out of the ordinary. If something of concern is noticed, there are two ways to offer assistance. The contact can dial 2-1-1, United Way’s 24/7 human services helpline, to share their concern. Or, they can share the tear-off panel on the pocket card with their neighbor to express their care and concern, and offer 2-1-1 as a resource for help.

Possible signs of distress include deteriorating physical appearance or mental condition; negative or worsening emotional state; challenging socioeconomic conditions such as the death of a loved one, job loss, social isolation; and change in living conditions such as untouched newspapers or mailbox, neglected yard, litter or strong odors, and change in sign of visible activity from the home. Specific changes to look for are provided on the pocket card.

“We’ve witnessed the tragic circumstances that can occur when someone is suffering with the inability to find help,” said Sedlacko. “United Way, alongside community leaders and partners, has been working tirelessly to develop effective solutions to provide our most fragile neighbors a helping hand, a potential lifeline. The first place we’re going to start is in our neighborhoods, with the help of those who care for and power our local communities.”

Familylinks will be reaching out to community partners, such as first responders and local business leaders, in both neighborhoods, making personal visits to encourage them to display the posters in their workplaces and distribute the 'I Care' pocket cards. The goal is for 20 organizations to support the program during the course of the pilot.

"At Familylinks, we are keenly aware of how isolated some older adults and people with disabilities can feel. We are honored to partner with the United Way in this grass roots initiative to get the word out to these communities that help is available and as simple as making one phone call," said Michelle Sipple, the service coordination unit director at Familylinks.

If any McKeesport or Wilkinsburg-based organizations are interested in participating in the 'I Care' pilot initiative, please contact Familylinks at 412.343.7166.

About United Way of Allegheny County – United Way of Allegheny County is a change agent and efficient community fundraiser that improves lives by addressing critical community needs. By convening diverse partners and investing in programs and people to advance solutions, United Way creates long-lasting change and helps children and youth succeed, strengthens and supports families by promoting financial stability, ensures the safety and well-being of vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities, and provides county-wide access to information and referral sources meeting basic needs.

About Familylinks – Familylinks is a nonprofit human services organization dedicated to providing integrated, family-centered services focused on behavioral, social and developmental issues. Each year, through our three service divisions – Behavioral Health, Service Coordination, and Youth and Family Services – we serve nearly 8,000 children, adults and families who are struggling with abuse, neglect, homelessness, addiction, mental health issues, intellectual disabilities or achieving/maintaining their independence. For information regarding services please call 412-661-1800 or log onto www.familylinks.org

###