

DENVER & THE WEST

Catchy ads help light up crisis hotline

By Colleen O'Connor
The Denver Post

Since catchy highway-sign-style ads for the Metro Crisis Line were plastered on buses and billboards throughout the seven-county metro region Jan. 3, the number of daily calls for help has doubled and the number of website hits has tripled.

"The majority of calls are from people who really, really need care and know it, but they just can't fig-

ure out where to find it," said Daniel Ward, chief executive of Metro Crisis Services, the region's first coordinated system of 24-hour emergency care for people suffering from behavioral health problems.

The signs provide the road map to help, offering such destinations as the "State of Depression: Pop. 15 million" and "Now Entering the State of Relief."

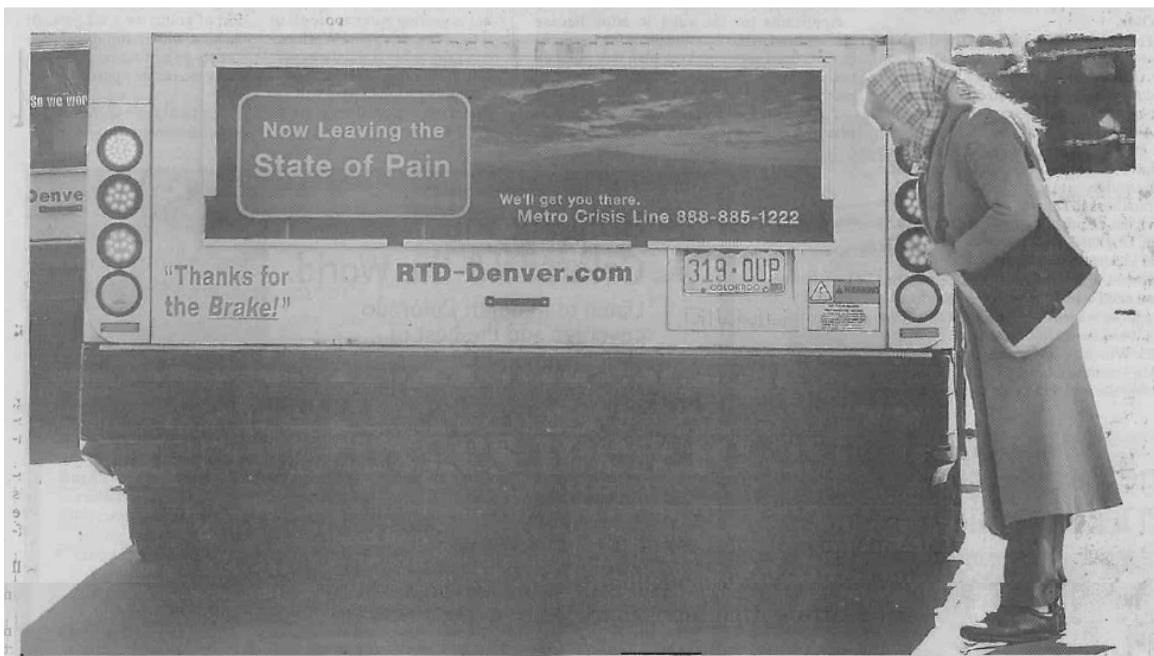
The simple but catchy public-service announcements include the

To get help

To reach the Metro Crisis Line, call the toll-free number: 888-885-1222. Find more information at metrocrisiservices.org.

Guidance» A Broomfield nonprofit shows men how to get their family help. »48

CRISIS LINE » 4B



The attention-getting ads that look like highway signs, appearing on buses and billboards throughout the metro area, are doubling calls to the Metro Crisis Line and tripling hits to its website. The hotline helps the mentally ill and those with behavioral problems. John Prieto, The Denver Post

CRISIS LINE: Mental-health aid given 24/7

◀ FROM 1B

phone number for the Metro Crisis Line, a free 24/7 hotline staffed by licensed mental-health professionals.

Since the signs debuted, they've helped people suffering from conditions as varied as alcoholism and anxiety find the help they need.

The biggest service has been referrals from the organization's electronic Rolodex of 900 mental-health-service providers in the seven-county region.

According to statistics from the federal government, of the 2.7 million people living in the seven Den-

ver-metro counties, nearly 112,000 adults are living with serious mental illness, and at least 277,792 people have substance-use disorders.

Metro Crisis Services Inc. started as an idea in 2006. Back then it was called The Triage Project and took the form of interagency discussions sponsored by Mental Health America of Colorado.

Three facts drove the conversations:

- Hospital emergency rooms were overloaded with increasing numbers of people — about 40,000 annually — with mental illness and substance-abuse disorders who couldn't find help elsewhere.

- Increasing numbers of mentally ill people were being held in jails on relatively minor infractions because law enforcement officials were not able to find help for them.

- The metro area didn't have a coordinated system of 24-hour emergency mental-health care.

More than 200 officials from hospitals, law enforcement agencies and mental-health and substance-abuse treatment programs — along with university faculty, foundations and philanthropists — participated in the planning.

For the past several months, Metro Crisis Line has been in soft-launch mode, and nearly every officer in the

region's 37 police and sheriff's departments went through an orientation with the Metro Crisis Line staff about the range of services.

Now that it's gone public, with the bus signs, billboards and radio-station spots, people are calling up.

"We had one woman who called and said, 'My husband has been struggling with alcoholism, and I'd really like to know what I can do to help him, and keep our marriage together,'" Ward said.

"We were able to help her with that."

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