

Money woes heat up headlines

Financial stresses prompt more Georgians to call suicide hot lines.

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ALBANY — The nation's financial woes are reportedly causing more people to call suicide hot lines.

The number of callers with concerns about financial difficulties increased 64 percent during July to September over the same period in 2006, said Mandy Mercer, whose company, Behavioral Health Link, operates the Georgia Crisis and Access Line.

From July to September, 930 callers used words such as mortgage, foreclosure, bank and debt in describing their problems to the crisis line's counselors, Mercer said. Data for October was not yet available.

The crisis line, (800) 715-4225, offers a "one-call resolution" with a licensed, trained professional who can refer callers directly to local mental health care providers if necessary, she said.

"It's completely normal to be stressing over these things. A person might feel with Christmas coming up, 'how am I going to handle Christmas?' " Mercer said.

"These feelings are normal, but should they become extreme ... should these thoughts or feelings persist, we can come in and help develop a plan."

Callers may remain anonymous and the crisis line can connect them with mental health care providers in all 159 of the state's counties, she said.

In Albany, suicide attempts are rising, with 54 handled by Albany Police this year, versus 32 attempts during the same period last year, APD spokesperson Phyllis Banks said.

Only two individuals succeeded in taking their lives in Albany during 2008, versus seven from January to Oct. 17 of last year, Banks said.

APD has a trained crisis negotiator that responds when a person is threatening to harm himself or others, she said.

In March, a successful Merrill Lynch financial adviser took his life in Albany, though the exact cause for his grief was unclear. In May, a 22-year-old Deerfield-Windsor graduate took his life off a rural Texas highway. A woman who jumped from a moving tractor-trailer Oct. 4 reportedly had a history of mental illness.

Lee County has had only two suicides this year, a decrease from previous years that averaged 7-8, Coroner Ron Rowe said.

Days before Christmas last year, a husband killed his wife and then himself in a Lee County subdivision, leaving behind three young children.

A Lee Sheriff's Office spokesperson said the department had very few requests for assistance with suicidal persons during 2008.

Worth County has had just one suicide during 2008, Coroner Johnny Johnson said.

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