

## 211 SNAPSHOT: JEFF PAPUGA

“My favorite part is working with the families,” said Jeff Papuga, an Electrical Maintenance Technician with Columbus House, a New Haven-based nonprofit focusing on housing needs across Connecticut. Jeff is responsible for the upkeep of six apartments in Middletown that provide emergency housing for families in crisis.

He works closely with several families that live on the properties, and he often takes extra time to lend a hand. “I like helping the kids, fixing their bikes, and making sure they’re safe.”



It’s more than just a job for Jeff. It’s a passion to pay it forward stemming from his own struggles. “I was homeless because my parents gave me tough love,” Jeff explained. At 19, he found himself kicked out of his parents’ home and living on the streets. He found housing through Columbus House and a call to 2-1-1 helped connect him to important resources that he didn’t know were even available.



Jeff says he often refers others to the 2-1-1 helpline and admires the Contact Specialists’ expertise and their dedication to understanding people’s needs and then connecting them to the right resources and programs. 2-1-1 has been a lifeline for Jeff – connecting him to a rental assistance program and additional support in other areas.

“They explain everything, so you understand what your next steps are,”

Jeff said, while sharing that he continues to take advantage of the helpline now. “Even as a worker for the shelter I use 2-1-1. My electric bill was sky high last summer and I couldn’t afford it. 2-1-1 helped me out.”

Jeff’s advice for those struggling to make ends meet: don’t be afraid to ask for help. “It doesn’t matter who you are. You need help, and they [2-1-1] will help. And if they can’t help you, they are going to refer you to somebody who will.”