

SUMMER NEWSLETTER

What's Lost when a Lifeline goes Silent?

On July 17 at 11:59 p.m. EST, something vital will go silent.

The LGBTQI+ subline of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline will shut down.

Not because funding ran out. The federal budget remains intact. Not because demand faded. More than 262,000 calls, texts, and chats were routed through the subline in just the first half of 2025. It's ending because someone decided it could. Because it was easier to retreat than to be seen standing with those whose lives are too often politicized. Easier to choose comfort over courage. Silence over solidarity. But if we only stand with people when it's easy, we were never truly standing with them at all.

Let's be clear. This subline wasn't a luxury. It was a lifeline. A space where LGBTQI+ people could reach out and, on the other end, hear someone who understood. Someone whose voice didn't require explanation. Whose presence alone said: You matter. You are welcome here. You are not alone. Stay. That message is being erased. Not because it failed, but because its existence made some people uncomfortable.

LGBTQI+ individuals, especially youth, are at significantly higher risk of suicide. Not because of who they are, but because of how often they're met with rejection, isolation, and discrimination. This subline wasn't about "special treatment." It was about effective treatment. When care is rooted in understanding, it works. That kind of support doesn't just feel better; it leads to better outcomes. It saves lives. We're being told this change is about inclusivity. That routing everyone through the same line promotes equality. But if that's the standard, why are other specialized subnetworks still in place? Why are targeted supports only called divisive when they center LGBTQI+ communities?

This isn't equity. It's erasure.

And logistically, it's reckless. Where is the infrastructure to

absorb more than a quarter-million additional contacts per year? Where is the staffing? The transition plan? The transparency? There isn't one. There hasn't been any. And that absence is not an oversight. It's a decision too. Eliminating a specialized line without expanding capacity or ensuring a thoughtful transition plan will have consequences far beyond LGBTQI+ callers. It will impact everyone who reaches out to 988. Increased wait times. Overloaded counselors. More people hanging up before help arrives.

The cost won't be measured in politics. It will be measured in lives.

And no matter your beliefs, no matter where you land on the ideological spectrum, I hope we can agree on this: No one should die feeling invisible. No one should believe their safety is conditional. No one should feel like the world would rather they disappear. This isn't about partisanship. It's about humanity. When someone in crisis asks, "Will I be safe here?" the answer should be immediate. Unwavering. Clear. Instead, it's been made conditional.

So, speak up. Ask the hard questions. Don't let this happen quietly.

We can disagree on policy. We can debate solutions. But we cannot turn away from people in pain. Because when the funding is still there, and the need is undeniable, we have to ask: Was this truly about what couldn't be done, or just what we were unwilling to do?

The subline may go silent. But we don't have to.

Amber Foley, Crisis Counselor

*Unfortunately, Amber's position is one of many affected by layoffs forced by this massive and unprecedented funding cut. We are devastated to be losing a large number of passionate people on our staff who inspire us every single day.

Pushing to do More with Less

When school lets out for summer break, thousands of Iowa kids lose access to their only reliable source of food: school lunch. For many families in Johnson County and across the state, summer break marks the beginning of a difficult season and putting food on the table becomes even more challenging.

During the 2023-2024 school year, there were 7,061 children eligible for free or reduced school lunch in Johnson County. That's a staggering 37% of all public school students! Child hunger is not a distant problem. It is right here and tangible in our community.

In June, CommUnity joined a team of local organizations working together to distribute food to over 1,000 local children through Healthy Kids Iowa. Together, we packed and distributed bags of groceries to help ease the burden for families already stretched thin. The collaboration was inspiring and a testament to the strength of our community, but it came in response to a frustrating and avoidable decision.

In both 2024 and 2025, Governor Reynolds opted out of the Summer EBT program, a federally-funded initiative that would have sent grocery assistance directly to families with school-aged children who qualify for free and reduced-price meals. These dollars—already allocated and approved—would have provided critical support during the summer months. Instead, the state created the Healthy Kids Iowa program, which relies heavily on nonprofits and local partners to take on the massive task of feeding children without the federal financial support that most other states receive.

The consequences were immediate and overwhelming. Pantries like ours are already navigating increased demand due to rising food costs and shrinking safety nets. Then we were asked to do more with less. While we dedicated enormous amounts of time, staff, volunteers, and resources to filling the gaps, Healthy Kids Iowa simply does not come close to meeting the full need in our community.

While we are proud of what we accomplished alongside our partners, we know this model is not sustainable long-term. Food pantries were never designed to replace federal nutrition programs. The strain was significant, and it's only increasing as more families turn to us for help. We urge our community members to stay informed, speak up, and advocate for policy decisions that prioritize children's health and well-being.

Still, we showed up. Volunteers packed hundreds of bags. Staff coordinated logistics. The community came together to support their neighbors. And most importantly, families got some relief—even if just for a little while.



Healthy Kids Iowa distribution in June 2025

To everyone who has stepped up this summer, thank you. Your support made a tangible difference for local kids. We remain hopeful that next year, Iowa will choose to opt in to the Summer EBT program so families receive the support they deserve and nonprofits are not left to shoulder this burden alone.

There will be several more Healthy Kids Iowa distributions throughout the summer, and we will continue to do what we can.

No matter what decisions are made at the state level, CommUnity will continue to show up for our neighbors. Every child deserves a summer free from hunger—and every family deserves a community that stands with them.



Archival photo from the original "Crisis Center" food pantry circa 1980

Adding to the Cycle of Crisis

For 55 years, CommUnity Crisis Services has been a steady, dependable resource for people in Johnson County facing some of life's most difficult moments. From food insecurity and financial emergencies to mental health crises, we've always been here to help our neighbors navigate challenges and find a path forward. But today, we're facing a new kind of crisis—one that threatens the very foundation of our work.

Recent policy decisions and sweeping federal funding cuts have shaken our ability to plan for the future. The current administration has made unprecedented reductions to programs that previously served as our most reliable sources of support. Many of our grants have already been placed in limbo, and we fear additional cuts are just around the corner.

These changes are not just numbers on a spreadsheet—they represent real losses for real people. Fewer crisis counselors available to answer calls. Fewer bags of food delivered to hungry families. Less emergency financial assistance to keep a neighbor housed or their lights on. These unnecessary and, at times, cruel decisions are

sending more of our neighbors into crisis while slashing the very resources that are proven to lift people out of it.

Our programs work together to disrupt the cycle of crisis. When a person calls our crisis line, they may also need rent assistance, access to the food bank, or help finding shelter. When one program is weakened, the whole system suffers—and so does our community.

Our neighbors facing food, financial, or emotional crisis must now rely more than ever on kindhearted people like you to help steady the ship. Your donation helps ensure that when someone in Johnson County is facing a crisis, they won't be left to navigate it alone.

We've been here for 55 years. With your support, we can be here for 55 more. When our neighbors thrive, our whole community thrives.

Please consider making a donation today. Together, we can keep hope alive in Johnson County.

Donate at builtbycommunity.org/donate



1121 Gilbert Court
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Crisis Line: 988

Mobile Crisis: 1-855-581-8111

Food Bank: 319-351-0128

Business Line: 319-351-2726

builtbycommunity.org

