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PIERRE – The Department of Social Services (DSS) launched 605 Strong, a new crisis counseling program, dedicated to helping people struggling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Many individuals have been isolated from their families, have lost jobs or their businesses – the pandemic has impacted so many and we want to find a way to support them," said DSS Cabinet Secretary Laurie Gill. "The 605 Strong program will help connect South Dakotans with basic needs, financial assistance opportunities, government information, and mental health and family resources."

The program was created to promote COVID-19 related resources and support, including crisis intervention and access to the COVID-19 Call Center.

Additionally, the grant dollars will support outreach to individuals impacted by COVID-19. The outreach includes a follow-up program for individuals in acute distress and those in need of supportive contacts, stress management skills, or connection to additional services.

Targeted outreach will also be provided by Lutheran Social Services to support refugees and their families working at affected employers in Sioux Falls, Aberdeen and Huron.

"As this program moves forward, the goal is to help as many people as possible, lifting up South Dakota so that businesses, families and individuals can move toward a stronger, brighter future," Gill said.

The State of South Dakota received $210,723 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the first of a two-part Crisis Counseling Program grant. DSS plans to apply for the second part of the Crisis Counseling Program grant this month, which will provide funding for continued outreach and supportive services for an additional nine months.

To learn more, go to 605Strong.com.