

NEWS RELEASE



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A New Day for Social Services

Arkansas Launches Statewide 2-1-1 Information and Referral System

LOWELL, Ark. (May 8, 2008) — Arkansas became the 17th state to introduce the statewide 2-1-1 system this week, with Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe placing the first call with the new 2-1-1 information and referral system at a press conference at the State Capitol yesterday. The system was introduced to northwest Arkansas today by representatives from the United Way and the Arkansas Public Service Commission at a news conference held at the United Way office in Lowell today.

“Arkansas leads the nation by being among the few states to have already implemented this system statewide,” Gov. Beebe said. “It’s a simple concept, one of putting people in need of help in touch with those who can assist them. It’s about taking care of our people, community-building and neighbors working together to support each other. It has the potential to touch all of us in some way, whether we are in need of help or want to offer our help to others.”

2-1-1 is a free, easy-to-remember number that connects residents with important community services and volunteer opportunities. Individuals and families seeking social services can call 2-1-1, a nationally recognizable number that makes a critical connection between callers and the appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies, and get the help they need. Users can also log on to www.arkansas211.org to access the same service.

Arkansas 2-1-1 will be managed by the United Ways of Arkansas Board of Directors and funded through local United Way contributions, foundation grants and private donations. The Wal-Mart and Sam’s Club Foundation provided the seed money for the system through a grant of \$600,000 (\$300,000 over two years) which has been matched by other contributors and United Way resources.

“Wal-Mart and Sam’s Club have a long-standing relationship with the United Way,” said Ray Bracy, senior vice president of Corporate Affairs for Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. “We are pleased to support this important project, which will help provide many essential services to residents in our home state of Arkansas.”

The annual operating budget for Arkansas 2-1-1 is estimated to be a little over \$1 million per year for the first two years. Two call centers are being operated in Arkansas; one in Pine Bluff and one in Springdale through a partnership with the statewide Crisis Center. The executive director, Nathan Cook, and administrative staff will be headquartered in Pine Bluff. Cook was recruited to Arkansas from North Carolina where he developed one of the first 2-1-1 systems in the state, and the only system nationwide to have received national accreditation on its first try. The Arkansas 2-1-1 board is made up of eight CEOs of United Way and 13 volunteers selected from the collaborative group that designed Arkansas's 2-1-1 system.

"This system has been a major force in helping us to break down the barriers that exist between those who need help and those who have the ability to help," Don Zimmerman, Executive Director of the Arkansas Municipal League and Chairman of the Arkansas 2-1-1 Executive Committee, said. "This number is a fast, easy and free way for those in need to take the first step in getting the help they need to put their lives back on track."

Angela Tilley, past Chairperson of United Ways of Arkansas, said: "United Way is proud to bring Arkansas 2-1-1 to our state. As always, we are committed to connecting people in need with the services that can help. 2-1-1 will touch the lives of every person in the state, whether he or she is in a situation where they need help, or they're in a position to give help. Our two call centers in Pine Bluff and here in Springdale will respond to an individual's needs 12 hours a day, seven days a week and service is accessible 24 hours a day. Also, 2-1-1 will provide local United Ways and human service providers with the data needed to better identify gaps of services within communities, so United Way can help fill those gaps."

Public Service Commissioner Daryl Bassett said "We took our time in implementing this system in Arkansas so that it was done correctly. We're now ready to provide a great quality of service to the people who need it most. And, we think that Arkansas 2-1-1 will be a model for other states to use in implementing their own 2-1-1 system."

Examples of services offered by 2-1-1 include:

- Basic human needs such as food banks, clothing closets, shelters, and rent and utility assistance
- Physical and mental health resources such as health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, maternal health, ArKids First, medical information lines, crisis intervention services, support groups, counseling, drug and alcohol intervention and rehabilitation
- Employment support including financial assistance, job training, transportation and education programs
- Support for older Arkansans and the disabled such as adult day care, congregate meals, Meals on Wheels, respite care, home health care, transportation, and homemaker services
- Support for children youth and families including childcare, after school programs, Head Start, family resource centers, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring, protective services

- Volunteer opportunities and donations

For more information on Arkansas 2-1-1, go to www.arkansas211.org, or contact your local United Way.

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Additional Fort Smith information

From: Angela Tilley

2-1-1 has already been beneficial to our area. The two call centers in Northwest Arkansas and Pine Bluff have been making referrals to our area. Surprisingly, sometimes calls to 2-1-1 from our area are picked up at the Tulsa call center. This is a very unique situation and one that our phone companies are working to correct. But, it has not deterred callers from receiving help. These calls are forwarded to the United Way office in Fort Smith. From these unique referrals, the United Way staff have been able to put folks directly in touch with needed services. The Community Services Clearinghouse has been one of the most referred to agencies locally by 2-1-1. Sue Robinson with the Clearinghouse shared the following story with United Way. “We just got a call from a Veteran's advocate in Florida sent to us through 211. There is a disabled Marine in Florida who wants to come home to Fort Smith to be closer to his family. But he was afraid he could not get VA medical services here. So we gave one of our Case Managers the details and she is gathering all the information she can find and will return the call within a couple of hours.” As the story goes, the veteran needing assistance was provided with numerous contacts and information about VA services in our area. Lucy, the Clearinghouse Case manager stated the client was very excited about the assistance. “He could have hugged us through the phone if he could have”. Lucy said it was very exciting to know the Clearinghouse and 2-1-1 helped a person all the way in Florida. We hope soon he will be relocating to our area.