



Connection

Volume 2, No. 1: Spring 2008

What is Michigan 2-1-1?

By Sherry Miller,
Director, Michigan 2-1-1

Established in 2005, Michigan 2-1-1 is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Organizationally, Michigan 2-1-1 is a membership organization with one member, the Michigan Association of United Ways. This assures the continuing close connection between United Way, nationally a source of ongoing funds for most call centers, and 2-1-1 Call Centers in Michigan. This commitment to 2-1-1 aligns with United Way's focus on making systems change in community conditions to address social

issues.

Michigan 2-1-1 is led by a Board of Directors who serve two-year staggered terms. The board meets bi-monthly with interim conference calls as needed. Current Michigan 2-1-1 Board members are listed on the Michigan 2-1-1 Web page: <http://www.uwmich.org/211/Michigan211Inc/tabid/64/Default.aspx>.

Section 214 of Public Act 179 (Telecommunications Act) identifies certain authorities and requirements for Michigan 2-1-1. Specifically, Michigan

2-1-1 is identified as the state 2-1-1 coordinating agency. The Act requires that state agencies and local units of government consult with Michigan 2-1-1 prior to implementing a community resource information and referral system. The Act also requires a recommendation from Michigan 2-1-1 to the Michigan Public Service Commission as part of the process of assignment of the 2-1-1 dialing code and designation of an entity as the community answering point. The Michigan 2-1-1 Board has established criteria and a process for this required recom-

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Michigan Alliance of Information & Referral Systems

www.mi-air.com

Established in 1977, the Michigan Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (MI-AIRS; formerly the Southeastern Michigan Information and Referral Alliance, or SEMIRA) is an alliance of agencies, community organizations, and individuals committed to providing quality information and referral services to all of Michigan. MI-AIRS is an affiliate of (international) Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS).

Contact MI-AIRS:
PO Box 1307
Southgate, MI 48195

The purpose of the MI-AIRS Connection is to keep MI-AIRS members updated on I&R news statewide.

Contact Newsletter Editor:
newsletter@mi-air.com

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mentation. The Act can be found at: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-179-of-1991.pdf>.

Following over one year of work, the Michigan 2-1-1 Business Plan was approved in January 2006. Nationally recognized consultant Kenn Allen, of Civil Society Consulting, provided wide-ranging groups of stakeholders a process by which the plan was developed. The Michigan Business Plan (<http://www.uwmich.org/Portals/0/docs/MI%202-1-1%20Business%20Plan.pdf>) calls for a system of seven regional call centers funded through a public-private partnership with the State of Michigan.

The Michigan Association of United Ways (MAUW) established key staff positions in public policy and statewide 2-1-1 operations to implement the Michigan 2-1-1 Business Plan. Some of the activities and groups supported by Michigan 2-1-1 & MAUW include

- Michigan 2-1-1 Legislative Day
- Michigan 2-1-1 Constituent Services Day
- Grantmakers Briefing co-sponsored by Council of Michigan Foundations
- Wireless and VOIP call routing
- Michigan 2-1-1 Operating Council and its work groups -
 - ◆Emergency

Preparedness (includes access by special populations)

- ◆Statewide Data Collection
- ◆Resource Managers Workgroups
- ◆After-hours coverage
- ◆Statewide database and telecommunications backbone

Michigan 2-1-1 works closely with MI-AIRS (Michigan Alliance of Information & Referral Systems) to leverage resources to enhance 2-1-1 Call Centers and information and referral in general. One example of this collaboration is the Essential Learning online training opportunity coordinated by Michigan 2-1-1 and partially subsidized as a member benefit by MI-AIRS. Another example is the coordination of MI-AIRS Review Teams.

Priorities for the year ahead include continued implementation of the business plan, identification of sustainable funding sources and further integration of 2-1-1 within Michigan health and human service delivery systems.

For additional information about Michigan 2-1-1, please contact Sherry Miller, Director, Michigan 2-1-1, at smiller@uwmich.org or at 517.371.4360 ext. 14 or go to <http://www.uwmich.org/211/tabid/60/Default.aspx>.

See y'all at the 2008 AIRS conference

By Susan Howell

The 2008 AIRS Annual Training and Education Conference is rapidly approaching, and it's an experience you won't want to miss. Meet other I&R colleagues from across the country, and participate in skill-building workshops. The event will be May 18-21 at the Westin Galleria & West Oaks in Houston, Texas.

Houston is the nation's fourth largest city and is home to Moody Gardens, Downtown Aquarium, Space Center Houston, fine shopping, and more than 5,000 restaurants offering everything from Gulf Coast Creole to Spanish tapas to Japanese sushi bars. And while Michigan's spring weather can be unpredictable at times, late May in Texas is certainly guaranteed to be sunny and warm.

AIRS conferences are known for providing top-quality educational seminars. The 2008 training offers nine separate tracks and more than 75 different workshops. The nine tracks include Aging & Disability, I&R Service Delivery, Disaster Response and Planning, Management, Military, Resource Management, Technology,

and 2-1-1. In addition to participating in outstanding courses, the conference will provide you with an extremely valuable opportunity to network with friends and peers. You will learn what others are doing across the country, and you will hear real solutions to some of your everyday challenges. The event also allows you the chance to interact with more than 30 exhibitors dedicated to the I&R industry. You will be able to see product demonstrations and talk to vendors face-to-face about their services. Lastly, some of you will even be eligible to earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

For some smaller organizations, the cost of the conference may seem prohibitive, but those who have attended past conferences will tell you it is worth the expense. You will be exposed to new ideas and will develop skills that you can immediately put to use in your own organization. Consider it an investment in the future growth and success of your Information and Referral program. For more information or to register, please visit the AIRS web site at www.airs.org. We hope to see you in Texas!

Call Center Corner

Federal Economic Stimulus Package Information

It's no secret that U.S. economy is in a recession. While we all know that Congress has approved sending tax rebates to most consumers in an attempt to kick-start consumer spending, pinning down the details (How much will I get? When will I get it? What do I have to do?) is a little more difficult.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is the agency that will be sending out the checks, and it's prominently posted information about it on its Web site.

Browse to www.irs.gov and click on the "Rebate Questions?" link to access all sorts of information.

In short, though, the facts are:

- ❑ In most cases, payments will range from \$300 to \$600 for individuals and \$600 to \$1200 for joint filers. Taxpayers may receive \$300 for each qualifying child. Payments could be less, depending on tax liability and Adjusted Gross Income. Phaseout reduction begins at \$75,000 for single filers and \$150,000 for joint filers.
- ❑ The rebate check won't count as taxable income when recipients file their 2008 tax returns next year.
- ❑ Rebate checks will start going out in May.
- ❑ There's no special application process to receive the rebate, but individuals must file a 2007 tax return to receive it. Individuals who normally don't have to file tax returns (beneficiaries of Social Security and some veterans' benefit programs and low-

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Helping out at the San Diego wildfires

By Sherry Miller,
Director, Michigan 2-1-1

Tuesday, Oct. 23 - Late afternoon - Message received that this is not an exercise - that the UWA/AIRS 2-1-1 Disaster Team will be deployed to California as a result of the wildfires.

That message began an experience in disaster response that I will not soon forget. The United Way of America (UWA) / Alliance of Information and Referral Systems 2-1-1 Disaster Response Team was formed a year ago to respond to 2-1-1 Call Centers impacted by disaster. The 22-member team brings together individuals with specific skill sets ranging from volunteer management, to information technology, to logistics. All in all, there are eleven specific skill sets represented. It is our job to help the 2-1-1 Call Center develop capacity to respond.



Wednesday, Oct. 24 - 10:01 a.m. President Bush has declared a federal disaster in San Diego County. The President's signature triggers the availability of federal aid to supplement local recovery efforts.

Thursday, Oct. 25 - Arrived in San Diego via Phoenix. In Phoenix, there was a family of four seated nearby. Their little girl, probably around 3 years old was tired, coughing and crying loudly. The mom apologized to the group by saying that they were from California, that their daughter is asthmatic and has not been able to breathe in 3 days. They were relieved to escape.

Arrived round 10:30 p.m. California time - the smell of smoke hit me as I left the terminal.

Friday, Oct. 26 - Met at 7:00 a.m. with the group - 16 are here in San Diego from the Disaster Response Team and headed for the call center. San Diego 2-1-1 has been plagued with problems - their software crashed, air conditioning doesn't work - so it's uncomfortable. The disaster call center is in a large room with tables, chairs - no computers, about 60 phones

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income workers who haven't had taxes withheld and whose income exempts them from having to file) won't receive their rebate unless they file a tax return.

Phaseout of Analog TV Broadcasting and Analog Cell Phone Service

Effective February 17, 2009, U.S. TV stations will no longer be permitted to broadcast analog signals.

This won't impact the vast majority of consumers, who have long relied on cable or satellite TV hookups rather than picking up over-the-air broadcasts. But those households who still pick up broadcast signals via roof-mounted antennas or rabbit ears could find themselves out of the loop if the TV set into which the is routed isn't capable of receiving a digital signal. (If the TV set is digital-ready, there's no problem; TV stations will still be sending out the same digital broadcast signals they already do.) In order to receive broadcast digital signals on analog sets, viewers will have to connect a digital-to-analog converter box between the antenna and the TV set. These inexpensive devices will be available from electronics merchandisers everywhere. To help defray the expenses of purchasing these items, the federal government will make available two Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupons worth \$40 each to any household which requests them. Requests can be made online (via www.dtv2009.gov) or by phoning 888.388.2009. More information can be found on the AIRS Web site (www.airs.org/aboutairs/about_dtv.asp). And analog cell phone service has already been shut down. Over 99% of US users had already migrated to digital service, but over 500,000 GM cars equipped with the analog version of the OnStar emergency road service notification program are stuck with no way to upgrade to the digital version.

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and is hot. Calls are coming in at a rapid pace - used to get around 300 calls a day, now getting upwards of 30,000 per day. Judy (from Hawaii) and I are assigned the task of call center management - volunteer recruitment, statistic gathering on volunteers and volunteer hours, set up and running the volunteer reception desk, creating ways for people to volunteer more and so on and so on. Add to that support for lead staff scheduled to assist in the call center - making sure they remember to be upbeat and motivate the volunteers. Volunteers come in 4-hour shifts - usually about 50 at a time. They have 15 minutes of training and then take to the phones. Resources are updated every 30 minutes and their notebooks of information are swapped out at that time. It takes 24 minutes to swap out the notebooks. The Disaster Response Team (DRT) is responsible for training, IT support, and many other functions. Today - at great cost - an air conditioner was set up outside and a large (2 feet in diameter) hose was stuck through the door to try and cool it off. It had two settings - on and off. Volunteers are helping everywhere and coming from everywhere. The San Diego District Attorney's office has assigned their staff (60 people) to the call center in 8-hour shifts around the clock as the courts were closed. That will end on

Monday, 10/29. Yesterday the mayor dropped in and thanked the volunteers. Got back to the motel around 9:30 p.m. - second shift is in place.

Saturday, Oct. 27 - What a difference a day makes! Today our organizational systems, put in place yesterday, paid off. We have systems and signage in place at the volunteer reception desk including survey forms and skill inventories.

Volunteers have put in nearly 5,000 hours this week. So far, in the last 6 days, we've taken over 115,000 calls. Calls from midnight to 4:00 a.m. were sparse but it really picked up at 6:30 a.m. to around 150 calls an hour and increased over the day. Today we moved from paper and pencil to computers and moved the call center to another room - all volunteers got trained in the new software that the resource folks had been populating around the clock. A foundation, with roots in Michigan, offered to write a software platform for use in the call center. They did that in a day and it was populated in a day by 2-1-1 Resource Specialists.

Judy and I developed questions for a small focus group we facilitated this morning and learned much about their volunteer experience.

I ended the day by calling people back from the 75-plus e-mails that had been sent but not responded to before we arrived. About 20 of the people

were still available and signed up to volunteer.

Sunday, Oct. 28 - It's easy to understand how people forget what day it is and again, what a difference a day makes! Call volume overnight decreased and 2-1-1 San Diego decided that what they really needed from our team was overnight supervision of volunteers, volunteer recruitment and some IT expertise. The rest of the team made quick reservations and most flew out yesterday. I took some to the airport and will do that again Tuesday morning when the overnight supervisor is released. It's funny, I had no idea that the airport was in downtown San Diego. It was dark when I got here on Thursday and I had only seen their call center and the Holiday Inn. It's a beautiful downtown and I hope I get to see it other than driving through it.

Again today, some great volunteers came through the doors. One was Rosie, who had been volunteering at Qualcomm (the stadium used for evacuees) who heard about the need at 2-1-1. Self-described as being 'anal,' Rosie made quick work of applying her organizational talents to our volunteer reception area and other areas around the call center. When I ended up having to go pick someone up, she volunteered to come with me to show me the way and then actually transported some of our team back to their hotel.

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Yes, another team member arrived yesterday only to be told to turn it around and fly home. We had no number to reach her, and had known that she would not be needed, but had no way to stop her. Another team member, Annette, is here from West Virginia. She is a 40-something mom and grandmother and this was her first time flying. She was thrilled that her West Virginia boss gave her some extra time here in San Diego, following her services, to see the sights.

Training volunteers was added to my duties yesterday - sharing that duty with two others. Volunteers arrive every 4 hours so there is a lot of training going on. On Monday we need to get an exit strategy timeline agreed to and in writing and start transitioning these tasks to 2-1-1 San Diego staff.

Monday, Oct. 29 and Tuesday, Oct. 30 - The days are flying by - there are 3 of us left on the ground here - our overnight team member Joy, left for her home in Florida this morning. I've been doing the

training for volunteers every 4 hours - the call volume has really decreased, is now down to about 2,700 calls a day. Reverse 911 is being used and we find that it needs to be explained during our volunteer training. I was told that one 2-1-1 caller said that she had tried Reverse 911, by dialing 119, but it didn't work. So, she called 2-1-1. Ah....a teachable moment. Today (Tuesday) volunteers completed entering the 100,000+ calls on the new software platform that were done on paper. 2-1-1 San Diego has hired two of the volunteers as staff for the foreseeable future to get through the next month or so. Through all of this the 2-1-1 San Diego staff has handled this with grace - all of these people coming into their workplace and having to do things in such different ways. They have also extended this grace to others.

San Diego truly supported the efforts and shares in the success of 2-1-1's response to the wildfires. At the onset, a local bank extended a substantial line of credit to 2-1-1 for the expenses

of this disaster. Businesses supplied 50+ computers and then decided to just donate them to 2-1-1. Restaurants donated food for volunteers around the clock. Local and county government supplied laptops and assigned their staff to answer phones. A local foundation wrote software in a day which was populated in a day. Volunteers were in plentiful supply and eager to help - no matter what the task. The staff of 2-1-1 San Diego was gracious and welcoming to this total invasion of their workspace. At the end of the experience it was easy to understand why this call center will continue their success. They were prepared and had the support of their community. United Way was there from the onset - bringing in tables, chairs, and other necessities as well as marshalling other much needed resources. United Way will be there in 2-1-1 San Diego's future as well, ensuring that callers can access information and referral not only in emergencies but each and every day.

Reflections from the past president

By Robert McKown,
Past President, MI-AIRS

The players and projects change but the value of I&R programs in Michigan working together to strengthen I&R services and the commitment to quality I&R are ongoing.

As the outgoing President of the Michigan

Alliance of Information & Referral Systems I was asked to reflect on the accomplishments of MI-AIRS over the past four years. The expectation I put on myself was to identify and share wise thoughts about our accomplishments. Listing activities and accomplishment did not seem sufficient.

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The first sentence is the wisest thought I have about our accomplishments. It addresses the question about what benefit a good I&R program attains by participating in MI-AIRS. It reflects the reason MI-AIRS continues although the people involved change. There are core values that are part of the soul of I&R programs and the people who represent those programs: the right of the caller to decide whether or how to use the information obtained, the inclusiveness of the resource information in the database, the commitment to not just provide information but to strive to provide information that results in the callers question or problem getting addressed, and a commitment to learning new ideas about providing I&R services. My premise is that the last value is what drives MI-AIRS members to belong, utilize, participate in and contribute to the work of MI-AIRS.

Nearly always, I&R programs realize that there are more commonalities than differences in the way services are provided. Yet, understanding and considering the differences rather than the commonalities is the key to moving from a good to a great I&R service. The common thread over time; in 1999 when MI-AIRS was an association of I&R programs in southeastern Michigan called the Southeast Michigan Information and Referral Alliance (SEMIRA), in 2001 when the organization moved toward including I&R programs across Michigan and became MI-AIRS, and now, is that providing training, education, certification exam opportunities, reviewing policies and procedures to assure the 2-1-1 programs in Michigan operate at high standards and identifying best practices helps us build stronger and more effective I&R programs. Through the work of MI-AIRS members and board we have attained:

- ❑ A single membership fee and process for AIRS and MI-AIRS. A portion of the membership fee paid to AIRS is shared

with MI-AIRS. A single application results in two memberships.

- ❑ In partnership with Michigan 2-1-1, an affordable subscription to the AIRS Online Training courses including unlimited use of the AIRS Online training courses for MI 2-1-1 and MI-AIRS members. Instead of paying for each course, MI-AIRS members who subscribe are able to use all of the available courses for less than \$50 per employee/annually.
- ❑ An efficient and effective process to review applications from I&R programs that seek to demonstrate they meet Michigan 2-1-1 Standards in order to be credentialed to use the 2-1-1 phone number. In 2004, 2-1-1 was available to residents in six Michigan counties. Currently 2-1-1 is available to residents of 31 counties including the entire Upper Peninsula. Michigan 2-1-1 and MI-AIRS developed a memorandum of understanding to outline the process for assuring that programs seeking to provide or expand 2-1-1 services fit the Michigan 2-1-1 business plan.
- ❑ A more complete Web site that includes background on MI-AIRS, information about training opportunities, certification and other events, recognition of AIRS Accredited programs, links to state I&R programs and membership information.

I enjoyed the opportunity and consider it a privilege to have served as the MI-AIRS President for the past nearly four years. In addition to the above accomplishments, MI-AIRS has provided trainings, workshops, certification tests and roundtable discussions of I&R issues. Informally, we have made professional friends and shared ideas and solutions between I&R programs. As a result our programs are stronger, more effective, our callers receive better services and we are positioned to continue our commitment to quality I&R.

Do you have an idea for a newsletter article? Want your agency to be profiled in an upcoming edition? We would love to hear from you. E-mail the newsletter staff at newsletter@mi-air.com