

Kevin T. Middleton, President
P.O. Box 4653
Louisville, Kentucky 40204
Direct: 502-292-5342 Mobile: 502-297-2965
kevin.middleton@uwky.org

United Way
of Kentucky



VIA E-MAIL AND U.S. MAIL

June 7, 2023

Linda C. Bridwell
Executive Director
Kentucky Public Service Commission
P.O. Box 615
211 Sower Boulevard
Frankfort, KY 40602-0615

RECEIVED

JUN 07 2023

PUBLIC SERVICE
COMMISSION

RE: Annual Status Report regarding United Way 211 Implementation

Dear Ms. Bridwell:

Pursuant to the Administrative Case No. 343 dated August 17, 2004 designating United Way of Kentucky as lead agency for implementation of the 211 dialing code in Kentucky, enclosed please find our annual report on the progress of the United Way 211 initiative.

We appreciate the ongoing support for statewide 211 by the Commission.

If you have any questions about the report or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Middleton", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Kevin Middleton
President and 211 State Director
United Way of Kentucky

KENTUCKY 211
Status Report to the
Kentucky Public Service Commission
from
United Way of Kentucky

211 Statewide Implementation
Administrative Case No. 343

June 7, 2023

Introduction

In July of 2000, the Federal Communications Commission reserved the abbreviated 211 dialing code nationwide for access to health and human service information and referral (I/R) services.

In 2001, following informal meetings held by the Kentucky Public Service Commission to discuss the assignment of 211 in the Commonwealth, United Way of Kentucky (UWKY) petitioned the Commission to assign the 211 dialing code to UWKY and its affiliated organizations. UWKY proposed that it be designated as the lead agency for the statewide implementation of 211 in Kentucky. The Commission granted UWKY provisional authority over 211 for a three-year period to develop a pilot program for the implementation of 211, and to report on its progress at the end of that time.

In 2004, UWKY submitted its report to the Commission on the progress of its pilot efforts, including its comprehensive business plan for Kentucky 211.

On August 17, 2004, the Kentucky Public Service Commission issued an order granting UWKY the permanent designation as the lead agency for the statewide implementation of 211 in Kentucky. The Commission directed that UWKY make annual reports on the progress of the 211 initiative.

Kentucky's 211 Service Delivery in 2022

UWKY remains committed to the ongoing development, maintenance and provision of high quality, standards-driven, statewide United Way 211 services in Kentucky. Since late 2020, Kentucky 211 contact centers have provided 211 information and referral services across all 120 Kentucky counties.

Background:

An original plan was presented to the Commission in 2004, and was restructured in 2009 to account for new developments in technology, updated pricing and national expansion models. This plan gave us the opportunity to propose new potential to the administration and legislators, reacquaint them with 211 and ask for their support. Meetings with state leaders were well-received at the time, though funding was not available.

Throughout 2018 and through the summer of 2019, a planning committee comprised of representatives of the United Way of Kentucky staff and board of directors, as well as the four 211 contact centers serving the state met with members of state government agencies, particularly within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, to explore the system's capacity for contracted service to the Commonwealth, in support of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) Kynect Resources project. In April 2020, UWKY signed a contract with the CHFS to support bringing "closed loop" referral services to the Commonwealth using 211 resource data, and offering residents the opportunity, for the first time, to maintain their own records of health insurance, referral and public benefits in a single, easy-to-use online system, while agencies assisting these individuals have the capacity to create referrals and review referral data to ensure that the most efficient provision of human services is provided to all.

In Summer 2021, a privately-funded four-part strategic direction setting series with Kentucky’s 211 contact centers took place, with a goal of discussing and addressing barriers to consistency in service delivery and user experience, as well as data sharing, in the context of:

- national quality standards,
- efficiency of delivery, and
- increasing interest from state agencies and other partners.

This series also provided a platform for Kentucky’s 211 Centers to discuss existing challenges, opportunities and network expectations, and resulted in the development of mutually agreed upon strategies to work more collaboratively and efficiently among the 211 contact center partners – to achieve the goal of shared systems that will provide a consistent and common user experience across the Commonwealth.

To that end, UWKY submitted a proposal in October 2021 to support additional outreach and onboarding services for the CHFS/Kynect Resources project, with a partnership approach that expanded on our data-sharing and coverage deliverables to include providing new technological and personnel supports to achieve our mutual goals of supporting Kentucky residents.

Subsequent contracts have renewed and expanded the partnership through FY 2024. UWKY invested in the expansion of 211 information and referral services to the final 62 “uncovered” counties, have added 8 new resource specialist positions performing both inbound call management and outbound follow up, supported awareness initiatives, and will soon launch an incentive program to support community partner engagement. The most current iteration of the partnership has also funded the creation of a statewide interactive voice response (IVR) platform to ensure that, once implemented, 211 can be utilized for additional statewide call center needs, such as eligibility and enrollment supports for public benefits programs, disaster response, and more. Finally, UWKY also invested in the hiring of a statewide Director of 211 Initiatives, Andrea Brown, in October 2022 to increase our internal capacity to continue our work in support of Kentucky communities.

In summary, through this partnership, one hundred percent of Kentucky residents can now access the largest electronic health and human resources information and referral database (collectively) in the Commonwealth through full 211 service by phone, chat, text, email, web search, and closed loop partner referral platform.

UWKY will continue its work with our 211 contact centers to support the provision of services through sustainable funding sourced through contract services, legislative avenues, and grant opportunities, and to seek additional public/private partnerships.

Usage Volume

In 2022, call volume in Kentucky was 54,595, a decrease from the height of pandemic era calling in 2021, but showing an increase from 2020 of 5,180 calls, highlighting the growth in service to the expansion communities. Figure 1 below shows statewide call volume. In 2022, for those reporting individualized

totals, calls for basic needs, such as housing, utilities, and food made up over 73% of all calls for services (see Figure 2 below).

FIGURE 1

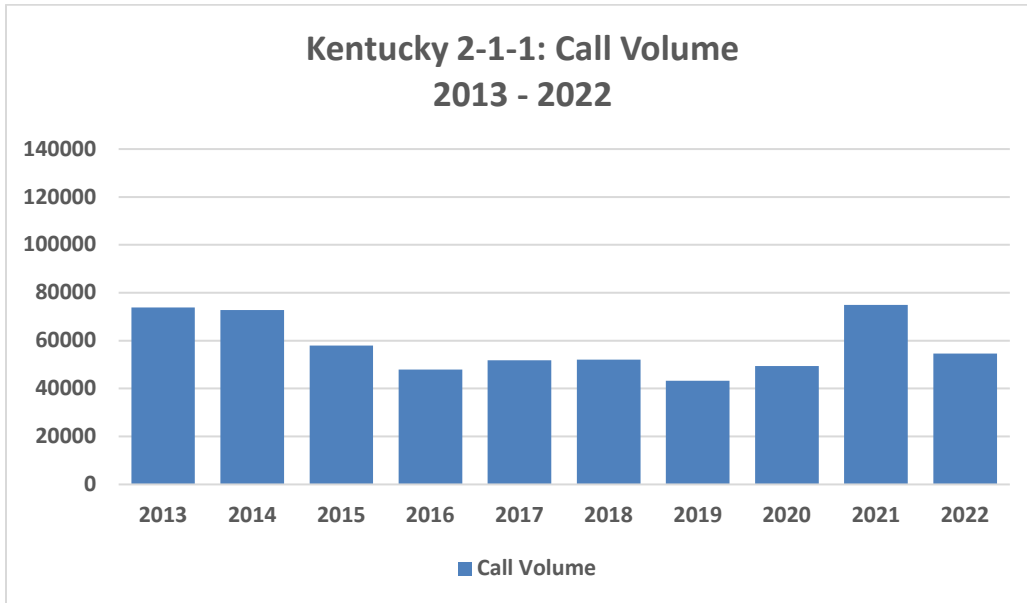
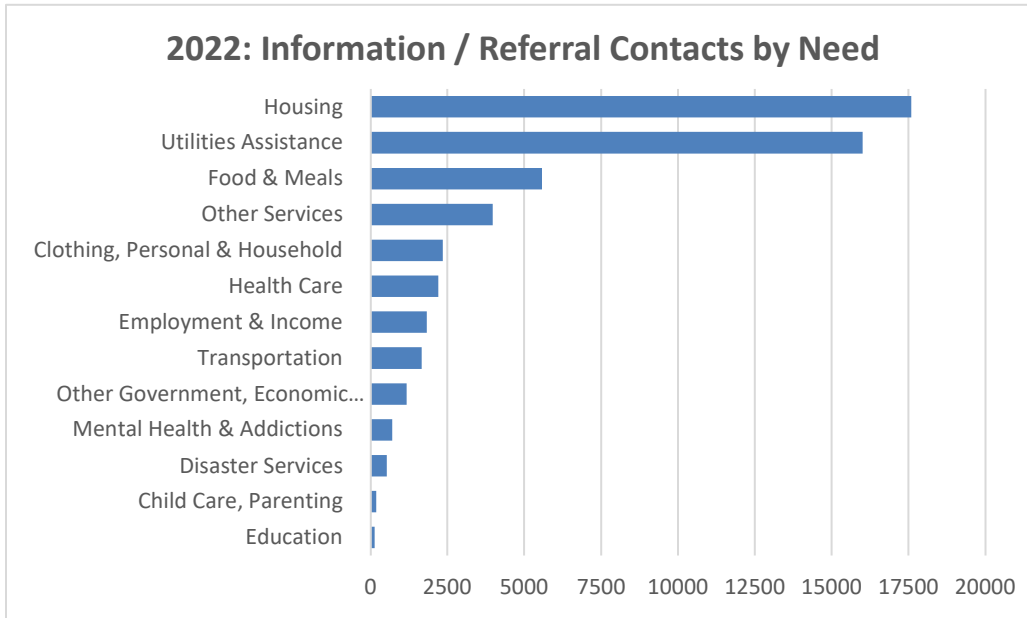


FIGURE 2



Community Partnerships and Special Projects

In addition to day to day information and referral services, United Way 211 has proven to be invaluable in several community partnerships and special projects.

Kynect Resources - Kynect Resources is a new tool that makes it easier than ever to not only connect people with available resources, but track outcomes and collaborate with community partners. UWKY, in coordination with our contact centers across Kentucky, has partnered with the Commonwealth to populate the resource data that underpins the service. This partnership has allowed for the expansion of 211 to 120 counties. Every Kentuckian can now dial 211 or text their zip code to 898-211 to access services 24/7/365. The 2022 subcontract with UWKY provided 211 centers with dedicated resource associates to further develop and maintain a robust database of resources and expand usage of Kynect. Through community partner site visits, regional workgroups, community events, and survey outreach, these associates collected new and revised resource information and updates for the resource database. The associates also actively collaborated with CHFS Kynect Resources project managers and the 211-database software teams to improve the data transfer between Kynect and the 211 data platforms. These associates, trained by CHFS, act as referral specialists for Kynect Resources, monitoring requests in the Kynect Resources portal from community organizations, to claim their sites, and in late 2022 forward are providing training and support as partners onboard and receive referrals within Kynect, as well as managing outstanding referral closures.

Disaster – During the last year, Southern Kentucky 211 provided critical services to local tornado victims by connecting them with Disaster Case Management, funding opportunities, and other services. 211 served as the initial contact for those seeking services and those wanting to volunteer. United Way of the Bluegrass also took disaster related calls, most of which are featured in the “other services” category on Figure 2, accounting for the increase in that figure. UWGC responded by ensuring appropriate resource connections for those impacted and calling from their service area. 211 has been at the table with our community partners from beginning to end, involving unmet needs committees, special project management and more to help stabilize communities and help them return to a sense of normalcy. We continue to support our state network to ensure appropriate engagement in helping affected families with up to date resources. In the Louisville area, UWKY has committed its newly hired 211 director to participating in the Mass Casualty Incident planning team.

V-VEAC – Virtual Veterans Experience Action Center – In 2021 and 2022, Kentucky 211 participated with the federal and state Departments of Veterans Affairs, as well as several other federal and state agencies to support the pandemic era implementation of the “VEAC” or Veterans Experience Action Center. The V-VEAC served as a three day event, promoted across the Commonwealth to hundreds of thousands of Kentucky Veterans, to provide information and resources to those facing issues related to:

- VA Claims and appeals filing and status updates
- Community and peer-to-peer networking referral
- VA and Kentucky State Veterans benefits
- Education, employment, and pro bono legal referral
- VA healthcare eligibility and enrollment

- Family member, caregiver, and survivor benefits and services
- Community-based programs and resources provided through 211

Over 450 Kentucky Veterans participated in the process each year, and we are looking forward to supporting the VEAC as it returns to in person services in the coming months.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) – United Way 211 provides low income individuals and families with information about free tax assistance sites throughout the Commonwealth. MUW 211 and its partners, Louisville Asset Building Coalition (LABC) and Louisville Metro Government continue to increase awareness of, and access to, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). At a time when many families are struggling to make ends meet, EITC dollars can be used to reduce debt. MUW 211 directs the callers to Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites that offer trained volunteers who provide free help preparing the caller’s tax return. A person dialing 211 can speak with a specialist and learn about EITC/VITA site locations, dates, times and general eligibility requirements.

In greater Lexington, UWBG is committed to helping families and individuals become financially stable. The promotion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is one important way UWBG helps those in the community achieve financial stability. EITC provides families with children an average tax credit of over \$2,000. This money can then be used toward savings, home repairs, bills, further education, or other needs that help families achieve greater stability. Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites, with coordination through 211, prepare taxes free of charge for families and individuals who fall within the income guidelines. The VITA volunteers are also trained to ensure tax filers receive the maximum credits for which the client is eligible.

Housing and Homelessness – United Way 211 has provided support to homeless programs like the Single Point of Entry which tracks open shelter bed space, and has historically supported the point in time count to ensure adequate services can be provided to this at-risk population.

Federal Legislative Initiatives

On Thursday, May 18, 2023, after significant efforts over the course of 2022 to educate members of Congress on the services of 211, Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) and Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) along with Congressman Brian Higgins (D-NY-26) and Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-1) introduced the bipartisan and bicameral “Human-services Emergency Logistics Program Act of 2023,” also known as the “HELP Act”. While the HELP act is not new, this development is the first bipartisan introduction of the legislation in the House and Senate since 2009. The HELP Act, which United Way Worldwide has publicly endorsed, will facilitate increased nationwide accessibility and coordination of 211 services and 988 services to provide information and referrals throughout the United States for mental health emergencies, homelessness, and other human service needs.

The HELP Act will connect people in communities with the human-services and mental health resources they need while reducing the call and response burden on local and state law enforcement agencies. It would:

- Divert non-criminal, non-fire, and non-medical emergency calls from 911 systems to state and regional 211 and 988 systems.
- Provide each state with funds to build out its 211 and 9-8-8 referral systems to link callers to both emergency and long-term human-services and mental health resources to address their needs. Special emphasis would be placed on responses for mental health emergencies, homelessness needs, and other non-criminal emergencies. In addition, the 211 system will serve as a robust resource and referral system capable of linking individuals and families to other human-services needs such as food assistance and childcare.
- Create an oversight system for the 211 and 988 networks comprised of community members who represent older adults, people with disabilities, people of color, and members of other communities. Each system will be evaluated every year and recommendations to improve services will be made public.

As the HELP Act moves through Congress, United Way Worldwide will be working with the sponsors as well as elected officials on both sides of the aisle to educate them about our work. We look forward to the potential that this legislation could bring to Kentucky families.

National View and Summary

In 2022, the 211 network in the United States:

- Answered more than 18 million phone calls
- Responded to more than 2.4 million texts, web chats and emails
- Made more than 19 million total referrals to help.
- Was designated by governors and health departments in 32 states as the official COVID-19 resource line.

211 specialists made:

- 4.8 million connections to help to reduce and prevent housing insecurity and homelessness.
- 1.6 million connections to healthcare information and resources including prescription payment assistance, substance use treatment programs, COVID-19 support, and mental health services.
- 2.4 million connections to help to reduce hunger and food insecurity.
- 2.6 million connections to utilities assistance.
- Provided support for more than 987,000 callers experiencing suicidal ideation or another mental health crisis, or worried about someone else who was.
- Helped more than 127,000 people get assistance related to sexual assault, domestic violence, or human trafficking.
- Made more than 808,000 referrals for financial assistance.
- Addressed food insecurity with 8.1 million meals delivered through Ride United Last Mile Delivery.

In the 23 years since the FCC assigned the 211 number for health and human services information and referral, it has repeatedly proven its impact and value. In Kentucky, United Way 211 is committed to maintaining the highest standards in the information and referral industry. In addition, we have achieved our stated goal to make 211 available to all Kentuckians. Expansion efforts in Eastern and Western Kentucky have built momentum for additional sustainable support to continue the mission.