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## **United Way Promoting 2-1-1 to Connect People to Help**

As many area families and individuals continue to face tough times during this challenging economy, and with the additional burden of the state shutdown, United Way wants to ensure that people who need assistance can be connected to services by simply calling 2-1-1. Callers can also dial (800) 543-7709.

“It is difficult to know where to turn for help, especially when you have never needed it before. Knowing that you can simply call 2-1-1 and be connected to services can be a comfort for people who don’t know where to start,” says Laura Bowman, President Greater Mankato Area United Way.

This week United Way is blanketing the community with 2-1-1 flyers. Hundreds of flyers were dropped off at local supermarkets, thrift stores, laundromats and various places which community members might frequent. Bowman says, “United Way’s efforts to connect people to the help at a critical time is invaluable to people in crisis or in a situation they haven’t experienced before.”

2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember number that helps people cut through what can be a confusing and overwhelming maze of information and resources. Trained information & referral specialists answer the calls, which remain confidential.

Phil Claussen, Director of Human Services at Blue Earth County indicates “especially in difficult times there is an increased need for information and referral services. 2-1-1 is a great resource that helps the community access information.”

Over 150 Blue Earth County agencies are listed with the 2-1-1 call center. During the past year, more than 1,000 referrals were made in Blue Earth County through the 2-1-1 call center.

With a large number of organizations promising help, people find it frustrating and confusing to access community services. 2-1-1 provides a one-stop service for vital information such as:

- **Basic Human Needs Resources:** food banks, clothing, shelters, rent assistance, utility assistance.
- **Physical and Mental Health Resources:** crisis intervention services, support groups, counseling, drug and alcohol intervention, rehabilitation, health insurance programs, etc.
- **Employment Support:** unemployment benefits, financial assistance, job training, transportation assistance, education programs.

- **Support for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities:** home health care, adult day care, congregate meals, Meals on Wheels, respite care, transportation, and homemaker services.
- **Support for Children, Youth and Families:** childcare, after school programs, Head Start, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring, protective services.

On July 21, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission assigned one of the nation's scarcest communications resources - a three-digit dialing code, 2-1-1 to be used exclusively for community information and referral purposes. There are 240 active 2-1-1 call centers in 46 states making 2-1-1 currently available for 80% of the country. Among other funders, United Ways in Minnesota and across the country provide monetary support and community awareness for the 2-1-1 helpline.

***About Greater Mankato Area United Way***

GMAUW's mission is to unite the community to secure and allocate resources to improve lives. By convening the community around important issues, connecting people and organizations together, and securing resources, GMAUW impacts more than 1 in 3 people locally each year. In 2011, more than \$1,860,000 was pledged to GMUW from more than 8,000 individual donors and 200 companies. GMAUW will allocate those dollars to more than 50 programs in our area.

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