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National Hopeline Network  
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
United Way of Douglas County

August 25, 2006

Mayor Mike Amyx  
City Commissioners  
City Staff

RE: History of 211 as it relates to our community

Greetings:

*"Where can a person turn to find available help in Douglas County?"* This question was identified as the prevalent concern of community residents in the 1995 "Douglas County Area Health & Human Services Needs Assessment," the last local assessment of this kind. The survey concluded that families and individuals often do not know that services are available to them nor do they know how to access an agency which can provide referrals or direct services. Unfortunately that barrier to people getting the help they need still exists - people's lack of awareness of how to find that help.

In 1998, I began hearing about the 211 Initiative through a professional organization we participate in, the American Association of Suicidology, and its member centers. At the April 2000 conference, representatives of the national Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) discussed this initiative and benefits to the communities where it was already in place.

During July 2000, the Federal Communications Commission assigned 211 as the three-digit number to provide free access to health and human services information. After that announcement, I contacted City Manager Mike Wildgen and County Administrator Craig Weinaug to learn about local interest in establishing this number. At that time, Mike consulted with Jim Denney of the Emergency Communications Center, and all concluded that Implementing 211 was unnecessary, with the service already being provided through our center's number, 841-2345.

Since that time, in various parts of the country 211 centers - as new service agencies, or as programs of United Ways or crisis centers - have been launched. The geographic area and population served by these 211 centers varies widely. Comprehensive information on 211 nationally is available through the website [www.211.org](http://www.211.org)

In fall 2004, I learned from Jo Bryant, Executive Director of the United Way of Douglas County, that the United Way of the Plains in Wichita had been planning and raising funds to implement a statewide 211 service. I was allowed to participate in one meeting about that project, where I raised questions about their plans to secure thorough and current

### *Mission*

Our trained volunteer and paid staff improve the emotional well-being and safety of adults and children through readily available counseling, education, and information services.



information about all areas of the state, especially as they indicated they would be the information resource in times of local emergencies; and questions about how they intended to work with communities already served by a local counseling and information service, such as Topeka, Salina, and Lawrence.

In June 2005, United Way of the Plains publicly announced its upcoming 211 service for the entire state. The actual launch was February 23, 2006. See their website [www.unitedwayplains.org/211kansas.htm](http://www.unitedwayplains.org/211kansas.htm)

In 2005 and 2006, I initiated conversations, and convened several meetings related to identifying the needs of our local community related to a 211 service. Discussions included Jo Bryant of our local United Way, Margaret Perkins-McGuinness of the Roger Hill Volunteer Center, Jim Denney of the Emergency Communications Center, Craig Weinaug of Douglas County, Mike Wildgen and Lisa Patterson of the City, Paula Phillips of Emergency Management, and Elizabeth Pesek-Shields of K.U. The group recommendation was to maintain a friendly relationship with the United Way of the Plains, while continuing to assess how to best serve our local community.

In early February 2006, Craig Weinaug met with a key United Way of the Plains staff member about the 211 project.

In addition, the Board of Directors of our center began discussing 211 and how our center could best meet the needs of this community. We intend to launch a Douglas County 211 Planning Committee this fall. We believe that at some point in the future, being able to dial 211 for referral information will be expected, just as dialing 911 for emergency fire, medical, or law enforcement assistance is expected.

Headquarters Counseling Center has over 36 years history of providing counseling and information services to people in Lawrence and Douglas County. Since 1998, our City of Lawrence Alcohol Tax allocation has been based in part on support for our information service. We maintain a comprehensive database of health and human services information for Douglas County residents. In the past we have also produced an annual directory of non profit health and human services available for purchase for the printing cost. Thanks to a grant from the Capitol Federal Foundation, and collaboration with the University of Kansas, we are preparing the database to become available on-line through our website [www.hqcc.lawrence.ks.us](http://www.hqcc.lawrence.ks.us) later this fall.

Many of those already involved with our local 211 discussions believe that for a state as large and diverse as Kansas, one centralized service is not a realistic way to meet the needs of each community. In addition, our center maintains our historic commitment to provide information and referral services as described in our Mission Statement: "Our trained volunteer and paid staff improve the emotional well-being and safety of adults and children through readily available counseling, education, and information services."

I would be happy to provide additional information, as the Commission considers what type of service is most helpful for this community. I can be reached through email at [me@hqcc.lawrence.ks.us](mailto:me@hqcc.lawrence.ks.us) or by phone on our administrative line of 841-9900.

Sincerely,

*Marcia Epstein, LMSW*

Marcia Epstein, LMSW  
Director