

Ohio 211 Helps Ohioans Impacted by Natural Disasters | Terry Carter, Mansfield Richland County Public Library's First Call 211 and Ohio 211 Board

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee.

I'm Terry Carter with the Mansfield Richland County Public Library's First Call 211, and I serve on the Ohio 211 board.

Ohio 211's history dates to the 1970s and 80s when the predecessor of today's organization was created to serve as an information and referral service for people seeking help. 211 launched nationally in 2000, and it came to Ohio in 2001. A partnership between the library and our county JFS office created the First Call 211 service in Richland County in 2004. Two of us - a JFS employee and myself - expanded the existing Information & Referral service hours, built a community database using integrated software, adopted the nationally recognized taxonomy structure and began training to become certified information and referral specialists. Today, with a staff of 5.5 Full-Time Equivalents, we operate a fully accredited 211 call center with 24/7 availability by phone, weekday walk-in service, and text and email options.

Across Ohio, each 211 center actively plans to assist during all stages of disaster events. 211 has the most up-to-date information about local assistance available for residents to address their immediate needs. They can call 211 from a cell phone or landline to speak with a live, highly trained service professional.

One of the most prominent examples was the train derailment in East Palestine. Mayor Trent Conaway and the Columbiana County EMA director encouraged impacted residents to call 211 instead of city hall, county offices, or 911. In addition, Lori Criss, director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, suggest that residents call 211 to learn about local providers for counseling services. The Help Network of Northeastern Ohio received more than 950 211 calls from residents who needed information about shelter, health, and safety following the train derailment.

Dayton's 211 took on multiple major disaster events in the Spring and Summer of 2019, responding to a mass shooting in Dayton's Oregon District and the tornados that impacted a four-county region, including Greene, Mercer, Miami, and Montgomery Counties. While Greene, Miami, and Montgomery Counties have 211 service, Mercer County does not, and first response agencies there felt the void.

In February 2014, county EMA offices were sent a list of households that could be impacted by a sudden propane shortage. That list consisted of 224 families in Richland County. First Call 211 assisted by placing those outbound calls, relaying information about the shortage, and identifying 22 households that requested additional follow-up contact. This task, which would have taken the EMA staff a week or more on their own, was completed within 36 hours, freeing the county staff to dedicate their time to work on contingency planning.

Ohio's 211 system has more than 20 years of history, providing crucial support for Ohioans to access a trusted, professional, real person who can communicate and answer each inquiry with the most accurate information available. Thank you.