



## **2-1-1 is Now Available In North Central Oklahoma**

It's official, on April 1, Payne County residents get access to a valuable service called 2-1-1. It's a three digit phone number you call "when you don't know who to call" for health and human service information --- much like you call 9-1-1 to get help in an emergency.

Stillwater Area United Way Director Shelley Ricker is a member of the steering committee that has been working for nearly a year to bring the service to more than 213-thousand citizens in north central Oklahoma.

"2-1-1 service has been available in Tulsa and Oklahoma City for a couple of years. In fact, ninety percent of the state was covered, but we couldn't find an established information and referral service in our part of the state with the resources to get a program going here," says Ricker. "Shortly before the deadline for applying, United Way directors in Ponca City, Enid and Stillwater along with agency directors from NODA and DHS convinced CDSA in Enid that "united" we could



The North Central Oklahoma 2-1-1 Steering Committee is a collaboration of non-profit agencies, state agencies and community volunteers including: (front row) Natalea Watkins-Stillwater community volunteer, Sharon Bruce and Helene Schwartz-United Way of Ponca City. (Back row, left to right) Allan McCobb-United Way of Enid and NW Oklahoma, Cheri Ezzell-CDSA, Shelley Ricker-Stillwater Area United Way, Lisa Cundiff-Payne, Noble and Kay County Health Departments, Tom Wade-Northern Oklahoma Department of Aging, Tricia Mitchell- YWCA Enid and Carrie DeWeese-Statewide Coordinator OK 2-1-1.

On March 31, 2008, North Central Oklahoma 2-1-1 will be holding kickoff events in five communities that anchor the north central part of the state: Enid, Perry, Pawnee, Ponca City and Stillwater.

"Not only did 2-1-1 step in to coordinate shelter openings and community meals, the operators were able to identify service gaps such as transportation to shelters for very vulnerable elderly and disabled citizens, says Ricker who also serves on the statewide 2-1-1 committee. "2-1-1 proved its value as a partner in emergency operations."

2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember number that keeps people from making 6 to 8 calls to find help from government agencies, non-profits or faith-based groups. It makes better use of tax-dollars by getting citizens to existing services and makes those services more efficient by getting the right calls to the right agencies so workers don't spend time trying to refer callers outside their area of expertise. 2-1-1 helps 9-1-1 operators by taking non-emergency calls so first responders are available for emergencies. 2-1-1 provides disaster information such as open shelters and other emergency services in a crisis like the recent ice storms so citizens get needed help and unmet needs are identified quickly.

Grant, Garfield, Kay, Noble, Payne, Pawnee and the western part of Osage Counties will be served by North Central Oklahoma 2-1-1. United Way of Enid and Northwestern Oklahoma, United Way of Ponca City and the Stillwater Area United Way formed a collaborative with the Community Development Support Association, CDSA, a long-time information and referral service in Enid to develop 2-1-1 services for the area. CDSA, with 25 years experience in running a helpline and providing support in areas from childcare to housing to employment, serves as the lead agency for North Central Oklahoma 2-1-1.

2-1-1 calls are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by trained call specialists. The call specialists have access to translators for 150 different languages and a computer database that includes local, state, regional and national contacts. Within three to six minutes, the 2-1-1 operator can offer callers multiple local referrals plus information on eligibility and required documentation. Northwestern Oklahoma 2-1-1, serving the Panhandle, also goes LIVE on April 1, completing 2-1-1 service throughout the state.

"As a United Way Director, I am also excited about the powerful reporting capacity of the 2-1-1 service," said Ricker. "Each month, every 2-1-1 in the state is required to produce a report on the number of calls, the type of referrals made and the agencies to whom the referrals were sent. It's truly an ongoing needs assessment for communities and will identify service gaps." North Central Oklahoma 2-1-1 is expected to receive about 22,000 calls annually.

2-1-1 will work with all three area codes and the many phone companies in the seven county North Central area. Even cell phones will be able to access the service as each individual provider from Sprint to AT&T completes re-programming. If calling 2-1-1 doesn't seem to work on your phone, call 580-242-6131 to report the technical problem.

Businesses-- particularly hotels-- need to be aware of an internal action that could be necessary to make sure guests -- such as someone who's been burned out in a fire or visiting an elderly relative -- or employees can access 2-1-1. Most PBX telephone systems will require "2-1-1" to be enabled as a three digit number by the office manager or technical support staff. It's easy to tell if you need to do this. Call 2-1-1 and if you hear a fast busy signal, you may need to "enable" 2-1-1 or instruct users to dial "9" first or both.

2-1-1 nationwide is a partner of United Way and additional information regarding North Central 2-1-1 can be obtained by calling CDSA at 580-242-6131 or toll-free at 866-580-5010. The North Central Oklahoma 2-1-1 website at [www.ncok211.org](http://www.ncok211.org) has flyers, a Powerpoint and Frequently Asked Questions regarding 2-1-1. Citizens can also call CDSA to get 2-1-1 flyers or to schedule Civic Club or Business presentations on the new service.