



NW-AIRS News

www.nwairs.org

Chair's Report

Dear Members,
Greetings. I hope your summer is going well and you are finding time to relax and take care of yourself and/or reconnect with family and friends. Some updates from the NW-AIRS Board of Directors include:

Board Member Recruitment

We are pleased to report we have two new members to the Board of Directors. They include Melissa Wall with the NorthWest Senior and Disability Services and Susan Shepherd, with the State Unit on Aging. Please join me in welcoming them to the Board. We continue our efforts to do further recruiting of Board members. With the upcoming 2008 NW-AIRS Training Conference, this is an especially important year for your involvement and help in conference planning activities. The time commitment to Board activities includes four meetings per year, two of which are conference calls and we have funding to assist with travel costs. Please contact one of the existing Board members for additional information. Thank you.

Affiliates Council Update

Affiliates continue to focus on AIRS membership – all is going well. If you have not yet renewed your AIRS membership, please take a moment to do so. Remember there are varying levels of discounts on conference registrations and AIRS products based on which membership level you select. Review the various membership levels and select the one that is most advantageous to your organization.

NW-AIRS Training Conference

The NW-AIRS Training Conference will be held in the fall of 2008 in the State of Washington. A final location will be determined by the first of 2008. Some of the training hot topics we have identified to date include ADRC's, disaster preparedness – both for agencies and individuals/families, and working with vulnerable populations. If you have specific topics you would like to have included, please let a Board member know. Keep an eye on our web site for more information -- www.nw-airs.org.

Farewell as Your Chair

It has been an honor over the last several years to serve as the Chair of the NW-AIRS Board. My term on the Board was scheduled to end in October. Due to changing priorities in my personal life I have chosen to take an early retirement in September. Julie Johnson, Vice Chair, will assume the Chair role until new officers are elected in October.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your support over the last several years. I cannot adequately express my respect and admiration for the work you do each day and the difference you make in the lives of the individuals/families you reach. Keep up the good work. Don't forget to breathe!

Best Regards,
Patricia Williams, *Chair*

Northwest Alliance of Information & Referral Systems

2007 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

FRIDAY, AUGUST 24, 2007
10:00am – 11am • SEATTLE, WA

*Please call to confirm your attendance
and/or if you have agenda items.
We hope to see you there. Thank you.*

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Spotlight on Northwest AIRS Board Member:

Michelle Morris and Eastern Washington 2-1-1

Michelle Morris is a recent new member of the NW AIRS Board of Directors, joining in March of 2007. She is Manager of the Eastern Washington 211 Call Center, a service of Spokane Mental Health Center serving Spokane, Stevens, Ferry and Pend Oreille counties. In addition to her participation on the NWAIRS Board, Michelle maintains active involvement with WIN211 and the Network of Call Center Directors. (NCCD)

Michelle is a graduate of WSU-Pullman with a major in Psychology and has been with EW211 since June 2006. Hired as the first call center employee, she says, "I was 211 in one body for a few months". She started with a stack of papers containing old database information and very quickly updated it, learning at the same time about community resources. Michelle was promoted to Call Center Manager in July and 2 additional Call Center employees were hired in September. EW211 went "live" in January of 2007 and they have been building and developing their program ever since.

Michelle is enthusiastic about her position and about 211. "I just love this job," she says. "I am able to do a little bit of everything - outreach, training, operations and talking to callers." As a manager of a new program, Michelle developed and learned her job description "by doing." In her experience, "getting on the phones is

important. It is vital to stay close to the callers and to understand their needs. No two calls are the same, and the database is constantly changing." Michelle has found that though it can be stressful to put all aspects of 211 programming and operations together - "it's a good challenge!"

Since coming to the program, it's been rewarding for Michelle to go into the community and see how excited individuals and agencies are about 211. "211's single point of access really simplifies things", she says, "and people breathe a sigh of relief knowing we're there. We help people directly to the front door for community services and help facilitate access for them." "Every caller has an individual crisis of their own. When you can point them in the right direction and help resolve the crisis - that's a big perk."

Eastern Washington 211 is sponsored by Spokane Mental Health Center, an agency that has been providing innovative services in Eastern Washington since 1970 and is well known and respected in the community. In addition to EW211, SMHC sponsors Senior Information & Assistance and First Call for Help. According to Michelle, "as part of Spokane Mental Health, people know we are a viable



service and trust that they are in good hands." She affirms that it's easy to promote 211 and easy to advocate for its sustainability because it is so beneficial to the community.

In the coming year, Michelle and her colleagues at EW211 aim to get started on the AIRS accreditation program. When asked for her advice to other Information and Assistance programs, she says, "Don't be afraid to customize." "In addition to following AIRS standards and a 211 model, each call center has community demographics and program needs that make it unique. Our Call Center serves a large rural area and looks different than King or Pierce. We try to tailor our services to our population and region. That makes it beneficial to callers and also more fun."

Michelle is a great addition to the NW AIRS Board and we welcome her.

JOINT MEMBERSHIP IN AIRS AND NW-AIRS

When you join AIRS, your agency now gets the added benefit of membership in NW-AIRS. You receive the NW-AIRS newsletter and announcements about our training conferences. NW-AIRS also sponsors certification testing so you will get the latest information about testing opportunities in your area!

Membership fees range from \$50-\$750, so there is an option for agencies of all sizes. Depending on the level of membership, you are eligible for discounts at the AIRS and NW-AIRS training conferences and on accreditation and certification fees! For more information on membership go to www.airs.org

If you aren't on the current membership list, please join today!

2-1-1 Updates

IDAHO:

2-1-1 calls in Idaho continue to average between 12,000 and 14,000 calls per month. Calls handled during state Fiscal Year 2007 totaled over 151,500. We are pleased to announce that T-Mobile implemented wireless 2-1-1 dialing for their customers, which greatly increases the availability of 2-1-1 coverage throughout Idaho. Another key enhancement to 2-1-1 coverage in Idaho has been an arrangement with All West Communications to provide emergency after hours and weekend/holiday coverage. The 2-1-1 Idaho CareLine has again teamed with local school districts and the Healthy Tomorrow's program to assist in statewide Back-to-School children's health insurance outreach efforts. Families applying for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program will also be able to request additional information about insurance coverage for their children by simply checking a box on the application.

OREGON:

Oregon 211 is moving forward to develop a statewide 211 system. After receiving its 501(c)3 status last October, the OR211 board of directors was able to raise enough funding to bring on Tom Page as a consultant. Tom is working with the OR211 board to secure additional funding with the goal of hiring a full-time Director in 2008 to coordinate the effort to expand 211 service across Oregon. Local planning and preparation is underway with White Bird Clinic in Eugene and Umpqua Community Action in Roseburg to prepare for the launch of 211 service in their communities. 211info, serving Metro Portland and SW Washington, continues to keep busy. In the first six months of 2007 the call center handled 46,370 calls on all of its lines. With budget restrictions requiring layoffs effective July 1, the center is looking for ways to work strategically and effectively so it can serve as many callers as possible.

WASHINGTON:

From January to April 2007, the focus of the Washington 2-1-1 effort was to secure a renewal of our state funding. Our initial state operating grant of \$2.5 million was only for one year (July 06-June 07). Thus, it was imperative that we renew and increase this level of funding to support the operation of all eight call centers and to support the increase in volume. There was an extensive and coordinated effort by all the call centers and United Ways to contact local legislators and ask them to support our requested amount. The good news is that the Washington Information Network 2-1-1 (WIN211) was in the biennial budget, but the disappointing news is that it was only for \$1 million for each of the next two years. This meant a significant reduction in funding to the local centers. The WIN211 Board and Network of Call Center Directors worked together to develop a formula for the distribution of these limited funds. This, of course, is a hardship for all the centers; requiring a reduction in days and hours of service and in eliminating staff. As a result, there are no call centers that operate 24/7/365. As might be expected, the primary focus for WIN211 next year is to secure additional funding; either through the Governor's budget and/or through a legislative appropriation.



Last winter WIN211 made its first contract with a state agency. The Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development used 2-1-1 as the entry point for its Earned Income Tax Credit program. Each of the call centers was able to direct callers to the local centers providing tax preparation assistance. The call centers handled a total of 10,000 calls, which generated an estimated \$36 million dollars in federal tax refunds to Washington residents! We hope to expand this program next year.

There has been an extensive focus on training activities as a means to assuring a quality system. Thanks to a three-year grant from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, WIN211 has a full time training coordinator, funds for a data manager at each call center, funds for trainings at each call center and for the system has a whole. Here are training highlights:

- In July, there was a day-long training offered for all Information and Referral and Resource Specialists. It was offered so that half the staff could attend one day and then the session was repeated the second day for the remaining staff. This way no call center had to close. Sessions included Dealing with Difficult Callers, Cultural Competency and Information on DSHS programs.
- This spring 18 staff from our call centers attended the state Emergency Management Conference because this was identified as key priority for call centers if we are to be an effective partner with government and other first responders.
- WIN211 secured the Essential Learning courses (a package of 20) as recommended by AIRS. This will provide the call centers with an online training resources on many topics.
- In April, there was a two-day training on Taxonomy and Data Consistency for all data managers and it was facilitated by Mary Hogan of the Connecticut 2-1-1. This proved extremely beneficial for building consistency in taxonomy coding.
- There were technical trainings offered by UCN to help call centers better utilize the telephone system and a webinar offered by North Light on the "Referral" component of their software
- WIN211 sponsored an AIRS certification test preparation training, as well as the testing. More testing is scheduled for August and November. Currently, 90% of eligible staff is AIRS certified!

Despite the funding shortfall, the Washington 2-1-1 system continues to focus on providing a quality service to callers and to identify new ways 2-1-1 can be useful to Washington residents.

“Learning to Challenge Your Challenging Callers”

Manipulative Callers

Forms of manipulation can include:

- Wanting something that you can't give (e.g. personal advice)
- Remaining silent
- Using the hotline to chat because they are bored
- Threatening suicide to stay on the line
- Making up stories to get attention

How to handle manipulation:

- Recognize the manipulation - trust your instincts!
- Acknowledge your own feelings
- Rely on skills you have already learned
- Use your supervisors for support

Three skills you need to handle manipulative callers are:

1. Focusing Callers. Keep the caller focused on:

- Themselves – Callers often try to focus on other people, including you
- Their Crisis – Only deal with the current concern, the “here and now”
- Their Feelings – Helping to sort through overwhelming emotions can help a caller feel more in control

2. Confronting Callers. Statements to confront:

- Contradictions - Two or more statements that disagree with each other
- Distortions - An inaccurate perception of the situation
- Evasions of Responsibility – Refusal to accept liability (blame)
- Remember to be gentle, but concrete.
- Begin by saying “I’m confused” or “I don’t understand”
- State what it is that caused you to confront them
 - “I’m confused, you mentioned that you always practice safe sex, yet you also said that often time you forget to use contraceptives.”

3. Avoiding Self-Disclosure

- Self disclosure is revealing something about you to someone else.
- Some disadvantages to self-disclosure are:
 - The caller might feel they should resolve the situation the way you did.
 - Because you’re okay, they should be, too. They are overreacting.
 - This is a common, unimportant problem. Their concerns are trivial.
- Reflect the feelings behind the question
- Acknowledge the question
- Decide if you feel comfortable answering the question
- If necessary, let the caller know you cannot answer their question

Intoxicated Callers

- Being intoxicated or high does not necessarily mean the caller cannot have a productive call on the hotline, but it may make the situation more difficult.
- Some features of intoxicated callers include:
 - Slurred speech
 - Incoherent rambling
 - Mixed/confused emotions or thoughts
 - Long pauses, even falling asleep on the phone
- When talking with an intoxicated caller all other procedures for hotline calls should be followed, but there are three additional steps that should be included:
 - Contract with the caller not to drink/use while on the phone with you
 - Assess the caller’s safety
 - Determine if the call should continue or if you should encourage them to call back at a later time

Verbally Abusive Callers

- Verbally abusive callers are people who misdirect their emotions toward you
- These callers may:
 - Yell or scream
 - Swear or curse
 - Express anger, agitation, or frustration
- Take a deep breath
- Elevate your voice tone to match the caller’s, but don’t yell
- Encourage the caller to tell you about their situation
- Reflect the feelings they are expressing as they talk
- If the caller is using graphic language, set guidelines
- If the caller threatens you, contact your supervisor immediately.

The above is an excerpt of a May 2007 presentation entitled “**Learning to Challenge Your Challenging Callers**” by Allyson Adolphson, Training Coordinator at 2-1-1 Big Bend, Inc., at the AIRS Training Conference in Florida. The full presentation is available on the AIRS conference CD or by contacting Ms. Adolphson by email at trainingcoord@211bigbend.org. 2-1-1 Big Bend, Inc., also offers for sale a training manual and/or consults on custom training programs.



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