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## 211 call center to be running by April

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Staff Writer

**STANTON** - In just a few months, answers to community-related questions will be just a three-digit phone number away.

The new 211 call service, available through HandsOn Battle Creek Call Center, will be active across Montcalm County by April, if everything continues to go as scheduled.

Operators will be sitting by 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year with information about service providers that enhance the quality of individual and community life.

Anyone can call the 211 number and receive help and guidance on transportation, home repair, utilities, clothing, support groups, dental care, car seats, donations, etc.

Denise Hubbard of United Way Montcalm-Ionia said that dispatchers in Battle Creek are currently "cleaning up data" in preparation for the 211 unveil.

"We provided them a lot of information over the summer," Hubbard said. "There are more than 150 records for both Montcalm and Ionia counties."

She said dispatchers are trying to make sure no major services are forgotten for the system.

"That's the most important thing right now, to make sure it's as complete as possible," Hubbard said. "Once it goes live, we want it to be functional."

"Once they have that completed, the next step is to make applications to the Michigan AIRS (Association of Information and Referral Service)," Hubbard said, explaining how the AIRS program makes sure all the call centers across the state follow standards of operation for referral systems.

Once AIRS has approved their application, the Michigan Public Service Commission must approve the application - something that is expected to take a few months.

"This service will benefit all of us," Hubbard said. "It's not a card you have to carry around or a number to carry around. Once people get used to using it, they'll remember the number and be able to access it."

Hubbard emphasized that the 211 Call Center won't be only for low-income or needy individuals.

"You can call to find out who the scout leader is in your area, find out where volunteering is needed, find out where to donate food - it's really for everyone," she said.

Lisa Lund of the Montcalm Human Services Coalition said the need for finding resources has increased in the past few years.

"211 Information Referral Specialists can assist people to find appropriate resources, help problem-solve and inform people what they need to bring with them to get the most help," Lund said. "That personal support and attention means a lot to people in need and, to me, it is one of the most valuable aspects of the service."

Some of the valuable information that will be available through the 211 call center is available at the HandsOn Battle Creek Call Center website. The public is welcome to explore the listed services at [www.handsonbc.org](http://www.handsonbc.org), under 211 Call Center.

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