For Immediate Release
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211 LA COUNTY RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION MATCHING GRANT FOR INNOVATIVE “211 DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING PROJECT”

Los Angeles -- Information and Referral Federation of Los Angeles County, Inc. (dba 211 Los Angeles County) has been awarded a $500,000 three-year matching grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to fund a dynamic new program to identify young children with possible developmental delays and disabilities and then to connect families to effective services.

An estimated 15% of LA County infants, toddlers and preschoolers have developmental delays or disabilities. Yet, children from low-income, ethnic-minority, or foster care families are often not identified and helped early on. 211 Developmental Screening Project will improve outcomes for these vulnerable children by providing telephone-based, high-quality developmental screenings and “systems navigation” to ensure that children are connected to services. The project was launched in September 2009, with funding from the W.M. Keck Foundation and the Weingart Foundation.

This project is a first. Never before has anyone attempted to provide high-quality developmental screenings through a 211 call center using a web online format. Trained Parenting Support Specialists at 211 LA help identify children over the telephone using the Parents’ Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS), a nationally validated and highly accurate screening test for children from birth to age eight. PEDS measures parental concerns about a child’s expressive and receptive language, fine and gross motor skills, self-help, behavior, social-emotional, preschool and school skills, cognitive development, and health.

“We nominated the 211 Developmental Screening Project for the RWJF grant because the Foundation believes this is a distinctive project that has the potential to reach low-income families in a simple but effective and far-reaching way and, if successful, could be replicated by information and referral centers nationwide,” said Dorothy Fleisher, Program Director, for the W. M. Keck Foundation.

The RWJF grant was awarded through Local Funding Partnerships (LFP)—one of RWJF’s most competitive annual grantmaking programs that recognizes innovative, collaborative new projects. Of more than 180 applications nationwide, only 10 projects were selected for the 2010 LFP awards.

Families that call 211 LA are more likely to have children with developmental concerns, including autism spectrum disorders, than the national norm because of psychosocial and environmental factors. The 211 LA caller profile indicates that the project is reaching a population that is less likely to know about or access resources because callers are disproportionately low-income, underserved, less well-educated and without health insurance. Four out of five have monthly household incomes of less than $2,000, 47% are Latino, and 30% are African-American.

“Developmental screening through 211 is a promising innovation that could quickly become a vital piece of the safety net for the most vulnerable children in Los Angeles County,” according to Belen Vargas, Vice President, Grant Operations for the Weingart Foundation.

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The 211 Developmental Screening Project works in partnership with the Early Identification and Intervention Collaborative (EII) for Los Angeles County. EII Collaborative Director Margaret Dunkle noted, “Early intervention works and is a good investment for families and society alike. Doing good developmental screening over the 211 phone line is an effective and creative way to ensure that all young children get the good developmental screenings and follow-up that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends.”

Collaborative partnerships with existing systems serving children birth-to-five years of age are key to the success of the project. “The Los Angeles County Office of Education, Early Intervention Support Services and 211 LA partnership is a powerful collaboration that will connect special needs infants, children and their families with needed intervention services within Los Angeles County,” said Joseph Rivera, Ed.D, Special Education Administrator for Division of Special Education.

PEDS developer, Frances Page Glascoe, Ph.D., praised 211 LA’s program, saying, “This project is a first to use PEDS on-line screening over the telephone. 211 LA is not only a national model for linking children to needed developmental-behavioral interventions, but also a model for preventing delays and behavioral challenges before they escalate into serious disabilities.” Dr. Glascoe is adjunct professor in the department of pediatrics at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN and serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics.

“We are very grateful to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, W.M. Keck and Weingart Foundations for recognizing the value of our efforts and supporting this cutting-edge project. Callers to 211 LA are the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach families in Los Angeles County. Their children can easily go undetected at the point when intervention can have the most impact, making it more difficult and costly to address developmental delays such as autism spectrum disorders in later years,” says Maribel Marin, Executive Director of 211 LA.

Patricia Herrera, M.S., with close to 20 years experience in early intervention, family support and the special needs service delivery system will direct the project for 211 LA. Trained Parenting Support Specialists at 211 LA administer PEDS to parents in English or Spanish using PEDS Online, a web-based tool that provides automated scoring as well as referral guidance about next steps for the family.

About 211
2-1-1 is the three-digit dialing code used nationally for information and referral to community and social services – food, shelter, child care and child development, safety (including domestic violence and abuse of children or the elderly), employment, health services, counseling, and more. 211 call centers operate in 46 states and reach 80% of the U.S. population.

211 LA County, founded in 1981, is a nonprofit organization that serves almost 600,000 families and individuals each year. Supported with funding from the County of Los Angeles, the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, and First 5 LA, 211 LA County provides an easy-to-use, caring, stigma-free, 24/7 professional source of guidance, advocacy and access to human services.

Additional information about The 211 LA County Developmental Screening Project is attached.