

## Understanding Callers' Experience with 211info Family through Multnomah Project LAUNCH

### Background



211info is a resource clearinghouse providing information and referrals on a multitude of service needs including utility and housing assistance; career, health, and education resources; and, since 2012, family and parenting resources. In 2012, with funding and support provided by Multnomah Project LAUNCH, 211info broadened their information and referral resources database to include early childhood programs and parenting supports, creating 211info Family. In addition to the enhanced database, Multnomah Project LAUNCH enabled 211info to have an experienced Parent Educator/Early Childhood Specialist answer questions and make referrals related to child development and behavior, school readiness, basic needs, parent groups, and family stress. This free resource Specialist can be reached by phone, text, or email, and the database can be accessed through the Specialist or directly via internet.

As part of the Multnomah Project LAUNCH evaluation, the Portland State University (PSU) evaluation team conducted interviews with users of the 211info Family phone service. Attempts were

also made to connect with users of the 211info Family email service but, unfortunately, no email users consented to being contacted by PSU. The purpose of the interviews was to learn more about callers' experiences with the 211info Family service in order to provide feedback to 211info Family, both in terms of the quality of the interaction with the 211info Family Specialist, and in terms of the referral process to other services.

Interviews were conducted between December 2012 and July 2015 and were with individuals who called 211info Family through May 6, 2015. A total of 165 callers were interviewed since December 2012. This report summarizes caller data for the 3-year period, with a focus on the most recent 80 interviews from this last reporting period (July 2014-July 2015).

Callers were asked questions such as: (1) How did you find out about 211info Family, (2) Why did you call 211info Family, (3) If you received referrals, did they help you, why or why not, and were they culturally appropriate, (4) If you received any over-the-phone support or advice, did it help you, why or why not, and did it meet your needs in a culturally appropriate manner, (5) Are there any services or supports that you wished existed in the community, and (6) Would you recommend 211info Family to a friend?

### Participants

Table 1 shows the number of callers, email users, text users, and interviews completed from October 2012 through July 2015.

The main reason that callers did not consent to a follow-up call with PSU was because they were not asked to participate, which is often a result of the caller wanting to get off the phone quickly after receiving referral information from the 211info Family Specialist.

Since the study began, a majority of callers (56%) who consented to an interview with PSU were able to be contacted by PSU staff and completed the interview. The main reasons for not completing an interview included families who were unreachable, did not respond to multiple attempts to complete an interview, or declined to participate after being contacted by the PSU team.

*Table 1. 211info Family Callers October 2012 – July 2015*

	Oct 2012- Jun 2013	Oct 2013- Jun 2014	Jul 2014- Jul 2015 <sup>1</sup>	Total
211info Family Callers	313	452	629	1394
Callers consenting to PSU follow-up	68	89	138	295
Callers completing interview	38	47	80	165
211info Family email users	4	15	65	84
211info Family text users	17	66	115	198

**Characteristics of Callers, Interviewees, & Target Children**

Basic demographic information was collected from callers early on in their initial call to 211info Family, about themselves and the youngest child in the household (the “target child”). Consistent with the majority of 211info Family callers overall, the vast majority of interviewees during 2014-2015 were parents, as shown in Table 2. Most parents were identified as mothers, with 6-10% of parent callers identified as fathers.

Table 2 shows a small decrease in service provider callers, accounting for 13% of all interviewees in 2012-2013 and only 5% in 2014-2015. This decrease

may be due to the convenience of the email service, which was added in early 2013, and which 211info Family staff have anecdotally reported that service providers seem to prefer. A caseworker described the importance of social service providers having access to the 211info Family service:

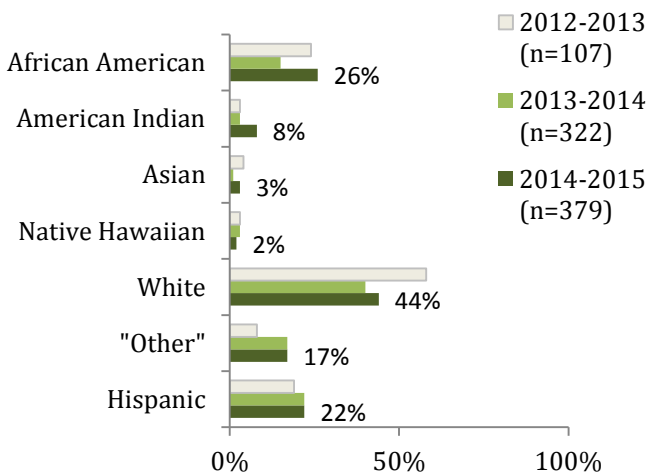
*"A lot of our families don't have access to our same technologies -- phone, computer, internet -- so, especially in emergencies, it's really helpful for places like ours to have the information that 211 provides or to talk with 211 and they can help connect us to the needed resources."*

Table 2. Interviewee/Caller<sup>2</sup>Type

	Oct 2012-Jun 2013		Oct 2013-Jun 2014		Jul 2014-Jun 2015	
	Interviewees (n=38)	Callers (n=285)	Interviewees (n=47)	Callers (n=327)	Interviewees (n=80)	Callers (n=419)
Parent	79%	73%	81%	74%	89%	74%
Mother	71%	--	75%	--	79%	--
Father	8%	--	6%	--	10%	--
Grandparent or other relative	8%	4%	6%	4%	5%	6%
"Concerned party"	0%	13%	6%	15%	1%	16%
Service provider	13%	9%	6%	7%	5%	5%

Information collected on the target child included their age, race, and ethnicity. Figures 1 and 2 summarize the race and ethnicity data reported on callers overall and interviewees for the past three years.

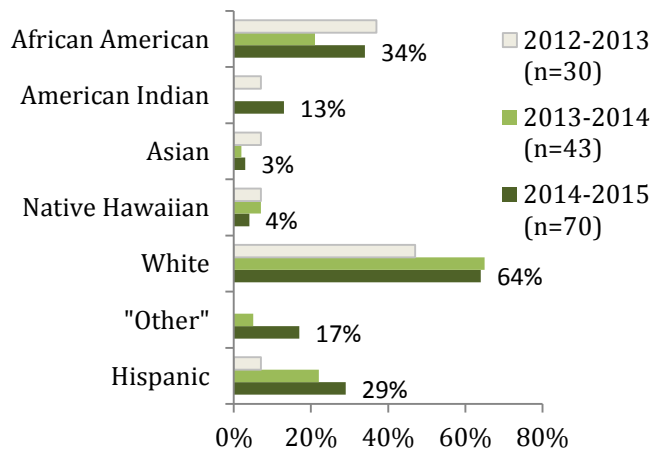
Figure 1. Target Child Race/Ethnicity of All Callers



Over time, there has been a small increase in the overall population of callers reporting their youngest child as Hispanic, which may be attributed to increased outreach activities by 211info Family that began in spring 2014.

The overall percentage of callers who identified the target child as White has fallen over time, while the percentages of children identified as American Indian or “Other” has increased. The “Other” category includes callers who either identified as multiracial, or who identified with another group other than the categories provided.

Figure 2. Target Child Race/Ethnicity of Interviewees



The growing proportion of Hispanic callers was also represented in those who were interviewed by PSU. From 2012 to 2015, the percentage of interviewees who identified their youngest child as Hispanic

increased from 7% to 29%. This may be due, in part, to PSU including Spanish-speaking callers in the interview pool after hiring a Spanish-speaking interviewer in summer 2014 as well as the increased outreach efforts by 211info Family.

Table 3 summarizes the characteristics of target children for whom data were provided during the most recent reporting period, compared to the population of children in the county overall. The largest group of callers and interviewees had target children 3 years of age or younger. This has been consistent for the past three years with 0-3 year olds making up 50% or more of the target child population among interviewees and callers overall.

The percentage of callers reporting their youngest child as African American is higher than the percentage of African American children under the age of 9 in Multnomah County, and the percentage of callers reporting their youngest child as White is

significantly less than that population in Multnomah County.

Table 3. Target Child Characteristics July 2014-July 2015

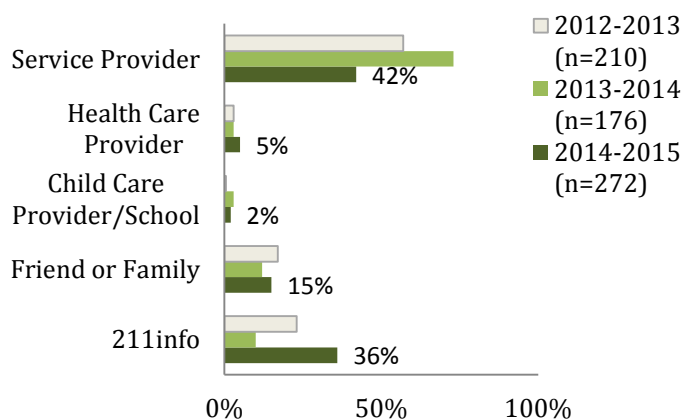
	Inter- viewees	All Callers <sup>3</sup>	Mult. County <sup>4</sup> 0-9 y/o
Age	(n=79)	(n=399)	
0-3 y/o	46%	50%	--
>3-5 y/o	27%	27%	--
>5-8 y/o	20%	22%	--
>8 y/o	8%	2%	--
Race/Ethnicity	(n=70)	(n=379)	(n=90,358) <sup>5</sup>
African Am.	34%	26%	12%
Am. Indian	13%	8%	4%
Asian	3%	3%	11%
Nat. Hawaiian	4%	2%	2%
White	64%	44%	83%
"Other"	17%	17%	--
Hispanic	29%	22%	20%

## Summary of Results

### How Did Callers Hear About 211info Family?

Figure 3 shows that the majority of callers heard about 211info Family from a community service provider such as Department of Human Services (DHS), local non-profits, or resource publications provided by local non-profits. More than a third of callers from 2014-2015 also described learning about Family Info directly from the 211info call center or from the hold message, which gives the option of connecting to Family Info directly.

Figure 3. Referral Source of All Callers<sup>6</sup>



Of notable mention, 9 of 79 interviewees (11%) in 2014-2015 did not know they had spoken to 211info Family when asked about their experience with the

service. They thought they were simply accessing 211info's general information and referral line.

### Why Did Callers Use 211info Family?

The most common reasons for calling 211info Family, described by interviewees, included seeking information and referrals for basic supports such as rent, housing, and/or utility assistance; nearly half of all interviewees cited one of these reasons. Additionally, 20% of callers discussed looking for help obtaining items such as clothing, furniture, or car seats.

More than a third of callers interviewed were looking for information on child care, in the form of referrals as well as financial assistance to pay for child care. Some callers were also looking specifically for emergency relief day care, summer camps or other extracurricular activities for their kids, and to find out where their child would attend school.

Another 20% of callers inquired about classes and resources related to pregnancy, parenting, and other family support services. In 2014-2015, an increasing number of interviewees described receiving referrals regarding child custody, child support, child visitation services, and other legal issues. This represented 13% of interviewees in the past year. Additionally, health insurance and health care issues were cited by less than 10% of interviewees.

## **Did Callers Get the Support They Needed?**

Half of the callers interviewed shared they were able to connect with the referrals they received from 211info Family and got the help they were seeking. As described by one interviewee:

*"[The Specialist] gave us a number of referrals. I contacted and we are going to Morrison Center for the kiddos, and signed up for a class that I think will be super helpful. She listened to my concerns, issues, narrowed down what agencies might be right rather than throwing them all at me. [She gave us] a more manageable number and more appropriate referrals--for example, I'm not a victim of DV [domestic violence] and so those weren't included. "*

Another 10% of interviewees described not pursuing the referrals mainly because they had not had the opportunity to follow-up or they no longer needed the resource. A mom described the challenge to following-up on a referral:

*"She [211info Family Specialist] sent the information to me in the email and I haven't had a chance to read it yet. I work full time and have a 3 year old -- not a lot of time. I'm sure she said other helpful things but I don't remember what they were."*

For callers who said they weren't able to get the assistance they were looking for, this was primarily a result of the resource not being available in the community. Examples of services that were often not available included rent or utilities assistance, or housing.

Other reasons callers were not able to connect with needed services included programs such as child care and parenting classes being full, services only being available at times when the caller was not (e.g., utility and rent assistance programs with specific time frames when assistance is offered), or callers being ineligible for services, e.g., income or other criteria for child care subsidies.

Another reason that interviewees reported not being able to connect with needed services, was due to the referral agency not returning their call/s.

*"The Specialist was really nice and gave me what I wanted but it was the actual parenting support groups that, to this*

*date, they have not called me back. 211 gave me what I needed and what I was looking for."*

When the service wasn't available, some callers shared how the 211info Family Specialist took time to try to find the service or appropriate alternatives. For example, a caller looking for emergency relief child care shared:

*"I did need emergency relief daycare for my infant for when I was getting surgery on my ankle. They spent a long time trying to find help and calling me back but none of them worked out. If I had needed longer support, I could have applied for Social Security but I just needed a week."*



Although revealing a need for a service that did not currently exist, one caseworker who was interviewed described calling 211info Family specifically for parenting classes for cognitively challenged parents with children older than three. The resource was not available in the community, but 211info Family helped connect the caseworker with an agency that previously provided the class and, due to conversations the agency contact had with the caseworker, she reported that the agency was considering offering the classes again.

Callers were also asked if they received over-the-phone advice or support from the Early Childhood Specialist. While most interviewees said they did not request or utilize this assistance, those who said they received this type of support (n=13) reported it being helpful. Callers described receiving specific parenting advice such as how to handle teething and picky eaters, responding appropriately to a child's temperament, and balancing the need for their child's independence with safety.

Parenting advice was always supplemented with referrals to services for more information. For example, one caller described struggling with how to discipline her child. She explained how the 211info Family Specialist took time to go over positive

discipline strategies and also gave her a 24-hour, 1-800 number to call during stressful parenting situations.

Interviewees shared their appreciation for the Specialist offering this over-the-phone support. An interviewee who called 211info Family because she was looking for speech therapy referrals for her son shared:

*"... I talked to someone about sleeping habits... [The Specialist] asked if there were any questions she could answer. It was very helpful. It helped my son sleep through the night. I was dreaming and I woke up and he had slept through the night!"*



Interviewees described the Specialist spending time talking with them over the phone and asking questions in order to unearth additional wants or needs. One mom called to find out where her daughter would be going to school but shared how the Specialist offered so much more:

*"The gal I talked to helped with a lot of other issues too... She opened my eyes about all that's out there for single parents, low-cost services...I felt supported, like she actually cared. She was very thoughtful. She wanted to be sure I had a full arsenal of tools. She didn't have to go as far as she did. Give her a raise."*

Callers also described appreciating the opportunity to talk to someone about their situation and feel heard. For example, a dad shared how the Specialist listened to him voice his frustration with the courts regarding visitation with his child, and both validated those feelings and helped him identify other potentially helpful services such as mediation. He went on to describe feeling he *"could call her anytime for advice."*

### **Challenges**

Although feedback from interviewees was largely positive, callers also made suggestions for ongoing

improvement or attention. Though many interviewees commented on appreciating the referrals given to them, some also described that a smaller number of referrals might reduce the amount of follow-up callers must do. One interviewee described wanting more specific referrals that matched her situation:

*"I couldn't get into some of the [parenting] classes because I wasn't court-ordered. I was volunteering to take the classes. It would be helpful if they [211info Family] had more information about the classes beforehand. Also, closer classes. I had to go all the way to Oregon City and I live in Gresham. All of the classes were far away. One was at the Lloyd Center and that is like 40 minutes from here."*

Another interviewee had a similar suggestion:

*"I'm not Hispanic and the organization I called spoke Spanish but I don't. They couldn't help me because I'm not Hispanic even though my daughter is, but she is not of-age for them to help. I am Native and they referred me to NAYA too, that was helpful. They gave every option. Maybe they could be more organized or careful or knowledgeable about where they refer to so you don't get your hopes up and call then get turned down."*

At the same time, and in contrast, a mom shared her appreciation for the amount of referrals she received:

*"...it was very helpful to talk to the 211[Family] Specialist. It felt empowering to be given so many options when I was feeling so down and hopeless."*

Another challenge occurred when non-English-speaking users contacted 211info Family. One caseworker shared that she had called multiple times without issue but on one occasion did not have access to a translator. Another Spanish-speaking interviewee described not being able to access the referrals due to the referral agency not having information available in Spanish:

*"...since I am not fluent in English I was not able to follow the directions and could not find the address."*

In order to gauge the extent to which referrals and support provided through 211info Family were culturally responsive, in December 2013 PSU

interviewers began asking interviewees if the referrals, information, or suggestions they received met their expectations based on their family's culture. Overwhelmingly, the response was yes (94% of respondents<sup>7</sup>) but there were several interviewees who offered additional feedback about the cultural match of the referrals they received and their family's culture.

One mom shared that she had not been able to find a culturally specific mental health provider:



*"I haven't been able to find one that is culturally specific. There are no mental health services specifically for African Americans. They told me about Morrison and Cascadia and places like that. I have been to Morrison before and, at that time, they did not have someone that met my needs culturally."*

This kind of feedback may be more indicative of a service need in the community, rather than a limitation of 211info Family. These issues speak to the challenges facing the 211info Family Specialist in meeting the needs of a diverse caller population as well as the challenges among county providers in meeting the needs of all racial/ethnic communities.

### **Satisfaction**

To gauge satisfaction with 211info Family, PSU researchers asked interviewees whether they would recommend 211info Family to a friend. Of the 79 interviewees asked this question in 2014-2015, 77% (n=61) gave the highest possible rating saying they "strongly agree" they would recommend the service.

*"I have told others about it. I wish I had known about the service long ago!"*

All others interviewed (23%) said they "somewhat agree", mainly because they were unable to access the resources or the resources were not available in the community. As one interviewee explained:

*"I'm sure [211info Family] has good resources. I just couldn't get any help for what I was looking for."*

### **What Services do Callers Wish Existed?**

In an effort to identify possible service gaps in the community, PSU began asking interviewees in December 2013, "Are there any services or supports that you wish existed but were not available when you called?" Interviewees commented on the need for more financial assistance for utilities, housing, rent, and child care. Interviewees wished there were more housing and shelter options available, especially those designed for families. Interviewees offered several additional areas of needs, including requests for assistance to parents wanting to further their education, free resources for family law questions and/or advice, and more culturally-specific services and providers.

Additional suggestions that interviewees provided related to changes to the 211info Family system. These examples included being able to access the most up-to-date information through 211info Family, having additional access points to 211info Family such as "service kiosks across the city", and a higher level of service coordination by 211info Family to take some of the burden off of callers to follow-up on referrals:

*"When someone calls for help it's hard enough and then everyone they call just gives them another number to call. I really appreciate the service but some people might just give up."*

In summary, based on interviews completed between 2012 and 2015, 211info Family callers were overwhelmingly positive about their experience with the service. The information, referrals, and over-the-phone parenting strategies were seen as valuable supports. Callers' needs were often met and in some cases, expectations were far exceeded. At the same time, interviewees shared insights to areas for continued attention and improvement both within 211info as well as the broader social service system in Multnomah County.

## Recommended Citation

Cooper, C. L, Lambarth, C. H., & Green, B. L. (October 2015). *Understanding callers' experience with 211info Family through Multnomah Project LAUNCH*. Portland, OR: Portland State University Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services.

## Endnote

This initiative was developed under Multnomah Project LAUNCH grant #5H79SM060214-04 from the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS). The views, policies, and opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or DHHS.

For more information about Multnomah Project LAUNCH, please contact:

Project Coordinator Elana Emlen  
[eemlen@mesd.k12.or.us](mailto:eemlen@mesd.k12.or.us)

For more information about the evaluation of Multnomah Project LAUNCH, please contact:

Lead Evaluator Beth Green  
[beth.green@pdx.edu](mailto:beth.green@pdx.edu)

Evaluation Coordinator Callie Lambarth  
[lambarth@pdx.edu](mailto:lambarth@pdx.edu)

[multnomahlaunch.org](http://multnomahlaunch.org)

---

<sup>1</sup> PSU typically contacted callers approximately 60 days after their call to 211info Family due to the data sharing process established between PSU and 211info Family.

<sup>2</sup> This data is not collected on all callers (e.g., caller in a hurry, refused to answer, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> Based on callers between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Multnomah County estimates by age are grouped as 0-4 year-olds (52%) and 5-9 year-olds (48%).

<sup>5</sup> Based on U.S. Census estimates, retrieved September 27, 2013 from <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/counties/asrh/2012/CC-EST2012-ALLDATA.html>

<sup>6</sup> This does not include callers who didn't respond, didn't know where they first learned about the service, were identified as prior callers, or had missing information.

<sup>7</sup> This represents 64 out of 68 respondents. Callers who responded that they didn't know, didn't receive referrals, didn't use the referrals, or that their service needs were not about culture were not included.