

The Healthcare Committee of the Mayor's Council for Women
Third White Paper: May 2016

I. Open Referral/Open Source

The Healthcare Committee continues to explore how we can improve access to resources for women—and all Chattanoogaans—in the areas of healthcare and social services, which we believe cannot be separated.

To that end, representatives of the committee met by phone with Greg Bloom, Chief Organizing Officer of Open Referral Initiative.

A former social services provider, Greg explained effectively in his executive brief what we have said in our meetings and have broached in our first two white papers:

“The Problem: A landscape of siloed directories

It's hard to see the safety net. *Which agencies provide what services to whom? Where and how can people access them?* These details are always in flux. Nonprofit and government agencies are often under-resourced and overwhelmed, and it may not be a priority for them to push information out to attract more customers.

So there are many ‘referral services’ — such as call centers, resource directories, and web applications — that collect directory information about health, human, and social services. However, these directories are all locked in fragmented and redundant silos. As a result of this costly and ineffective status quo:

- **People in need** have difficulty discovering and accessing services that can help them live better lives.
- **Service providers** struggle to connect clients with other services that can help meet complex needs.
- **Decision-makers** are unable to gauge the effectiveness of programs at improving community health.
- **Innovators** are stymied by lack of access to data that could power valuable tools for any of the above.”

If the City were to engage Greg, or someone like him, his team would advise, facilitate, and project manage so that information could be synchronized into an Open Referral approach.

There is, however, something between here and there, and that is open source software. Examples are smc-connect.org in San Mateo and link-sf.com in San Francisco. Per Greg, creating sites like these has the following advantages:

1. It can serve as a demo—something to whet the collective whistles of community players so they see how effective this can be.

2. Working with the demo should clarify under whose auspices it should be the site should be administered.
3. It can be achieved with access to data programmers who know Ruby on Rails, and an effective project manager
4. This option is less expensive

II. April 11 meeting

In April, Lesley Scarce and Dr. Eileen Rehberg of 211/United Way, Corinne Hill of the Chattanooga Public Library, and Tim Moreland of the City met with Healthcare Committee members Stacy Johnson, Colleen Combs, and Rachel Schulson.

- The group viewed the San Mateo and San Francisco sites and discussed differences between those who want the personal connection of 211 versus completing an online field labeled “I want” and finding services
 - It was determined that it could enhance (rather than replace) 211 to make information available in a digital format. This would allow those with digital access skills to retrieve information independently and those who prefer to speak to someone by phone to do so as well.
 - Digital access could possibly reduce the 211 call levels.
 - At the same time, digital access will also assist 211 operators with efficient access to referral information for the calls they do receive.
- Lesley noted that there must be a way to “bake in” quality and good customer experience through, for example, an intake or follow-up survey. She says that many social services are open at odd hours and have criteria before someone arrives. 211 makes the referral call on behalf of the client so they don't spend time running from agency to agency seeking service.
- Eileen wants to be sure that all agencies are consulted if/when resources are compiled. She noted that issues regarding currency of information would need to be resolved.
- Corinne feels that the goals must be clear and measurable
- Lesley said that United Way is in the process of evaluating 211 and needs time to consider what was presented at the meeting. But she does feel this is necessary and 211 services must be online.

III. Next Steps

- Eileen will contact Greg Bloom to learn how 211 services in other U.S. cities have utilized the open source the referral system
- A decision needs to be made about whether the City wishes to fund something like a 211 in a digital environment. If so, the methods identified should be explored more fully to determine costs and usability factors.