

**When you don't know
where to turn.TM**



**Quand tu ne sais pas
vers qui te tourner.^{MC}**

**Calls to 211 after Goderich tornado
demonstrated Ontario's generosity**

Collingwood, ON – December 7, 2011 – Three months after the August 21 tornado and storm that demolished the downtown of Goderich in Ontario, it's the generosity that is remembered by the 211's helpline staff. Through phone and email, 737 people offered to volunteer and 481 individuals, families, municipalities, organizations and corporations offered donations to the emergency response in Goderich.

Huron County asked 211, the information and referral helpline to community and social services, to answer the calls and emails of volunteers and donations to direct them to their options, while they focused on search, rescue, assessing and mobilizing resources for its shell-shocked residents.

"The generosity of everyone who offered to volunteer or donate goods was truly incredible. Offers came in from everywhere. Over the first six weeks, 211 did call back 243 people on behalf of Huron County to take them up on their generous volunteer offers," said Michelle Gaynor, Ontario Works Manager, Huron County. "The generosity of everyone since has been incredible and the community was quickly able to organize itself to help out."

211's help was essential in the tornado's aftermath, according to Gaynor. We also believe it prevented many people with good intentions from coming to Goderich when they would have been more of a hindrance to emergency responders in the early stages.

"In the U.S., 211's have a longer history in disaster response. Helping Huron County we learned that 211 could do whatever the county needed us to do. In this case, a volunteer and donated items registry," said Pam Hillier, Executive Director, 211 Central East. "The key learning for 211 as we helped Goderich was that using social media for information gathering and directing people appropriately was just as important as answering the phone."

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A 'Goderich Ontario Tornado Victims & Support' Facebook page was created by a Goderich fan and the United Way of Bruce-Grey. Within 12 hours this page had over 7,000 followers and become one of the key channels to communicate about Goderich. Directing people who wanted to donate or volunteer to call 211 was key as information quickly became out of date and to preventing too many items being delivered to Goderich that would end up in a landfill, as happened after the Slave Lake fire evacuees returned home.

"Having the support of 211 during and after the Tornado was a wonderful addition to our support agencies. It enabled Goderich staff time to deal with local citizens while allowing offers of assistance to be documented and made available as required." said Lynda Rotteau the Community Emergency Management Coordinator for Goderich. "We were overwhelmed with all the volunteers received through 211. Goderich received so many offers of support from other municipalities that private individuals were not utilized. The individuals who volunteered were a great help who assisted the people of Goderich to clean up the debris on their property. I believe that 211 should be part of every Emergency Plan in the Province of Ontario."

"The trauma of losing one's home or business to a force of nature must be overwhelming. I am glad 211 was able to help Huron County and its residents in the recovery efforts," said Bill Morris, Executive Director, Ontario 211 Services Corporation. "When 211 started, no one could have foreseen how social media could be harnessed for community problem solving."

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Media Contact Information:

Pamela Hillier, Executive Director
211 Central East Ontario
Ph: 705-444-0400, ext. 234
phillier@communityconnection.ca

Michele Gaynor, Ontario Works Manager
Huron County
Ph: 519-482-8505
mgaynor@huroncounty.ca