Heart of Florida United Way Launches National Cybercrime Texting Platform

Heart of Florida United Way is the first 211 center in the United States to launch a texting platform to support cybercrime victims on the existing 211 infrastructure.

ORLANDO, Fla. (March 16, 2021) – Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is continuing its fight against cybercrime by launching the first national Cybercrime Texting Platform. A pilot program supported through a U.S. Department of Justice, Victims of Crime grant, residents can simply text “CYBER” with any zip code in the U.S. to 898-211 and a series of prompts will direct them to report instances of cybercrime and find resources to recover. HFUW is the first 211 in the nation to launch a texting system to support cybercrime victims nationally. The platform has been developed in partnership with the Educational Message Services (EMS) / PreventionsPays Text and the 211 National Text Platform Steering Committee.

“United Way exists to fight for the well-being of our residents,” said Jeff Hayward, HFUW President and CEO. “With the national increase in cyberattacks surrounding the COVID vaccine, unemployment, social security, stimulus check frauds – amongst others – that put our already vulnerable population at-risk of losing more money, this platform is certainly a valuable link to resources and necessary help through their phones. Lengthy internet searches are in the past. Suffering from cybercrime without support is something no one should ever have to endure.”

Cybercrime includes identity theft, financial fraud, phishing, cyberstalking, cyberbullying, romance scams and other related crimes. It’s a pervasive, stealth crime that preys on vulnerable populations, and often leaves victims struggling with few resources for economic or emotional recovery. However, in addition to contacting 211 by phone, cybercrime victims can now text 898-211 to receive assistance.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, there were over 1.3 million reports of Identify Theft by victims in 2020, making up just under 30% of the fraud reports received. Imposter and online shopping scams taking the number two and three spots, respectively, with a combined total of over 850 thousand reports. The FTC reported that, “Just over a third of all consumers who filed a fraud report with the FTC—34 percent—reported losing money, up from just 23 percent in 2019.” In 2020, 4.7 million reports were made to the FTC with approximately 2.2 million of those reports being fraud. Fraud reports alone constituted $3.3 billion in monetary losses.

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Florida currently ranks 3rd in the U.S. for fraud, totaling nearly $200 million in financial losses. Unfortunately, experts estimate these figures represent only a small fraction of the cybercrime that actually occurs.

“Every day, hundreds of people across Central Florida turn to 211 for information and support – and it’s become even more heightened during the pandemic,” continued Hayward. “Residents can now text 898-211 nationally to be connected with the tools and resources needed to help victims report and recover from cybercrime while also educating them on cybercrime prevention practices and tips from anywhere in the country.”

Also through this grant, local 9-1-1 operators have been trained to re-direct non-emergency cybercrime calls to 211 for support. This is through a partnership with the Cybercrime Support Network for the Victim Support Initiative, allowing residents to report instances of cybercrime and find resources to recover by calling, chatting or texting 211. HFUW is the first 211 call center in Florida – and the third in the nation – to launch a system to support cybercrime victims.

“Cybercrime Support Network is proud to be a resource for individuals and small businesses impacted by cybercrime, said Kristin Judge, Cybercrime Support Network president and CEO. “We are grateful to Heart of Florida United Way 211 for helping connect people nationally with resources to assist with reporting and recovery.”

Visit www.hfuw.org/cybercrime to learn more about the Cybercrime Victim Support Initiative. Visit www.HFUW.org to learn more about Heart of Florida United Way.

About Heart of Florida United Way
Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida’s most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region’s most critical health and human service programs. In 2018-19, it raised and managed more than $22.4 million in total resources, including $16.6 million raised for the Community Fund that invests in dozens of vital programs in the community throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person in Central Florida. It operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida’s information and referral assistance center, crisis, suicide and helpline; Volunteer Resource Center and the Ryan White program, which administers nearly $3.2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 400,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. It received the GuideStar Platinum Seal of Transparency in 2020. Visit www.HFUW.org for more information, or call (407) 835-0900.

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