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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **COMMUNITY-WIDE SERVICE ASSET MAPPING SURVEY TO BEGIN**

Service Providers throughout the greater Bemidji area need help from the public in gathering information about services available to residents. The current system of information gathering is resulting in unintended gaps and duplications of service. As a result, within the next two weeks, letters asking for cooperation in completing a web-based survey referred to as Service Asset Mapping (SAM) will be going out to 519 service agencies.

Organizations receiving the request include nonprofits, public and private educational facilities, government offices, fraternal organizations, churches and faith based service providers, for-profit human service oriented businesses, foundations, art organizations, as well as support systems for military families. The area covered runs as far south as Laporte; east to Cass Lake, North to Grygla, West to Bagley and all points in between.

According to one of the project coordinators, Ruth Sherman of Community Resource Connections, "Funding sources often ask whether a new program responds to a gap or if it resembles an existing service. Currently, we can only answer with the limited knowledge of what we have observed or believe to be the case. Knowing what exists will allow all of us to more effectively refer clients in need and develop responses to legitimate gaps in service."

The electronic tool being used to gather this data (SAM) was developed by a coalition of organizations: United Way of Bemidji Area, Community Resource Connections, Beltrami Area Service Collaborative, Northwoods Interfaith, and Bemidji State University Software Engineering students.

Funding is being provided through the Federal Compassion Capital Fund; a grant received and managed by the Northwest Minnesota Foundation.

According to partner Ashli Bowen of United Way of Bemidji Area, "SAM has been made to be as user friendly as possible. SAM is also designed to be updated. The first year data entry will take the longest. In upcoming years organizations will only need to update already populated fields of information. The information obtained will be a snapshot of where things are at today. The ability to update will allow us to periodically take a look at the direction we are headed as a community service area concerned about the health and well being of our residents".

When the surveying process is complete there will be a variety of reports easily extractable from the data. SAM will report program and service availability across age, race, cost, income, location and eligibility. SAM will compare similar programs, determining overlap and identifying potential collaboration. Individual reports as well as generalized observations will be available to area

professionals. The data system will be housed with United Way Bemidji Area and the coalition of agencies working to develop SAM, enabling information to be accessed and updated as needed.

All of the programming and project work made possible through the Federal Compassion Capital Fund is done with a vision for building capacity and long term planning. SAM is a replicate-able system that could potentially be implemented in other communities. Upon completion, it will be available to communities throughout the Northwest Minnesota Foundation service area.

Partners are asking that organizations watch for the upcoming notice and complete the survey no later than July 31, 2010 in order to allow for a timely response to federal funding guidelines. Group help sessions and individual consulting will be available for anyone needing more assistance with the process. Participants notified by letter will receive a list of session dates and times as well as contact information for individual consultation.

Community presentations reporting the findings of the tool will follow completion in September and October, 2010.

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