

COMMUNITY ACTION MONTH – Energy and Weatherization



A family came to HopeSource distraught because their utility bill was so high they were not able to run their furnace at all during the coldest winter months. Instead, the mother and her daughter were forced to "... bundle up with blankets and 'live cold' ..." Upon hearing about their predicament, HopeSource took immediate action and worked with the power company to help pay part of that high heating bill through energy assistance program funds. In some homes that the weatherization crews visit, families have redirected their dryer vents into the home to provide heat. One family on a fixed income and a with a disabled dependent, had sold nearly everything they owned to pay for heating for their home. When the cost kept climbing, thinking they had no choice, they too began heating the home with the dryer vent.

Nearly every day we hear of hardships families are facing as the result of the economic downturn. It may be hard to believe that people go without heating their homes in the harsh Northwest winters due the ever soaring cost of utilities but the reality is, it happens to an extraordinary number of people every winter right here in Kittitas County. Two of the most utilized programs HopeSource offers income-eligible applicants are the Energy Assistance and the Weatherization programs. In 2011, the HopeSource Energy Assistance Program provided 1,636 households with help for their heating bills. The program is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Energy, Puget Sound Energy, and Bonneville Power Administration.

Utility expenses have risen over 20 percent from 2007 to 2010 alone, and continue to climb. Andrew Lyons, Weatherization and Energy Manager for HopeSource reports there are two ways to save on energy costs: energy conservation and housing retrofits. When eligible households begin the energy program with HopeSource, a full energy audit is completed including an evaluation of the energy consumption behaviors of the household, an analysis of utility bills to determine patterns of use, and energy conservation education through in-house workshops. In these workshops households and individuals learn how their energy habits affect their bills, and what low cost or no cost solutions are available to them to immediately see a savings.

Following the initial assessment, if qualified, the weatherization team takes over and looks at opportunities to save the household money by insulating heating ducts, pipes and attics and sealing underneath the structure. According to the Federal Trade Commission, the initial assessments can cost \$300-800 if hiring a private consultant. The cost of having a team assess and weatherize the house would be prohibitive for most households if HopeSource were not available to do it at no charge for income-qualified families. If more comprehensive rehabilitation is required beyond the scope of repair provided by HopeSource, the household is referred to other agencies or contractors who can assist them with the more intensive repairs.

The goal of the HopeSource Energy and Weatherization programs is to help households reduce their energy expenses, and empower them to make their own cost-saving decisions, allowing more households to live comfortably and safely through the winter.