

LENAWEE UNITED WAY



Utility Needs

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Lenawee United Way is working with local utility companies and non-profit agencies to find solutions to the area's top requested need: Utility Service Payment Assistance.

Central Michigan 2-1-1 reports show that calls for utility service payment assistance spike during April. This is due to eligible utility customers paying less than their total amount due, as part of the Winter Protection Program, from November 1st to March 31st.

In April, the customer begins repayment, and more people call 2-1-1 for assistance. Timing also plays an important role for eligibility, which can aggravate the problem. If people wait until they receive a shut-off notice, it adds to the amount of repayment, and takes more to get the utilities turned back on.

A sample call is outlined below to show how 2-1-1 helps people in this situation:

Chris' utilities had already been disconnected and he had been to court for an eviction proceeding. Out of work for several months, he had recently found employment and had managed to save \$2,500 for his arrearages. However, that amount would only pay one of them. Knowing that Chris was in a lose-lose situation at his current residence, his call specialist suggested that he seek out another rental property that included utilities so that he could pay off his large utility debt over time while still connecting service at the new address. With time slipping away, his call specialist made a series of calls to local landlords asking about availability. Within the day, the call specialist had found a property owner willing to accept Chris' \$2,500 for down payment and first month's rent on a land contract. Not only was Chris able to obtain new, affordable housing, he was also placed on a path to home ownership without having to use scarce community resources for relocation.

The Utility Needs Committee consists of staff from the following organizations: Citizens Gas Fuel Company, Community Action Agency, Consumers Energy, Department of Human Services, Goodwill Industries, Lenawee Emergency and Affordable Housing Corporation, Lenawee United Way, Midwest Energy Cooperative and the Salvation Army. The group is working on a pro-active program that can help families in this situation who can't make a utility payment, and are trying to do the right thing. If you are interested in joining the committee or would like more information, contact Lenawee United Way.

What can you do to help? If you know someone in this situation, urge them to call 2-1-1 (or 866.561.2500) to find out if they are eligible for assistance, before they receive a shut-off notice. Also, check out energy savings tips on local utility websites: www.teammidwest.com, www.citizensgasfuel.com, and www.consumersenergy.com. These sites all list easy things you can do to reduce your cost and save energy.