

Jackson's Community Action Agency still able to help residents facing utility shutoff

By Lisa Satayut on May 02, 2013



Consumers Energy employees and community members cross Jackson Street in downtown Jackson during the 2013 Walk for Warmth on Friday, Feb. 22. The funds from the event are given to the Community Action Agency to help residents facing a utility shutoff. (Mike Mulholland | MLive.com)

JACKSON, MI – While financial assistance with utility bills is the number one unmet need for Jackson County residents, there is still help. The Community Action Agency announced there are year-round funds still available to financially assist residents who are facing a utility shutoff. “Just coming out of winter, we have people behind and in shutoff headed into the summer. Utility needs are ongoing in our area,” said Jessie Murray, a spokeswoman for the CAA which serves Jackson, Lenawee and Hillsdale counties.

The agency receives state, federal and private funding to assist residents with utility bills who are facing a shutoff. In February, Consumers Energy held the annual “Walk for Warmth” in Jackson and raised nearly \$30,000 for the CAA. There are certain eligibility requirements to receive assistance. Murray said the person requesting assistance must have already received a shutoff notice. There are also income eligibility requirements. For example, for one of the assistance programs a family of four must make less than \$34,575 annually, Murray said. While there are funds still available, they don’t last long. The CAA is constantly looking for other funding sources. “The need far outweighs the available resources,” she said.

For the past two years the AARP has given \$3,500 to the CAA to assist those 50 and older with utility bills. Those funds have been used for 2013, but Murray is hoping the CAA will receive another grant in 2014. She said they were able to help 14 households facing a shutoff in 2011 and 2012 with the AARP grant. The average bill was \$510. Under the AARP grant the CAA has the ability to pay the entire bill to restore or prevent shutoff. Other funding the CAA receives limits the amount of funds that can be released to one household, Murray said.

“AARP helps us handle some larger bills,” she said. “They really stepped up to the plate to help Jackson County residents.” Murray said senior citizens who are receiving social security benefits as well as pensions still have a hard time paying utility bills. They might make less than \$12,000 annually. She said the CAA recently helped an 88-year-old Jackson resident who needed her propane tank filled. It was going to cost her \$1,129.

“She knew her \$974 a month Social Security check wouldn’t cover it,” Murray said. The CAA was able to foot the entire bill. Besides offering financial assistance the CAA has resource specialists available that can help with home weatherization and energy savings.

For more information on the Community Action Agency's utility assistance program call 517-784-4800.