

A CLOSER LOOK AT FEDERAL SPENDING

Stimulus allows nonprofits to fill growing need for help

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Area low-income families will receive help from more than \$10 million in federal stimulus funds being pumped into local nonprofits. The money will help keep area residents in their homes, keep food on their tables and save money on annual energy bills. It also will pave the way for a new health-care facility that should expand options for those on Medicaid or who are without insurance. While some components of President Barack Obama's stimulus plan have drawn criticism, local authorities, seem to agree that stimulus funds earmarked to strengthen the safety net for the poor was a good move.

With rising unemployment and limited resources, the funds have allowed area nonprofits to fill a growing need for services. Take the Community Action Agency, which was awarded more than \$8.5 million in stimulus funds for six community services programs in Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee counties.

More than \$5.7 million will be used to fund the agency's weatherization program, making homes more energy efficient by improving insulation, repairing windows and weatherstripping leaky doors and

See **NONPROFITS**, on A2

Nonprofits happy to have stimulus money

Continued from A1

more.

The agency hopes to weatherize up to 1,400 homes in all three counties, with an average of \$6,500 to be invested in each home, said Executive Director Marsha Kreucher. About 1,000 applications have been approved so far.

The agency is also expecting the weatherization program to save people up to 30 percent on energy bills annually.

"To impact the economy of the community is great for us," Kreucher said. "We hope it makes a difference."

About \$1.4 million will expand the agency's Early Head Start programs in Jackson and Hillsdale. About 60 children and about 10 staff members will be added to Early Head Start in January, said Mary DeLuca, director of children's programs for Community Action Agency.

Though the infusion of cash is helpful, it's unlikely most of the area nonprofits will be able to maintain the programs once the funds are gone. Most organizations have to spend the money within two years of receiving it.

"Unless we get some money from heaven, we'll just be paring down," said Becky Filip, executive director of AWARE, Inc., in Jackson.

AWARE, which provides services for victims of domestic violence, hopes to help at least 20 area families with its award of \$500,000 for transitional housing, Filip said.

"We'll be able to provide homes for women who would not be able to afford it on their own," she said.

AWARE is also set to receive a \$56,335 sub-grant to help 24 domestic violence survivors through the United Way of Jackson County.

The city of Jackson allocated \$500,000 in stimulus funds to the Neighbors In Need campaign to provide services through the federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program, which assists people in paying their rent and utilities.

Earlier this year, United Way spearheaded Neighbors In Need, a communitywide collaborative of more than 30 local organizations. For the city to approach

Neighbors in Need to lead the effort was "creative and outside the box," said Ken Toll, executive director of United Way.

In turn, United Way plans to give sub-grants to AWARE and the following nonprofits: \$65,760 to Do'Chas II to help four youths aging out of foster care; \$283,667 to the Salvation Army to help the general population; \$50,000 to Legal Services of Southern Michigan; and \$40,000 to Central Michigan.

United Way will retain \$4,238 to manage data collection and reporting through a Homeless Management Information Systems database.

Clients are asked to contact 211 instead of going to the different agencies for help, said Scott Schmidt, Full Circle Development Coordinator for United Way.

"We want (clients) to be able to be served in a way that is not frustrating to them," Schmidt said.

Officials expect to go through the \$500,000 quickly because of the increasing need in the area, said Michelle Pultz, the city's community development project coordinator.

Clients must either live in the city or be willing to relocate in order to receive help, Pultz said.

The United Way also was awarded \$72,352 in stimulus funds. About \$50,000 was distributed to local food pantries and the other portion went to shelter and administrative costs.

The Center for Family Health was awarded \$1.09 million in stimulus money, which will be used to cover the administrative portion of its new community health center at 505 N. Jackson St. Construction for the 50,000-square-foot building is set to begin in April.

The new facility — scheduled to open in June 2011 — also will allow the center to create 75 full-time, competitive-wage positions and provide services to 13,000 more patients in the next five years, Executive Director Molly Kaser has said.

The agency, which serves more than 24,000 Jackson County residents, was also awarded about \$363,000 to increase staff and expand health-care services.