

## Near record number of families need heating help

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CINCINNATI, OH (FOX19) - As the temperatures drop, home heating bills soar and with it the amount of need. Thousands of people in the Tri-State are making tough decisions, including: choosing between paying their heating bills and putting food on the table.

As Amber Lee Hutton and Benjamin Angelo loaded up the car in Covington to head home, they had one worry on their mind: their \$400 heat/electric bill.

"It definitely makes it tougher because I think I could handle a small electric heater in one room," Hutton said. "But we can't do that with {our 6-month old daughter Gracie}. We have to heat the whole house."

Her partner Benjamin Angelo agrees.

"Everyone else says that's way too high and that something has got to be wrong," Angelo said. "I know it's the windows because you can feel a breeze coming through."

It's a story the Northern Kentucky Community Action Commission or NKCAC has heard often, and can now finally help.

The agency can provide a subsidy to help pay for a household's primary heating source, including utility companies and bulk fuel vendors. The program is available based on the household's total income, and no disconnection notice is needed to apply. The Subsidy program normally operates in November and December each year, but has been extended this year, until the money runs out. To be eligible, participants must be at or below 30% of the poverty level. For a single person, that includes a salary of about \$14,000. For a family of four, that's a salary of \$28,000.

"We started up Monday morning and as of this afternoon, about 4:30p.m.," said Deputy Director Jennifer Belisle. "We had helped 880 families with \$250,000 in assistance."

The need is just as great across the bridge in Cincinnati.

Robin Avant runs the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency's heating assistance program, commonly called "HEAP." The program provides assistance to eligible households that have been disconnected, have received a disconnection notice or have less than a 25% supply of bulk fuel. Emergency HEAP begins November 2, 2009 and ends March 31, 2010. To be eligible, families must reside in Hamilton County and earn a household income at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

"It's really the largest crowd that I've ever seen," said Avant. "I think it's just people are struggling with keeping up with all of their bills because not everyone who applies for this program is jobless. Some individuals are just struggling because things have increase."

And so has the program's individual awards. This year, a DUKE Energy grant boosted the maximum amount from \$175 to \$475.

And as for Hutton and Angelo's money-wasting window? The NKCAC weatherization program could help. The program focuses on making sure local homes keep heat and money from going out the windows.

"Hopefully with longer term assistance people will be able to afford their heating bills and get them through the winter a little more comfortably, a little more safely and a little more economically, too," said Belisle.

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For more information on Cincinnati-Hamilton County's program, please call (513) 569-1850. The agency accepts walk-ins Monday through Friday at 8:00 a.m. Appointments are not available.

For more information on Northern Kentucky Community Action Commission's program, please call: (859) 581-6607. The agency has several satellite offices throughout Northern Kentucky.

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