

News Release

Lifeline for the Empowerment and Development of Consumers, Inc.

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HEAP Winter Crisis Program Assists High Number of Residents with Winter Heating Costs April 25, 2013

PAINESVILLE, Ohio—The Emergency HEAP Winter Crisis Program (WCP), which began on November 1, 2012 and ran through March 31, 2013, served a high number of low-income households with emergency utility assistance.

Throughout the five months of the Winter Crisis Season, Lifeline's staff completed applications for 1,420 households from nearly every community in Lake County for emergency utility assistance. Of those 1,420 applications, 1,284 of them were approved for emergency utility assistance with either their gas or electric or the purchase of fuel oil. Over \$331,000 in federal dollars was expended over the course of the season.

"It was definitely a busy season. A lot of our Lake County residents needed a little extra help this winter," said Carrie Dotson, Executive Director at Lifeline. "On our walk-in days we always had a long line at our door of folks waiting for assistance and we were always booked two solid weeks out for appointments. The numbers prove what we were seeing every day."

Dotson said that the agency staff was glad to help their neighbors in need. They were also able to help so many residents who had never before sought the help of the program.

"We saw so many new people during the 2012-2013 Heap Winter Crisis Season who had not heard about our program until they read about it in the newspaper or saw the inserts with their utility bills" said Marina Rivera, Energy Programs Coordinator at Lifeline.

HEAP is a federally funded program designed to help eligible low-income Ohioans meet the high costs of home heating. This program can only be accessed one time per season and the amount of the benefit depends on the size of the household, household income and what type of fuel is used.

The WCP program can provide a one-time payment per heating season (Nov. 1 through March 31) for gas or electric utilities, or toward the delivery of wood, propane, fuel oil or kerosene to households when: a customer's gas or electric service has been disconnected; a customer has received a final disconnect notice; or the customer has less than a 10 day supply of bulk fuel.

Lifeline administrators have just learned that there will likely be enough funding to support a Summer Crisis Season in July and August 2013, but that program's guidelines haven't been released yet.

“We know that with the economy still challenging people who live on tight budgets, we will be busy this summer,” said Dotson. “We’re really glad that we’ll be able to offer a summer program as usual.”

For more information on the HEAP Programs, please contact Lifeline, Inc.’s Energy Assistance Office at (440) 350-9160. Lifeline’s Energy Assistance Office is located at 54 S. State Street, Suite 303 in Painesville and opens daily at 8:30 a.m.

Lifeline for the Empowerment and Development of Consumers was founded in 1973 with the mission of helping Lake County residents by providing them assistance and life skills programming that is designed to increase self-sufficiency. In 1980 Lifeline became a participating agency of the United Way of Lake County, UWLC, and in 1987 was designated a community action agency by the Ohio Department of Development, ODOD. In 2008, Lifeline was designated as a mental health agency by the Ohio Department of Mental Health.

Today Lifeline continues with the same mission of helping Lake County’s low-income residents break the cycle of poverty and make the transition from agency-dependency to self-sufficiency. Lifeline’s current programming includes services in the healthcare, housing & energy assistance, information & referral services and consumer education & job training areas. Our motto is ‘helping people, changing lives.’ Lifeline is currently funded by the UWLC and by grants through the ODOD, the Lake County Board of Commissioners, the Lake County ADAMHS Board, Lake County Department of Job & Family Services, the City of Mentor, the Western Reserve Junior Service League, the CVS Foundation, Bikers Aiding Local Diabetics and through private donors.