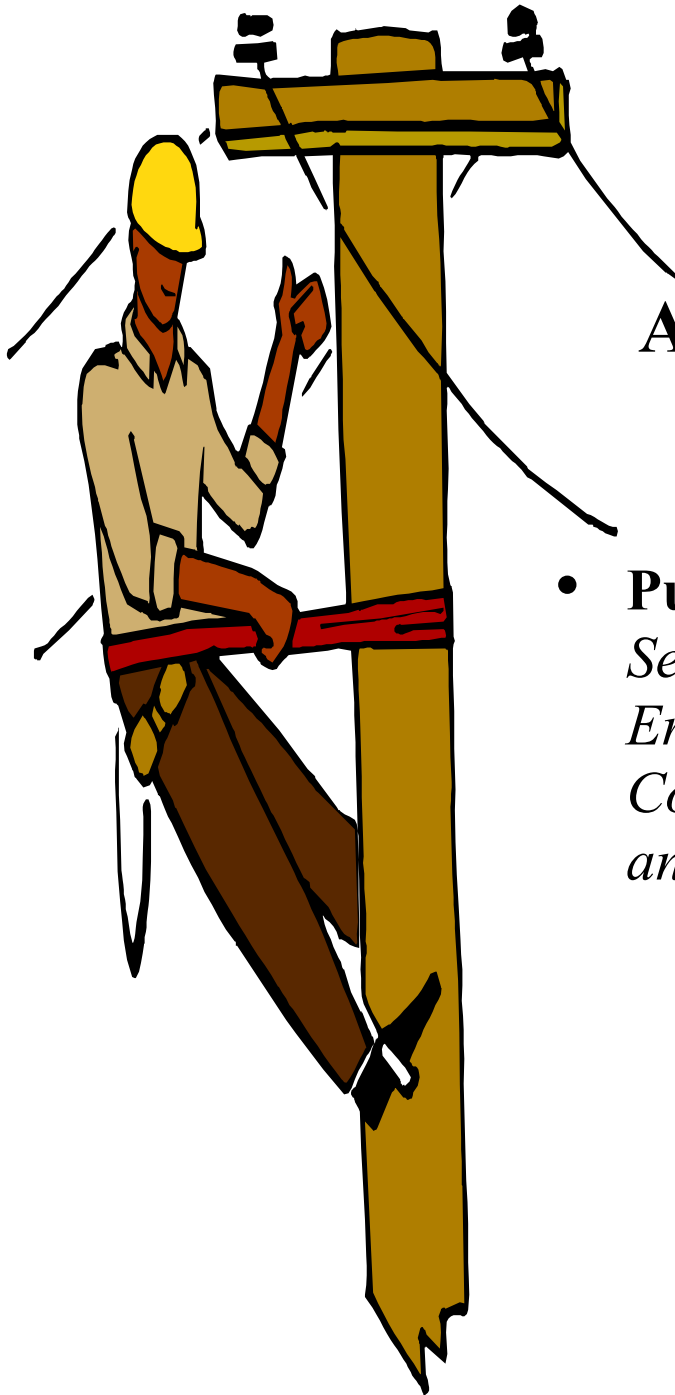


Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force



Utility/Conservation Assistance Subcommittee

- **Purpose:** *Assessment of Services to Remedy Utility-Related Emergencies, Weatherization, Conservation and Education*

I. Introduction to Utility/Conservation Assistance Subcommittee

The Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force Utility/Conservation Assistance Subcommittee meets on a regular basis through out the year. (Every other month) Members consist of representatives of local utility/conservation service providers and utility companies. The meetings are open and new members are welcome. Members meet to share information regarding utility/conservation programs, services and to identify problems and recommend solutions that will more effectively meet the emergency utility/conservation needs of Kent County residents.

The Seidman School of Business Information Services of Grand Valley State University worked with participating members of the committee for the fifth consecutive year in a study of emergency assistance in the area of heat, electric and water payments in Kent County. Participating agencies reporting monthly were: Department of Human Services (DHS), The Salvation Army, and Area Community Services Employment & Training Council – Community Action Unit (ACSET-CAA). Seidman data was used to prepare this report.

The availability of these data reports and the United Way 2-1-1 Basic Needs Reports enable us to scan the immanent, to identify shortfalls and needs ahead of time. As an example, the emergency utility assistance dilemma that was predicted for the 1st quarter of 2005 was lessened because of the implementation of LIHEAP DIRECT. The program allowed the State Treasury and the Department of Human Services (DHS) to share information electronically with utility providers that identified households receiving assistance and who were in shut-off status. Payments were made to the utility company on behalf of the household electronically, with no client involvement. This contributed to the decline in requests during December. The utility committee just recently received data on the 2004-2005 LIHEAP Direct payments and will be applying this information to next years planning.

II. Trends in Needs & Client Demographics

Trends indicate that there was a decrease in the number of applications for assistance in 2004 and as indicated in the chart above, the gap between those applying in 2004 and of those resolved increased significantly from 2003.

Total Number of Cases by Agency, 2002-2004

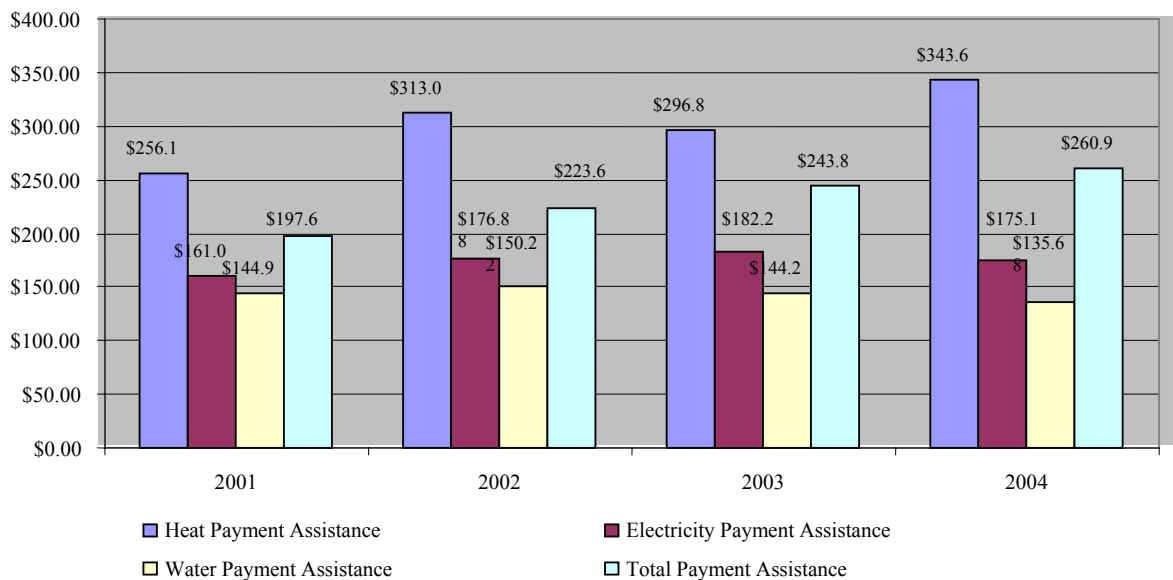
Agency Name	Number Of Cases Applied 2002	Number Of Cases Resolved 2002	% Cases Resolved to Applied 2002	Number Of Cases Applied 2003	Number Of Cases Resolved 2003	%Cases Resolved To Applied 2003	Number Of Cases Applied 2004	Number Of Case Resolved 2004	%Cases Resolved To Applied 2004
DHS	7,416	3,690	50%	10,206	8,757	86%	10,708	6,995	65%
ACSET	981	977	99.60%	1,688	1,687	100%	903	900	99.60%
United Way's 211	186	184	99%	171	170	100%	NA	NA	NA
Soldiers & Sailors Relief	40	38	95%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total:	10,063	6,129	61%	13,734	12,031	88%	12,794	8,942	12,031

Note: Because most agencies require a DHS decision notice before providing assistance, the committee believes the true universe of need is closer to the total of 10,708 as represented by applications received by FIA.

Reasons for Change:

- Lack of community resources at various time periods - Households assisted were down 34% from 2003, while funding was reduced by nearly 20%.
- Guidelines for qualifying for available funds were more restrictive.
- Applicants may have failed or could not meet the requirements of the program. (This year most resource providers required client co-pays as a condition of assistance.)

Average Dollar Amount Distributed per Case 2001-2004



As illustrated above, the highest average payment of \$343.63 in 2004 was for heat. This trend could also be observed in the previous years. Total payment assistance increased by about 25 dollars from 2001 to 2002; by about 20 dollars from 2002 to 2003 and by about 15 dollars from 2003 to 2004.

Total Dollar Amount by Utility Type, 2000-2004

Utility	Total 2000	% Of Total 2000	Total 2001	% of Total 2001	Total 2002	% of Total 2002	Total 2003	% of Total 2003	Total 2004	Total
Electricity	\$286,584	39%	\$504,347	41%	\$545,509	42%	\$803,068	28%	\$610,153	26%
Heat	\$404,130	54%	\$631,637	52%	\$666,810	51%	\$1,961,811	68%	\$1,623,987	70%
Water	\$51,841	7%	\$79,828	7%	\$94,937	7%	\$113,993	4%	\$99,863	4%
Total:	\$742,555	100%	\$1,215,812	100%	\$1,307,256	100%	\$2,878,872	100%	\$2,334,003	100%

2. Demographic Information

A survey of 527 randomly selected cases was completed by the participating agencies. The survey provided data on the individuals served and tracked demographic statistics of recipients/households served.

- Fifty eight percent (58%) of the households applying for utility assistance consisted of two to four members in the household with the largest number being a four (4) person household.
- The majority of clients applying for emergency utility assistance are single female heads of households (63%). This has been a consistent pattern over the past four years.

Income Groups

The sources of income for the random sample cases in the study were divided into six categories and are reflected in the chart below: Department of Human Services as a source of income, which includes only money grants; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Social Security Benefits (RSDI); Wages; Unearned Income (pensions, child support and unemployment); and other. As the participating cases can have more than one source of income, the sum exceeds the total number of 527.

Cases by Source of Income, 2001-2004

Source of Income	Number of Cases 2001	Percent of Total Cases 2001	Number of Cases 2002	Percent of Total Cases 2002	Number of Cases 2003	Percent of Total Cases 2003	Number of Cases 2004	Percent of Total Cases 2004
FIA	78	18%	128	25%	167	32%	145	28%
SSI	80	18%	71	14%	93	18%	78	15%
RSDI	55	13%	50	10%	66	13%	76	15%
Wages	204	47%	182	36%	172	33%	198	39%
Unearned Income	36	8%	42	8%	49	9%	36	7%
Other Sources of Income	74	17%	41	8%	54	10%	39	8%

According to these results nearly 40% of the households participating in the study have income from wages; this is an increase of 7% from 2003. The households reporting income from (DHS) in 2004 dropped to 28% from 32% in 2003. This implies that there are more working poor that are struggling to make ends meet and are seeking help through the emergency assistance system.

Cases by Income Bracket, 2001-2004

Household Income Bracket as Percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines (FPIG)	Total Number of Families in the Income Bracket 2001	Percent of Total 2001	Total Number of Families in the Income Bracket 2002	Percent of Total 2002	Total Number of Families in the Income Bracket 2003	Percent of Total 2003	Total Number of Families in the Income Bracket 2004	Percent of Total 2004
Up to 70%	236	54%	339	67%	293	62%	405	80%
75%	56	13%	46	9%	60	13%	17	3%
100%	70	16%	64	13%	52	12%	39	8%
125%	33	8%	16	3%	16	3%	14	3%
130% & Above	41	9%	41	8%	49	10%	31	6%
Total	438	100%	506	100%	470	100%	506	100%

This data presents the income level for the households in need of emergency utility assistance at time of application. Two thirds of the randomly selected samples of cases fall in the lowest income bracket. [Note: Percents differ due to rounding]

U.S. Federal Poverty Annual Income Guidelines 2004 for Household of four (4)

<i>Household Size</i>	<i>0-70%</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>125%</i>	<i>Under 60 Yrs.130%</i>	<i>150%</i>	<i>160% and Above</i>
Four (4)	12,880	13,800	18,400	23,000	23,920	27,600	29,440

III. Trends and Change in Resources

Utilities:

- With State direct payments to utilities, requests locally were down 30%, but available funding also fell 19%.
- Utility costs continue to rise: average heat bills paid in 2001 were \$256.18, in 2004, they were \$343.63.

Cooling:

- Adequate resources existed this year for cooling needs. It was relatively cooler than normal this past summer. The Department of Human Services (DHS), Area Agency on Aging and several other agencies continue to fund emergency cooling assistance. The need will continue to be monitored.

Conservation:

- Weatherization funding was increased in 2004 through continuation of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), increased DOE funds, and the addition of Michigan Public Service Commission Funding and Kent County Senior Millage Funding. Requests continue to

increase for weatherization services. Many utility assistance service providers are requiring households to apply for weatherization assistance as a condition of their receiving a utility payment. Additionally the increase in heating fuel of nearly 16% again this year, is resulting in increased requests for home weatherization services.

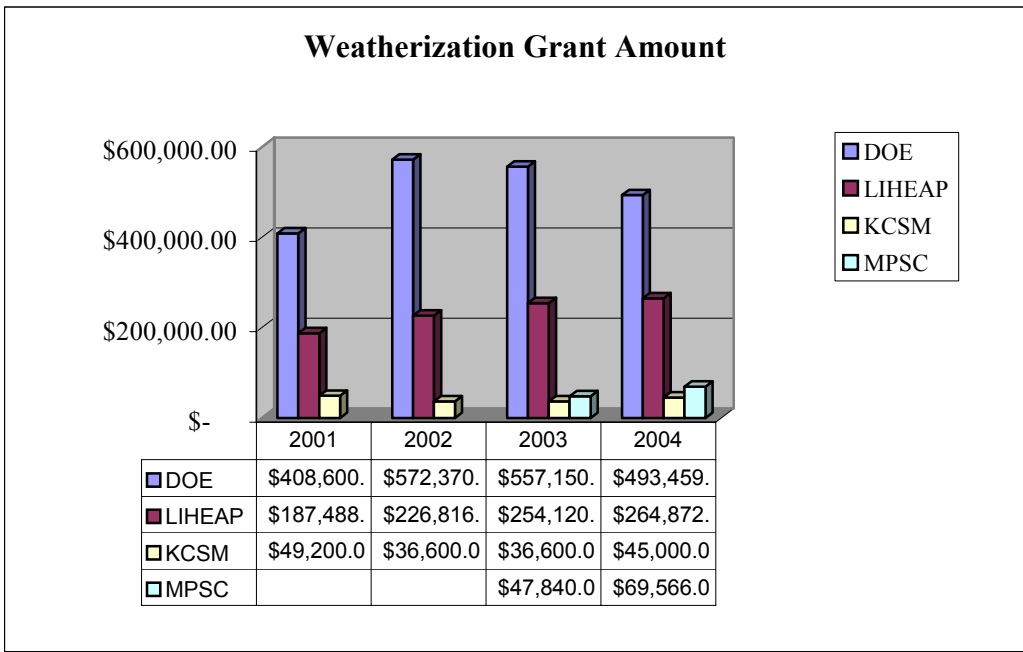
- Funds were made available for energy conservation client education. This service is being provided in the homes at the time of weatherization.

Unmet Needs:

- Additional funding for utility assistance to meet the increased need. Utility costs increased in 2004 and will continue to increase in 2005. (See chart #1)
- The continued lack of funds available September through December. The (Emergency service funds and Exceptions funds used up or (90% of Emergency Service Funds and Exception funds were used in the first quarter of the fiscal year). Most programs end September 30.

The Area Community Services Employment & Training Council – Community Action Agency is the primary service provider for Home Weatherization Services:

ACSET WEATHERIZATION PROGRAM



Weatherization funding has remained fairly consistent over the past two years. Increased funding has occurred since 2002 and is the result of local Kent County Senior Millage Funds and the Michigan Public Service Commission “Deregulation” funds.

The majority of households assisted in the weatherization program in 2004 (75%), were very low income and had incomes at or below 125% of poverty.

There has been an increase in the need for furnace replacement 25% of the homes weatherized need new furnaces. Furnace replacement increases job costs significantly and thereby reduces the number of homes that can be weatherized.

IV. Status of 2004 Recommendations:

Prevention:

Expand Energy Conservation Workshops – targeting those households that repeatedly need assistance paying their utility bills and have high-energy usage

Results:

Funds were received through the ACSET Home Weatherization Program to expand energy conservation client education. Clients whose homes are being weatherized go through client education session with the inspector and develop a conservation plan of action to be completed by the time the weatherization on the home is done. The inspector verifies that the client education work plan has been completed at post inspection.

Ten homes of high energy use and repeated emergency assistance have been identified and service agencies are working together to develop a plan for each household that entails energy conservation education, home weatherization measures installed, finance management classes. One-on-one follow-up at 1-3-6 month intervals will provide monitoring of progress.

Agencies are involved in providing energy conservation workshops at elementary several schools, senior centers, and at other agencies where special workshops are being held.

Funding:

Work with ENTF Leadership Committee to identify potential funds to aid in meeting needs at those times when funds are scarce.

Information Management:

Continue to work with United Way 2-1-1 to improve resource provider sharing of program information.

Results:

Continue to work with 2-1-1 ENTF Basic Needs Data Committee to obtain detailed information regarding utility conservation funding. This will allow the committee to analyze and track status of local resources and will put us in a better position to close the gap in services at various times in the year.

V. Recommendations for 2005:

Prevention:

- Expand Energy Conservation Workshops-targeting those households that repeatedly need assistance paying their utility bills.
- Expand Energy Conservation working with elementary school children, tailoring the presentations to those age groups.
- Enhance the Client Education that is done with the clients who have received Weatherization. Train and education front line staff about basic energy conservation and weatherization services.

Funding:

Continue to work with ENTF Leadership Committee to identify potential funds to aid in meeting needs at those times when funds are scarce.

Information Management:

Continue to work with 2-1-1 ENTF Basic Needs Data Committee to obtain detailed information regarding utility conservation funding. This will allow the committee to analyze and track status of local resources and will put us in a better position to close the gap in services at various times in the year.

Utility/Conservation Assistance Subcommittee Roster

Nora Barkey
Area Agency on Aging of West MI

Jan King
Grand Rapids Housing Commission

Bob Barnes
Senior Neighbors

Frank Lynn
Creston Neighborhood Association

Megan Crow
The Salvation Army

Nancy Marshall
Family Independence Agency

Terry Cruzan
The Salvation Army

Robert McKown
Heart of West MI United Way's 2-1-1

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John Frazier
Detroit Edison-Credit Dept, GR

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