

News Release

Lifeline for the Empowerment and Development of Consumers, Inc.

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HEAP Winter Crisis Program Assists Record Number of Residents

April 29, 2011

PAINESVILLE, Ohio—The Emergency HEAP Winter Crisis Program (WCP), which began on November 1, 2010 and ran through March 31, 2011, set a new high record of serving low-income households with emergency utility assistance.

Throughout the five months of the Winter Crisis Season, Lifeline's staff completed applications for just under 1,700 households from nearly every community in Lake County for emergency assistance. Of those 1,700 applications, over 1,500 of them were approved for emergency utility assistance with either their gas or electric or the purchase of fuel oil. That number is up nearly 70 households over the same season in 2009-2010. Over \$330,000 in federal dollars were expended over the course of the season.

"We could definitely tell that it was a busier season than usual and that a lot more 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 somewhat surprised at the increased and steady demand for the emergency assistance, but 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 2010-2011 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 is enough funding to support a Summer Crisis Season in July and August 2011, 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. "But we're really relieved 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.

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 health, housing, energy and consumer education areas. Our motto is 'first to help, then to teach.' Lifeline is currently funded by the UWLC and by grants through the ODOD, the Lake County Board of Commissioners, the Western Reserve Junior Service League, the CVS Foundation, Bikers Aiding Local Diabetics and through private donors.