



Community Action Brings Power to the People

Sharon Elmusleh didn't want to visit Community Action. As she entered Community Action's main office in Hillsboro on February 20th, she was worried what people would think of a parent who was about to have her heat shut off in the middle of winter. "I was really embarrassed to go. I'm a single mom and I pride myself on making sure my bills get taken care of," said Sharon, a mother of three. After arriving, she nervously looked around the waiting room and wondered how the intake worker would respond to her. As she watched the children in the room playing, she thought about her own children. She wondered what would happen if Community Action couldn't help. The notice she held in her hand said her power would be shut off the next day.

"A wonderful woman helped me. She told me not to worry, that everyone asks for help at some time."

Although she didn't have an appointment, she was seen after a short wait. "A wonderful woman helped me. She told me not to worry, that everyone asks for help some time. She told me that she used to get energy assistance too. That really put me at ease." Tammy Mace, the intake worker who helped her, listened while Sharon explained that her monthly heat bill was usually about \$85.00. The past month, however, had been colder and she had expected a larger bill. When her monthly statement arrived, Sharon knew she didn't have the money to pay it. The bill was \$289.00. After completing the application and qualifying, funds were sent directly to her utility company. Tammy called the company to verify payment and avoid the anticipated shut off.

With energy costs increasing, Sharon and many other Washington County residents have sought

assistance from Community Action. Between October and April, the energy assistance program provided \$853,364 in assistance to 4,400 households. This year, more families who have never before used energy assistance are seeking help. The region's energy crisis is also resulting in comparatively larger utility bills than in the past. According to Judy Schilling, Energy and Emergency Services Coordinator, "We are seeing many first-time applicants and people are coming in with very high bills."

As many as two dozen people each day come to the Hillsboro office because their power has been shut off or soon will be. Clients qualify for assistance if they are at or below Oregon's annual median income, which is \$27,060 for a family of four.

Community Action's energy assistance program is the result of community collaboration. Oregon Housing and Community Service, PGE, Northwest Natural Gas, and the federal Low Income Energy Assistance Program provide funding. Energy assistance is available at both Community Action Hillsboro and Tigard Neighborhoodshare offices.

Energy assistance is much more than paying a heating bill: it's about improving a family's well being. In the worst cases, the loss of heat can lead to a tragic accident as families attempt to cope. "Anytime people's utilities are shut off it creates a huge hazard for the family. We've had people try to cook inside with briquettes or kerosene heaters or use candles for light, all of which can cause fire or asphyxiation. This puts people at extreme risk," said Judy.

Sharon Elmusleh knows too well the worries of raising children in a house with no heat. "If you don't have basic needs met for children, you lose your children and my children are my life. So I can honestly say Community Action saved me and my children's lives."



Home Depot staff, community members, and shelter residents enjoyed a house warming party May 16th

Local Heros: Home Depot, Merix, and Nike employees partner with Community Action

When Teri Service of Home Depot taught her home improvement class how to build a playhouse, she knew the group would donate the finished project to a local charity. What she didn't know was that the house would become the springboard for a new partnership with Community Action.

On June 16th, the playhouse was donated to the Hillsboro Family Shelter during a "house warming" party that included balloons, root beer floats, and many very excited children. Participants of the Beaverton Home Depot class that built the playhouse attended the event and enjoyed a tour of the shelter afterward.

Next up: Teri and the Home Depot crew are helping the shelter plan for a much-needed kitchen remodel. One good idea leads to another!

(Continued on next page)

A Letter to Our Friends—

I've had the pleasure of working with Community Action Organization for a long time. So long, in fact, that I often joke with friends that when I was first involved in the 70s, I worked with an energetic, young, VISTA volunteer, and now—as I step down as board chair in the year 2001—that VISTA volunteer is the executive director (Jerralynn Ness)!

My association with Community Action has always been positive, partly because of the good works being done, partly because of the good people doing them. I've learned so much from staff and continue to be inspired by clients. Stories such as Sharon Elmusleh's described in the energy assistance article in this newsletter continue to inspire me and validate my association with the agency.

I met Sharon in April at our Celebration of Community Spirit Dinner. She came to

share her story with nearly 200 Community Action supporters. And share it she did—with poise, dignity, depth and emotion. Sharon had “an awesome upbringing” (her words), but somewhere along the way got lost. It took her hitting rock bottom to find the courage to seek out programs to help bring herself and her three children back up. In addition to receiving energy assistance funds from Community Action, Sharon's children have benefited from Head Start, and Sharon is now enrolled in a welfare to work program. Sharon now volunteers her time editing resource directories to ensure the social service information provided to families in need is current.

At that same April dinner I shared that 76 people in our county were sleeping in one of four homeless shelters that very night, and 40 families (more than 100 people) were

Ralph Brown
Board Chair



waiting for a room in shelter. So, while Community Action changes lives one family at a time—families like Sharon's and those currently in shelter—we are well aware of the many other families who need a hand up.

That's where you come in. One of the lessons I've learned in my community work is that while one person can make a difference, many people with varied backgrounds can make a significant impact. Together we are building a stronger community by supporting the programs of Community Action, and I want to thank you for making a difference in the lives of those we serve.



Local Heros: Corporate Partnerships

(Continued from previous page)

A recent market slump has meant fewer orders and less work for many employees in the high tech arena. Faced with the economic downturn, the Human Resources Department at **Merix Corporation** in Forest Grove looked for the silver lining.

Merix identified Community Action as a potential work site and released a few employees to work in Community Action programs as a pilot project. Volunteers help during their regularly scheduled shifts and are paid their salary by Merix. The benefits to Merix are three-fold: their donation of labor may qualify as a tax deduction, they retain their trained work force through reassignment, and they are providing a valuable service to the community. The benefit to Community Action is much-needed help for understaffed programs serving the low-income community.

Jean, who usually spends her days inspecting circuit boards, likes the opportunity to do something different. Jean is currently assisting with a bulk mail project for Community Action Metro Child Care Resource & Referral. When the project is complete, she will paint offices. To date, three Merix employees are making a

difference in Community Action programs and all report satisfaction with the partnership. “I tell everyone in my department what a great thing this is to volunteer during the work day. I feel like I'm really helping Community Action,” said Jean.

Around the Nike campus they're known as the Customer Service group, but Jamiel Morris and 11 coworkers also make community service their work. The group has such a strong commitment to community involvement that every month the whole department makes time for at least four hours of volunteer service. Nike supports this effort by giving a matching cash donation to Community Action based on the number of volunteer hours donated by employees.

This spring, Jamiel and his team mates visited two Community Action Head Start classrooms. The group enjoyed working with the children so much that they voted to return the following month to chaperone a horseback riding field trip. According to Jamiel, “All the projects are worthwhile but the best times are interacting with people, then you really see the impact of what you're doing.”



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Community Spirit Dinner a Success!



Nancy Johnson, Jack McGowan, Bernie Thurber, Jan McGowan

The 4th Annual "Celebration of Community Spirit Dinner" raised \$52,000 this year to support Community Action programs. Nearly 200 people, representing more than 32 companies, gathered at the Greenwood Inn on April 25th to show their support for Washington County's low income community.

Guests enjoyed wine provided by the Washington County Winery Association and Sake cocktails mixed by Sake One Corporation. Featured speakers included John Emrick, CEO of Norm Thompson, and Sharon Elmusleh, a recipient of Community Action services. Rick Van Beveren of Reedville Cafe and Reedville Catering, and Intel Corporation received Community Spirit Awards.



"Why do we describe non-profits by what they are not? Why not use the term 'social profit' to describe the benefits of the work you do."
 —John Emrick, CEO of Norm Thompson



Ralph Brown, Jerralynn Ness, Bree Brown, and Craig Kinnie



Jerralynn Ness, Rick Van Beveren, Ralph Brown

"...if you give, it will always come back to you...."
 Sharon Elmusleh, Former Client



John Platt and John Emrick

Norm Thompson • Portland General Electric • Wells Fargo Bank • Columbia Community Bank • Kaiser Permanente NW • The Interest Group • NW Natural

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In partnership with the community,
Community Action assists low income
people to achieve
self-determination.

Community Action Organization is a
private, non-profit corporation.

For further information contact
Resource Development: at 503-693-3230

or see our website:

www.caowash.org

**Community Action Organization
6th Annual Wine Raffle Tickets
Now on Sale at Community Action's Hillsboro office**

TICKETS
\$200 EACH



AVAILABLE
NOW!

GRAND PRIZE

6 Cases of Premium Washington County Wine

10 Additional Prizes

3 Cases of Premium Washington County Wine

Proceeds directly benefit programs serving low-income families.

Wine provided by:

Beran Vineyards
Cooper Mountain Vineyards
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Drawing: Sept. 20, 2001 - 6:00 pm at Community Action Organization
1001 SW Baseline St. Hillsboro, Oregon 503-693-3230

Need not be present to win