

Inside the Operation

WE'RE ALL PART OF THE OPERATION.

SPRING 2016

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Milder Winter, Lower Oil Prices Mean More Funds for Summer Energy Assistance

Thanks to a mild winter and lower home heating oil prices, there were fewer requests for energy assistance this winter. This means that Operation Fuel will be able to help more households that are facing utility service shutoffs during the warmer months.

“Connecticut residents finally caught a break this winter from high energy bills. This is the first time this has happened during my 18 years at Operation Fuel. Now, we will be able to help more families who need energy assistance this summer,” said Executive Director Patricia Wrice.

The annual winter moratorium, which prevents households from having their utilities shut off, ends on May 1 and won't resume until November 1, 2016. During the spring and summer months, some lower-income families and individuals face losing their electricity or gas services because they do not have the resources to keep up with the high cost of energy.

As of March 1, Operation Fuel had provided \$506,441 in winter energy assistance to over 1,100 households. Since the fiscal year began on July 1, 2015, Operation Fuel has awarded \$1,679,978 in energy assistance grants to 3,965 households. Although there were fewer requests for energy assistance this winter and the energy affordability gap has decreased from a year ago, there actually are

more Connecticut households that are struggling to pay their energy bills. According to the Home Energy Affordability Gap: Connecticut (2015) report, there are more than 313,000 Connecticut households that can't afford their energy bills.

The energy affordability gap dropped from \$784 million in 2014 to \$471 million in 2015 for households with incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. The decline primarily was due to a significant reduction in the price of home heating oil and natural gas.

Even with lower energy prices, there continues to be a large gap between what lower-income households pay for energy bills and what they actually can afford. On average, the 313,000 households each owe about \$1,506 more in annual energy bills than they can afford to pay.

“The fact that the Home Energy Affordability Gap in Connecticut can decrease by more than \$300 million, and still leave an aggregate gap substantially higher than available assistance resources, indicates the extent of the affordability gap crisis in Connecticut,” stated the report, which was prepared for Operation Fuel by regional economist Roger D. Colton, a partner with Fisher, Sheehan & Colton Public Finance and General Economics, of Belmont, Mass.



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A Word from The Executive Director



Dear Friends,

We are very grateful to Pat for the leadership that she has provided to Operation Fuel over the past 18 years. Her guidance has helped the agency to grow tremendously and to become what it is today.

Under Pat's direction, Operation Fuel has evolved into a statewide, year-round energy assistance program with more than 100 fuel banks throughout Connecticut. During this time, Operation Fuel has become the voice for families and individuals who are struggling with unaffordable energy bills, and brought attention to the energy affordability crisis that currently affects more than 313,000 Connecticut households.

To celebrate Pat's devoted leadership and service to Operation Fuel, please consider giving a gift in her honor. Your generosity will allow us to continue to help Connecticut residents stay safe and warm throughout the year.

Sincerely,

Nancy Bulkeley
Chair, Board of Directors
Operation Fuel

Dear Friends,

After more than 18 years as Executive Director of Operation Fuel, I will be retiring effective June 30.

This has been a bittersweet decision. I love Operation Fuel and feel honored to have been an integral part of this organization, but now it is time to step down.

I am proud to be leaving Operation Fuel as a well-respected energy assistance program with a dedicated, hard-working staff and diligent board of directors. The new Executive Director is expected to be named in June. Together, they will continue to ensure that all Connecticut households have year-round access to heat and utility services.

Operation Fuel has evolved significantly since I started here, but this is the first year that I can remember when struggling households may be catching a break. Between the milder winter and lower home heating oil prices, there has not been the frantic need for energy assistance that we've seen in past winters.

This means that we will have enough money to help a substantial number of families, individuals and the elderly who are faced with utility shutoffs this spring and summer.

For nearly 40 years, Operation Fuel has helped Connecticut households with energy assistance. We will continue to be here for as long as we are needed.

Thank you for your continued support of Operation Fuel. We never could have accomplished what we have over the years without your generosity.

Patricia Wrice
Executive Director

Nancy Bulkeley, Chairperson of Operation Fuel's board and Senior Community Affairs Representative for Dominion Nuclear Connecticut with Operation Fuel's Executive Director Patricia Wrice.



Programs Help Lessen Energy Burden



Operation Fuel continues to look for alternative solutions to help ease the energy burden that affects 313,000 lower-income Connecticut households.

"We know that Operation Fuel doesn't have the resources to provide energy assistance to every Connecticut household that needs it. As a result, we have been looking at different ways to help empower lower-income households so they can reduce their energy bills and lower their energy consumption," explained Operation Fuel's Executive Director Patricia Wrice.

Operation Fuel has completed piloting a program with Eversource Energy and is starting another pilot program that helps homeowners take advantage of existing renewable energy and energy efficiency programs.

New Start Program

Last summer, Operation Fuel partnered with Eversource Energy to help increase enrollment in the utility's New Start program. Operation Fuel hopes to continue its involvement in the program.

New Start can help to eliminate an outstanding balance for customers who meet specific eligibility requirements, including income. After Eversource reviews an eligible customer's billing history, a payment plan is set up. As long as New Start payments are made, electric service will not be shut off, despite the outstanding balance, and a portion of the balance will be forgiven. "The partnership is a natural fit because Operation Fuel has the ability to reach people in need through its network of

fuel banks," pointed out Brenda Watson, who is Operation Fuel's Director of Community Programs.

Energy Efficiency Programs

For the next six months, Operation Fuel will be running a pilot program at four of its fuel banks, where it will educate energy assistance recipients who also are homeowners about different ways to save money by lowering their energy consumption. Operation Fuel staff will be available at the fuel banks, for several hours each week, to meet with people after they apply for energy assistance. Homeowners will learn how to apply for the Home Energy Solutions (HES) program, the Connecticut Green Bank's solar energy program, and various energy-related loan programs.

Both HES and the solar energy program begin with a home energy assessment. "Clients who are interested in doing more will be connected to energy programs that are designed to lower their energy consumption through efficiencies or the use of solar energy," explained Operation Fuel's Julian Freund, who is coordinating the pilot program.

Operation Fuel staff will maintain contact with interested clients and provide ongoing assistance and support for program participants. Freund says he expects the pilot program experience will provide insight into how to maximize client participation in these valuable energy programs.

Operation Fuel and Utility Companies Host Second Annual Energy Assistance Conference

Operation Fuel partnered with Eversource Energy, The United Illuminating Company (UI), The Southern Connecticut Gas Company (SCG), and Connecticut Natural Gas Corporation (CNG) to host its annual energy assistance conference on October 14, 2015.

More than 280 people attended the second annual Social Agency Energy Assistance Conference, bringing together staff from Operation Fuel, utility companies, state agencies, and local fuel banks to focus on the growing home energy crisis faced by over 313,000 Connecticut households.

The conference presented an opportunity for Operation Fuel's partnering fuel banks to meet directly with representatives from Eversource, UI, SCG, and CNG to learn more about updates to utility arrearage forgiveness programs, medical and hardship protection procedures, and payment options for households struggling to stay current with their utility services.

During a panel hosted by Operation Fuel, Energize Connecticut, and the Connecticut Department of Social Services, Operation Fuel's Director of Community Programs Brenda Watson discussed the options available to Connecticut residents looking to increase energy efficiency and lower

their utility bills by taking advantage of the various energy audits, rebates for home improvements, and conservation programs available to consumers in addition to assistance programs provided by the state and Operation Fuel.

Fuel banks were also given the chance to attend a training session on the Utility Social Agency Web portal to ensure access to the most current information available, and to efficiently and effectively assist clients through the application process.

The event also featured keynote speaker Jonathan Harris, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection, who emphasized the need to protect vulnerable clients from the widespread problem of identity theft and consumer scams, often aimed at seniors.

"This is our second year partnering with Eversource, UI, SCG and CNG to host one large conference. We applaud the commitment from the utility companies to collaborate for this conference and for smaller regional trainings throughout the state. Doing so ensures that our service providers are given the information and tools they need to better serve customers in need," said Brenda Watson.



Representatives from Eversource Energy, The United Illuminating Company, The Southern Connecticut Gas Company, Connecticut Natural Gas Corporation, and Operation Fuel at the annual energy assistance conference.

Operation Fuel and Mercy Housing Partner On Program to Avert Homelessness

Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation has joined Operation Fuel's Homeless Intervention and Prevention Program (HIPP). Adding Mercy Housing gives HIPP a presence in the Greater Hartford area and in Middlesex County.

HIPP is one of the ways that Operation Fuel is partnering with community agencies to find long-term solutions for clients who are struggling financially. Now in its third year, the program was developed by Operation Fuel to help prevent and reduce homelessness. LifeBridge Community Services of Bridgeport and Inspirica, Inc. in Stamford are the program's other community partners.

Mercy Housing and Shelter, which is in Hartford and Middletown, provides housing assistance and supportive services to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Through HIPP, Operation Fuel will provide energy assistance grants to Mercy Housing clients who need to pay their past due utility bills in order to transition from homelessness to permanent housing.

Owing a previous utility debt can prevent this type of move, while losing utility services can violate a lease agreement. "Operation Fuel hopes to continue

expanding HIPP to reach more individuals and families who need energy assistance in order to move back or remain in their home," said Operation Fuel's Director of Community Programs Brenda Watson.

To date, HIPP has provided energy assistance to more than 170 Connecticut families and individuals who were able to resume or maintain housing as a result. Applicants for HIPP must be below 60% of the state median income to qualify for an energy assistance grant and a registered client at one of the three intake sites.



St. Elizabeth House Transitional Living Program is home to 44 homeless adults who live in single rooms for up to two years. During that transitional period, the agency provides intensive case management and works with clients to prepare them for employment and job placement, with a final goal of finding permanent housing.

Shared Mission Helps Partnership Succeed

Reverend Mary Shepard believes the Faith Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church fuel bank's partnership with Operation Fuel works so well because they share a similar mission: helping individuals and families who are going through a financial hardship and need energy assistance.

From July 1, 2015 through the end of February, the fuel bank provided \$104,675 in Operation Fuel energy assistance grants to 232 households in Stamford and Norwalk.

Reverend Shepard, who serves as assistant to the pastor in social action and visitation for Faith Tabernacle

Missionary Baptist Church, said her fuel bank's clients include elderly and disabled people on fixed incomes, working families with low incomes, people who are temporarily unemployed and single-parent households that are struggling financially.

Despite lower oil prices and a milder winter, the Stamford fuel bank had given out about \$70,000 in winter energy assistance to 158 households through the end of February. Some examples of households that have been helped recently by Operation Fuel include an

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elderly couple who could not afford to buy oil to heat their home and a woman who had to quit her job to take care of her terminally ill husband.

Both couples were extremely thankful to Operation Fuel, said Reverend Shepard adding, “I could go on and on about how Operation Fuel has helped clients in the Stamford/Norwalk area in emergency and crisis situations. I greatly appreciate Operation Fuel working so diligently with our fuel bank to approve clients’ applications in a timely manner.”



Reverend Mary Shepard, the Faith Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church.

Westbrook Residents Need Help

There is a perception that anyone who lives in the town of Westbrook is well off financially. Elizabeth Carpenter knows firsthand that this just isn’t true.

Carpenter is the social services coordinator for the town, and many of the Westbrook residents she helps are disabled, unemployed, underemployed, or elderly and living on a fixed income.



Elizabeth Carpenter, Westbrook Social Services.

“Living on a low, fixed income is very stressful. Part of my job is helping people find alternative sources to help ease their financial burden. One important resource is Operation Fuel,” she said. Overall affordable housing is the biggest issue that clients face, and high utility bills is second. In the past year, Westbrook has had the highest increase in food pantry users from the nine towns that participate in The Shoreline Soup Kitchens and Pantries.

“Often it’s hard to plan for life circumstances such as the loss of a job or divorce and with this economy very

few people are able to keep up with the day to day, let alone have anything to put aside. This year with the warm weather and lower price of oil, it has been a blessing, but the need is still there,” said Carpenter, who also is the fuel bank director.

This past fiscal year, Operation Fuel provided more than \$12,368 in energy assistance to 31 Westbrook households. One of the clients was Dave and his wife, Jane, who have lived in their mobile home in Westbrook for over 40 years. Dave works part time at a grocery store and collects a small monthly Social Security check. Jane has several health problems and is unable to work. Her medication alone averages about \$800 each month. Several years ago the couple got into credit card debt, when they used their cards to pay for some of their basic necessities. Today, they are still trying to pay off that debt. They had kerosene heat until their furnace broke two years ago. Now they are using electric space heaters. Every day is a financial struggle for the couple.

When Dave received a shut-off notice for his electricity he turned to Westbrook social services. “I had them apply for an Operation Fuel grant because I knew they would qualify based upon their need and means. I honestly don’t know what would have happened if they didn’t get help from Operation Fuel,” explained Carpenter.

Operation Fuel Last Option for Many

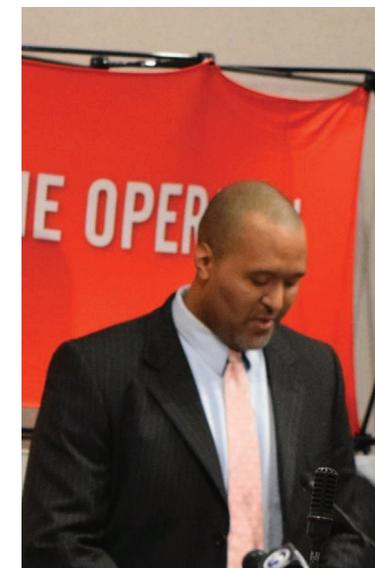
Without Operation Fuel, Joel Cox says the Enfield Neighborhood Services Fuel Bank would never be able to help as many Enfield residents stay warm during the cold winter months and keep their electricity running year-round.

Cox, who is the assistant director of social services for the town of Enfield, said that because of Operation Fuel, the Enfield fuel bank has been able to help struggling families and individuals when there were no other options. “Over the years, we have been able to pull hundreds of families back from the brink of a utility-related disaster, something that wouldn’t have been possible without Operation Fuel funding,” he added.

Sarah is one of the many Enfield residents who Operation Fuel has helped. She recently received a shut-off notice for her electricity. Although Sarah is 68, she doesn’t qualify for Social Security benefits and has a minimal income.

Sarah lives in subsidized housing, so if she lost her utility service she also would have faced eviction. After running out of options, she turned to the Enfield fuel bank and within a

few days was approved for an energy assistance grant from Operation Fuel. Sarah’s situation is not unique. “Every year we see individuals and families struggling to make ends meet; they’ve tried their best to keep up with their utility or heating expenses and at some point they run out of options,” concluded Cox.



Joel Cox of Enfield Neighborhood Services Fuel Bank, speaking at Operation Fuel’s press conference which released the Home Energy Affordability Gap: Connecticut (2015) report.

For Second Year in a Row GoodWorks Insurance and CEMA Collaborate On Generous Donation

GoodWorks Insurance launched a community service initiative with the Connecticut Energy Marketers Association (CEMA) for the second year in a row to support Operation Fuel.



GoodWorks unveiled the initiative by pledging a minimum \$10,000 donation to Operation Fuel and promising to match up to \$5,000 in donations from CEMA’s member companies.

As a result of the generous collaboration between GoodWorks Insurance and CEMA, Operation Fuel received a combined donation of \$15,300. The donation will be used to help more than 30 lower-income Connecticut families keep the heat and electricity on in their homes.

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“Operation Fuel does invaluable work statewide, where one in five residents has a hard time paying for energy. We’re honored to join with CEMA to support Operation Fuel,” said Chad Yonker, GoodWorks Insurance chairman and CEO.

“CEMA is so happy that GoodWorks and the home heating oil dealers in our state were able to contribute to Operation Fuel’s mission to ensure that people in need have access to energy assistance. We are proud of our ongoing relationship with these organizations and the great work that they do,” said CEMA President Chris Herb.

“The generous support from GoodWorks Insurance and CEMA shows that we are all part of the Operation. Without the support of the community, Operation Fuel could not do the work that we do,” said Operation Fuel Executive Director

Patricia Wrice. “We are so grateful to GoodWorks Insurance and CEMA for their significant donations at a time of year when support is greatly needed,” added Director of Development Kim O’Brien Green.

GoodWorks Insurance is a regional independent insurance agency headquartered in Glastonbury, Conn., with additional offices in New Milford, Avon and Columbia, Conn., and Great Barrington and Worcester, Mass. It donates 50% of its operating profit to local charities through GoodWorks Community Grants. For information about GoodWorks, go to www.goodworksinsurance.com.

CEMA is based in Cromwell, Conn., and consists of 585 Connecticut home heating oil dealers and gasoline distributors. For more information on CEMA, go to <http://www.ctema.com>.



GoodWorks Insurance donated \$12,650 to Operation Fuel as part of a collaboration with the Connecticut Energy Marketers Association (CEMA), which donated \$2,650, for a total donation of \$15,300. Pictured from left are, Operation Fuel’s Director of Development Kim O’Brien Green, GoodWorks Senior Vice President Curt Johnson, Nancy Bulkeley, Chairperson of Operation Fuel’s board and Senior Community Affairs Representative for Dominion Nuclear Connecticut, and Operation Fuel’s Executive Director Patricia Wrice.

EOS Partnering With Operation Fuel



Environmental Office Solutions (EOS) and Operation Fuel are partnering to promote recycling and reduce landfill waste, while helping Connecticut residents who need energy assistance. EOS, of East Hartford, Conn., will make a donation to Operation Fuel, when businesses and organizations collect used print cartridges (inkjet and laser/toner cartridges) for EOS to recycle. The amount of the donation will be determined by the type and quantity of cartridges collected by EOS.



“We appreciate the support of Environmental Office Solutions. Every donation we receive can help to make a difference. Operation Fuel is often the last resort for vulnerable families and individuals who are struggling to pay their energy bills,” explained Operation Fuel’s Executive Director Patricia Wrice.

Before collecting cartridges, companies and organizations that want to participate in the program should contact Brian Marconi at 860-291-1900, ext. 305, or email bmarconi@eosusa.com for more

information and mention that you would like to support Operation Fuel. Environmental Office Solutions is a leader in helping companies, government agencies, and consumers recycle their used toner and inkjet cartridges. EOS, which started in 1996, has custom-tailored, comprehensive recycling programs and recycles every cartridge based on R2:2013 standards. EOS also provides used printer cartridges and cell phones to secondary markets for continuous reuse, which reduces landfill waste. For more information about EOS, go to www.eosusa.com

Every donation we receive can help to make a difference.



Over the Past 32 Years Operation Fuel's Add-a-Dollar Program Has Helped 40,000 Households with Energy Assistance

When Operation Fuel implemented its Add-a-Dollar program 32 years ago through Connecticut's monthly utility bills, no one envisioned just how much of a difference the \$1.00 donations would make.

Over the past 32 years, Operation Fuel's Add-A-Dollar program has raised more than \$17 million to provide energy assistance to over 40,000 Connecticut households. Operation Fuel uses 100% of the donations made to the Add-a-Dollar program for energy assistance.

Today, Connecticut utility customers are still able to contribute to Operation Fuel through the Add-a-Dollar program when paying their monthly utility bills by check or online. Utility customers who wish to donate more than \$1.00 or who want to contribute automatically each month to Operation Fuel can do so by contacting their utility company.

"Every dollar donated to the Add-a-Dollar program goes directly to providing energy assistance. By adding just one dollar to your monthly utility bill, you can make

a tremendous difference for families and individuals who are trying to keep their heat and electricity on," explains Operation Fuel's Executive Director Patricia Wrice.

This past fiscal year, Operation Fuel provided more than \$3.6 million in energy assistance; of which \$584,610 was raised through the Add-a-Dollar program; \$460,011 from utility customers' donations and \$124,599 in utility provided shareholder-matching funds.

In addition to the Add-a-Dollar program, donations for Operation Fuel can be made online at www.operationfuel.org or mailed to Operation Fuel, Inc., 75 Charter Oak Avenue, Suite 2-240, Hartford, CT 06106.



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Our Mission: Operation Fuel brings together communities, businesses, government and individuals to ensure people in need have access to vital year-round energy assistance.



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SPRING 2016

How to Contribute

SEND A CHECK

Send a check payable to Operation Fuel, Inc. to:

Operation Fuel, Inc.
75 Charter Oak Avenue, Suite 2-240
Hartford, CT 06106

Or make a check payable to Operation Fuel, Inc. and enclose it with your utility bill. The utility companies will forward all checks to Operation Fuel.

ADD-A-DOLLAR

Support Operation Fuel through the Add-a-Dollar program with your utility company. You may donate \$1.00 by adding the amount to your utility bill, both paper bills and electronically. 100 percent of funds raised through the Add-a-Dollar program are used for energy assistance grants. The utility companies also match a percentage of Add-a-Dollar funds raised. You may contact your local utility companies to donate more than \$1.00 or to become enrolled in an automatic Add-a-Dollar program.

DONATE ONLINE

Donate online through Operation Fuel's secure Web site, www.operationfuel.org. Click on the "Donate Online" button at the top of the page.

MATCHING GIFTS

Take advantage of your company's matching gifts program. Contact your company's human resources department for more information.

ESTATE PLANNING / PLANNED GIVING

Plan for the future security of Operation Fuel by considering a planned gift through your estate plans, such as gifts of stock, real estate and life insurance policies. For more information please contact Kim O'Brien Green, Director of Development at 860-243-2345 x3303.

BE PART OF THE OPERATION

If you are a corporation or business wishing to partner with Operation Fuel please contact Kim O'Brien Green, Director of Development at 860-243-2345 x3303.