



Franklin Grand Isle Community Action

Electronic Newsletter, December 2011 – January 2012

From the Director

It hardly seems possible that we are turning the corner into another winter; funny how that always happens in Vermont. Our office is very busy this time of the year, and we will likely remain very busy right through the remainder of the heating season. This year we have the lowest level of funding that we have ever seen for the Seasonal Fuel and Crisis Fuel programs, and the cost of fuel itself has only gone up. Here's one perspective:

- In 2009 FGICA helped 798 households with the Crisis Fuel Program;
- In 2010, we worked with 969 families;
- During the 2011 heating season, we worked with 1,196 families.

We expect to see even more people in need this year, as the poor economy, low Seasonal Fuel funding and high costs of home heating fuel drive more and more families into our office seeking help against the cold winter weather.

Our Food Shelf remains busy, as well; since I was looking over previous years statistics recently, here are a couple more:

- In 2010, our Food Shelf provided 5,063 three-day grocery orders to 1,576 families
- In 2011, our Food Shelf provided 5,714 three-day grocery orders to 1,714 families.

I can not understate how extremely thankful we are to all the churches, businesses and individual doors who have written a check, brought us a donation of food or purchased Hannaford's Helping Hands gift boxes; every donation makes a difference in someone's life, every donation helps us keep someone from going hungry; so **Thank You**.

Donation Opportunity

The Hannaford's Helping Hands Food drive continues through December 31st; the Helping Hands boxes are filled with core staples of the Food Shelf, such as rice, pasta, peanut butter, soup and tuna fish. Please consider purchasing one (or more) for donation to the Food Shelf!

Holiday Schedule

FGICA will be closed on the following dates:

- ❖ Monday, December 26th, for Christmas
- ❖ Monday, January 2nd, for New Years
- ❖ Monday, January 16th for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Home Heating Fuel and Utility Assistance; New Rules and Requirements for the 2012 Season

As we noted in last month's newsletter, this year Vermont has received the lowest level of funding through the LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) that our office has seen since the beginning of the fuel assistance program.

To put it in perspective, three years ago, the average amount of a Seasonal Fuel benefit for a family in Vermont was about \$1,064.00. Last year, the benefit amount was about \$866.00, and this year, the average benefit amount is \$474.00.

Reduced funding through LIHEAP also affects the available funding for the Crisis Fuel Program, the emergency component of the overall state of Vermont Fuel Assistance service. One result of less funding is a tightening of rules related to when Crisis Fuel Assistance can be provided; Vermont needs to make the Crisis Fuel Program last as long as possible, and help as many people as possible, as we all struggle to get through this coming winter season.

All applicants for Crisis Fuel must have applied for Seasonal Fuel. If someone comes to Community Action for Crisis Fuel Assistance and has not yet applied for Seasonal Fuel Assistance, they will be denied until a Seasonal Fuel application has been completed. Community Action staff can assist with completing Seasonal Fuel applications either on-line or by filling out a paper application in our office.

All Crisis Fuel applicants who use bulk home heating fuel (oil, kerosene, propane, etc.) must sign a new state form (called a 204NST) when they first come in this year, acknowledging that they are required to request Crisis Fuel Assistance when they have ¼ tank of fuel remaining; in most fuel tanks, this would be roughly one week's worth of fuel. The Crisis Fuel Program will not cover any costs related to a tank running dry, such as special trip charges, pressure tests, furnace start up costs, or special service charges.

Planning Ahead

Don't run out of fuel!

Many low income individuals and families will need financial assistance to buy home heating fuel this year; that's simply a reality of winter in Vermont and not having enough money to cover all the bills.

However, you can avoid running completely out of fuel by checking your tank regularly, and understanding how quickly your household uses home heating fuel. Community Action *may* be able to help with the cost of a minimum delivery of fuel, but we can not cover a special trip charge.

The cost of a special trip charge, the expense fuel companies charge customers when they are asked to deliver fuel outside a normal delivery schedule, can run between \$50.00 and \$225.00, depending on the fuel company and the time of the delivery.

Watch your tank and plan ahead for your fuel needs; don't get stuck having to pay a special trip charge!

Fiscal Year 2011 Statistics (October 2010 – September 2011)
Franklin Grand Isle Community Action Food Shelf

Total Unduplicated Persons Served: 4,145 (Previous Year: 3,662)

Total Unduplicated Households: 1,714 (Previous Year: 1,576)

Total Food Shelf Grocery Orders Provided: 5,714 (Previous Year: 5,063)

Fun with numbers: the average FGICA Food Shelf grocery order is designed to provide enough food for 3 days. Last year, FGICA provided 5,714 grocery orders, or enough food to last a single person for almost 47 years.

Roughly 68% of the families that use the FGICA Food Shelf also receive 3SquaresVT benefits.

Roughly 70% of the families that use the FGICA Food Shelf have incomes that are at or below 100% of the federal poverty level; that's \$903.00 per month for a single person, \$1,215.00 per month for two people, etc. (add \$312.00 for each additional family member to calculate the poverty level for your household size).

3SquaresVT: Nutritious Food for Good Health

What is 3SquaresVT?

- It is a federal nutrition program (formerly called food stamps) that can help you buy more healthy food.
- Monthly benefits come on a debit card you can use at the grocery store or farmers market, so you have privacy and flexibility when you shop.
- For those 65 or older or getting SSI, benefits are directly deposited into your bank account.

Who is Eligible?

- 3SquaresVT is open to everyone who qualifies, including individuals, families, seniors and people with disabilities. Eligibility is based on household income.
- Income limits went up in 2009. Many Vermonters qualify and don't know it.
- Special rules make it easier for households that get Vermont Earned Income Tax Credit or that include a senior or person with a disability to be eligible.

How to Apply?

- Call 1-800-479-6151 or visit www.vermontfoodhelp.com for information, a link to the online application at www.mybenefits.vt.gov, or to request a paper application in the mail.
- Call your local Community Action Agency; FGICA can be reached at 527-7392.
- If you are 60 or older, call 1-800-642-5119 for the Vermont Senior Helpline.

This message is funded in part by the USDA, an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Tax Season

Every year, Community Action offers free preparation of basic income tax returns, property tax forms and renters rebates, for income eligible households. Most of the tax returns are prepared and filed electronically, and the FGICA staff that help with tax preparation go through VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) training in December and January. Community Action begins to offer tax preparation, by appointment, starting February 1st, 2012.

Volunteer Opportunity

- Interested in helping to prepare basic tax returns?
- Do you have time available anytime during February, March or early April, 2012?
- VITA volunteers need to pass a basic tax preparation course, available on-line. Volunteers who pass the course can volunteer just a few hours, or several days' worth of time.

For more details on becoming a VITA volunteer, please contact Walter at 527-7392.

Julie's Kitchen Corner

In the spirit of the holidays, Julie has brought us not one but two festive and sure-to-please cookie recipes, both of which she found at <http://allrecipes.com>. Both easy to make recipes feature ingredients often found at our Food Shelf; chopped figs for the first recipe, and rolled oats for the second. Enjoy!



Fig Cookies

A quick, simple recipe, these cookies aren't just for holidays! Studded with nuts and tasty bites of sweet fig, they are sure to be a popular desert.

Ingredients: 1 cup white sugar ½ cup shortening 1 egg
 2 cups all-purpose flour 1 teaspoon baking soda ½ teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon baking powder ½ teaspoon ground cloves 1 cup chopped figs
 ½ cup chopped walnuts

Directions: preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.
 Cream the sugar and shortening, and beat in the egg
 Sift the dry ingredients together, and blend with the creamed mixture
 Fold in the figs and nuts
 Drop by spoonfuls onto a greased cookie sheet, and bake for 15 – 20 minutes

Chocolate No-Bake Cookies

These sweet treats are a long time classic, and will be well received by children and adults alike.

Ingredients: 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups white sugar $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter
 4 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder $\frac{1}{2}$ cup peanut butter
 3 cups quick-cooking oats 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Directions: In a medium saucepan, combine sugar, milk, butter, and cocoa
 Bring the mixture to a boil, and cook for 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ minutes
 Remove from heat, and stir in peanut butter, oats, and vanilla
 Drop by spoonfuls onto waxed paper; let cool until hardened