

Homelessness prevention programs to end as state sweeps source of grants

KINGMAN – Mohave County’s Eviction Prevention and Emergency Housing Assistance (EPEH) program and Housing Trust Fund Emergency Repair program will cease to exist as the State of Arizona sweeps the Housing Trust Fund.

The two programs are both funded through the Housing Trust Fund, which derives its money from unclaimed property proceeds, said Mohave County Housing and Community Revitalization Manager Dave Wolf. “Emergency Housing Assistance goes back to 2000 and our Emergency Housing Rehab began in 2007. The state Legislature is sweeping the unclaimed property proceeds from the Housing Trust Fund as part of its effort to balance the state’s budget.”

The impact in Mohave County will be the end of Emergency Housing Assistance on June 30, he said. Emergency Housing Rehab is on a two-year contract and will end on December 31, 2010.

The Emergency Housing Rehabilitation program serves low-income senior citizens, disabled people and families with children, County Grants Coordinator Barbara Blythe said. “We will go a person’s home who has no heating or cooling or their roof is leaking and make emergency repairs so that person can stay in his or her home. Some have no electricity or water. These are emergency situations that, if left undone, could cause that person or family to become displaced or homeless.”

Emergency Housing Assistance “is basically eviction prevention and assistance for the homeless,” Wolf said.



Barbara Blythe and Dave Wolf

“We’ve had it for 10 years. It is a one-time payment of utilities, rent deposit, first month’s rent or even a house payment. It is a once-in-a-lifetime payment to prevent a family from becoming homeless or to house a homeless person who has sufficient income to sustain. We primarily do homeless prevention since applicants have to show sufficient income to sustain after they receive the one-time payment and this is difficult with the homeless population. The loss of these programs will have a dramatic impact on the community that we have served the last 10 years.

“In 2008, we received \$259,056 for our Emergency Housing Program and served 450 families countywide,” he said. “In 2009, we received \$230,000 and served 390 families. This year we had a reduction in funding and were down to \$153,000 and we have served 195 families to date. We will probably serve about 240 by the end of the fiscal year. Typically, we would serve about 10 families per month in each of the three cities. This is a very high-demand program. We open up the waiting list for

the program on the second Monday of each month. The program's policy is first come, first served. Some people choose to line up outside our offices very early in the morning on that day. Without this funding, these people are going to slip into homelessness. It can be devastating on the communities."

"In 2007, Emergency Housing Rehab received \$495,000 and rehabilitated 62 homes," Blythe said. "Our current contract of \$275,000 has already assisted 31 homes and we expect to serve eight to 10 more by the time it expires on December 31."

According to Wolf, some of the money from the Trust has been used to match administration costs for federal grants, such as HOME funds used for Owner Occupied Housing Rehabilitation and other programs, "which, because of its loss, will cause a snowball effect on decreasing local community services."

The state has tremendous debt while our economy is struggling, Wolf said. "But this is exactly the kind of economy where these grants are needed more than ever. When someone loses a job and then becomes re-employed, and there is a need for a one-time assistance to pay a month's rent to keep a home, our program can save that person from becoming homeless. Participants have to show that, with one-time assistance, they can be able to pay their way in the future."

The Community Services Department is still analyzing the impact of the loss of these grants.

"The state Department of Housing did what they could to hold on to this money for these programs," Blythe said. "But the state swept the fund."

Wolf and Blythe said other services will continue because they are also funded through federal grants.

"We will continue to serve the public with the resources that are still available," Blythe said. "We will do housing rehab under Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and we will be doing weatherization. There is a void created because of the end of these grants.

"We are hoping that, as one door closes, another door will open and we will be able to resume these services to the community," she said. "We are diligently looking for other grants and other partnerships with agencies that will allow us to continue services. We are very proactive in looking for funding to meet the needs in the community."

"Here is another example of the state robbing funds that are targeted for local communities," Mohave County Manager Ron Walker said. "The state is trying to bail itself out of its self-inflicted problems."