

CAC's Weatherization Program Lightens Senior Citizen's Burden

Though Barbara Blakely* lives a modest, no-frills existence – residing in a 920-square foot home in Jessup and driving a 2001 Toyota - she can barely pay her bills.

Barbara's financial hardship started four years ago when the then 65-year-old retired. "I would like to have worked longer, but the job was too stressful," says Barbara, who suffers from depression, diabetes, high blood pressure and tendonitis. Barbara now tries to scrap by on the \$21,600 a year she collects from Social Security, a pension and a 401K, but it is not easy.

Thanks to Community Action Council's Weatherization Program, Barbara's financial burden has been lightened and her home will be more comfortable. Her home audit determined that weatherizing her house would substantially reduce her energy bills.

In March, 2010, contract workers took two days to weatherize her 25-year-old home. They installed a new heat pump and new ducts for \$6,700. In addition, weatherization workers replaced lighting with energy efficient light bulbs; reduced air infiltration from the basement so the floor would be warmer; added insulation in the attic and foam insulation in all her electric outlets; reconnected her kitchen ceiling light; and caulked around her windows. The additional work cost about \$2,300.

"I would have had to replace the air conditioner soon if I had not gotten a new heat pump," says Barbara. "I would not have been able to afford a new air conditioner. What would I have done?" The improvements will reduce her electric bill.

Barbara took advantage of a Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development program for rehabilitation of her home. Such homeowners are automatically referred to the Weatherization Program. Her home audit determined that weatherizing her home and replacing her expensive baseboard heaters with a heat pump would be cost effective. CAC funding increased from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) made it possible to include the change to a heat pump. Due to ARRA, CAC's funds available for weatherization have increased from about \$100,000 per year to \$600,000 in the last year. More importantly, the amount available for equipment replacement has increased dramatically. "I appreciate those willing to help me in my time of need," says Barbara. "I am not desperate. I have a roof over my head. I just need a little help along the way."

CAC has gotten funds for weatherization from the Federal Department of Energy since 1978. CAC has gotten most of its weatherization applications through its Energy Assistance Program. Individuals interested in weatherization should submit applications directly to CAC. The state's Department of Housing and Community Development has significantly increased income eligibility for the Weatherization Program making it available to the broader population. For more information, call 410-313-6440.

* The name has been changed at the request of the individual in the story.