

GreenBox promotes conservation to food bank clients

By Scott Rosts

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LINCOLN -- Clients of Community Care of West Niagara are receiving a helping hand in conserving energy in their homes.

Last week the Friends of the Earth-Canada and the Ontario Association of Food Banks joined Ontario's Minister of Energy and representatives from Enbridge Gas Distribution and Union Gas to launch a pilot project to help families tackle climate change by conserving energy, saving money and improving comfort. They are distributing an Energy GreenBox, a kit with energy-saving initiatives, to food bank clients in various areas of the province.

"For the average Canadian, climate change can present all sorts of challenges. But for families who are trying to make ends meet, it can be especially difficult. By teaming up with the Ontario Association of Food Banks, we are providing relief to thousands of families across the province," says Beatrice Olivastri of Friends of the Earth-Canada.

The Energy GreenBox contains rolls of insulating foam to seal doors and windows, draft excluders for power outlets, two compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL) along with energy conservation tips and an offer for a complimentary membership in Friends of the Earth.

So far, more than 200 have been handed out to clients of Community Care of West Niagara. Cheryl Scott said it's an important tool to provide access to energy-saving initiatives to low-income families.

"It's unfortunate, but when our clients go into hardware stores it's more feasible for them to buy the 49-cent lightbulb," she said. "The fluorescent bulbs are about \$10 for a couple and it's that initial cost that our clients are lacking."

Another key component of the Energy GreenBox is an important offer that qualified Enbridge Gas Distribution and Union Gas customers can use for access to substantial energy conservation in their homes at no cost.

"Enbridge does a wonderful job," said Scott, adding they will go in and assist families by installing an energy-efficient showerhead, at no cost, as well as other initiatives such as foam pipe insulation or programmable thermostats.

Scott said programs such as the GreenBox are important because they reach out to lower-income families.

"A lot of the time some of the energy grants are focused at the middle- to high-income families," she said. "This is accessible and valuable to the lower-income families."

In addition to the hopes that the bulbs and weather stripping will assist with clients' financial burdens, Scott noted the campaign is also about awareness, as well.

"It's good to educate as well," said Scott. "Being proactive environmentally is a trend we all really need to be aware of."

Clients who receive a kit can register to become a Friends of the Earth member for free. A registration form is in the GreenBox.

Scott said Community Care will continue its partnership with the Friends of the Earth.

"We're actually working on a summer program to help with air conditioning bills during the heat," she said.