

HELP

Home Energy Link Program

Report
Fiscal Year 2006/07



Submitted to
City of Willits
Community Development Agency
Alan Falleri, Director
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Prepared by
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Executive Summary

REDI has completed the first twelve months of the Home Energy Link Program to assess the needs for residential energy conservation services within Willits and to provide direct weatherization services and materials to low- and moderate-income households.

Results of HELP

- 328 completed household energy survey forms – 15% of 2,200 Willits households
- 60 (53 plus an additional 7 near completion) weatherized households at an average value of \$1,200 each for a total of \$63,600, and an additional \$8,750 in Utility Bill Credits at \$250 each
- 20% average household energy reduction
- Over \$180,000 estimated 10-year energy savings of 60 homes
- \$303,000 added value delivered to the Local Economy
- Water savings through conservation retrofits
- Long-term reduction in greenhouse gas emissions
- Increased awareness and demand for program services
- Local loan fund established by REDI to assist with financing
- REDI named a PG&E agent for their CARE/FERA program countywide.

Recommendation for Weatherizing Willits within Five Years

- Continue Energy Surveys with target of 15% of households per year
- Weatherize 80 to 100 households per year, for a target of 400 to 500
- Coordinate with other area agencies to provide more efficient services.

Needs Identified/Other Recommendations

- Expanded marketing of the program
- Additional outreach to target communities including low-income and Hispanic residents
- Networking with social services agencies, senior services programs, churches, schools and other organizations for household referrals
- Development of funding from other sources such as PG&E, City of Willits Water Department, fees for services, and grants.
- Expand program beyond Willits City limits
- Sponsor formation of a Community Energy Authority.

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Introduction

HELP is the Home Energy Link Program. HELP assists Willits residents in reducing the amount of energy that households use. HELP is a proactive response to rising utility costs for electricity and natural gas and the need to use energy efficiently for environmental and other reasons. HELP is currently funded by the City of Willits through Renewable Energy Development Institute (REDI), a local 501c3 not-for-profit engaged in energy education and demonstration. REDI was awarded \$25,000 by the City of Willits for a Pilot Project that ran from July 15, 2006 through January 15, 2007. Funding of an additional \$50,000 was granted to extend the HELP project through June 30, 2007. The City's Low and Moderate Income Housing Fund (Budget #210-2100-6001-000) was the grant source.

HELP directs low- and moderate-income households to existing federal, state, utility, and City programs that provide energy improvements, and in some cases utility bill payment assistance, to qualified applicants. Programs for low-income earners are completely free to the households. Moderate-income households located in the Redevelopment Area within City limits can apply for energy improvement matching grants that will meet up to 50% of the costs.

HELP is available to owners and tenants living in houses, apartments, and mobile homes within City limits. Interested households are identified using a variety of outreach techniques. HELP staff contact interested households and provide information, applications, and follow-up assistance as needed. Households apply directly to programs for assistance.

HELP has partnered with the City of Willits, North Coast Energy Services of Ukiah, and PG&E, to provide these services.



Window Caulking

Program Goals

HELP was first initiated as a six-month Pilot Project to conduct:

- A door-to-door Household Survey of 250 low and moderate-income households within the City of Willits
- Energy Assessments for 100 of the households surveyed
- Weatherizations for 25 of the 100 households assessed, including two complete "Energy MakeOvers." An Energy MakeOver implements a prioritized list of recommended energy-use improvements.

The ultimate goals of HELP are to:

- Reduce the amount of energy used by Willits City households
- Offer every qualified household within City limits the opportunity to participate

Program Results

From the start of the Pilot Project on July 15, 2006 through the end of Phase 2 on June 30, 2007, HELP has conducted:

- **328 Household Surveys**
- **75 Energy Assessments** (both low- and moderate-income)
- **60 Weatherizations** (53 completed and 7 near completion).

328 Completed Household Surveys

Through household surveys, the HELP team identified and sent information and applications to:

- **265 Low-income households** eligible for utility bill credits, free energy assessments, and free weatherization services
- **15 Moderate-income households** eligible for free energy assessments, grants, rebates, and loans
- The balance of surveys that were conducted identified other City residents who declined to participate at this time or who did not qualify for the program.



Signing up a HELP client

75 Energy Assessments

60 low-income household energy assessments each provided:

- a list of recommended energy improvements
- a combustion and safety test for all natural gas fired appliances
- a “duct blaster”, as needed, for testing
- heating and cooling ducts.

15 moderate-income household energy assessments each provided:

- a software-generated report with prioritized recommendations
- financial assistance information.



Electric Water-Heater Timer

60 Weatherizations (53 complete and 7 near completion)

Weatherizations by North Coast Energy Services have provided, as needed:

- weather-stripping, caulking, insulation
- water heater blankets
- refrigerator, microwave, range, heater, AC, and hot water heater replacement
- heating/cooling system repairs
- compact fluorescent lamps
- faucet aerators, low-flow shower heads
- solar shade screens, interior storm windows
- door and window repair and replacement.



Under-floor Insulation

Weatherization services received by income-eligible households

- Carbon monoxide alarm – 29
- Caulking – 29
- Furnace filters – 6
- Outlet gaskets – 23
- Duct Repair – 5
- Weatherstripping – 29
- Door replacement – 3
- Compact fluorescents – 32
- Hot water flow restrictor – 29
- Door sweep repair – 23
- Window replacement
- Low flow shower head – 9
- AC vent cover – 3
- Water heater blanket – 7
- New refrigerator – 8
- New microwave – 20
- Air conditioner or swamp cooler – 6
- Floor insulation – 7
- Window shade screens – 6
- New furnace - 1
- Reset thermometer - 3
- Lamp replacement - 1
- Water heater timer - 6
- Hand held shower head - 4
- Attic vent - 1
- Ceiling insulation - 2
- Air conditioner repair - 2
- Furnace repair - 2
- Storm windows - 9
- Kitchen range repair - 1
- New kitchen range - 1
- Energy use education - 11

Of all the positive results of HELP, perhaps one of the most valuable, is the good will expressed repeatedly—by both low and moderate-income participants—toward Willits City government for providing HELP.

Estimated Value Delivered to Local Economy

The following are estimated dollar amounts of value delivered to City of Willits residents, businesses, and organizations as a direct result of the HELP program. Estimates are based on recent indicators from the California Department of Community Services and Development, input from weatherization services implementer North Coast Energy Services (NCES), PG&E figures, and data reporting by REDI.



Solar Shade Screen

The additional value delivered was provided from other sources other than the City grant, at no cost to households, property owners, or the City. Indications are that *at least* 60 households have been weatherized and received a household utility bill credit. Note that some household weatherizations were scheduled to be completed after current program ended on June 30, 2007.

The US Department of Energy (DOE) website states that community-wide energy improvements generate local Economic Development. DOE acknowledges that 80% of a utility bill payment typically leaves a community permanently and is unavailable to be spent again locally. Reducing utility bill payments recaptures local dollars that can then be spent locally, stimulating local Economic Development.

Weatherization Services Value	
\$1,200 average x 60 Households	\$ 72,000
Household Utility Bill Credit	
\$250 average x 60 Households	15,000
Weatherized Household Annual Dollar Savings	
\$300 average x 60 Households = \$18,000 x 10-year life of improvements	180,000
Local Business Vending Supplies & Services	<u>3,600</u>
Total Estimated Value Delivered to Local Economy	\$303,000

HELP also provided employment to a number of Willits residents with 4.5 part-time staff positions during the term of this first year of the program.

Program Progress and Additional Benefits

- Percentage of City Households Surveyed in 12 months - 15% (328 surveys / 2,200 households)
- Percentage of City Households Surveyed that received Weatherization – 18%
- Weatherized Household Annual Energy Cost Reduction - 20% average
- Reduction of Greenhouse Gases (GHG):
34.6 tons carbon (1.58 lbs CO₂ / kWh x 43,750 kWh = 69,125 / 2000 lbs)
75,000 kWh electricity saved ($\$300 / 2 = 150 / .12$) x 60
5,555 therms natural gas saved ($\$300 / 2 = 150 / 1.62$) x 60

Program Analysis

Outreach to Households

HELP staff found interested households through:

- Outreach to **community organizations**
- **Tabling** at City public places and events
- Placing **brochures** on doors of neighborhood homes, medical clinics, social service agencies, schools, businesses and church programs
- Displaying **posters** at over 100 City locations
- **Referral** by family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, participants
- Public Service Announcements, articles, advertisements and interviews in various **media**.



Tabling at public event

All of these forms of contact worked well and are worth continuing and expanding as techniques used to identify households interested in participating. A brief summary of each follows.

Community Organizations. All were supportive of HELP; unfortunately, due to privacy considerations, few were willing to directly provide names of households that might participate in the program. Service organizations such as Willits Community Food Bank, Meals-on-Wheels, and Early Start that deliver services directly to low-income households were completely willing to promote HELP by including program brochures with their deliveries. Organizations with locations used by the public, such as Little Lake Health Clinic, Family Services, and Willits Chamber of Commerce displayed HELP flyers and brochures.

Tabling. Tabling involved displaying hand-out program information on a table in public places to engage passers-by in order to inform them and encourage them to participate in HELP. Tabling was often a successful point of contact, although elderly residents often did not want to leave personal information for HELP staff to be able to contact them afterwards. They preferred to take a brochure and then call the HELP office after taking time to read the information at home.

Brochures. A HELP introductory brochure was created, including a Spanish-language version. Several thousand copies of the brochure were distributed throughout the City at multiple public places, including businesses. The HELP brochure was used to leaflet most City neighborhoods by leaving a copy on household front doors or fences.

Posters. Posters were displayed at over 100 City locations, including public bulletin boards, businesses, and organizations.

Referrals. Especially with the elderly, word-of-mouth referral from family, friend, neighbor, or familiar organization was particularly effective in gaining initial trust and participation. This seems to be due to general distrust among the elderly and to a few recent local scams that have preyed on elderly homeowners.

Media. HELP has utilized local Radio and newsprint. HELP was featured in three Willits News articles, and three KZYX&Z interviews. HELP had an ongoing Public service announcement on KZYX&Z and in the WELL (Willits Economic Localization) newsletter. HELP also placed advertisements in the Willits Nickel & Dime, which has a circulation of approximately 4,000.

Household Survey Methods

HELP conducted door-to-door Household Surveys for the first third of the program. For the remainder of the program, staff utilized telephone surveys, conducted from the REDI office, to interview interested households. Phone surveys have proven to be more cost effective than the door-to-door surveys. HELP staff are generally able to easily develop rapport with households over the phone and successfully convey program information. When tabling, attempted Household Surveying was difficult and most participants seemed unwilling to take the time at that point of contact.

Household Participation

Once identified, it has been easy to provide information to interested households. Qualifying interested households as low- or moderate-income is quick and confidential with the HELP Household Survey.

HELP has been challenged to continually find new households to survey, particularly moderate-income residents within the City limits. HELP was able to attract 15 moderate-income households to participate in the free Energy Assessment. Three have indicated they are purchasing at least some of the energy improvements recommended by the Energy Assessment.

Follow-up calls by HELP staff were necessary to motivate and assist many households to complete the paperwork process. Occasionally, staff conducted home visits when assistance was needed to complete the application process. Community awareness of REDI's outreach efforts, particularly relative to HELP, has become much more widespread, creating a good momentum for effective continuation of HELP in the 2007/08 Fiscal Year.

Program Budget Considerations

The HELP Pilot Project was offered to the City at a substantial discount. Unfortunately, this resulted in staff wages and salaries initially targeted too low to attract and retain consistent staff during the first half of the program. REDI staff compensation was increased during the second phase.

“Energy MakeOvers”

The free Weatherizations being conducted are far more comprehensive than even initially hoped for. Many would qualify as being what was intended to be considered an Energy MakeOver. HELP was able to leverage City funding by having households take advantage of energy programs already funded by other entities.

The Energy MakeOver concept was suspended early in the program as a theme for program promotion. With the limited program funds available for paid advertising, the concept added an additional area of explanation that proved difficult to convey without more sophisticated concept-oriented market advertising.



A HELP recipient is very pleased with her new refrigerator.

Other Related Programs

REDI operates several other energy reduction and money saving programs which link well with HELP.

- **Flex Your Power:** In March, 2007 REDI was one of 17 organizations throughout California selected to participate in a statewide campaign to educate the public on ways to conserve energy and increase energy efficiency in their homes. This campaign is focusing on rural areas within California, and REDI is charged with covering all of Mendocino County. REDI is participating in various events throughout the county through the end of November. A variety of materials are distributed to event participants to educate and encourage them to reduce their energy use. The Flex Your Power program is funded by California utility ratepayers and administered by California Investor-Owned Utilities under the auspices of the California Public Utilities Commission.
- **PG&E CARE/FERA Programs:** In April of this year, PG&E selected REDI to be an agent to enroll all qualified Mendocino County residents into their California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) and Family Electric Rate Assistance (FERA) programs. CARE provides a 20% discount on monthly gas and/or electric bills for low income households, and FERA provides savings on electric bills for large households of three or more persons. PG&E's statistics show that there are over 18,000 residents in Mendocino County who qualify for one of these programs, and **only 53%** of those qualified are benefiting from these programs. REDI has sent out at least 150 applications to county residents. The CARE/FERA applications are included with HELP materials that are sent to City residents, in addition to being sent to non-City residents. REDI believes we can increase the number of participants in these programs significantly.
- **Small Business Energy Alliance (SBEA):** REDI has signed a contract with MSI Integrated Solutions (MSI) to provide Small Business Energy Alliance (SBEA) energy reduction services to businesses in Mendocino and Lake Counties. SBEA is funded by PG&E. REDI enrolls businesses to receive free energy assessments on lighting and cooling system usage. The businesses are then given a report on their monthly and annual usage, along with a list of suggested upgrades to reduce both usage and expenses. The businesses can then choose to have the work performed by one of the licensed contractors. In Willits, businesses also have the added incentive of applying to the City of Willits for the Matching Grant program which, if approved, will cover 50% of the expenses, up to \$7,500.

REDI has observed a distinct synergy develop between all of the programs we are offering. Not only advertising, but word of mouth from satisfied clients, has made our programs familiar to an increasing number of people and businesses, but REDI, too, is becoming recognized throughout the City and the County as the place to go to for assistance in reducing energy costs and use.

Recommendations

Plan for Long-Term Program Completion

To build on the initial success and make the most of startup efforts, we recommend that HELP continue as an ongoing program. Materials and techniques developed through the first year of the HELP Project can be expanded, using best practices identified to date. The promotional goal of HELP is market saturation, which means every household within City limits has been made aware of HELP and has had the opportunity to take advantage of the program. Based on results through June 30, 2007, this would likely take five years. It is recommended that Willits continue to fund HELP as a five-year program (year just completed and four more years). Funding would be reviewed annually, informed by a HELP Progress Report. The City of Willits program goal would be to weatherize 80 to 100 of the 2,200 households within City limits annually, improving about 400-500 homes over a 5-year period. (Note that this projection has been refined since the Pilot Project report.)

Funding for a subsequent REDI contract budget would continue as a time-and-materials, not-to-be-exceeded amount. Invoices would continue to include a summary of progress toward desired benchmarks. A proposed second-year budget will be made available soon.

Continue Existing HELP Format

- Multiple outreach techniques to identify and engage interested households
- Household Surveys conducted by phone
- Mailing of information and applications to eligible households
- Followup calls to assist household completion of application process
- Free Energy Assessments for low- and moderate-income households
- Free Weatherization services for low-income households
- Affordable Weatherization upgrades for qualified moderate-income households.



"We hope that you will choose to continue the funding for this practical and necessary energy conservation program which has made such a difference in our lives, and can do the same for others living in the Willits area."

- Terry & Theresa Wilcox

HELP would develop more effective outreach and persuasion for **moderate-income households** through:

- Stronger outreach to community organizations, many members of which are moderate-income
- Direct outreach to moderate-income households through personal and business contacts of HELP staff and REDI Board
- Improvement of program materials including a sample Payment Plan that demonstrates payback financed with energy savings, available rebates, City Matching Energy Grants, and loans.

HELP would continue to expand **Latino community** outreach with Spanish-language materials, including the HELP brochure recently translated by staff of Nuestra Alianza, and ideally, a bilingual Program Representative for phone surveys and followup calls to Spanish-speaking households.

HELP also would continue to:

- Reach out to property managers
- Develop funding from additional sources
- Work cooperatively with North Coast Energy Services to improve Willits-specific program tracking and reporting by NCES
- Promote the program by purchasing ads with Noyo Theater, Willits Community Theatre, and other venues.

Coordinate with ICLEA Program

HELP can provide data and assistance to the City of Willits' ICLEA—Local Governments for Sustainability initiative, such as greenhouse gas emission reduction results and educational opportunities.

Expand Program Beyond City Limits

HELP can be expanded throughout Mendocino County with funding from additional sources. Interestingly, HELP received requests from over 249 Willits residents in unincorporated County areas outside of the City limits. Roughly half of those reside in Brooktrails. Easily twice as many more Willits county names could have been collected if staff had been actively engaging county residents.

HELP was unable to assist Willits residents outside of City limits because of funding source restrictions. All of those households were placed on a list to be contacted at a later date when other funding can be generated for serving County residents. Existing HELP techniques such as cost-effective Phone Surveys would support eventual program expansion to outlying county areas.

Continued funding and support from the City of Willits could be the link that leads to an expanded HELP countywide.

Sponsor Formation of a CEA

If a Community Energy Authority (CEA) were to be formed as enabled under Assembly Bill 1659, many conservation and renewable energy programs could be efficiently delivered through comprehensive planning and management. As in similar joint powers agencies, elected officials could represent the various local jurisdictions, with administration provided by contract or other agreement for staffing. According to the Local Government Commission (LGC), "*Local governments seeking to take advantage of programs may want to consider establishing a CEA since it is tailor-made for communities wishing to take the lead in planning and developing more sustainable cities.*" LGC offers to assist local governments in forming CEAs and identifying funding for programs.

City of Willits, once known as "the Solar Capital of the World," could introduce this idea to other local governments in Mendocino County and potentially sponsor establishment of a new CEA.

(Refer to www.lgc.org/freepub/energy/factsheets/fact5.html)

Thanks and Acknowledgements

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- ❖ Alan Falleri and Dee Lynn Carpenter, City of Willits Department of Community Development, for their guidance in initiating HELP
- ❖ Mayor Tami Jorgensen for her personal assistance and ongoing support of HELP
- ❖ Willits City Council for their unanimous support for HELP Pilot Project funding approval and continuation of the program through June 30, 2007
- ❖ Members of the REDI Board of Directors for their consultation in developing and supporting HELP
- ❖ Members of the Coordinating Committee of Willits Economic Localization (WELL)
- ❖ Lynn Kennelly and the Willits Chamber of Commerce for their enthusiastic support of REDI's energy savings programs
- ❖ The Willits Nickel & Dime for helping advertise HELP to the community
- ❖ The programmers at KZYX&Z public radio for valuable free airtime for PSAs
- ❖ The HELP staff and volunteers for their hard work and commitment to providing much-needed services to the community
- ❖ All others who helped to make HELP a success!

Appendices

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