



# The Florida Weatherization Network



by Donna Carman

Utility costs can bring a poor working family to its knees. When your life's work is to provide affordable housing to some of the poorest working families in the nation, you see clearly that rehabilitating a house without making it energy efficient is to deliver an affordable

product that may not be sustainable for a family that cannot withstand high and unexpected utility bills. It sets the family up for failure. Rehabilitation and retrofits of housing for low-income families can and should include delivering a house that is energy efficient.

An affordable utility bill is just as important as an affordable mortgage. Providers of affordable homeownership housing understand that it is imperative for families living on a tight budget to have a fixed rate mortgage so that they can budget properly. Utility bills necessarily fluctuate depending upon the season, but this fluctuation can be minimized if a home is not leaking. To deliver a house that is energy efficient, energy conservation work must be independently verified.

The ARRA, part of the federal economic stimulus plan, made an extraordinarily positive impact in Florida. It brought more than \$176 million dollars into Florida for Weatherization which assisted 27,210 households; 24,296 single-family homes and 2,914 multi-family rental apartments.

But it did more than that. It awakened developers, advocates, state agencies, and consumers to change the way we think about housing rehabilitation, retrofit, and preservation. It "upped the game" for weatherization agencies around the state and inspired the development of the Florida Weatherization Network.

When we meet at the Utilities and Green Caucus at the Florida Housing Coalition's statewide conference, I hope that we have strong participation from WAP agencies from around the state; some of the topics we will cover are:

-  Getting out the message about energy efficiency, including legislators.
-  Working effectively with our utility providers, staff from the Public Service Commission, DEO and the Energy Office; focusing on how to better leverage all of our resources.
-  Improving how we share best practices among Florida's Weatherization agencies and their partners.
-  Gathering and quantifying WAP and Energy Efficiency data to create specific ways for marketing services to the private and public sector.
-  Determining specific educational requirements and certifications for marketing to the private and public sector.
-  Understanding what types of energy efficiency and sustainability programs are in place or planned to be in place in our local communities that would benefit from our participation. **HNN**

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