

# TIGARD TIMES

Helping neighbors

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staff photo by Craig Mitchelldyer

Jenine Macon has gone from being helped by Community Action Neighborshare to working as a full-time employee at the Tigard center.

## Neighborshare is a community effort

**The Washington County program helps people in need, thanks to volunteers and donations**

**By BARBARA SHERMAN**  
Of the Times

TIGARD — The good news about the Community Action Neighborshare program is that homeless and low-income people know how to utilize its resources; the bad news is that the organization does not have enough funds to handle all the requests it receives.

"We turn away 25 to 30 families a week who request food boxes," said Jenine Macon, the community resource advocate for Neighborshare who is temporarily in charge while the center's head, human resources advocate Rachael Brown, is away on medical leave. The agency is located at the intersection of Burnham and Ash but serves people in eastern Washington County.

"We offer a lot of services to low-income families," Macon said. "We can provide energy assistance for water, electricity, and gas bills. We have job interviews,

food boxes, gasoline vouchers, prescription assistance, weatherization, rent assistance and advocacy.

"We try to be of assistance, but if we can't, we can channel them to the right resource."

According to Macon, about 30 percent of the center's clients are homeless and come for food boxes. If they need a place to take a shower, they are referred to Open Doors in Hillsboro, which has public bathroom facilities.

Rather than receive ongoing handouts, clients are limited to the amount of financial help they can receive.

They can get rent assistance only once a year if they are in danger of being evicted, and they can get funds from both state and federal programs only every six months to pay utility bills. There are specific programs for different forms of fuel, such as gas, wood or oil.

"We try to give them energy-efficient shower heads and light bulbs to keep their bills lower," Macon said. "And we try to get them on a PGE payment plan. Plus, we have both a state and federal crisis fund."

The center has only \$1,700 per month to hand out for

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# Neighborshare: 'We try to prioritize the needs,' said Macon

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rent assistance, and the funds are always gone by the middle of the month.

Many people requesting food boxes are turned away, too, because of lack of funding, Macon said. "People start calling at 9 a.m., and by 10:30, our list is filled up. We give out 11 per day that are filled with USDA-approved food that comes from the Oregon Food Bank. We just don't have the funding to provide more."

People who get on the food-box list pick up their boxes at St. Anthony's Church, where they are assembled and handed out.

"St. Anthony's and St. Vincent de Paul fund a lot of our vouchers," Macon said. "St. Anthony's is one of many churches in the Tigard, Tualatin and Sherwood area that support our programs, because that is the area we serve."

Food and vouchers are not handed out to just anybody, according to Macon.

"We try to verify what people tell us," Macon said. "If they are homeless, they must have an Oregon driver's license and proof of insurance to get a gas voucher. To get a bus voucher, they must be homeless and either going to a job interview, which we verify, or needing medical care."

"Clients only get vouchers for thrift stores, if they need clothes for a job interview or are trying to furnish a new apartment. Beds and

the basic necessities come first. We keep track of everyone in the computer and what help has been provided, so they can't take advantage of us."

The clientele is made up of families with children, single parents with children and single people. "We try to prioritize the needs," Macon said.

The non-profit agency is always in need of donations, including furniture, school supplies, and "anything people have," Macon said. "St. Anthony's stores things for us."

Macon is a Neighborshare success story herself. A single mother of five children ranging in age from 1 to 10 years old, she started in the Jobs Plus program last year for people who are unemployed. The state Employment Department pays a portion of the salaries.

Macon has a college degree and experience in social services, and after she was hired in July 2000, she moved up into a full-time paid position.

"This is what I want to do," she said. "This is what I went to school for. Now I can comfortably support myself and my children."

Shelley Gordon, an office specialist intake worker, is currently working in the Neighborshare office for 13 weeks in the Jobs Plus program and hopes to be hired permanently. She has three children, 10, 12 and 15, and is a grandmother.

Macon and Gordon are two of the many people that Community Action programs have helped during the past 35 years.

Approximately 8,000 Washington County residents face homelessness every year. During the 1999-2000 fiscal year, Community Action received 2,617 housing-related phone calls, 1,418 of them specifically for rent assistance. Neighborshare was able to help 13 percent of the requests.

During the same fiscal year, Neighborshare provided 185 households, or 514 individuals, with rent assistance; approximately 68 percent were women and children.

"Neighborshare is a community effort," said Jeri Alcock, community relations coordinator. "Community Action has a well-established and growing relationship with local churches and concerned citizen groups."

"Rather than congregations or groups providing assistance directly, and risking duplication of gaps in service, many faith-based organizations support the agency through fund-raising activities and board participation. With the assistance of private contributions, foundation support, and state and local government funding, we are able to help the community help its neighbors in need."

For more information or to volunteer or make a contribution, call Alcock at 503-693-3254 or Macon at 503-598-0505.