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Naperville Sun

Naperville Cares ... and so should we

March 18, 2009

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When we write stories about those devastated by huge health care bills or with no health insurance for even minimal treatments, it's virtually impossible for reporters not to empathize. It's not that we like bad news.

I certainly do believe that getting these stories out into the public arena can help to turn things around for some people.

Paying for health care — when the pay check stops, for instance — must be no easy job.

However, when unemployment strikes fear into those responsible for the family budget, all is not lost. Help is out there.

Just ask Janet Derrick, executive director of Naperville Cares. Her story will appear soon in the Naperville Sun's Five Questions feature.

The volunteers at Naperville Cares live up to the name. Like most of the writers of these kinds of stories, they really do care about the problems that face families and individuals when they lose their health insurance.

The organization has made it a priority to not just help find emergency assistance in the form of food and shelter, but also to move them toward economic self-sufficiency.

"Sometimes, it just takes \$3,000 or \$4,000 to help them with that particular bill or medicine funding problem. We also work with area churches. We will work in partnership with them," Derrick said.

Derrick may refer people to Access DuPage, which aims to "open doors" to a healthier community. The organization helps those who are eligible receive primary care medical services, although it is not an insurance program.

Those eligible are assigned to a primary care physician or clinic that provides ongoing primary care. Participating physicians work with Access DuPage to meet the needs of the clients, for a small fee, or no fee, until they become eligible for insurance again.

As of December, halfway through the new fiscal year, requests for assistance were up by 25 percent, mostly because of unemployment rates.

People who have health needs and require regular medication have extra worries when they become unemployed, Derrick said. If they have no more income to pay those bills, the result is not pretty.

Currently the national unemployment rate is close to 8 percent, the highest since 1983. Organizations such as Naperville Cares, led by caring people such as Derrick, hope that contributions, no matter how small, will continue to meet the growing need.

After all, every little bit helps.