

## Agency gets grant to help with housing

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A \$547,798 grant to Helping Overcome Poverty's Existence Inc. (HOPE) in Wytheville has been awarded through the Homelessness and Rapid Re-housing Program, authorized through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. It will be used for rental assistance over the next two years.

"It's what we've been doing with state funds," noted HOPE's executive director Andy Kegley. "These are federal stimulus dollars through ARRA to the state department of housing. The money will be used to help individuals who are renters who have lost their resources or close to being homeless to keep their homes. We will continue to do that."

HOPE's primary mission is to reduce the conditions contributing to poverty in Southwest Virginia. It seeks to enable lower income and disadvantaged families to achieve solutions for sustaining affordable housing.

According to Kegley, the grant also will cover two new positions for housing counselors. The jobs will be filled by early October.

Headquartered in Wytheville, HOPE covers the jurisdictions of Wytheville and Wythe County, Bland County, Smyth County, Carroll County and Galax.

"We're both excited and a little awed with the need for assistance," Kegley added.

He reported a large increase in the number of requests from the last fiscal year to so far this year.

Last year, Kegley said, there were 74 requests while there have been 218 requests this year.

"The majority of the requests has been for rental assistance," he stated. "For the first two months of this fiscal year, we have paid \$21,000 in rental assistance to 57 families so far."

Eligible families must be at or below 50 percent of the area median income and must be either homeless or at-risk of losing their homes. They must be recertified every three months.

Individuals who are homeless or feel they may be at-risk of becoming homeless should contact the local HOPE office at 228-6280. Their applications will be processed to determine eligibility.

HOPE will continue accepting requests for housing/rental assistance. An application is available on the agency's Web site or one can be mailed by contacting the HOPE office.

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