

DSB members assist low-income households with energy program

By [Michael Erskine](#) -
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MANITOULIN— Workers from the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (DSB) were on hand in Gore Bay and Little Current recently to provide assistance to low-income households in determining if they were eligible for the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP)—the province’s electricity bill relief program.

Beginning in January 2016, the OESP will reduce the cost of a low income household’s electricity by applying a monthly credit directly to their bill.

“The application takes a couple of months to process,” said DSB manager Eric Morphet, “that’s why we are doing this now, so that if people qualify they will be able to get it right away.”

“It’s not retroactive,” added Ontario Works’ Case Manager Stéphan Parent, who was on hand at the Little Current Cambrian College computer lab to assist applicants.

The amount of credit a household will receive will depend on two factors, how many people live in the home and the combined income of the household. An example illustrating the potential savings available to low income homes would be that of a four-person household with an annual income of \$37,000. Such a household would receive an on-bill credit of \$34 each month. For a low income household of seven earning less than \$28,000 a year that number jumps to \$70, although the actual amount of the credit is subject to “regulatory approval and may change,” there are factors that could increase that amount.

If your home is electrically heated or if you rely on medical devices requiring a lot of electricity, the OESP offers a higher level of assistance and members of the First Nations and Métis will also qualify for a higher level of assistance.

The application process is very simple, but it is important to gather up some key documentation before you begin the process. An applicant will need their electricity bill, the birthdates and names of all the residents in the household as registered with the Canada Revenue Agency and the social insurance numbers (or temporary taxation numbers for residents over the age of 16).

The next step would be to go online at the website ontarioelectricitysupport.ca (or stop in to visit the Ontario Works office if you do not have access to the Internet, Mr. Parent has already assisted many low income families in making an application). Once at the online site (hard copy application forms can also be downloaded and printed from the website) complete the application, readily available on the site’s homepage, print and sign the consent form and mail it to the address provided.

An applicant will be notified of eligibility in about six to eight weeks from the date of approval, but the website will let the applicant know if they are likely to qualify within seconds during the first step of the application process. In a simple two entry process, an applicant enters the number of people living in the home and the total income of the household after taxes and deductions.

“Everyone will be hit by a 10 percent increase come January,” noted Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association member Daniel de Chevigny. “This application is important for low income households to not have that increase on their bills.” At the end of the day, however, everyone receiving an electricity bill will be paying for this program.

It is important to have filed an income tax return recently, if you have not or if your situation has changed since your last filing, you can apply for the OESP through a designated agency that can be found on the program’s website. When you go to the agency you will need the documentation listed above.

The OESP can be contacted toll free in Ontario at 1-855-831-8151.