



Union Gas Winter Warmth

2015 Year End Report

Prepared by: United Way Chatham-Kent



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Summary

Union Gas Winter Warmth became a year round program in 2010-2011, in order to align with LEAP (Low-Income Energy Assistance Program), as mandated by the Ontario Energy Board (OEB), and to fulfill the increased needs of low-income energy users in these difficult economic times. The Union Gas Winter Warmth Program is coordinated by a network of social service agencies through United Ways in 28 Union Gas catchment areas.

Winter Warmth is designed for low-income households who are experiencing *temporary* setbacks and have exhausted all other appropriate means of financial support. The Winter Warmth program is an important part of the community and the participating social service agencies (Intake Agencies) serve as the place where families can go for assistance.

Winter Warmth is a blessing for many customers who face a crisis or life-changing event that, in turn, creates a backload of debts, including their heating bill. It is anticipated that households receiving the grants become more financially stable and are better prepared to manage ensuing utility bills. In addition to the monetary portion of assistance, the clients may be provided with the necessary referrals, interventions and information about existing programs/services available in the community and energy conservation tools and techniques through Union Gas' Energy Savings Programs, to assist them in overcoming their economic hardships.

The Union Gas Winter Warmth program helps families who have already exhausted all of their available resources and have nowhere else to turn. More specifically, Winter Warmth is able to help families stay together under one roof, lessen the impact of financial strain and help clients maintain a good credit rating without going into arrears.

In 2010-2011 the maximum individual Winter Warmth grant was increased from \$450 to \$500, in attempt to keep pace with other utility relief programs, and to assist as many households as possible, as much as possible. These funds are not allocated for security deposits and connection fees. Care is taken to ensure that all clients are able to sustain payments post-grant and that the specific guidelines of the program are adhered to.

The Winter Warmth Program, as it has existed for many years, comes to an end as of December 2015, as settlement funds are all but depleted. 2016 will begin the transition over to the LEAP Program, specifically Union Gas Energy Assistance Program.

The following tables will show a year over year comparison (2014 vs. 2015), in order to demonstrate the impact that the Union Gas Winter Warmth Program has had on the 28 participating communities/municipalities.

Section A: Total Grants

The following table contains a comparison of grants disbursed in the Winter Warmth 2014 vs. 2015 heating seasons.

⇒ Please refer to the end of each Section for the Table of Definitions

Table 1: Total Grants

Year	Budget (includes left-over funds from previous years)	Less Admin Fee allowed (on new funds only)	Total Funding available for WW grants	Total Pay-out	Remaining
Jan.01 – Dec. 31, 2014	\$1,293,928.68	\$177,882.08	\$1,116,046.60	\$1,091,959.88	\$24,086.72
Jan.01 – Dec. 31, 2015	\$937,086.72	\$127,385.11	\$809,701.64	\$718,554.86	\$91,146.75

In 2015, \$913,000 new dollars were available for allocation to 28 communities in Ontario for the Union Gas Winter Warmth Program, as mandated by the OEB. With \$24,086.72 left over from 2014 funds, this amounted to a total of \$937,086.72 available for grants for clients in need and administration fees for the Intake Agencies. The 2014 funding was increased by \$301,100 above the 2014 Board required level of \$907,000 to meet the high need in 2014. 2015 did not require an additional contribution and, in fact, there were significant funds left over at \$91,146.75.

Only two communities decline taking administration costs, in favour of serving more clients – Guelph & Wellington and Huron County. Hastings County (Quinte) took 13.5%, Haldimand-Norfolk 11.6%, Simcoe-Lambton has chosen a 10% administration fee, Burlington 7.5% and Chatham-Kent 6.8%.

Table of definitions

Budget	Total funds received from the funder for one heating season (current allocation plus funds left over from previous year)
Less Admin	Funds appropriated by each Intake Agency to cover admin costs; up to allowable 15% taken from total budget
Total WW	Funds available to assist clients - budget minus admin fee



Pay-out
Remaining

Total funds spent on grants
Funds that remain after the total Pay-out is deducted from the Total WW

Section B: Household Composition

The following tables describe the total number of households assisted along with the number of individuals (adults and children) within the households.

Table 2: Household Composition

	Total Number of Households Assisted	Total Number of Adults Assisted	Total Number of Children Assisted
2014	2,735	4,069 (51.9%)	3,772 (48.1%)
2015	1,746	2,482 (52.8%)	2,215 (47.2%)

Almost 1,000 fewer households were assisted through the Union Gas Winter Warmth Program in 2015, which translated into fewer adults and children. This may be attributed to a lack of funds available during the summer months. While some Winter Warmth Intake Agencies may have been unable to serve clients with Winter Warmth funds, they may have been able to find funding through other sources/agencies to ensure that client needs (as appropriate) were met.

In addition, the winter of 2015 was much less severe than that of 2014 and even 2013. One could then extrapolate that, with warmer temperatures, the need may have been less dire than in previous years, and hence a reduction in those families assisted.

Table of definitions

- Total Number of Households Assisted** Total number of individual households assisted with WW grants
- Total Number of Adults Assisted** Total number of adults within total assisted households
- Total Number of Children Assisted** Total number of children within total assisted households

Section C: Funding Impact

The following tables show the household size and gross income in relationship to the amount of utility arrears.

Table 3: Funding Impact

Year	Average # of Individuals per Household (Adults & Children)	Average Monthly Household Gross Income (\$)	Average Arrears Amount (\$)	Average Grant Amount (\$)
2014	3	\$1,891.19	\$597.79	\$399.41
2015	3	\$1,849.65	\$611.48	\$411.54

The average size of the household has not changed year over year (the number is rounded off). Average income has decreased slightly over 2014, while other costs continue to increase – food, housing, hydro, transportation, etc. Arrears have increased yet again, as well as grant amounts, as families seem to postpone utility bill payments in hopes that they can either catch up later, or access programs such as these. One can conclude that low-income families continue to be challenged to keep pace with increasing household costs.

Table of Definitions

Average # of Individuals per Household

Total number of assisted individuals (adults and children) divided by the total number of assisted households (rounded to the nearest digit)

Average Monthly Household Net Income

Total monthly *gross income* of assisted households divided by the total number of assisted households

Average Arrears Amount

Total amount of arrears divided by the total number of assisted households

Average Grant Amount

Total grant amount paid to the assisted households divided by the number of assisted households

Section D: Staffing

The following table provides information on human resources required to carry out the WW program. It also contains information on total number of inquiries as well as applications that were not granted and the number of hours spent on the program.

Table 4: Staffing

Year	Total Number of Inquiries	Total Number of Staff	Total Number of Hours	Total Number of Rejected /Referred Applications
2014	4,421	68	6,443	1,686
2015	3,011	68	4,343	1,265

In 2015, the requests for assistance have decreased over the previous year. 60% of applicants *qualified* and received Winter Warmth grants this year, as compared to 62% in 2014. Intake Agencies have reported that more people are requesting assistance who are aware of the Winter Warmth Program and have accessed grants previously.

Staffing has remained stable over the previous year, with fewer hours required to process applications. Many of the Intake Agency staff have been involved with this program for a number of years now. One would think that the intake process would be more streamlined as a result of this experience. And, of course, with fewer requests for assistance, it makes sense that the time committed to the program has also decreased.

Table of definitions

Total Number of Inquiries

Total number of inquiries that participating WW agency received from the public

Total Number of Staff

Total number of staff involved in work on WW (on part-time or full-time basis)

Total Number of Hours

Total number of staff hours spent on WW (answering inquiries, assessment and referral, application process, approval, follow-up)

Total Number of Rejected Applications

Total number of rejected applications through prescreening and application process, or when funds were depleted

Section E: Reasons for Rejected/Referred Applications

The following are reasons, as identified by the 28 participating communities/municipalities, why client applications were turned down or referred to other agencies for the 2015 program. These differ little from previous years:

- Account was not in applicant's name
- Applicant was a client of OW, ODSP or other agency
- Approval pending
- Assistance no longer required
- Bill was paid in full
- Bill was sent to collection agency
- Bills too high
- Cannot maintain housing
- Client already used the Winter Warmth program during same period
- Client could pay on their own
- Client did not show for appointment/lack of follow-through
- Client did not submit/complete application
- Client does not live at address/from another community
- Client had no income
- Client made no attempt to pay on their account in many months
- Client not truthful about income
- Client was moving
- Client was not a Union Gas customer
- Client was not in arrears/threat of disconnection
- Client was not sustainable
- Client would not provide bank statement
- Client's income too high
- Received assistance elsewhere
- Resolved with utility company
- Union Gas Winter Warmth funds were exhausted

Section G: Referral Source

The following information captures the data on applicants' referral sources for the 2015 program. They differ very little from previous years. Once again, in 2015 Union Gas itself appeared to be the largest referral source, with social service agencies as the second highest source.

Of note as well, is that "word of mouth" and the "other" category show the two next highest numbers. People appear to be accessing Union Gas' website for information about the program; folks know more about the program because they have accessed it in previous years or know someone who has.

Media and marketing materials do not seem to have a large impact on awareness of the program.

Ontario 211 in Grey-Bruce continues to act as a referral partner for all requests for utility assistance, be it for gas, hydro, propane or wood.

Table 5: Referrals

Utility referral (26 communities) – 611 referrals
Social service agency (23) - 499 referrals
Word of mouth (21) – 393 referrals
Radio (1) – 1 referral
TV (2) – 10 referrals
Newspaper (2) – 3 referrals
Billing inserts (4) – 29 referrals
Poster (1) – 4 referrals
Other (15) – 222 referrals - have accessed the program previously/repeat clients, Utility website, internet search

Section F: Challenges/Recommendations/Comments

- There was considerably more communication with agencies this year, in order to keep them informed of funding challenges and impending changes to the Winter Warmth/UGEAP Program
- Several community agencies required follow-up on more than one occasion and in some cases several occasions, to ensure that reporting was submitted for processing. This made reporting up-to-date statistics to Union Gas, on a regular basis, a challenge.
- Going forward, with the transition over to UGEAP and the depletion of Winter Warmth Trust funds, considerable communication will need to be had with all our partners (OEB, Lead and Intake Agencies, United Ways and Union Gas) to ensure that the program continues smoothly and all have the capacity to provide this service.

Funding:

- The total funding required to be allocated to the 2015 Union Gas Winter Warmth Program was \$913,000, vs. \$907,000 in 2014.
- Only three allocations of Winter Warmth funds were made in 2015, versus eleven allocations in 2014, due to the timing of the maturation of investments and consequent funds available in the Trust Account.
- The investment ladder was initially structured such that \$350,000 would be left from the final 2014 allocations in order to begin the 2015 Winter Warmth Program.
- However, given that numerous allocations were made in 2014 (which amounted to considerably more than the required \$907,000) to continue to serve the need of people in our communities, most of the funds earmarked to begin 2015 were depleted. Consequently, Union Gas forwarded \$250,000 to shore up the funds to begin the 2015 program.
- The next investment came due in 2015 APRIL and a second allocation of funds (\$199,658.88) was sent to agencies at that time.
- 16 of 28 agencies (57%) had completely exhausted the second allocation of Winter Warmth funds by JUNE 30.
- The next and final Winter Warmth Trust Account investment was not accessible until 2015 OCT 27. Rather than wait until that time to send the final installment of funds to agencies, as so many communities continued to have needs and no funding, Union Gas, once again forwarded funds (\$500,000) on AUG 28 to United Way of Chatham-Kent to complete the final allocation (\$413,341.12) in advance of the planned date in OCT.
- Five communities ran out of these final funds (Waterloo Region, Haldimand Norfolk, London, Sarnia-Lambton and Sault Ste. Marie) before the end of 2015.
- Funds left over at the end of 2015 were the most in the past six years of the program at \$91,942. The next highest was in 2013 with \$83,503.

Accomplishments

The Winter Warmth Program has continued to provide an extremely valuable form of assistance to many low-income households which face the prospect of living without heat. United Ways and social service agencies, in collaboration with Union Gas Ltd., help individuals and families maintain their housing and enhance their support network when many families are confronted with challenges such as job loss, family breakdown, illness, injuries or even death. Given an ongoing difficult economic situation, this program continues to help to stabilize the life situations of low-income families who are confronted with short-term financial difficulties.

In addition, this program has provided an opportunity for social agencies to determine deeper issues that may be affecting the lives of their clients. They are then able to wrap additional services around them (such as credit counselling, energy efficiency programs, bereavement programs, housing services, etc.) in order to improve their lives and, hopefully, end the feelings of despair and hopelessness.