

Power bills putting people in the cold - Feilding Herald, 29 September 2009

The surge in the cost of power is still plaguing those on a limited income.

Budget manager at Manchester House Social Services Liz Mills said they currently advise 84 clients and the majority have difficulty paying their power accounts.

"Unfortunately too many people come to us when they are already in financial difficulty," said Mrs Mills.

"We would prefer people to come to us before they have got into trouble or have accumulated debts, as it can be easier to manage." Manchester House has eight qualified budget advisers. Most clients visit weekly to assess their income and payments and plan their expenditure after meeting commitments.

"We have had an increase in super-annuitants using our services and for many it is the increase in power that has challenged them.

"Also we find people facing unexpected medical bills need assistance with paying them. It is sad to hear of people turning off their heaters to cut down on their power accounts. It has been a long and cold winter." Priority is always given to the payment of rent, food and power first and then the remaining expenses are accounted for. Social workers are also available to act as advocates should a client need to visit another agency or government department for assistance.

Manchester House does not charge for its service and will accept any new clients wanting assistance.

Another option is to use the The New Zealand Federation of Family Budgeting Service free helpline 0508BUDGETLINE (0508283438) Chief executive Raewyn Fox said "it is best if people act sooner rather than later – to avoid digging themselves deeper into debt." On the helpline advisers give immediate advice, informing people about their entitlements, rights and legal options, guiding people in preparing a budget and cash-flow, using websites or paper based tools.

Family Budgeting Services offer tips for managing money problems – "put all income and spending, commitments, debts down on paper to see the situation is clear.

"Look at the big picture of your financial situation to put problems in perspective.

"Act early, talk to creditors, renegotiate contracts as soon as problems occur.

"Examine all spending times to see if any can be reduced to free up money. Plan ahead – develop a 12 month plan which balances income and spending.

"Set goals and targets to work towards."