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## Township's programs often overlooked, underused

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by Robert Bykowski

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A Bolingbrook couple was laid off and in danger of losing their home when they found respite in an often overlooked resource – their township.

April and her husband, their last name is being withheld out of respect for their privacy, both lost their jobs within a month of each other. When making their mortgage became difficult, April took the advice of a

relative and emailed Bolingbrook Mayor Roger Claar. He, in turn, put her in touch with Linda Youngs, DuPage Township's Housing and Career Development Counselor.

April's meeting with Youngs changed her outlook.

"I hate to sound corny, but it was like a breath of fresh air," April said. "We didn't know what to do. We were in a gray area where we could afford the bills coming in but we couldn't afford the mortgage."

Through her meetings with Youngs, April was able to put together a tight, specific budget plan she presented to her mortgage lender to help negotiate a payment plan.

Previously unsuccessful in her dealings with the mortgage lender, April found the combination of a budget plan and continued talks between the lender, Youngs, and April to be successful, and a deal was struck.

That result isn't atypical, Youngs said, noting that she talks to between 25 and 35 families each week with similar situations. DuPage Township, which serves Bolingbrook and Romeoville, offers numerous programs to help families in need, and the township is eager to spread the word about programs they feel are underused.

"The economy affects all walks of life," Youngs said. "We tend to stereotype (and say) this only happens to the lower-income, but it's not true. It's affecting the middle class as well."

April is now employed and even though her husband is still looking for teaching work they now have breathing room.

That room has allowed April to give a little back to the township. She dropped by last week to donate groceries to the food pantry and is doing so on a regular basis.

For Youngs, though, it's important that other village residents learn of the available free services and take advantage of them.

Currently, the township offers one-on-one budget counseling sessions, as well as general assistance which ranges from emergency issues with utilities to rent assistance. In the fall, when school is back in session, Youngs hopes to roll out additional programs, such as job search assistance and money management training workshops. Youngs hopes a classroom setting for the workshops in the fall will encourage more people to attend, as they might feel less pressured to talk in a group setting. All of the programs are free, and Youngs urges anyone with questions to call without hesitation.

"A lot of it comes back to budget counseling," Youngs said.

Bill Mayer, the township's supervisor and creator of the programs, feels they are "exactly what township government is supposed to be about."

Mayer said the creation of the programs is part of an effort to stay current with the needs of its residents.

"Five years ago I never thought w'd need a housing counselor," Mayer said. "Any time you're able to save someone's house in these economic times...you can't put a price on it."

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