

Energy Share was started by a group of concerned utility companies and human resource agencies who saw a need to help Montanans who were "falling through the cracks". The federally-funded energy assistance program, LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program) was available for people with annual incomes under specified amounts. Many families just above those income guidelines, however, still need help once in awhile paying their home energy costs.

Energy Share was organized in 1982 to provide a source of funds to help fixed and low income people in Montana who have energy-related emergencies and have no other resources available to help them. It is Energy Share's intent to provide assistance to people who are currently insufficiently assisted by federal, state, or local government and private programs.

Energy Share raises and distributes funds in the private sector to help people facing emergency situations with their energy costs. Until the late 1990s Energy Share relied almost entirely on contributions from individuals, utility companies and electric cooperatives to provide bill assistance. In 1997 shortly before Universal Systems Benefits (USB) was implemented, Energy Share's annual bill assistance budget was just under \$200,000 statewide.

When USB came into effect some utilities, electric cooperatives and large electric users began contracting with Energy Share to administer bill assistance programs for them. These programs can be customer-specific, area-specific or unrestricted, meaning the contributing company can request that Energy Share uses its funds only for its customers, only in a certain area, or for any Montanan in need.

And of course, we still rely heavily on private donations from individuals. Every November we initiate a Public Relations campaign to inform people of what we do, how they can help and/or how they can apply for assistance. All Montanans will find Energy Share donation envelopes or pledge cards in their utility bill or Rural Montana electric cooperative magazine in November. Private donations are usually used in the area from which they came. For example, if you live in Billings and donate \$100 to Energy Share, one hundred percent of that gift will be used in the Billings area to help someone in need.

Up until Energy Share's 2001 fiscal year we had some funding available through the Montana state legislature from oil overcharge funds. In 1997 the Energy Share Board realized that funding source would not exist forever, so it established a permanent endowment with the intent of replacing those funds using interest earnings from the endowment. Thanks to the generosity of many individuals and companies around the state, the endowment has grown sufficiently to enable the Board to use interest earnings to fund other programs. The Board will continue to evaluate the need and use endowment earnings as necessary.