

HOPE-SUDBURY

Local families struggling in the suburbs

Charity helps an increasing number of residents keep financially afloat

By **Brittney McNamara**
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Poverty creeps into all corners of America, sparing almost no place. HOPE-sudbury co-president

Christina Granahan said she learned that appearances don't tell the whole story, even in Sudbury.

In 2014, Sudbury's HOPE Fund gave out about \$53,000 to local families in need, the charity's highest ever number. Looking at last year's donations, Granahan said some local families are struggling despite the glimpses of money in the town's

expensive homes and nice cars, a trend she said will likely continue in 2015.

The HOPE Fund, the locally charitable branch of the larger HOPE-sudbury, offers temporary financial help to down and out residents. In 2014, the fund helped 68 families, a significant hike over 2013's \$40,000 to 56 families, prompting a mid-year budget increase.

"This year, I don't know what our original budget was, but we had to expand it, Granahan said. "This was our highest year."

Granahan said she doesn't know exactly what caused the spike in requests.

The fund gives up to \$1,000 to families and up to \$500 to individuals. This year, the average donation was \$762. It helps with all

kinds of requests, Granahan said, from bills to medical expenses, including costs not often thought of.

"There was a gentleman who was a senior in town. His wife was hospitalized and he couldn't afford the (hospital) parking," Granahan said. "We paid his parking so he could visit

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his wife."

Residents go through Sudbury social worker Martha Lynn to request help, making the process anonymous from the fund's board. Granahan said the anonymity helps eliminate issues of pride.

"There is a lot of hidden poverty in suburban America. There are a lot of people living paycheck to paycheck," Granahan said. "They might be driving a

nice car, but the cost benefit of selling that car isn't going to help them much. There's also a lot of hidden illness. When people are struggling, they keep quiet."

This especially comes into play in a town like Sudbury, which was ranked one of America's 15 wealthiest zip codes by Business Insider in 2014.

"For years there was this disconnect, people really didn't understand there was this need," Granahan said.

Looking ahead at 2015, Granahan said she expects

requests to continue to flood in. Though the price of gas is lowering, electric costs have spiked. Nstar recently announced a near 30 percent hike in electric rates, with National Grid following suit at a 37 percent increase.

"I'm concerned about people's ability to heat their homes," Granahan said of the increase. "We had a situation this year where someone, an elderly person, was only turning on heat when they wanted to shower because they couldn't afford it."

The fund will set its budget at an upcoming meeting, taking rising utility costs and the cold weather into account. To learn more about the HOPE Fund, visit hope-sudbury.org. To request financial assistance, contact social worker Martha Lynn at 978-639-3358.

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