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**TEENAGER COMES TO AID OF THOSE IN NEED  
 10<sup>th</sup> Grader Starts Program to Benefit Energy Assistance**

Hopkins, MN (October 10, 2006)—With rising heating costs, many families will not be able to afford their energy bills this winter; a growing problem that’s got one Orono teen stepping up to help her neighbors stay warm this winter.

Driving through Montana during a family vacation on a cold December day, Maria Sperduto came across an article in the local newspaper warning of reduced funds for energy assistance programs. After reading the article, the Orono High School 10<sup>th</sup> grader decided she needed to help out.

Arriving back home after her family’s vacation, Sperduto researched energy assistance programs in Minnesota and decided to start Youth Energy Assistance (YEA). She set up a meeting with Scott Zemke, Director of Operations for Community Action Partnership of Suburban Hennepin (CAPSH).

Zemke informed Sperduto about CAPSH’s Reach Out For Warmth (ROFW) program—CAPSH’s local fuel fund, operated by the Energy Assistance Program. “The great thing about the Reach Out For Warmth program is that donations are matched at a 2:1 rate and are tax deductible,” explained Zemke. “Increased energy costs are really affecting low-income families.” The fund is used to assist low- to moderate- income families that are facing utility disconnection due to financial hardship, and are not otherwise eligible for the Energy Assistance Program because of depleted funds or because they are slightly over the income limit. In 2005, over 117,000 households received energy assistance; that number is expected to jump to over 133,000 in 2006.

After meeting with Zemke, Sperduto started fundraising for YEA by explaining the cause to the Student Senate. The Senate decided to donate all funds from “A Crush for your Crush”, a Valentine’s day fundraiser at her school. Students paid \$1 to reveal the sender. The fundraiser brought in over \$200. “The school has been very supportive of [YEA],” says Sperduto.



Our mission: To improve the quality of life in suburban Hennepin County by creating and supporting links between individuals and communities through: service, education, and collaboration.

In addition to the school fundraiser, Sperduto and her friends are making scarves to raise funds for YEA. “The scarves will be symbols of warmth which will raise awareness of the problem, and their sale will raise money to pay for heating low-income households,” says Sperduto.

Sperduto is also working on a Spare Change Initiative to benefit YEA. “It’s amazing how good adults and kids alike feel about giving their spare change to a good cause,” says Sperduto. “My hope is that every time people put change in a cup at the end of their day, they think of YEA.”

“This impressive young lady is really making a difference for many families,” says Zemke. “We’re happy to partner with YEA to continue improving the lives of those in our communities.”

To learn more about YEA, visit [www.youthenergyassistance.com](http://www.youthenergyassistance.com).

CAPSH is the Community Action Agency serving the 45 suburban Hennepin County communities working to improve the lives of low-income people. CAPSH provides a variety of programs to low- to moderate-income individuals, including First Time Homebuyer Education, Reverse Mortgage Counseling, Foreclosure Prevention, Home Rehab Counseling, Energy Assistance, Employment Services, Tax Assistance and Planning/Development Services.

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