



Dealing with COVID debt accumulation

Introducing case studies from Energy Financial
Capability Appointments

Welcome

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(pronounced Effa)

**Energy Financial
Capability Officer – Care
Financial Counselling
Service**

About Care



Financial
Counselling

Microfinance
Program

Consumer Law
Centre

Community
Development
& Education
Program

Energy Support Voucher
Program



Energy Support Voucher Program

The Energy Support Voucher Program funded by ActewAGL and ACT Government and provides supports including:

- \$100 ActewAGL Energy Support Voucher
- Energy Support Voucher Call
- Energy Support Financial Capability Appointment
- Energy Workshops
- Energy events
 - Bring Your Bills
 - Community events/expo's
 - Pop-up stalls
- Advocacy work with ACTCOSS



Energy Support Voucher Call

The Energy Support Voucher Call includes supports such as:

- Establish the applicant's ability to manage their energy bills and look for signs of financial stress or hardship.
- Explore use of heating/cooling and other appliances to establish environmental or behavioural impacts on the household's energy usage and costs.
- Provide information on options including linking to ActewAGL's bill helpline, self-service platform, or Staying Connected program.
- Provide referral to the following support services

Energy Financial Capability Appointments

Activities that FCW can undertake with the client:

- Discuss financial position and money story.
- Complete a budget and assess energy payment affordability.
- Assist client to negotiate manageable payment plan with providers financial hardship program.
- Check appropriate energy rebates and concessions are applied.
- Engage with energy provider to apply best market retail offer.
- Register on energy providers self-service platform.

Energy Financial Capability Appointments

- Referrals can be made to:
 - Care Financial Counselling Service (including financial counselling, No Interest Loan Scheme including Assistance Beyond Crisis, Consumer Law Centre).
 - Emergency relief and food banks.
 - CentrePay registration (either online via myGov or letter given to the client to facilitate at Centrelink office).
 - ACT Government Home Energy Efficiency Program.
 - ACT Government Home Energy Assessment for Renters program.
 - ACT Government Housing ACT Energy Efficiency Program – Heater upgrade.
 - ACT Civil & Administrative Tribunal (ACAT).

CASE STUDY 1

Name: Vidhi **Age:** 40 **Marital status:** single **Employment status:** professional

Vidhi is a professional and earns a decent wage. She has lived in Canberra for many years with her adult son after travelling abroad together for many years.

Vidhi approached Care in 2018, through the Energy Support Voucher Program, referred by her energy provider. She had gas and electricity arrears of over \$3000. She lives in private rental accommodation in the ACT.

Vidhi feels overwhelmed as unable to come to an arrangement that is affordable with her energy provider.

CASE STUDY 1 – Financial Issues

- Outstanding electricity and gas bill – \$3000+ in arrears
- Credit card debt – unaware of the total amount owing

CASE STUDY 1 – Actions

- Outlined how a financial capability worker can assist
- Vidhi explained what is happening and what she would like assistance with
- Prepared a budget and discussed options

Energy Supports:

- Budget
- Financial hardship program.
- Payment plan.
- Financial incentivisation.
- Market retail offer.
- Tariff
- \$100 Energy Support Voucher.
- Energy savings tips and ways to reduce bill going forward.
- Late payment charges.

CASE STUDY 1 – Other Actions

- Ongoing financial capability appointments to address:
 - Budget
 - Spending leaks
 - Household budget - Son and son's partner living in household but not equally contributing to bills and expenses
 - Debt (general discussion)
 - Referred to financial counsellor for assistance with credit card debt
 - Accessing No Interest Loan Scheme Microfinance Program to afford dental work
- Assisted client to write a to do list at each appointment

CASE STUDY 1 – Outcomes

This client has been support since 2018

- Outstanding electricity and gas bill
- Credit card debt
- Referral to Relationships Australia and EAP to discuss relationship with son

Vidhi continues to be supported by a financial capability worker but is more empowered and is taking control and make changes to her budget

Note: not all clients seeking assistance with energy bills are low income. This client is an example of a higher income earner with other complexities

CASE STUDY 2

Name: Amy **Age:** 65+ **Marital status:** Married **Employment status:** Husband is income earner

A wife with a CALD background with a single income for the household was referred by the financial hardship team at her energy retailer. Amy had arrears for gas, electricity and water in excess of \$4000 and was currently not making any payments. Amy had advised the energy provider that they could not make the payments that were proposed to meet minimum usage.

They have a mortgage on their property. And also have an investment property in Queensland.

Amy mentioned that there were solar panels that had been installed a few years back but it would seem were never connected.

Amy advised that her daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter were currently living in the property as, due to COVID, they had lost their jobs.

Amy also advised that she had extended family living at the property but had since moved on.

There were many challenges in making contact with this client – at least 4 – 5 attempts needed to be made.

CASE STUDY 2 – Financial Issues

- Outstanding electricity, gas and water bill – \$4000+ in arrears
- Issues identified with mortgage payments
- Inequities of household members financial contribution to household bills

CASE STUDY 2 – Actions

- Outlined how a financial capability worker can assist
- Amy explained what is happening and what she would like assistance with
- Prepared a budget and discussed debt options

Energy Supports:

- Budget
 - Financial hardship program.
 - Payment plan.
 - Financial incentivisation.
 - Market retail offer.
 - Tariff
 - \$100 Energy Support Voucher.
 - Energy savings tips and ways to reduce bill going forward.
 - Late payment charges.
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- Referred to Actsmart Home Energy Efficiency Program

CASE STUDY 2 – Other Actions

- Ongoing financial capability appointments to address:
 - Budget
 - Spending leaks
 - Household budgets – daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter living at the property
 - A culturally sensitive discussion around cultural expectations
 - Mortgage arrears (general discussion)
 - Referred to financial counsellor for assistance
- Discussed having on going discussions in the household about the household budget.

CASE STUDY 2 – Referrals

- Financial Counselling Service – mortgage
- Consumer Law Centre – ineffective solar panels
- Actsmart – Home Energy Efficiency Program coordinate by St. Vincent De Paul

CASE STUDY 2 – Outcomes

This client has been supported since October 2020

- Outstanding electricity, gas and water bill
- Mortgage issues
- Household budget contributions

Amy continues to be supported by a financial capability worker and financial counsellor.

Note: We have noted COVID impacts resulting in grown-up children with families needing to live with parents to survive on a reduced income. This has impacts financially on seniors within our community.

CASE STUDY 3

Name: Marian **Age:** 35 - 44 **Marital status:** married **Employment status:** Carer

Marian is a mother of a refugee family and is an Arabic speaker. She has a large family of 7 children and a husband. She is a carer for her daughter who is deaf. Her husband also has medical concerns. They live in private accommodation within the ACT.

Marian and her husband have limited English. Her 7 children attend school.

Marian dropped into Care Financial Counselling Service to access a \$100 Energy Support Voucher which she had received before. She had concerns around her energy bills.

A conversation was had with the Care staff member and other complexities were identified.

Marian's husband had previously sought assistance and completed a series of appointments with Care Financial Counselling Service.

CASE STUDY 3 – Financial Issues

- Outstanding gas bill - \$600 arrears
- Private rental – unaffordable on household budget
- Living on low income – running a deficit fortnightly
- ACT Infringement Fine - \$297

CASE STUDY 3 – Actions

- TIS
- Outlined how a financial capability worker can assist
- Marian explained what is happening and what she would like assistance with
- Registered client with Access Canberra Work and Development Order Program (to clear fines)

Energy Supports:

- Budget
- Financial hardship program.
- Payment plan.
- Financial incentivisation.
- Market retail offer.
- Tariff
- \$100 Energy Support Voucher.
- Energy savings tips and ways to reduce bill going forward.
- Late payment charges.

CASE STUDY 3 – Other Actions

- Ongoing financial capability appointments to address:
 - Complete budget – this was an ongoing activity. Using TIS can inject challenges.
 - Spending leaks – addressed where changes could be made
 - Household budgets – discussed elderly children and how to teach them how to manage money
 - Wrote support letter for ACT Housing Application
- Assisted client to write a to do list at each appointment. Advised how to do a spending diary.

CASE STUDY – Referrals

- Access Canberra – Infringement Office
- ACT Housing – Support Letter
- The Smith Family – Learning For Life Program

CASE STUDY 3 – Outcomes

- Outstanding gas
- ACT traffic fine
- Budget
- Learning for Life The Smith Family
- Support letter for ACT Housing

Note: this case study highlights the on going work that is needed for vulnerable clients with complexities.

ACT Energy Supports

- ACT Utilities Concession - \$700. This concession can be backdated for 2 years
- ActewAGL and ACT Government Energy Support Voucher Program (while funding remains)
- Financial Hardship Team – Staying Connected Program @ ActewAGL. A matched payment of up to \$100 (increased from \$50 - \$100 during COVID and remains so) for every 5 payments made
- Actsmart Home Energy Efficiency Program for eligible community members. This is done through home visitations, during which an Energy Efficiency Officer:
 - performs individual household energy assessment
 - provides tailored advice to help reduce energy usage
 - performs draught-proofing of the house
 - provides new energy efficient appliances and fittings, e.g. fridge, reverse cycle air conditioning, curtains and heated throw rugs (subject to additional eligibility requirements)

ACT Energy Supports

- Renters' Home Energy Assessments. Australian Energy Foundation provide phone or face-to-face appointments:
 - identify the quickest, cheapest and most effective ways to reduce your energy bills and use;
 - improve the comfort of your home;
 - get answers to your questions about your home and appliances;
 - get a written report on your home and how to reduce your energy costs.
- The ACT Government Energy Efficiency Program:
 - Replaces inefficient gas or electric heaters in ACT properties with energy efficient heaters (split system heaters);
 - Replaces gas hot water systems with electric heat pumps

ACT Energy Supports

- Sustainable Household Scheme

The Sustainable Household Scheme will provide Canberrans with access to zero-interest loans of between \$2,000 to \$15,000 to support eligible ACT households to live more comfortably, reduce emissions and their energy costs. The scheme will be open to new applications for 5 years.

- The scheme will be rolled out in a phased approach and will include products such as:
 - Rooftop solar photovoltaic systems
 - Household battery storage systems
 - Electric heating and cooling systems
 - Hot Water Heat Pumps (HWHP)
 - Electric stove tops
 - Electric vehicle charging infrastructure
 - Installation costs for these products.
 - New and used electric vehicles will also be included in the scheme under different eligibility requirements to the household loans.

COVID SUPPORTS

- AER Statement of Expectations
- ActewAGL increase financial incentivisation from \$50 - \$100. Extension of Utilities Hardship Fund to other providers
- Café and restaurant rebates - one-off \$1000 rebate on their electricity bills issued in the first quarter of 2020-21
- Extending the Utilities Concession to asylum seekers – those on Access Cards
- Utilities Concession Rebate and Small Business Electricity Rebate
 - A one-off \$200 Additional Utilities Concession Rebate will be applied to eligible ACT residential consumer electricity accounts, currently receiving the ACT Utilities Concession.
 - A one off \$750 Electricity Rebate will be applied to eligible ACT small business consumer electricity accounts, using up to 100 megawatt hours of electricity.
- ActewAGL & Icon Water Hardship Support - COVID-19 Check-in's – 6 weekly
- Connections established with Red Energy, Origin and Energy Australia



Q&A