

MN pilot website fans across region to help struggling families

Written by Laura Thornquist
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MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. - A Minnesota Web site meant to help families access the available assistance in these difficult times has been successful and is now being adopted in others states in the region. The Children's Defense Fund of Minnesota says the multi-state pilot project improves the well-being of low-income families by linking them to public work support programs and tax credits.

The site, called "Bridge to Benefits," is meant to serve families making between 100 and 200 percent of the state poverty level, by directing them to programs in which they might be eligible for help, such as Minnesota Care, school meal programs, energy assistance, child care assistance and tax credits. Marc Kimball of Children's Defense Fund of Minnesota says the site has helped thousands of Minnesotans hanging on by their financial fingertips.

"These sorts of benefits that people are eligible for, by law, are crucial to maybe lifting a family out of poverty or to making sure that all of their families members have enough to eat."

According to the Children's Defense Fund, 70 percent of eligible households in Minnesota aren't enrolled in the energy assistance program, 22 percent aren't enrolled in Minnesota Care, 76 percent aren't enrolled in the child care assistance program, and 58 percent don't take part in the food support program.

Kimball says "Bridge to Benefits" helps families that aren't in the welfare system, but are still eligible for many of the programs but might not know about them.

"This can maybe help them so that they can make sure that their children get the check-ups and the immunizations they need, because they've got assistance with health coverage that they didn't know they had."

The Web site now also serves Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota.

The site is at bridgetobenefits.org