

Douglas County Post-Gazette

Wednesday, March 24, 2021 • Covering Elkhorn, Valley, Waterloo and Bennington

1B: Ken Kulus leads Concordia to historic season

ENCAP continues to assist two years after historic flooding

By Lance Lawton
Douglas County Post-Gazette

DOUGLAS COUNTY — Several households were under serious water when the historic flooding swept its way through the area. Many people were left to gut their homes and try to rebuild, but bills and other financial issues arose.

The nonprofit Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership (ENCAP) knew it had to jump to action to assist those in need and help bring a sense of normalcy back to flood victims' lives.

Being the designated Community Action Agency for both Douglas and Sarpy counties, ENCAP was eligible to receive Community Service Block Grant Disaster funding. The funding has been applied throughout the country to help agencies like ENCAP help communities respond to and recover from natural disasters.

In April 2020, ENCAP received the CSBG disaster funds and immediately went to work to help those affected by the flood months prior. To date, ENCAP has been able to serve 45 people in 17 different households.

According to Aaron Bowen, executive director of ENCAP, the potential allowable expenses related to the disaster funding include rent, mortgage and utility payment assistance, alongside home repair (work returning property to pre-disaster state), rebuilding supplies, mold removal and transportation (car payments, car repair, car insurance or motor vehicle registration).

Bowen said it was crucial to reach out to as many people in Douglas and Sarpy counties and work with them to provide assistance, even two years after the historic flooding.

"There are still households out there whose residence is uninhabitable due to flood damage," Bowen said. "In the meantime, they have to seek out a temporary dwelling, while in some cases simultaneously continuing to pay a mortgage payment on their damaged residence. This complex



Lance Lawton, Douglas County Post-Gazette

Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership (ENCAP) members help an elderly lady load food products into the back of her vehicle on May 27 in Valley. As part of the mobile food pantry, ENCAP has been providing food assistance to those who are in need and who have been affected by COVID-19. ENCAP has also reached out to many households in the area to help with rent, bills and remodeling work needed after the historic 2019 flooding.

scenario creates an unexpected financial hardship. Most of the cases we are seeing are people who are experiencing a financial crisis for the first time in their lives, and don't know where to turn.

"We are trying to reach those who may just need one-time support in order to move past their current situation."

For instance, a King Lake resident has been living out of a mobile home on his property while he tried to repair his primary residence, little by little, with what funds he had. However, according to ENCAP officials, the biggest issue was the residence's roof. While the front of the home was covered, the back of the home (with the kitchen), was without a roof and open to the natural elements.

While the man had received assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the funds did not cover the roof repair costs. Without

homeowners or flood insurance, he had to pay out of pocket. That's when ENCAP representatives stepped in, and about a week ago, ENCAP was able to work with a local contractor to finish up the roof repair. Work can now begin on the interior and the resident may be able to move back into the home in the near future.

Another King Lake resident has also been hard at work on building his shop back up after the major flooding. While Trever Ashbrook's house is not right on the Elkhorn River, it didn't matter how close or far away he was when the area was devastated by the high waters. Ashbrook said there was about 12 feet of water in his backyard, with about four feet in the house.

After speaking with the Douglas County Community Emergency and Natural Disaster Recovery Group nonprofit, case manager Stephanie White was able to get Ashbrook connected

with ENCAP.

Ashbrook said even though he was able to work with ENCAP for assistance, he wanted to ensure others who couldn't get work done by themselves were the ones who were helped first.

"I am self-employed and have been remodeling homes and doing renovations my whole life," Ashbrook said. "I got what I got from FEMA to cover parts of my house and just went off on my own. I told ENCAP to take their flood relief funding and first get the older folks and others who couldn't do repairs or who needed financial aid."

Once the water receded, Ashbrook went to work on gutting his home and cleaning up debris with the help of a few volunteers. He finally reached a point where he not only lost some of his tools, but he needed to rebuild his shop altogether. After speaking with ENCAP, he was able to receive a

gift card to Menards to restock on tools and materials needed for his shop, which he said was a huge help.

Although he said he didn't need much help, Ashbrook was very grateful for ENCAP's support and the assistance they provided to others in the area.

"Every little bit helps," Ashbrook said. "ENCAP isn't out here dumping \$20,000 on people, but more of \$500 or \$1,000 here and there, whatever they can do to help. They just wanted to help. And going through a huge event like the flood, it's a long process afterwards, so every nickel and dime helps down the road."

Bowen said it's been an incredible year so far providing assistance to many households affected by the 2019 flooding.

"The unique thing about ENCAP is we are able to pivot quickly to provide access to

services as needs in the community arise," Bowen said. "We take a holistic approach to service delivery and meet families and individuals where they are at in order to connect them with the best support that will help them reach their goals as they move toward long-term stability. No one aims to be in crisis. Sometimes life happens, and when it does, we are there to support them on their journey."

ENCAP's current disaster funding will expire at the end of its fiscal year on Sept. 30, 2021. Bowen said disaster funding is as unpredictable as the disaster itself. He mentioned ENCAP continually collaborates with community partners and local funders to assess community needs and works to provide support based on local needs data.

To determine if you are eligible for assistance from the 2019 flooding, contact Dakota Rodriguez, ENCAP's support services specialist, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at (402) 453-5656 ext. 214; email: floodrelief@encapnebraska.org; or visit www.encapnebraska.org/i-need-services/flood-relief.html.