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Here's help for those in financial bind

By Andrea Kelly

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Rogelio Solis lost his job last year, and though he was one of the lucky ones to find another, albeit lower-paying, he needed some help with his mortgage.

He went to his mortgage lender and heard there were some options involving federal government services.

But he had no idea how to apply for those services when he showed up at a Neighborhood Economic Resource Fair Saturday morning.

Like many others who are caught in unexpected, traumatic economic situations, he just needed a guide through the process.

The Pima County Interfaith Council and St. Mark's Presbyterian Church hosted the four-hour resource fair Saturday after canvassers knocked on thousands of doors in Tucson to find out what services the community needs.

The event included information on obtaining health care, managing debt, job training, mortgages and housing issues, and the Community Food Bank, plus workshop sessions on similar topics.

For Solis, the Freddie Mac information table was critical.

Though Solis got a new job this year, he is making no more than 60 percent of what he made before he lost his last job in October, he said.

He completed an application through his bank, which said he could qualify for either an interest reduction on his mortgage, or a reduction in the value of his house and the cost of his mortgage.

"A lot of the information through Bank of America is confusing, and I want to know how to start the procedure," Solis said.

Another attendee at the fair said she used a lot of community resources when she lost her job last year. Now that she's employed again, she uses the same resources to help others.

Regina Koch-Mart learned it was hard to get a new job with 16 years of experience in one field. "I wasn't 25 anymore."

She said she was gathering information for herself and others.

"You never know when your own family is going to need help," she said. "Most people are one paycheck away from devastation."

Even as someone who knew about a lot of community resources, Koch-Mart said she felt overwhelmed when she was pummeled into joblessness at the same time as her husband.

She said applications for some of the services would have been nice at the event Saturday, in addition to the advice and information.

"Otherwise, it's another bus ride" before many people can get help, she said.

The resource fair was a direct response to the feedback from the door-knocking earlier this year, said Bill Cozine, a St. Mark's parishioner.

"We want to help them find out where they can get help," he said.

People in the Midtown area near the church, at 3809 E. Third St., said job-loss, health-care and child-care programs were most important to them.

If you go:

The next Neighborhood Economic Resource Fair will be at Sacred Heart Church, 601 E. Fort Lowell Road, May 30 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Jobs and health care were the topics most mentioned throughout the city, and make up 47 percent of the services people said they wanted more information about, according to data from the Pima County Interfaith Council canvass.

This is the seventh event the PCIC has hosted with a local church since February, said Genevieve Padilla, PCIC event organizer.

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