

TRIAD HOMES

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WORKING ASSETS

Program offers help with housing costs, job training

By EDDIE HUFFMAN

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The bad news: North Carolina has one of the highest home-foreclosure rates in the country. The good news: Help is available for people able to work — even before a homeowner has missed a mortgage payment.

"It is not a handout, it's a hand up," says Tamika Bowers, certified housing counselor with the nonprofit Guilford County Homeownership Center (GCHC).

The agency helps with mortgage payments and job training for people who find themselves in circumstances that make it difficult for them to pay their mortgages, including people laid off from work and

those dealing with a serious illness or divorce, she says. GCHC offers a weekly information session at its office in downtown Greensboro, and Bowers will make a presentation about the Mortgage Payment Program at noon Thursday at the Women's Resource Center.

"It's a great program," Bowers says. "It's a program that has proven results and has definitely helped homeowners from all walks of life."

The money, \$452 million total, comes from the federal government's Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), established in 2008, via the N.C. Housing Finance Agency. Administrators expect North Caro-

lina's share of the fund to dry up by the end of 2014, so homeowners are encouraged to apply now, Bowers says.

"Guilford County Homeownership Center, year to date, has closed 168 applications," she says. "We have been cited with one of the highest approvals in the state, and we have the highest approval from agencies that are participating in the area."

GCHC can help with mortgage payments and related expenses on a primary residence, such as homeowner association dues.

Help is available to people of all ages and at all income levels. The agency works with GTCC

to provide rehiring training through the school's Back-to-Work Program, and can provide financial assistance for retraining or recertification at any level, from getting an associate's degree to earning a Ph.D., Bowers says.

"If they qualify, they could get mortgage assistance up to 36 months or their graduation date, whichever comes first, not to exceed a maximum of \$36,000," she says.

There are restrictions on who can benefit from the Mortgage Payment Program. People who were having financial trouble and missed or made late mortgage payments before a significant change in life circumstances may not be

eligible.

And people who are unable to work because of a disability or other reasons will need to seek assistance elsewhere.

While GCHC has primarily helped homeowners in Triad counties, the program is open to homeowners from across the state, as long as they are willing to come to Greensboro for a face-to-face consultation, Bowers says.

"We have helped people as far east as Burlington and as far west as Yadkinville and Boonville," she says. For more information, call GCHC at 553-0946.

Contact Eddie Huffman at 373-7335 and follow @eddiehuffman on Twitter.

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Tamika Bowers, Guilford County Homeownership Center

WANT TO GO?

- **What:** Mortgage Payment Program Workshop
- **When:** Noon – 1:30 p.m. Thursday
- **Where:** Women's Resource Center, 628 Summit Ave., Greensboro
- **Admission:** Free to women and men, but pre-registration is required
- **Information:** 275-6090; www.gchcnc.org; www.womenscentergo.org

