

Needy pensioners suffer

Fundraiser gives the poor Winter Warmth

Community | Anna Prytz

AN elderly Doncaster East pensioner unable to pay his electricity bill was left to sit alone in the darkness last month.

With no money to buy food, the 74-year-old wondered what his life was worth.

"I've had my electricity and gas cut off three or four times over the last 10 years because I simply don't have enough money to pay," said the man, who was a "proud fool" and did not want to be named.

"A single person's pension (\$671 a fortnight) disappears on the day you get it," he said. "You have to work out what you can spend it on. If you choose food, the bills slide.

"It's impossible."

The man is only one of the many elderly pensioners who defy Manningham's reputation as an affluent area.

But lighting a glimmer of hope is the new Winter Warmth campaign.

Accountant Des Galgut started the campaign to get local businesses to donate money to subsidise struggling pensioners' utility bills.

"Winter's on the way, the cost of living is rising and they're really drowning," Mr Galgut said.

"If they can come to us and we can pay that bill then it's one less thing for them, and it's battling that social isolation and stress."



Doreen Stoves and Des Galgut are fundraising for poverty-stricken pensioners.

Picture: MICHELLE KELCEY N41DT304

The money will be distributed to clients of Manningham welfare agency Doncare.

Doncare chief executive Doreen Stoves said it was important for the community to take action given the "horror stories" happening in their backyards.

"We've heard stories of pensioners staying in bed all day to keep warm," Ms Stoves said. "A 97-year-

old lived on bread and tea for a week because she had no money to buy food after she paid her bills, and another woman who sat in a blanket around a campfire stove in her lounge room to keep warm.

"It's no way to live."

Manningham Business Network president Stephen Farrell said the group had donated \$300.

"We didn't realise how common a

problem it was and it was very surprising. Even the small things make a difference so we thought, we're part of this community, we should give back to it," he said.

To get involved in the campaign, contact Doncare on 9841 4215.



Are you struggling to pay your utilities bills? Tell us about it at manninghamleader.com.au