

Aid info available on line

By Diana McFarland
News editor

Isle of Wight residents who are having a hard time making ends meet can now see if they're eligible for state services via the Internet.

It's called *commonhelp*. Virginia.gov and it allows residents to see if they're eligible for food stamps, childcare, energy or cash assistance.

Isle of Wight Social Services Director Pam Barton said the number of food stamp cases has steadily increased over the past four years — since the start of the recession.

The county had 2,216 open food stamp cases in September, she said, adding that for most people its

because unemployment benefits have run out.

But a change to a key eligibility rule may make more people eligible, she said.

The former rule that all able-bodied adults are limited to six months of benefits has been lifted, Barton said.

"That's because the economy is still struggling," Barton said.

With *commonhelp*, residents may not even have to come to the office if they discover they're eligible, Barton said.

Sometimes the interview can be done on the phone, she said.

Requests for food has definitely increased this year, said Charlie Seitz,

president from Christian Outreach.

There's been several times this year that Christian Outreach hasn't had enough food to make deliveries, and now it's 55-75 families a month, he said.

Plus, the need goes up in the summer because the kids are home from school, but supplies go down because the schools do food drives, Seitz said.

Seitz suspects the increased demand for food will continue, especially because of the drought in the Midwest.

Right now, several local businesses are accepting food for Christian Outreach, including Ringo's Donuts and William E.

Wood Real Estate, both located on South Church Street in Smithfield. Seitz said they also get a lot of donations from local grocery stores.

For more information about donating food to Christian Outreach, call Seitz at 238-9506.

To learn about eligibility for state programs, visit <http://commonhelp.virginia.gov>.