

Hilltop Promises is an all-volunteer, community-based nonprofit organization that offers a range of services for the public and people who are homeless in Richmond, Virginia. Since 2001, it has provided free tax preparation services as a year-round VITA program. In 2011, approximately 10 percent of all its VITA clients were homeless. Hilltop Promises distributes flyers in the community to promote all of its year-round services including financial education, computer and parenting classes, job training programs, health care services, clothing distribution, and services to take phone messages and receive mail for the homeless.

As a member of the MetroCASH Coalition, the Hilltop Promises VITA site is included in all of the coalition's outreach materials and activities. In 2011, the site filed 489 tax returns generating \$504,505 in federal refunds, including \$169,824 in EIC refunds. Hilltop Promises also completed 462 prior-year returns.

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Workers Who Are Homeless

Workers who are homeless face serious challenges that may prevent them from claiming the EIC and CTC. Without a stable place to live, workers who are homeless may not receive mail consistently, making it hard to be sure they will receive the documents needed to file a tax return and claim tax credits. Sometimes, people who are homeless are unable to keep track of documents they may have received or their documents have been destroyed.

STRATEGIES

- Let workers know they can file a tax return and claim tax credits even if they do not have a permanent address. Shelters or other service providers, such as a health care clinic or a drop-in day center, can allow residents or clients to use their address for tax purposes. Organizations that do this should ensure their mail-handling procedures are secure and provide a way for refund checks to reach workers safely. Some organizations require mail to be opened in front of two staff members so that both can verify that checks were received.
- Enlist food banks, soup kitchens, shelters, transitional housing programs and local welfare agencies that come in contact with homeless persons. Work with shelters to establish free on-site tax filing clinics. Engage job placement assistance programs for homeless persons in tax credit outreach. They can extend their efforts by informing employers with whom they work about the credits and encouraging them to share information with all of their employees.
- Contact national organizations that have state or local affiliates to identify local groups providing services for people experiencing homelessness, such as the National Coalition for the Homeless, (202) 462-4822, www.nationalhomeless.org, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, (202) 638-1526, www.endhomelessness.org, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty,

Glad You Asked That!

Q: If a person who is homeless has lost the papers they need to file taxes, what can they do?

A: If a worker cannot get a copy of their documents from their employer, he or she can complete Form 4852, "Substitute for Form W-2, Wage and Tax Statement," or Form 1099-R, "Distributions From Pensions, Annuities, Retirement or Profit-Sharing Plans, IRAs, Insurance Contracts, etc." This form requests information about wages and taxes withheld, so it is helpful if workers have documentation, such as a final pay stub, when completing this form. Workers without a final pay stub may still be able to complete the form by estimating their earnings. It will be helpful to get assistance from a local VITA site on how to do this.

(202) 638-2535, www.nlchp.org and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, (800) VET-HELP (838-4357), www.nchv.org.

- Reach out to your state's Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. School districts are also required to have a homeless "liaison" to coordinate educational services for students who are homeless. Encourage your school district's liaison to provide information about the EIC and CTC to families.
- Explore using "street newspapers," which raise public awareness about poverty and homelessness by publishing articles by people who are homeless or formerly homeless, advocates and professional writers and are sold by people who are homeless. Outreach Campaigns can encourage publishers to inform sellers about the tax credits, to publish stories about the tax credits, and to advertise the locations of local VITA sites. Place an advertisement to recruit volunteers for free tax filing assistance. *To find out if there is a street paper in your area, visit the North American Street Newspaper Association, www.nasna.org.*
- Connect with your city's "Plan to End Homelessness" by enlisting participating groups in tax credit outreach activities. These initiatives were spearheaded by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Association of Counties and the National League of Cities. *To find out if your state or city has a "Plan to End Homelessness" visit www.endhomelessness.org/section/solutions/community_plans and click on the "Ten Year Plan Database" under Library Resources.*

FACT:

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, research suggests that families make up one-third of the homeless population and that almost half of all people experiencing homelessness work.



Find It On the Web

www.eitcoutreach.org

- More Outreach Strategies and Examples