

Credit counselors at the Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Northern Idaho, Inc. (CCCSNI) in Lewiston discuss



the benefits of claiming the EIC and CTC with clients who are working to reestablish their credit. For two years, CCCSNI has also coordinated a VITA site. CCCSNI partners with Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Montana (CCCSM) which assists with VITA trainings and answers questions volunteers have about the tax software and filing complex tax returns.

CCCSNI displays posters about the tax credits during tax season and distributes approximately 320 flyers per year with specific information about its VITA site and other local free tax preparation services in the community. CCCSNI also publishes information about both VITA and tax credits in its quarterly newsletter, which it mails to all clients.

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Consumer Credit Counseling and Money Management Services

Families throughout the country are confronting perhaps the most severe financial challenges they have ever experienced. Many are overwhelmed with debt, are seeing their savings plummet or are falling behind with their mortgage and other monthly payments. In increasing numbers, low- and moderate-income workers are seeking help from debt management assistance organizations, consumer credit counseling services, and home foreclosure prevention programs. These nonprofit organizations provide a range of financial services. They help clients create a budget, set financial goals, reduce monthly credit payments, and employ strategies for managing their money, paying bills on time, surviving a reduction in income and maximizing tax refunds. Such organizations are in a good position to help families understand that claiming the EIC and the CTC complement other approaches to addressing debt-related problems.

STRATEGIES

- Reach out to local affiliates of the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC). The majority of NFCC affiliates are Consumer Credit Counseling Services (CCCS) offices. They provide counseling on housing, credit and bankruptcy issues, as well as assistance in developing debt, money, and credit management plans. In addition to in-person assistance, CCCS organizations provide counseling online and over the phone 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. Tax Credit Outreach Campaigns can suggest ways they can share EIC and CTC information through one-to-one counseling programs, newsletters and websites. *To locate a NFCC member agency in your area visit: www.nfcc.org/FirstStep/firststep_01.cfm. If there is no NFCC affiliate in your area, check for affiliates of the Association of Independent Consumer Credit Counseling Agencies, www.credithelp4u.org or 866-703-8787. Alternatively, a community organization, such as a community action agency, may provide similar services.*
- Encourage consumer assistance organizations to incorporate information about claiming the EIC and

CTC into their intake, screening or orientation process. Tax Credit Outreach Campaigns can provide basic fact sheets and other materials about eligibility requirements, claiming procedures and locations of free tax preparation sites.

- Help counselors develop the capacity to provide more in-depth information about the tax credits to their clients. Train consumer assistance organizations to assist clients in determining if they qualify for the credits and link them to free tax filing assistance. Help them develop key contacts in the community so they can refer workers to Low-Income Taxpayer Clinics if they owe back taxes or need professional help with other tax related issues.
- Invite CCCS organizations to share information about their services at VITA sites and during tax credit outreach activities. Tax filers may be in need of the foreclosure prevention, credit counseling, homeownership and savings programs they offer. CCCS staff can distribute literature and sign people up for classes and personal counseling sessions. Credit counseling programs can also work with Outreach Campaigns to offer free credit reports at VITA sites. They can explain how to understand a credit report, how credit scores are used, and how tax refunds can be used to help improve credit history. Banks and credit unions can also partner with Outreach Campaigns to open checking or savings accounts at VITA sites so workers can have their refund directly deposited into the account. *To help taxpayers obtain free credit reports visit: www.annualcreditreport.com.*
- Help community organizations incorporate tax credit information into financial education classes, Individual Development Account (IDA) programs or investment clubs. While these programs tend to focus on developing assets for purposes such as buying a home or higher education, they can also help workers learn and understand how to avoid debt and protect their savings. Community organizations can offer financial education classes or can work with a bank or credit union that has already established a financial education program. Outreach Campaigns can help organizations include information about how tax credits can help workers meet specific goals as part of a class.

The Homeownership Preservation Foundation provides free foreclosure prevention counseling 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and can assist homeowners in developing a financial plan, contacting their lender and identifying local resources. For more information visit: www.995hope.org or call 1-888-995-HOPE.

FACT:

According to a survey conducted by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, on average, 69% of clients seeing housing counselors for foreclosure assistance are low-income.



Find It On the Web

www.eitcoutreach.org

- More Outreach Strategies to Link to IDA Programs