



## 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.



The Homeless Resource Network (HRN), a founding member of the VITA in the Valley Coalition in Columbus, Georgia, has hosted a free tax filing assistance site since 2004. HRN provides information and referral, mail and phone services, storage of personal items, local bus transportation and financial assistance for people facing eviction, foreclosure or utility disconnect. In 2009, HRN's VITA site prepared 101 tax returns providing \$109,053 in total refunds to tax filers. HRN staff and volunteers complete the tax returns and also assist clients with contacting employers to request copies of their Form W-2, if needed. Clients can also use HRN's address to receive mail, including tax refund checks. HRN promotes its site through meetings for organizations that serve the homeless, email lists and by delivering posters for display at area shelters.

**Contact:** Liz Alcantara, HRN, (800) 341-9371 or [liz@homelessresourcenetwork.org](mailto:liz@homelessresourcenetwork.org).

### 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](http://www.nationalhomeless.org)), the National Alliance to End Homelessness, (202) 638-1526 ([www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org)), the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, (202) 638-2535 ([www.nlchp.org](http://www.nlchp.org)) and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, (800) 838-4357, ([www.nchv.org](http://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](http://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.ich.gov/library/10-year-plan-cities.pdf](http://www.ich.gov/library/10-year-plan-cities.pdf). View plans for some locations at [www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/communityplans](http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/communityplans).*

## FACT:

*According to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, research suggests 40 percent of families experiencing homelessness have children, and approximately 40 percent of all homeless adults are employed at some time during the year.*

## 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 a Missing Form W-2 or Form 1099.” 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.



**Find It On the Web** [www.cbpp.org/eic2010](http://www.cbpp.org/eic2010)