

Leveraging Dollars for Hardworking Families

Sue Haupt, Communications Director, United Way of Marathon County

It's not news that many hardworking families in our community are still struggling to meet their monthly expenses. Although there has been some slight improvement in the economy, living paycheck to paycheck is the reality for many people in Marathon County.

In an effort to help low income working families, United Way, in cooperation with United Way's 2-1-1, GetSmart Wausau and the AARP Volunteer Tax Preparation program, held the third annual EITC Saturday in February. More than 40 families took advantage of this one day free tax preparation service to file their taxes and claim their credit. During the entire tax season, AARP volunteers helped almost 150 families claim EITC credits totaling more than \$110,000.

According to Bill Neyens, the AARP Coordinator, "This program helps people who really need it. They are so grateful when we tell them how much their refunds will be. Many of them have medical debts, overdue utility bills and are barely getting by."

A second goal of this collaborative effort is to increase awareness in the community about the tax credit and encourage people who qualify to claim it when filing their taxes. Final data isn't complete, but over the last few years the number of individuals inquiring about and claiming the credit in Marathon County has continued to grow.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a federal tax credit implemented in 1975 for working individuals and families. It has been a tremendous financial boost for people hit the hardest during recent tough economic times. According to the IRS, in 2009 (the most recent data available) over \$771 million was returned to Wisconsin taxpayers. Both locally and across the county, United Ways are helping promote and increase the dollars returned to local communities.

Another way that United Way is leveraging dollars into our community is the FamilyWize prescription drug program. This program is available to anyone who does not have insurance for prescription medications. It's free and it's easy to use. Since United Way of Marathon County started promoting this program locally in April 2009, residents have saved over \$90,000—money that can be spent on food, housing or other expenses. To learn how you can participate and to get your card, go to www.unitedwaymc.org/gethelp.htm, or stop by the United Way office at 137 River Drive.

United Way continues to explore new and innovative ways to accomplish our goals. By bringing together people and resources, we can make a greater impact on the issues that we all care about.