

The United Way Money in Your Pocket campaign meets the Department of Human Service's goal of helping people in need. Under the eye of John Litz, Planner in the Office of Community Services, DHS's participation in Money in Your Pocket has grown from the Human Services Building site, Downtown, to include three other locations in the Allegheny County suburbs.

The program taps into the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to bring much-needed money to the low- and moderate-income individuals and families who are eligible for it. By claiming the credit, people can receive thousands of dollars in federal tax refunds that can be put into savings or used to purchase a car to get to work.

Federal tax returns for 2012 filed through Money in Your Pocket at the Human Services Building location resulted in 313 returns being filed, with a total refund amount of \$488,575. Of those, 165 returns claimed \$234,089 because of eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credits. Those clients had an average adjusted gross income of \$11,890, so it's clear that the EITC goes a long way toward helping people in need.

For more information on Money in Your Pocket or to learn how to volunteer, go to www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/MIYP.aspx.



Marc Cherna
Director
Allegheny County Department of Human Services



Rich Fitzgerald
Allegheny County Executive

DHS MAKING AN IMPACT

Money in your Pocket



Toni

Toni cannot say enough good things about the Money in Your Pocket free tax preparation assistance program, in which the Department of Human Services participates.

Illness caused Toni to be downsized from her job in 2012, so she could not afford to pay an accountant the \$100 or more to do her federal taxes, as she used to do. Toni had a business card for PA 2-1-1 Southwest for awhile before

realizing help was at her fingertips. PA 2-1-1 Southwest linked her to Money in Your Pocket, operated by a coalition overseen by the United Way of Allegheny County that includes the Department of Human Services. DHS oversees four sites for Money in Your Pocket, an Internal Revenue Service initiative that helps low- to moderate-income people. The program was top shelf, she said, from the convenience of the site to the quality of the volunteers.

Toni continued: And there was that tax return she got. She anticipated owing taxes, since she had taken a few contracted jobs. But she ended up getting a nice tax return because DHS volunteers helped her find deductions.

“I was so elated that I didn’t have to pay,” she said. “The volunteers took their time with me. They were professional and very pleasant. It was so assuring that I would get full service and it would be done right. I don’t generally get that kind of service.”

Jamie

Jamie has used Money in Your Pocket three times. She tried the Downtown site this year and said not only was it convenient, the volunteers treated her extremely well.

A food court worker whose income is limited, Jamie said she feels that she is not always treated with respect because of her income status. But at the Human Services Building, “I felt like I was a citizen who was coming to get a service” instead of feeling she was being judged.

“I have a lot of things on my plate and I try to do the right thing, and knowing there is a free tax service that helps me on the road to do the right thing is wonderful,” said Jamie, a single mother of a preteen son.

“I can’t even describe in words how nice it is that you can get your taxes done by someone so well-educated and it’s free,” she added. “You don’t have to give what little money you do get back to the tax preparer.”

Brittany & David

It is not only Money in Your Pocket clients who laud the DHS for offering the program. Volunteers say helping people with what is usually an unpleasant annual task is rewarding.

Brittany Whiteside, a financial analyst at UPMC, helped involve about 15 people from her sector at the health care insurer in Money in Your Pocket in 2013. She volunteered for three hours a week – every Monday, from Jan. 30 to April 15 – at the Human Services Building.

A dedicated volunteer for other initiatives, Brittany said her Money in Your Pocket work is

especially rewarding.

“That’s my favorite part, the people that we meet. You can definitely tell we are providing them with a great service,” Brittany said. “Whatever their income is, you can tell they need every penny of it.”

David Donahue, executive director of the Allegheny County Regional Asset District, agreed. He has volunteered for the past three years for Money in Your Pocket at the Human Services Building. “I remember one woman who came in, a working mother, who had something like \$1,000 withheld” for federal taxes. With three children, she thought she would get her

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-Jamie

\$1,000 back, but was stunned to find she would get more. “Oh, my goodness (program participants) are very appreciative, particularly those who are surprised by the kinds of refunds they get,” David said.

He said clients are so thankful, one even offered to make him a pie.

He declined – volunteers receive training that includes ethics, so even a pie is not permitted – but the offer indicated how much clients value Money in Your Pocket.

“You’re being helpful to individuals, so I do find it rewarding,” he said.