

As the Tax season looms in the very near future, Lakota Funds gears up for their fourth year participating in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site program for the 2011 tax filing season. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) provides working families on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation area with free tax preparation. Volunteers who provide the services of VITA are trained and certified by the IRS. The VITA program allows families and individuals to receive every tax benefit available to them, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Since implementation in 1969, thousands of volunteers have provided free tax assistance and prepared millions of U.S. federal tax returns for customers who are generally of low to moderate income.

The Lakota Funds prepared 245 federal tax returns for the 2010 tax season, which is an 87% increase from 2009. In 2010 Lakota Funds VITA volunteers brought back to families over \$227,334.00 in EITC funds and approximately \$453,177.00 in overall federal refunds. In addition these families saved over \$75,200.00 in potential tax preparation fees. By increasing income to working families the VITA program directly effects the family's or individual's ability to become or remain financially stable.

Why is outreach needed? In 2009, 20-25% of eligible workers did not claim the Earned Income Tax Credit; up to \$10 billion in Earned Income Tax Credit refunds went unclaimed. Lakota Funds would like to ensure eligible workers know how to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit as well as other credits they may be eligible for such as the Child Tax Credit. For the upcoming 2011 tax season, workers with 3 or more children may be eligible for a maximum benefit of \$5751.00 for the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit is worth up to \$1,000 for each qualifying child.

Why pay when you can get your taxes done for free? Commercial tax preparers charge an average of \$100 to prepare a return claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit. You may pay as much as \$100 more if you get a Refund Anticipation Loan (RAL). These types of loans are often advertised as "fast cash" and provide a cash loan on your tax refund. By having a VITA site prepare your tax return for free and the IRS depositing your refund directly into a bank account taking only about 7 to 10 days, you may want to ask yourself; Is it worth paying \$200 or more of your hard earned cash to a commercial tax preparer or to get a RAL loan?

Lakota Funds in keeping to its mission of promoting economic growth and sustainability on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation provides the services of free income tax preparation in hopes of keeping valuable tax return dollars in the Reservation communities. This year seven employees of the Lakota Funds will become certified VITA preparers. They are: Tony Taylor, Tawney Brunsch, Kateri Montileaux, Whitney O'Rourke, Tonia Young, Roberta Wounded Head, and Kadem Fisher.

Call Lakota Funds at (605) 455-2500 to schedule an appointment or visit one of our many sites set up across the reservation. What to bring with you:

- Valid picture ID
- Copy of 2010 tax return (if you have it)
- Social Security Cards, Social Security Number verification letters of Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) letters for you, your spouse and any children born before December 31, 2010.
- Income documentation including:
  - W-2 Forms from all jobs worked in 2010

- All 1099 Forms showing other income received in 2010
- A blank check for direct deposit of your refund (If you don't have a checking account, bring your bank account name, number and the 9-digit American Bankers Association routing number).

The Lakota Funds objective for the tax preparation season is to provide extensive outreach throughout all the communities of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation by reaching qualifying working families that may have otherwise been missed in the past and to keep hard earned money in family's pockets by providing free tax preparation.