



Contact: Sara Payne Phone: (740) 345-6685
Marketing Director Fax: (740) 345-7712
Address: Licking County United Way Email: spayne@lcuw.net
68 W. Church St., Suite 203
P.O. Box 4490
Newark, OH 43058

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For Immediate Release

**LICKING COUNTY UNITED WAY PROMOTES FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
DURING TAX SEASON**

NEWARK - The Licking County Community Blueprint needs assessment report identified economic issues as a priority concern of Licking County residents. As tax season is now upon us, the Licking County United Way is informing area residents about some opportunities and resources in our community to help you be more financially stable.

Residents are encouraged to apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The IRS estimates that 20 percent of the taxpayers who are eligible, may not be aware of and claim their EITC. The EITC is a refundable credit for people who work but do not earn high incomes and is a valuable tool helping eligible taxpayers lower their taxes or receive refunds.

The United Way is also advising tax payers to not be tempted by tax-time advertisements for “fast cash” or “instant refunds”. Many of these fast refunds are actually refund anticipation loans. With a refund anticipation loan, you are paying a very expensive fee to borrow against your own tax refund. Combined with tax preparation and electronic filing fees, this can eat up a large portion of your anticipated refund. These loans can also be risky because they must be repaid even if the IRS denies or delays your refund or if it is smaller than expected.

If you need help filing your taxes, the United Way would like you to consider using one of the free tax preparation resources in our community. Local resources include “Tax Counseling for the Elderly” sites, which are operated by AARP and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites operated through the Licking County Coalition for Housing’s Positive Balance Program.

Positive Balance offers free tax preparation service at Opportunity Links and the Ohio State University in Newark, Monday-Friday from 8:00am to 4:00pm through April 14. Call 349-1930 to schedule an appointment. Area seniors are encouraged to call the Licking County Aging Program at 345-0821 to find out more information about the AARP tax preparation sites in their area.

Positive Balance provides additional services to improve a person's financial conditions, such as financial counseling, financial planning, budgeting, money management, credit and debt repair and the Benefits Bank. Benefits Bank helps individuals and households learn if they are eligible for state and federal benefits such as Food Stamps or Medicaid and assists with completing the forms necessary to access these benefits. Call 349-1930 to schedule an appointment with a Benefits Bank counselor or a VITA tax preparer, or to learn about any of the services offered by Positive Balance.

The Licking County Aging Program provides this Benefits Bank services for members of our community who are age 60 or over.

The United Way knows that financial stability and responsibility programs are beneficial to adults, especially during tax season, but the organization also has taken steps to reach youth. United Way has partnered with Positive Balance to address financial responsibility for youth in after-school programs, summer camps and other venues serving area youth. This program also provides information for parents to reinforce the lessons learned by their children. If you are interested in offering this program to the youth you serve, please contact the Licking County United Way at 345-8717.

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