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More Free Tax Assistance Sites Launching This Month

Windham—The Windham Region Asset Building Collaborative (WRABC), established this summer by Windham Region United Way and the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, is expanding the number of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites available to local residents.

“We’re excited to report that two new, free tax assistance sites will be opening in Windham this month: one at Covenant Soup Kitchen and one at Windham Area Interfaith Ministries,” said WRABC coordinator Jessica King, an employee of Co-opportunity, Inc., who was hired by WRABC to coordinate its work with funding provided by Windham Region United Way. Co-opportunity, Inc. is recognized across Connecticut for its expertise in helping families gain income, earnings, savings and assets.

At VITA sites, individuals and families earning less than \$50,000 per year can receive free tax preparation services from a volunteer trained by the IRS. Most tax filers receive their refunds within seven to ten days. In 2009, Willimantic VITA sites helped lower-income tax filers collect more than \$608,000 in tax refunds, including Earned Income Tax Credits (EITCs) worth more than \$205,000.

The two new VITA sites will be managed by *Access* Community Action Agency, bringing the total number of Willimantic sites under its management to five. “We’re really excited that these new sites are opening,” said Eglá Madera, asset development supervisor at *Access*. “We’ll be able to meet more people where they already are. The more comfortable people feel, the more likely they are to use our services,” she added.

In addition to the new sites, WRABC and *Access* helped another local nonprofit organization “build capacity” so that its existing clients can receive tax assistance at a location they already visit. Staff from *Access* trained employees at Catholic Charities, Diocese of Norwich, Inc., to offer volunteer tax assistance to its clients.

United Way supports local VITA site and Earned Income Tax Credit outreach as part of its commitment to help working families become more financially stable.

Windham Region United Way is part of United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut, which has been meeting local human care needs for 85 years in 40 towns, including Ashford,

Our mission is to engage people to improve lives and change community conditions.

Chaplin, Columbia, Coventry, Hampton, Lebanon, Mansfield/Storrs, Scotland, Willington, and Windham/Willimantic. With its network of partner agencies, volunteers and community leaders, United Way takes a leadership role in changing conditions to improve lives in the communities it serves.

To schedule an appointment for free tax preparation, call the *Access* toll-free hotline at (800) 260-0400, or dial 2-1-1, a free help line funded by United Way and the State of Connecticut.

To learn more about the Windham Region Asset Building Collaborative, contact Jessica King at (860) 236-3617, x127, or jessicak@co-opportunity.org. For more information about *Access* and its services, contact Kathy Crees at (860) 450-7146 or kathy.crees@accessagency.org. To learn about United Way's work in the Windham region, contact Julie Suedmeyer at (860) 456-0188 or jsuedmeyer@unitedwayinc.org.

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