

Tax Credits - Easier Than Ever To Claim

The **Earned Income Tax Credit** or the EITC is a refundable federal income tax credit for low to moderate income working individuals and families. Congress originally approved the tax credit legislation in 1975 in part to offset the burden of social security taxes and to provide an incentive to work. When the EITC exceeds the amount of taxes owed, it results in a tax refund to those people who claim and qualify for the credit.

In order to qualify, taxpayers must meet certain requirements and file a tax return, even if you did not earn enough money to be obligated to file a tax return.

The EITC has no effect on certain government benefits. In most cases, EITC payments will not be used to determine eligibility for Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps, low-income housing or most Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) payments. The **Child Tax Credit**, or the CTC, is a nonrefundable credit and may be as much as \$1,000 per qualifying child depending upon your income. There are several factors, or "tests" the IRS takes into account when determining who is a qualifying child for the purpose of this tax credit. These include things like his/her relationship to you, residency, your level of support and the child's age.

To find out if you qualify, talk to a tax professional or obtain tax information at your local library or on the IRS website at www.irs.gov (from irs.gov)

Homestead Tax Credit 2010

The Homestead Tax Credit is available to low income individuals in WI who own a home or pay rent. It can provide an income tax credit or an annual cash refund for state low income homeowners and renters. The purpose of the credit is to help people meet the rising costs of property tax bills and rental payments.

To be eligible a person must have been an adult resident of Wisconsin all of the previous year, own or rent the property that he/she lives on, and have total household income of less than \$24,500.

The amount of credit is based on the relationship between a person's household income and the amount of his/her allowable property taxes and/or rent. Persons sharing living expenses for a rented homestead are each entitled to claim a portion of the rent paid for occupancy of the homestead. A person must complete a Wisconsin Homestead Credit Claim, Schedule H or H-EZ, to receive the credit. For help in preparing a homestead credit claim, see the list of tax assistance sites in this newsletter.

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Your Help is Appreciated!
If you would like to receive North Country News via email or alternate format, please contact North Country at ncilcheryl@superior-nfp.org or call 800-924-1220v/tty

2010 Transportation Voucher Program Rolls Out

North Country is proud to announce the launch of our 2010 transportation voucher program. If you've already contacted us, you're on our waiting list, and we'll be contacting you soon about enrolling in the program. If you haven't yet contacted us and you or a family member or friend would like to find out more about signing up for the voucher program, please contact Bob Olsgard, Transportation Coordinator at: ncilbob@superior-nfp.org or toll free at 800-924-1220, extension 20.

2010 is the third year North Country has offered this very popular and successful program. Not surprisingly, the program has grown each year. Our 2009 program helped 83 people with disabilities make nearly 4,500 trips, traveling more than 123,000 miles. We also need to recognize the many drivers and the time they generously contributed in order to get their friends and neighbors down the road.

Where did they go? Shopping was the most popular trip purpose, with one third of all trips. Medical trips were the second biggest category, with about a quarter of the total, followed by trips for recreation and education. Thanks again to our program participants and their drivers and other transportation providers who made our 2009 program so successful.

Funding for the North Country Transportation Voucher program is provided by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation New Freedom Initiative.

Peer Support Network Being Formed

The Wisconsin Mental Health Consumer Movement's momentum is growing stronger with every passing month. There are new programs being introduced to help ease the frustration of what can be an overwhelming system. Most, if not all of these programs are programs other consumers, just like us, started. It's the voice, along with action of the people that brings life and strength to change a broken system. Let one of those voices be yours.

We have two Regional Network Leaders added to northern Wisconsin. They are the people who can provide you with the resources for self-advocacy and programs to improve your quality of living by keeping you informed of events around the state.

Another program that is being introduced to Wisconsin is the Peer Specialist Program. A Peer Specialist is a peer helping another peer. We are people who have experienced and overcome the obstacles and barriers in our recovery. We would like to show you that recovery is possible. Although Peer Support isn't offered in every county, you can contact your caseworker and begin to advocate for it.

Empowerment Days will be held in Madison April 18th-20th, 2010. The Grassroots Empowerment Project has reserved 150 rooms for this occasion. This event is the chance to learn about systems advocacy and speak with your legislator about matters that concern us all.

For any questions or concerns contact your Regional Network Leader, Arnold Hokanson at 715-718-0356 or arnoldhokanson@gmail.com. In Ashland, contact Casie Ledin at 715-685-2509 or ledin-casie@yahoo.com

TELEWORK The Wisconsin Telework Program is a statewide, alternative loan program that allows Wisconsin residents with disabilities to purchase computers and other equipment needed to work from home or from other remote sites away from the office, such as work on the road or at a Telework center.

Telework is made possible through a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Department of Workforce Development and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation received the grant and provide program and fiscal oversight.

North Country Independent Living staff are able to answer questions you may have. Call 800-924-1220 v/tty.

Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program

North Country Independent Living helps people with the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP) voucher, a program that helps consumers purchase adapted telephone equipment. The program is funded by the Universal Services Fund through the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin.

The TEPP voucher is for consumers who are hard of hearing, deaf or severely hard of hearing, speech-impaired, mobility or motion impaired, deaf with low vision, or deaf / blind. It helps pay for telecommunications equipment such as amplified phones, TTY phones, big button or picture phones, hands free phones, and speech enhanced phones. TEPP voucher amounts begin at \$100 for the hard of hearing voucher and increase depending upon the category of disability. The higher value vouchers have \$100 co-pays. Consumers who apply for the deaf / severely hard of hearing voucher may qualify for co-pay assistance.

North Country Independent Living staff help consumers apply for the voucher, submit the required hearing loss certificate, and demonstrate a large selection of amplified phones and devices from our loan closet. Consumers make informed choices about which telecommunications equipment would serve them best. After the consumer orders and receives the equipment, NCIL staff can hook the equipment up and help the consumer practice using the equipment that occasionally has more than one volume control or other feature.

North Country Independent Living encourages consumers to call with any questions about the program. Our staff will meet with consumers at their homes or any where they wish to meet.



Calendar of Events

All phone numbers are in area code 715 unless otherwise noted.

Wisconsin Primary Election, February 16th.
Please remember to vote.

Superior Days, February 23 & 24 in Madison.
Call John in Superior for more information.

Wisconsin Spring election, April 6th.

North Country Board of Directors, April 9 in Superior. Call John in our Superior office for more information.

Empowerment Days, Madison, April 18-20.
This will be your chance to learn about systems advocacy and how to present your issue to Wisconsin legislators. For more information, contact Arnold at: arnoldhokanson@gmail.com or call at 715,718-0356 in Superior and in Ashland, contact Casie at 685-2509 or ledincasie@yahoo.com

Special Education Seminar, April 28, 2 p.m. & 6 p.m. at the Great Lakes Visitor Center, west of Ashland. Information will be presented to help students with disabilities and their parents get the help they need in special education. Information will also be presented on Family Care and IRIS. North Country and Disability Rights-Wisconsin are sponsoring this free seminar. Keep watching for more information.

North Country will be sponsoring an **Assistive Technology Fair** in May in collaboration with UW-Stout. Our tentative date is **May 19th**, at a location yet to be determined. Keep watching for an announcement from North Country with more details.

Fishing Has No Boundaries, May 21-23. Call or e-mail for your application at: hayfhnbc@cheqnet.net or call (715) 634-3185. Apply early as spots fill up fast.

Changes in Communication Technology

If someone used the terms Captel, IR, VRS or VRI in a conversation with you, would you know what they were talking about? Well, now is your chance to find out.

These terms all refer to newer types of communications technology. In the past several years there have been several innovations in how communication can be conducted by people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

We plan to conduct presentations around communications technology, since captioned telephone (Captel), Internet Relay (IR) video relay service (VRS) and video remote interpreting (VRI) are relatively new. These presentations, with demonstrations of specialized phone equipment, will happen around north-west Wisconsin in the coming months.

If you are interested in a presentation for your group or agency, please contact John Nedden-Durst via email or in our Ashland office. Once we have them scheduled, we will publicize presentations on our website and in our next newsletter. This outreach project is sponsored by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin through the Universal Service Fund.

University Pilot

North Country will be participating in an exciting new project involving integrated employment and Social Work student interns from the University of Minnesota-Duluth and the University of Wisconsin- Superior.

The project will assist people with disabilities in exploring integrated employment opportunities in Douglas County. The project will also give social work students “real world” internship experiences, assisting consumers with their employment quest.

The project is being developed by a team, with representatives from both UWS, UMD, Pathways, state and local agencies, area non profits, etc.

Presently, we are searching for the program coordinator. If you are interested in learning more about the pilot as a consumer, employer, family member or are interested in being on the advisory committee, please contact North Country.

This project is funded by Pathways from the Wisconsin Office of Independence and Employment.

Ticket to Work

Are you interested in working and are currently receiving social security disability benefits? If the answer is “yes,” there is a new employment effort that North Country Independent Living and Northwest CEP, Inc. are working on that may be a good fit for you.

John Nedden-Durst can assist consumers who receive SSI or SSDI, and who are between ages 18 and 64 to learn more about Social Security’s Ticket to Work program. John can also assist you in learning how earned income can impact benefits and the employment services available that help you find work. Contact John via email or by calling our Ashland office.

SSI Medicaid Change

There is a change in Medicaid coverage for persons who receive their Medicaid through SSI. If you receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) you may have received a letter stating that you must enroll in a Medicaid SSI HMO program. What this means is that you will now get your health care coverage through an HMO instead of fee for service Medicaid. Enrolling in an HMO gives you certain benefits like no copayments for covered services, coordinated health care and access to health care 24 hours a day. You have the option to choose which HMO to enroll in. If you don’t choose, you will be (Continued, Page 5)

Are you SAD?

Seasonal affective disorder (also called SAD) is a type of depression that occurs at the same time every year. Symptoms start in the fall and may continue into the winter months, and include depression, hopelessness, anxiety, loss of energy, social withdrawal, oversleeping, loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed, appetite changes, especially a craving for foods high in carbohydrates, weight gain, difficulty concentrating and processing information.

Factors that may increase your risk of seasonal affective disorder include: being female, living far from the equator, and/or family history. It's normal to have some days when you feel down. But if you feel down for days at a time and you can't seem to get motivated to do activities you normally enjoy, see your doctor.

Treatment for seasonal affective disorder includes light therapy (phototherapy), psychotherapy and medications. There are some measures you can do on your own that may help, such as: make your environment sunnier and brighter, get outside and exercise regularly.

There's no known way to prevent the development of seasonal affective disorder. However, if you take steps early on to manage symptoms, you may be able to prevent them from getting worse over time. See: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/seasonal-affective-disorder/DS00195>

SSI Medicaid Change

(Continued from Page 4)

assigned to one automatically. If are not satisfied with an HMO you can switch to another plan. If after 60 days you still don't like an HMO, you have the option to dis-enroll and go back to fee for service Medicaid. Which plan is best for you? It depends on who you get your health care from and if they participate with the HMO. To find out if a plan is accepted by your health care provider, contact your clinic or call the SSI HMO enrollment specialist at 1-800-291-2002.



Support Groups

All phone numbers are in area code 715 unless otherwise noted.

Ashland Area Brain Injury/Stroke Support Group, meets the third Wednesday of the month at the Chequamegon Clinic, 415 Ellis Ave. For more information, call Stewart at North Country in Ashland.

Superior MS Support Group, meets the second Tuesday of each month from 6-8 p.m.

at the Superior Public Library. For more information, contact Pam at 394-6958.

Visually Impaired Support Group, Park Falls Area/Wisconsin Council of the Blind,

Meets at 700 Division Street in Park Falls the third Wednesday

the month. For more information, call Arnold at 762-4018.

Ashland Area Low Vision Support Group, meets the second Wednesday of the month at the Ashland Senior Center. Call the Senior Center for more information, 682-4414.

Special Education Seminar held in Superior

North Country Independent Living hosted a Special Education Seminar last December. The seminar was designed to empower parents of children who receive special education services in schools. Parents and educators alike want students to receive the best education. Navigating the special education system can be daunting and confusing.

Genie Hedlund from Disability Rights Wisconsin was the presenter at the December seminar. Genie is an attorney and manages the Rice Lake, WI office of Disability Rights-Wisconsin. Genie educated parents and North Country staff about education law and children's rights. Parents talked to Genie about their children's specific cases. Genie used a book published by Disability Rights Wisconsin called Special Education in Plain Language. The book is easy to read and is cross-referenced throughout in a way that helps parents understand what the laws mean to their children and how the law affects the way services are delivered. Genie stressed to all attendees that "Individualized Education Plans" mean just that and that each student has his or her own unique set of strengths, abilities, and needs.

North Country Independent Living will be hosting a second Special Education seminar at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, west of Ashland. The date is April 28th. Two information sessions will be held, one at 2 p.m. the second at 6 p.m. Keep watching for more details from North Country and plan to attend.

New Online Transportation Directory

If you're looking for a transportation provider that serves our eight-county area, there's a new online transportation directory to help you find that ride. myrideconnection.com features complete, up to date listings of services, hours and contact information for transportation services.

Volunteers Needed for Radio Comedy

North Country Independent Living and Honest Contempt for Authority Production Company are planning a collaborative effort to raise awareness about people with disabilities. The project will create opportunities for consumers to become involved in a radio comedy production.

"The idea came to me as a result of looking for a way to take advantage of the Wisconsin Arts Board Community collaboration grant," says Evan Sasman, HCA Production Company Producer. The grant requires artists to work with a community organization. "Because I have a disability, it seemed a natural to me work within this vein."

HCA will produce an episode of the radio situation comedy, Rural Mail Carrier, with a storyline that confronts disability stereotypes.

"As a person with a disability, I love working in radio because we are only limited by the width and depth of our imaginations," Sasman said.

People with disabilities are being encouraged to audition, but if you'd rather not get up on stage, there will be opportunities in other areas.

However, the collaboration is dependent on a successful grant application. Grant approval is enhanced if people with disabilities support and participate and if agencies who work with consumers also provide support.

Those who have an interest in auditioning or volunteering for the production, or providing letters of support can contact Evan Sasman at evansasman@yahoo.com or by calling 682-2024.

Backed by a Chequamegon Bay Arts Council grant, an episode of Rural Mail Carrier was recorded at Stage North in Washburn last year.

AT4ALL Assistive Technology Info Online

You can now look at all of our WisTech assistive technology (AT) loan closet items online, conduct a search for a particular item, see item details, bookmark items of interest and request a loan when appropriate. This new website, launched in the Fall of 2009, is www.wisconsinat4all.com. We have approximately 550 items listed for North Country Independent Living AT program.

An additional benefit of this website is that you can search the loan closet inventory of other programs in Wisconsin and you may be able to try out some of their AT equipment. Some equipment cannot be loaned in another area of the state or may be for demonstration only.

If you are interested in becoming a user of the website, you can set up your own user account, if you have a valid email address. Click on "Request a New Account" and complete the personal information form. Items marked by a red arrow are required. Please write down your password so you will have it when you log in.

You may still contact us by phone or stop by in person if you are interested in trying out equipment from our loan closet. The AT4ALL website is intended to provide an additional way for you to access AT item information.

Please contact John Nedden-Durst via email or in the Ashland office if you have any questions.

Tax Preparation Help

Northwest Wisconsin Community Services Agency-(715)392-5127

Indianhead Credit Union-Spooner-(715)635-8273

Public Libraries in your community

Call "211" for other local free tax sites

WISLOAN

WisLoan is a statewide, low interest loan program that allows a Wisconsin resident with a disability to purchase assistive technology or make home modifications so that he or she can live more independently or productively. **Contact North Country for more information.**

WisLoan is a federally-funded project of the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and the U.S Dept. of Education.

Donation for North Country Independent Living

North Country welcomes your support in fulfilling its mission of empowering people with disabilities. Your contribution is tax deductible. North Country Independent Living is a non-profit agency with 501(c)3 status.

Enclosed is my donation of \$ _____

Name _____

Organization/Company _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

I would like to volunteer at North Country

Mail to:
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ALTERNATE FORMATS AVAILABLE

If you require any of this information in an alternate format, please contact us.