



What's Inside

Page 2

Family Economic Supports

Page 3

Workforce Development

Page 4

Community Investments

Page 5

In the Community

Local Sponsors & Funders



Working Hard To Make Ends Meet

How Existing Benefits Can Stretch Your Budget

Alberta is said to be the land of prosperity. With provincial unemployment rates currently sitting below four percent there is a seemingly endless supply of help wanted signs posted in our cities. However, with Edmonton's top employer being the retail sector, many people are working in low paying, hourly-waged jobs, without benefits such as prescription drug coverage.

When you're a single parent working retail, getting paid by the hour, you can't afford to get sick. Your wages barely cover the basics like rent, food, clothing and child care. There just isn't room for extras like prescription drugs.

Vibrant Communities Edmonton has found that there are number of benefits and subsidies for which many workers are eligible, but which they may not receive.

- 1.They are required to file tax returns to apply for benefits and subsidies
- 2.Application forms can be complicated and intimidating
- 3.There is a lack of awareness of the available benefits and subsidies

The *Make Tax Time Pay* campaign was created in order to address these issues.

In order to facilitate this initiative, *Vibrant Communities Edmonton (VCE)* is working with a number of local organizations (such

as *Canadian Revenue Agency*, the *Alberta Human Resources and Employment*, *City of Edmonton*, non-profit organizations and an extensive volunteer network) to help citizens get their taxes done and to build an awareness of and apply for available benefits and subsidies. Together we have trained hundreds of volunteers who are working in all areas of the city to help Edmontonians file their tax returns and fill out the applications for these benefits. We have also created an easy tool for the volunteers to use that will help them assist people with the applications.

This process has helped us create a strategy that we believe will lead to five hundred families accessing benefits and subsidies that they had not previously received. These benefits and subsidies represent family economic supports and we believe these supports will help stretch the budget of people who are working and earning low wages.

Call 211 or visit our website at <http://www.vibrantedmonton.ca> for more information about the benefits and subsidies and where to go to have your taxes done.



Family Economic Supports:

Things families need to get ahead such as access to health benefits, financial education, credit clean up, and opportunities to build a savings account.

Make Tax Time Pay is only one of VCE's strategies to build family economic success. In an effort to focus on family economic success through education, VCE is also offering workshops which focus on topics promoting financial literacy. The aim of these workshops is to help people understand **why** they spend **what** they spend, so that they can change **how** they spend their money. The workshops also provide participants with an opportunity to obtain their credit reports and learn what the reports mean, and to understand their rights and responsibilities when opening a bank account. Tools to help people track their spending and to understand the basics of banking services are also provided.

The workshops are 1.5 hours in length and take place every two weeks.

The 12 workshops cover the following topics:

- 1. What are Assets?** – It's not just about cash!
- 2. Supports and Values**– Who can help me with my financial decisions?
- 3. Goal Setting** – Strengthening all of our assets
- 4. What's Stopping You?** – How to deal with obstacles to reaching our goals
- 5. Ways to Reach Your Goals** – Dealing with obstacles and beliefs about money
- 6. How to Find the Money to Save** – Identifying needs and wants and spending leaks
- 7. Budgets and Record Keeping** –

Tracking your money

8. Reality Check – Bank Accounts and Cheques*

9. Understanding Credit – Part 1, Credit reports, common errors on reports, dealing with collection agencies, tips for creating, maintaining or re-establishing credit

10. Understanding Credit – Part 2, The five C's of credit and credit scoring

11. Finding and Keeping Your Own Place*

12. The HOME Program, Insurance, Wills, RESP's*

* VCE may choose to change these sessions, based on the participants' requirements.

If you are interested in participating in a workshop series, please contact Vibrant Communities Edmonton at 428-1866 to add your name to a waiting list. We will contact you when we have 10 people for a workshop. There is no cost to attend the workshops.

If your company or organization is interested in hosting a workshop series, please contact us at the phone number above.

****By registering on the Resources/Research papers page of our website (www.vibrantedmonton.ca) you can have access to the following article which may be of interest:**

"The Current State Of Canadian Family Finances - 2003 Report"



A job that can support a family is critical to family economic success. Yet many people earn wages that don't support their family's basic needs. This creates an incredible amount of stress on a family. The difficulties they experience also impact their employers. Employers of people who earn low wages are often faced with higher costs as a result of absenteeism, and high turnover. Employee issues such as reliable child care are often beyond the scope of most employers to deal with on their own.

Employer-Sponsored Child Care

> We are developing an innovative initiative for employers who are interested in offering their employees employer-sponsored childcare. The range of options includes:

> Child care allowance or subsidy on a sliding scale or flat contribution

> Contract with local child care provider to reserve slots for employees and subsidize the costs especially if the business has non-traditional (shift work) or changing work schedules

> Provide employees with applications for government-sponsored child care subsidies

> Partner with another business and/or a non-profit organization and subsidize the construction of or the operating costs of an on-site or near-site child care centre that serves local businesses



> Partner with a child care centre to provide emergency backup care to help when children or babysitters are ill

A person earning the annual income listed below would be considered to be working at the low income cut off.

Size of Family	Annual Income	Per Hour Wage
1	\$20,337	\$ 9.77 /hr
2	\$25,319	\$12.17 /hr
3	\$31,126	\$14.96 /hr
4	\$37,791	\$18.16 /hr

*****By registering on the Resources/Research papers page of our website (www.vibrantedmonton.ca) you can have access to the following article which may be of interest:***

"Statistics About Employer Sponsored Child Care"

Workforce Development:

What it takes for people to access jobs with benefits and a future that will increase their earnings and income including work supports such as child care, transportation, and training at their workplace.



Community Investments:

How to make neighbourhoods and communities more viable places for families to choose to live, invest and build their futures through home ownership and affordable and accessible financial services.

Investing in our community does not only happen at the level of government; commitment is also necessary within the community itself. In an additional effort to invest in our community, we will also be working with employers to offer a line of services (Employer Assisted Housing) which will help employees buy their own homes.

The line of services that will help employees work toward this goal includes on-site financial literacy, employer-matched savings programs and access to The HOME Program. In employer-matched savings programs the employer matches the savings of participating employees toward the purchase of a home. The savings are vested for a period of time as determined by the employer. This is an excellent retention tool.

The HOME Program will offer the following services:

1. Home ownership education
2. Individual support and advocacy
3. Underwriting assistance
4. On-going support
5. Up to \$1000 towards closing costs

Research has indicated that services such as these lead to an increase in the number of applications received for available positions, a higher retention rate, a decrease in the number of missed days, increased productivity in the workplace and an overall higher degree of employee satisfaction.

If you are interested in participating in **The HOME Program**, you can call 504-6161 or toll free at 1-877-504-6161 or

visit the web site:
www.TheHomeProgram.ca.

If you are an employer interested in the range of services in our Employer Assisted Housing initiative, please contact Vibrant Communities Edmonton at 428 1866.

Alternative Banking Services

We are currently conducting a feasibility study to examine alternatives to the high cost services of pay day loan and cheque cashing companies. There are many of us who live pay cheque to pay cheque need to have immediate access to our money. Financial institutions place holds on deposits to accounts for many of their customers as a standard operating practice, even when a pay cheque is directly deposited to an account. As a result, at the end of the month when rent and day care fees are due, the funds are not available. For this reason, there is an increasing number of people who are working and who are turning to pay day loan and cheque cashing companies to meet their banking needs.

Results of the feasibility study will be released later this spring. Our goal is to partner with financial institutions to offer an alternative to pay day loans and cheque cashing companies.

*****By registering on the Resources/Research papers page of our website (www.vibrantedmonton.ca) you can have access to the following article which may be of interest:***

“The Cost of Pay Day Loans”



Interview with a community volunteer:

Cyndy: Have you volunteered with tax preparation before?

Tricia: No, this is my first time. I found out about it through my church.

Cyndy: What do you get out of participating in an initiative like this?

Tricia: It's a good, practical way to help people. Some of our clients forget to do their taxes or don't know how to do them. This program is very helpful that way.

Cyndy: Have you helped people apply for any benefits or subsidies?

Tricia: Most of our client are already accessing many benefits, but we have had a few who will be receiving them for the first time.

Cyndy: How do people react when you're helping them get their taxes done?

Tricia: They are very grateful. It's very exciting. The client makes me feel appreciated. Sometimes the client even wants to learn how to do their taxes on their own.

Vibrant Communities Edmonton

10237-104st Edmonton, AB, T5J 1B1

Phone: (780) 428-1866

Fax: (780) 428-1878

Email: karengingras@vibrantedmonton.ca

<http://www.vibrantedmonton.ca>

DID YOU KNOW??

> ...you qualify to have your taxes done for free if your household income is less than the following:

1 person – 25,000

2 persons – 30,000

3 persons – 32,500

4 persons – 35,000

5 persons – 37,500

> ...the Alberta Child Health Benefit covers on average \$265 of health care costs (medications, dental, etc.) per child per year

> ...you may be able to receive financial assistance for child care even if your child is in school (and 13 years or younger)? (Edmonton Out of School Care Subsidy)

> ...you could get prescription drug and dental costs covered if you qualify for the Alberta Health Care Premium subsidy because you automatically qualify for the Blue Cross Subsidy?

> ...you can apply for the Alberta Health Care Premium Subsidy for up to 2 previous years?

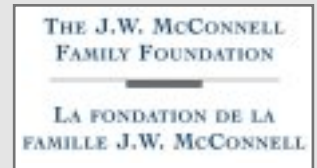
> ...you may be able to visit City of Edmonton Recreation Facilities for free? (Leisure Access Program)

Call 211 to find out where the nearest free tax preparation site is so you can get your taxes done and apply for these benefits and subsidies at the same time.

National Sponsors



Caledon



J.W. McConnel Family Foundation



Tamarack - An Institute for Community Engagement

