

Tax Time

Pioneers Help Make Filing Tax Returns an Affordable Reality

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The Canadian Revenue Agency partners with the SaskTel Pioneers' Regina chapter and United Way Regina to host CVITP clinics in Regina.

Tax season is a time most of us tend to dread, but that can be especially true for those of us who may not have the skills or knowledge to feel confident filling out their tax return. When that happens, many people turn to an accountant for help.

Unfortunately, for low-income individuals or families that might not be an option they can afford.

Thankfully, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) operates the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) that works with volunteer and charitable groups like the SaskTel Pioneers and the United Way Regina to host free personal income tax filing clinics across the country.

"Even if they don't pay any income tax or even if they don't make any money, there are lots of reasons for people to come do their income tax," said Lyle Sampson, SaskTel Pioneers CVITP Clinic Co-coordinator. "We tend to look at income tax, but really what the form is called is an Income Tax and Benefit Return, so for a lot of the people we see it's the family that benefits."

"This includes credits like: GST/SLIC, Working Income Tax Benefit, Climate Action Incentive or Canada Child Benefits, refunds of taxes paid and many more."

Since the 2013 tax season, the CRA has partnered with the SaskTel Pioneers' Regina chapter and the United Way Regina to host CVITP clinics in the Queen City. While things started out relatively small with just over 1,100 filings completed during its first year, demand for the program's services have continued to skyrocket; climbing over 450% since its launch.

Thankfully, the SaskTel Pioneers CVITP Tax Clinic at the United Way has 35 trained and dedicated volunteers who come back year-after-year to help people in the Regina area get their Income Tax and Benefit Return filed with CRA.

At this year's clinic, the trend toward growth has only continued.

In its first three weeks, volunteers at the clinic have filled over 2,500 Income Tax and Benefit Returns – the busiest first three weeks seen in its seven Tax Seasons! And for Lyle, this shows how the volunteers have truly become the backbone of the Pioneers CVITP.

Although the growth has been staggering, United Way Regina CEO Robyn Edwards believes that the clinic is a great example of the non-profit's mission in action, even if the pace has sometimes posed a challenge.

"We're about mobilizing our community to improve lives starting with the most vulnerable," said Robyn. "We used to just have a small room where the Pioneers were working diligently to provide the service and with the expansion we've had to change the way we work and make sure there is more space because the volume is just so significant."

Launched in 1971, the CVITP has grown rapidly across the country. Last year alone, volunteers with the program filed over 750,000 returns that resulted close to \$217 million in tax refunds and in securing over \$1.7 billion of benefits entitlements.

Here in Saskatchewan, close to 450 volunteers from 125 different organizations filed nearly 36,800 returns; generating over \$9.25 million in tax refunds and more than \$134.4 million in benefits for some 32,000 residents of the province.

"Filing a tax return opens the door to benefit payments that can have a significant financial impact on the lives of vulnerable individuals. That said, for some people, having access to the necessary documents and the opportunity to file their return can be challenging. In addition, the process can feel overwhelming", said Jennifer Olauson, CRA Outreach Officer.

"I've been with the program for many years and the efforts of participating CVITP community organizations and volunteers, such as the SaskTel Pioneers and the United Way of Regina enable

hundreds of thousands of Canadians to meet their tax obligations and receive the benefits, credits, and refunds to which they are entitled.”

In addition, a CVITP Clinic is being hosted by the Melfort Chapter of the SaskTel Pioneers at the Melfort Public Library.