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Program led by John Hope Settlement house offers free filing help for low-income taxpayers

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PROVIDENCE — A group of trained volunteers, certified by the IRS, will be available at several locations in Providence this week to help people file their taxes online.

The project is a partnership between local nonprofit agencies, led by the John Hope Settlement House, and the One Economy Corp., a global nonprofit whose mission is to use 21st century technology to help low-income people enter the economic mainstream.

Michael Byrne, Northeast site coordinator for One Economy, said the service has several advantages. It often saves people money on their taxes, alerting them if they qualify for deductions or credits. Byrne said 20 percent of the population that is eligible for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit fails to take advantage of it.

Byrne said the sessions teach taxpayers how to file on their own. "Once you learn how, you can keep doing it," he said. "It's a liberating feeling for most people."

Richard Keller, family economic success program coordinator for the John Hope Settlement House, said he's hoping between 100 and 200 taxpayers will take advantage of the tax-filing assistance.

Anyone is eligible for the service. It's free for any individual or family whose adjusted gross income is under \$56,000. Taxpayers whose income is over that amount can still use the service but must pay a small fee.

Byrne said to file taxes online, people must have a valid e-mail address and Social Security number. One Economy also suggests that people bring the following items to the tax-filing sessions: last year's tax return; Social Security numbers and birthdates for all people to be listed on tax returns; income statements such as W-2s or 1099 forms for any job; amount of rent paid or property tax statements for 2008; childcare expense information, including the name of the provider, address and tax identification; education expenses for children in grades K-12; expenses for college and documentation for charitable donations.

One Economy said people may want to bring a voided check, which would provide information so that any tax refund could be directly deposited into the taxpayer's bank account.

The tax service will be available at the following sites, all in Providence:

Today — 1 to 6:30 p.m., Knight Memorial Library, 275 Elmwood Ave.

Tomorrow — noon to 7 p.m., Genesis Center, 620 Potters Ave.

Wednesday — 1 to 6:30 p.m., Knight Memorial Library.

Thursday — 11 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Dorcas Place, 220 Elmwood Ave.

Friday — 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., ACORN, 807 Broad St.

Saturday — 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., ACORN.

For additional information, check the One Economy Web site at www.myfreetaxes.com.

Keller said assistance with tax preparation is also available through VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) sites throughout Rhode Island. For information, he said, call the United Way's 211 number.