

REAL STORIES REAL IMPACT

Help that changes lives



“I was born in Lynn, raised in Lynn. The United Way Financial Stability Center is the best thing that has ever come to Lynn. It’s the single most important place in the city.”

– Petra Jimenez

Petra Jimenez works hard. Very hard. As a visiting personal care assistant, she makes \$12 an hour providing healthcare, housekeeping and other vital services to elderly people in their homes. But it was only recently that this financially struggling, single mother of two started receiving the vital help she needed to create a path out of debt and begin building a solid financial foundation for her family.

“I didn’t just want to keep owing money and owing money and getting into a deeper and deeper hole,” says Petra. “When the United Way Financial Stability Center opened here in Lynn, anybody can tell you that I was one of the first people in the door.” Petra’s path to financial stability started by filing for her federal Earned Income Tax Credit, a frequently unclaimed credit aimed at helping the working poor. Thanks to free tax preparation from community volunteers trained at the United Way-funded Center, Petra received the maximum \$5,000 refund as well as approximately \$2,000 in state and federal refunds. “Before coming here, I would have thought about buying a new TV with that money,” she says, “but now, because of my classes, it’s going towards something bigger – a home.”

The financial education classes that Petra attends every week have totally transformed the way she thinks about money. “I used to buy things that I didn’t need,” Petra says with conviction. “Now, I pick things up and ask, do I need it or do I just want it?” “Today, I have real goals: paying off debt, paying my bills, building a solid credit history and sticking to a budget. I keep a record of everything that I spend.” Most of Petra’s tax refunds went toward paying off student loans that financed her medical assistant training, but a full \$3,500 was set aside as savings for her long-range goal of home ownership. As she sticks to her plan, Petra knows that she can also qualify for an IDA (Individual Development Account) that will match the money she saves for her down payment.

Today, more and more Lynn families just like Petra’s are transforming their futures with the help of United Way’s Financial Stability Center powered by SPIN. This year alone, almost 200 low income local tax filers have taken advantage of the EITC credit, putting approximately \$300,000 back into a community that has been hard-hit by the recession and record unemployment rates.

“I wish I’d known a lot of the things I know now when my kids were younger,” she says with wisdom. Still, she acknowledges that it isn’t too late for her kids to benefit. “they’re seeing that you can have the power and control to change things, and that education is the way out. That’s what the programs here are all about.”

GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.
LIVE UNITED™

