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Rappahannock United Way Calls Volunteers to Action, Tax Preparation

Fredericksburg, Va.

Last year Meh Hussain volunteered through her employer Stafford County Head Start, to help out with free tax preparation in the community through Rappahannock United Way's (RUW) Tax Services program.

With her co-workers, the Stafford County resident and working single mom found joy in the program, which is an initiative of the Rappahannock Region Financial Stability Coalition. The Coalition, led by RUW, aims to equip working families with the income they need by providing them with free tax preparation and asset-building information.

"I liked the whole idea of helping parents so that they actually received some money back—and were able to save a couple hundred dollars on top of that since we don't charge any fees." Meh shared, "It was a good feeling; it brought us a lot of joy."

Last year volunteers prepared over 900 tax returns in the Greater Fredericksburg area. This saved community members over \$170,000 in tax preparation fees and refunded them \$1.18 million. Individuals and families used these refunds to pay bills, reduce debt, pay for an education, build savings, or even buy a car—things that have a lasting impact on community members' lives.

"We try to do everything we can so they get back what they deserve," Hussain said of the Tax Services volunteer corps.

Rappahannock United Way is looking for volunteers to help prepare taxes, screen clients, and greet visitors during the 2012 tax season. Training, which begins in December, is free—and no experience is necessary.

When asked whether she thought it was necessary to have a financial background, Meh disagreed. "You get the training there; the system walks you through it, so it's easy for anybody to learn if they are interested. It would be beneficial to anybody if they did learn."

Besides fulfillment in helping others, Meh discovered another benefit to volunteering: she was able to prepare her own tax return last year. "The person who oversaw the program walked me through it, and I learned so much," she beamed.

Trainings* take place at Rappahannock United Way, 3310 Shannon Park Drive on the following dates:

Tax Law Training

Thursday, December 8: 1-5pm

Saturday, December 10: 11am-3pm

Tax Wise Software Training

Thursday, December 15: 1-5pm

Saturday, December 17: 11am-3pm

*Volunteers only need to attend one session of Tax Law Training and one session of Tax Wise Training—not all four training dates.

Those who cannot volunteer have the opportunity to advocate in support of the Tax Services program in the following ways:

- 1 - Promotion – Put up posters in your business, or include informational fliers with pay checks. We have free marketing materials for your use. (Effective July 1, 2009, Virginia requires employers to post a notice informing employees of their rights under the Earned Income Tax Credit.)
- 2 - Presentations – Invite one of our staff to give a quick, five minute presentation to your associates about free tax preparation available to them.
- 3 - Encourage Support – Invite your associates to give a couple of hours a week to help low-to-moderate-income workers get the refunds they have earned.

It only takes a little bit of time to make a huge difference in someone's life. Those interested can contact Sarah Walsh, Director of Community Investment at Rappahannock United Way at (540) 373-0041 ext. 315 or swalsh@rappahannockunitedway.org.

About Rappahannock United Way: Founded in 1939, Rappahannock United Way is a local nonprofit organization serving the city of Fredericksburg, and the counties of Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania and Stafford. Rappahannock United Way is working to advance the common good by focusing on Education, Income and Health. These are the building blocks for a good life—a quality education that leads to a stable job, enough income to support a family through retirement, and good health. Our goal is to create long-lasting changes that prevent problems from happening in the first place.

We invite our community to be part of the change. Together, united, we can inspire hope and create opportunities for a better tomorrow. That's what it means to LIVE UNITED.