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Taxes Are Hard, United Way Volunteers Make It Easy

SAN FRANCISCO (November 1, 2016)—United Way Bay Area’s Earn It! Keep It! Save It! program is seeking volunteer tax preparers, interpreters, and greeters to help staff our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites throughout the Bay Area during the 2017 tax season. With the support of trained, IRS-certified volunteer tax preparers, VITA sites provide free tax preparation to individuals and families earning less than \$54,000 per year at more than 200 locations throughout eight Bay Area counties.

VITA volunteers help Bay Area households receive the best possible refunds by ensuring they claim all deductions and tax credits available. For example, the federal Earned Income Tax Credit—one of the most powerful poverty-fighting safety net programs in the country—can provide eligible families with three or more qualifying children a \$6,269 credit. Sites also provide support in helping families access the California Earned Income Tax Credit, which leverages the federal EITC in the communities that need it the most. The estimated average household benefit is \$460 per year with a maximum credit of more than \$2,600 for a family with three or more qualifying children.

“We’ve asked our volunteers what their number one reason for volunteering is and they all answer, ‘I want to help people and give back to my community,’” said Kelly Batson, Vice President of Program Operations at United Way of the Bay Area. “We hear from our volunteers that come back year after year that there is something addictive about helping people with their taxes.”

Last year, 3,500 Earn It! Keep It! Save It! volunteers helped file more than 81,000 federal and state tax returns, bringing more than \$81 million in federal tax refunds back to the local community. Since 2003, volunteers have brought back over half a billion dollars in refunds to Bay Area households—an estimated 80% of which is spent locally.

Free volunteer training provided by community partners and the IRS begins in December and January. New volunteers will be required to attend three days of classroom instruction. For tax professionals or experienced volunteers, an online training and certification tool is available.

Site operation hours vary, but each volunteer is asked to volunteer regularly for at least one four-hour shift per week from late January until April 15, 2017. Volunteers of all ages and backgrounds are welcome, but all volunteers need to be comfortable working with a computer. There is a special need for bilingual Spanish speakers.

“Volunteers are the heart of Earn It! Keep It! Save It!, as thousands of people show up every tax season to connect with and give back to their community,” said Batson. “The amazing result is tens of thousands of tax returns prepared and millions of dollars are returned to the pockets of working families--I can’t think of a more direct way to connect with and help your neighbors!”

Learn more: earnitkeepitsaveit.org/volunteer

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About United Way Bay Area

United Way Bay Area is a nonprofit organization, leading a movement to end the cycle of Bay Area poverty. We’re harnessing the collective power of nonprofits, government, corporations, labor and thousands of individuals to create change through giving, advocating and volunteering. Every year, our programs—SparkPoint, Earn It! Keep It! Save It!, 211, MatchBridge and SparkPoint —help more than 250,000 Bay Area residents. We connect people to food and shelter, put people back to work, bring tax dollars back to our community, help youth succeed in school and in the workplace, and move people toward financial stability. Founded in 1922, United Way Bay Area serves Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Solano Counties.

Learn more about United Way Bay Area: uwba.org