



Williamson County Financial Stability Coalition

NEWS RELEASE

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Coalition Forms to Expand Free Tax Services in County

What do United Way of Williamson County, the IRS, AARP, Catholic Charities, WBC Opportunities and Foundation Communities all have in common? The answer is easy – all these organizations have a genuine desire to help families become more financially stable. This unique gathering of dedicated staff and volunteers has been meeting regularly for more than six months to look at ways to help families become more financially stable. Aptly named the Williamson County Financial Stability Coalition, the group's first area of focus is to increase the accessibility of free tax preparation to low income families and seniors in Williamson County.

“The United Way of Williamson County (UWWC) has always looked at ways to help our neighbors in need, but more recently we have begun to strategically focus our efforts on ensuring that the residents of Williamson County are able to increase their income and assets,” said LeAnn Powers, the organization's Chief Professional Officer. “Discussions began in 2009 with a group of UWWC Board members looking at specific areas of need in our community as it relates to financial stability. Through a very thorough review process, these folks realized the need to offer more free tax preparation opportunities in the eastern and western parts of the County. So they brought together a great group of people in the community that could assist in the process of bringing free tax preparation sites to these areas.”

Two organizations, Foundation Communities and the AARP, do offer free volunteer tax preparation services in the County, but on a limited basis and at restricted locations. So the Coalition will open two new sites – one at City Hall in Taylor and one at the Bagdad Head Start facility in Leander. These sites, often referred to as VITA sites or Community Tax Centers, are staffed with volunteers that have received extensive training in preparing IRS tax returns. These volunteers work to ensure that the individuals and families that they help will receive all the tax credits that they are due. The Taylor and Leander sites will be staffed from late-January through April 18, 2011. Additionally, the AARP will increase their tax preparation services in multiple Williamson County locations. Once all the sites in the County have finalized their hours of operation, a complete list will be posted on the UWWC website at www.unitedway-wc.org.

By utilizing a free tax preparation service, low income families can realize a larger amount of tax credits and refunds, and save money on tax preparation fees, thereby increasing their income and improving their standard of living. In tax year 2008 (calendar 2009), the IRS reported that the total Earned Income Tax Credit collected by more than 21,000 working taxpayers in the County was over \$42 million. A conservative

assumption is that an additional 25% were eligible, but did not file or take advantage of this credit, presenting a large opportunity for the Coalition to help these families. These dollars would not only help families achieve financial stability, but will also aid local business as refunds are spent locally.

More than 10,000 families in the County pay a tax preparation service to assist them with their returns. The fees for this service range from \$100 to \$500. These are dollars that families often have to redirect from other expenses such as food or utilities. VITA and AARP tax preparation is free.

The Coalition is currently recruiting volunteers to provide such services as site coordination, site support, translation and tax preparation. The Coalition, in conjunction with the AARP and the IRS will offer complete training for all volunteers, including certification for volunteer income tax preparers. Volunteer hours are flexible. For additional information on volunteering call 512-876-4185, or email coalition@unitedway-wc.org.

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