



## United Way of Washtenaw County Builds Prosperity Through Financial Health: One Man's Path to Financial Independence

United Way  
of Washtenaw County



Many of us can relate to the difficulties in filing taxes. This yearly demand requires a considerable amount of dedicated time and skill and many of us turn to hired professionals for assistance. However, many others are unable to obtain that assistance and are left behind, creating barriers to employment and long-term financial stability.

Though he was offered a full-time position at the Environmental Protection Agency, Willie Williams, a client of the United Way of Washtenaw County (UWWC), was unable to secure the position due to unfiled taxes. The governmental agency insisted on an up-to-date tax file, "Those taxes were holding me up," reflected Williams. Many, including Williams, often wonder, 'Why do they make it so hard to pay my taxes?'

Fortunately, UWWC has mobilized considerable resources to support the community with this yearly demand. "We are proud to be able to find solutions to our community's financial needs by way of providing free financial services," remarks Patrick Helman, an Americorps Member, and UWWC Financial Stability team member.

During May 2017, Williams sought out the support of UWWC following his sister's recommendation. As his advocate, UWWC helped Williams track down all necessary paperwork from prior employers. During this time, staff from UWWC also helped him stay in constant contact with the enrollment officer at the EPA. Williams gained financial confidence while learning how to file his taxes. UWWC further connected him to resources at the University of Michigan Low Income Taxpayer Clinic to set up a payment plan for five prior years of owed taxes. Luckily, much of what was owed was offset by refunds from the Homestead Property Tax Credit, which, prior to visiting UWWC, he was unaware of his eligibility.

Williams thanks UWWC for being very helpful and reducing stress over the whole process. "[The United Way] stayed on me, they're very professional, it drove me to get it done." As of today, Williams is happily and gainfully employed with the EPA office in Ann Arbor and has plans to file taxes with the help of UWWC this spring.

United Way of Washtenaw County connects people, resources and organizations together to create a thriving community for everyone. Through their commitment to Financial Stability, the agency offers workshops in financial literacy, individual coaching, and programs such as VITA. The VITA program offers IRS sponsored Volunteer Income Tax Assistance by matching over 70 trained and certified volunteers to community members earning less than \$54,000 and who are eligible for free tax filing support. Find out more about VITA, and the other facets of UWWC's financial literacy mission on our website.

In 2017, UWWC helped over **100 households** file taxes. The income of these households averaged \$20,794. Collectively, they earned **\$1.65M** in tax returns.

Our goal is to help working families and individuals pave a path to financial independence. Your gift helps ensure the continued impact of United Way Washtenaw County in our community.

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