

Volunteers Staff Free Tax Clinic for Low-Income Families

For several years, **Goodwill Industries of Hawaii** (Honolulu) has run a free tax clinic three days a week and on Saturday mornings to assist a wide range of people with low incomes, including people who are elderly, people who recently immigrated, those who have not filed their taxes for multiple years, people who do not speak English, workers who are homeless, and individuals who are simply inexperienced with or uninformed about the tax process.

The clinic operates in partnership with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program and the Aloha United Way.

The use of volunteers enables the VITA Program to operate with minimal overhead and adds a Goodwill touch, says Laura Kay Rand, the Goodwill's vice president of corporate services. "The compassion and knowledge of the taxpayer situations makes this a perfect match for Goodwill and the community."

Tax clinic volunteer positions at Goodwill Industries of Hawaii include tax preparers, interpreters, administrative assistants, greeters and IT support. This year, volunteers included 21 Goodwill employees and five community members with a total of more than 1,000 volunteer hours served in tax clinics run on Oahu, Maui and Hawaii's Big Island.

This year, volunteers prepared 616 tax returns, helped families access \$286,548 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$757,071 in overall federal refunds, while saving families thousands of dollars in tax preparation fees.

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— Laura Kay Rand
Vice President of Corporate Services
Goodwill Industries of Hawaii



Misti Pali (left) helps Jennifer Cohen-Murray with her taxes at the Honolulu VITA tax clinic on Oahu.

IT Professional Teaches Valuable Skills to Inmates

Brenda Hernandez, a federal government IT worker by day, uses her technical expertise two weekends each month to make a difference in the lives of men and women who are incarcerated in Frederick, MD.

This married mother of four and grandmother of one has volunteered at **Goodwill Industries of the Monocacy Valley** for more than three years, giving up part of her weekends to teach Microsoft Word and Excel to people in the Frederick County Work Release Center.

Hernandez is happy to "give back" to her community. In the process, she's helping people with criminal backgrounds develop sought-after workplace computer skills to help in their

job searches upon release, which is less than a year away for some of her students.

Elissa Gross, director of marketing and development for the Frederick Goodwill, attended one of Hernandez's classes recently to get a first-hand look at how the program is changing lives. "I really noticed their enthusiasm about being there — to learn and interact with each other," she says.

In addition to computer training, the Goodwill also offers job coaching and pre-release counseling programs at the Work Release Center. Since its inception in March 2007, its programs have served 191 individuals. Comprehension test scores have also improved significantly, with an average post-instruction score of 88 percent. ■



John King (left) and David Bonita learn Microsoft Excel at the Frederick County Work Release Center.



Beth Hernandez, an IT professional and Goodwill volunteer, teaches inmates valuable computer skills before they are released and begin looking for work.