



Wisconsin | Campus Compact

Best Practices in UWEX Service-Learning

Service Learning through VITA Family Living Programs

Iowa County is home to 22,000 people. About 6% of the residents receive Food Share, 600 children get free/reduced price school meals and there are 565 WIC participants in Iowa County. Although the poverty rate of 7.3% is lower than the state average, there are individuals and families who struggle to make ends meet. The cost of tax preparation in Iowa County is \$75-\$175 per return. With the introduction of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program in Iowa County in 2005, and a goal of preparing 100 tax returns, many volunteers were needed.

Ruth Schriefer, Iowa County Family Living Educator, assumed leadership for VITA in Iowa County. A VITA Site Coordinator manual provided by the IRS provided extensive details and job descriptions for the various volunteers needed at a VITA site. All volunteers completed the on-line IRS Link & Learn VITA training prior to volunteering at our VITA site, which the seven students found easy due to their previous tax accounting classes.

Iowa County VITA volunteers successfully prepared 47 tax returns in 2005. Collectively, the students from UW-Platteville and Southwest Wisconsin Technical College volunteered more than 150 hours. Their roles included intake (meeting, greeting and screening clients), computer processing returns, and quality assurance. Their ability to ask questions and understand responses grew each time they volunteered. A true compliment to their efforts was the couple who remarked "Your volunteers did a better job than any paid preparer...."

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