

**Media contact: Christine Decker, christine.l.decker@odhs.oregon.gov;
503-602-8027**

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Free help can ensure teenagers don't miss tax refunds

Oregon Department of Human Services' partners offer tax help in-person or online

Free tax help is available to meet the needs of young people, some of whom may be earning income for the first time. This help is available through a network of community partners funded by the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Tax Infrastructure Grant Program.

What young people need to know

- Young people in their first jobs or working part-time may be owed a refund of some - or even all - of the taxes withheld from their paychecks.
- Even if a young person is claimed as a dependent on their parents' or guardian's return, they still file their own tax return to report their income.
- A correctly filed tax return by a child who is a dependent would not interfere with exemptions claimed by their parents or guardians on their returns.

The ODHS Tax Infrastructure Grant Program funds IRS-certified community organizations and Tribal governments that provide free tax filing help for youth and all people with low incomes. The ODHS Tax Infrastructure Grant Program also funds projects through educators.

Young people helping young people

As part of an ODHS grant, teachers at Salem's McKay High School trained about a dozen students this school year using free, IRS-approved tax-filing software, so they can help their peers. They hold tax filing clinics where students prepare their own returns using the software program and the grant provided incentives, such as coffee gift cards, to get students involved. Teacher Marcia Latta said that in the first clinic a student got \$269 back, a recent graduate came back to file and got almost \$1,200.

"Most get money back. They're so pleased," Latta said. "I love that we provide this extra opportunity to our students to develop these skills and it's great to see them get this money back," Latta said.

Oregon State University's Shelly Krehbiel said their student-led team has trained about 90 university students this year to provide free tax filing assistance. The Corvallis students also lead site operations, marketing efforts, and training development, including support for outreach teams at OSU Cascades in Bend and OSU Extension Service in Eugene. Krehbiel, who is the Program Manager for Extension and Partner Operations for OSU's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA), said the program also partners with South Eugene High School's Finance Club, training about 10 students as tax-filing facilitators and helping them reach out to others at their high school to help them file their taxes.

"From the people they've helped there is such surprise. They say, 'Oh, that was so easy.' When people walk into our locations, they look scared and anxious. They walk out smiling and relieved. It's great to see," Krehbiel said.

Students who participated in a 2023 ODHS pilot project in nine high schools across the state received state and federal tax refunds ranging between \$95 and \$1,246.

Where and how to get free help

The ODHS Tax Infrastructure Grant Program partners with Get Your Refund, a free online tax filing service through which individuals can have their return prepared or file it themselves using free tax software. Help is available in English and Spanish. To get started, go to [GetYourRefund/OR](https://www.getyourrefund.org).

In-person help is available through community organizations at ODHS-sponsored sites that offer free tax return preparation through October 15. All give assistance in English and Spanish at a minimum. Those sites by location are:

- **Beaverton, Gresham, Portland:** CASH Oregon, 503-243-7765, info@cashoregon.org. CASH Oregon offers virtual help for people who live outside these areas.
- **Bend, Redmond:** Latino Community Association, 541-382-4366, info@latinocommunityassociation.org
- **Corvallis, Eugene, Bend:** Oregon State University, 541-737-3371, vita@oregonstate.edu
- **Coos Bay, Roseburg:** Moneywise Oregon, 541-670-5054, dan@moneywiseoregon.org
- **Medford:** United Way Jackson County, 541-864-5092, <https://unitedwayofjacksoncounty.org/volunteer-income-tax-assistance/>
- **Monmouth, Independence:** Western Oregon University, 503-751-4132, wouvita@wou.edu
- **Ontario, Portland:** Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, 971-331-9811, elizabethz@irco.org
- **Woodburn:** Centro de Servicios Para Campesinos, 503-982-0243, debbiec@centrospc.org

For more information about the Oregon Department of Human Services Tax Infrastructure Grant Program: <https://www.oregon.gov/odhs/pages/tax-help.aspx>.