

YOU MADE A DIFFERENCE THROUGH THE

FREE FILE

FREE TAX PREPARATION PROGRAM

SUMMER 2025



THANK YOU FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Few programs have had a greater impact on the financial stability of Pickens County families than United Way of Pickens County's Free File program.

Thanks to your support and the dedication of our volunteers, in 2025, Free File filed 2,244 tax returns for Pickens County families and individuals for a total economic impact of \$2,211,197.

Sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service VITA (Volunteers Income Tax Assistance) Program, Free File provides free in-person income tax preparation assistance to individuals and families with a household income of less than \$60,000 a year.

We are pleased to also offer an online free income tax preparation do-it-yourself option for those with a household income of \$84,000 or less through MyFreeTaxes.com.

Having access to these free services, as well as all eligible tax credits and deductions, helps thousands of individuals across the community save hundreds of thousands of dollars in filing fees each year, and pays huge dividends for our local economy.

Your support fuels this work, and for that we are truly grateful.



HOW IT WORKS:

The taxpayer makes an appointment either online or by dialing 2-1-1.

On the day of the appointment, the taxpayer is greeted at the door by a volunteer Intake Coordinator and receives a form and clipboard to fill out their personal information.

The Intake Coordinator asks for the taxpayer's drivers license and Social Security card and leads them to a designated area to wait.

When a Tax Preparer is available, the Intake Coordinator takes the taxpayer to have their return prepared.

After the return is prepared, the Intake Coordinator brings the taxpayer to a Site Coordinator who then checks the return, makes sure the appropriate forms are printed and signed, and then files the return.

Finally, all documents are returned to the taxpayer.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Dan and Lori Baker

Dan and Lori Baker began volunteering in different positions with United Way when they lived in Kentucky. Once they retired and moved to South Carolina, they both wanted to continue volunteering. A friend in their subdivision, who is a Free File Site Coordinator for United Way of Pickens County, connected them to Free File where Dan and Lori both became certified Tax Preparer volunteers.



"You will gain so much more than what you give. The gratitude of the clients is unbelievable," shared Lori.

Free File Volunteer Tax Preparers are IRS Certified at the advanced level and can provide basic education and assistance. They utilize the electronic tax software to prepare returns for eligible residents.

Dan and Lori enjoyed interacting with the taxpayers they helped this season. One taxpaying couple shared that they had been married for 64 years, and Dan recalls that listening to their story was wonderful. "I had no idea I would receive the blessings," Dan shared.

Lori went on to share, "Helping widows when they have never filed taxes is very fulfilling. They were lost and so relieved after the taxes were completed. **The gratitude they express, and just knowing that you have helped them in an area that most either dislike or are afraid of, is rewarding.**"

Prospective volunteers can be daunted by the idea of helping with taxes. But Dan and Lori would like to reassure everyone that this is a doable volunteer role. "The biggest challenge is overcoming the thought that you aren't qualified. The training is very helpful and the Site Coordinators help tremendously with any questions. The tax program walks you through step by step."

Serving as a Free File volunteer is a truly rewarding experience. As Dan and Lori shared, **"The impact Free File has on the community is huge. It is obvious when person after person tells you how thankful they are that this is offered in their community."**



"Working with and getting to know other volunteers, plus helping United Way in a really awesome program that helps the community," are just a few of the volunteer benefits Dan shared.

MEET JUST A FEW OF THE NEIGHBORS YOU HELPED

Behind every Free File tax return is a face... a name... a story. Meet just a few of the more than 2,200 Pickens County neighbors who were helped thanks to your generosity this tax season.

Jackson is 80 years old. One of eight children, he grew up tending the cotton fields. He never learned to read or write. Jackson tried to learn as an adult, but was soon diagnosed with dyslexia, making it a nearly impossible task to learn to read in his older age. Jackson relies on your generosity and United Way's free tax service to help him file his taxes each year.

Emily and Gerald had a tax appointment scheduled for a Monday. Sadly, the Friday before the appointment, Gerald passed away suddenly. Emily still attended her tax appointment the following Monday, knowing that the friendly volunteers at Free File would be kind, compassionate and understanding of her loss and would help her get through her tax return.



I just wanted to say a heartfelt thank you for your and Dan's help in preparing my 2024 taxes at the Sarlin Library in Liberty. You all are kind and professional. This service is a BIG help to me and many others. Sincerely, Jane, Liberty resident.

Johnny is 79 years old and diabetic. His medicine costs are about \$2,000 per month. He was concerned about how he was going to afford to pay a tax professional to prepare his taxes.

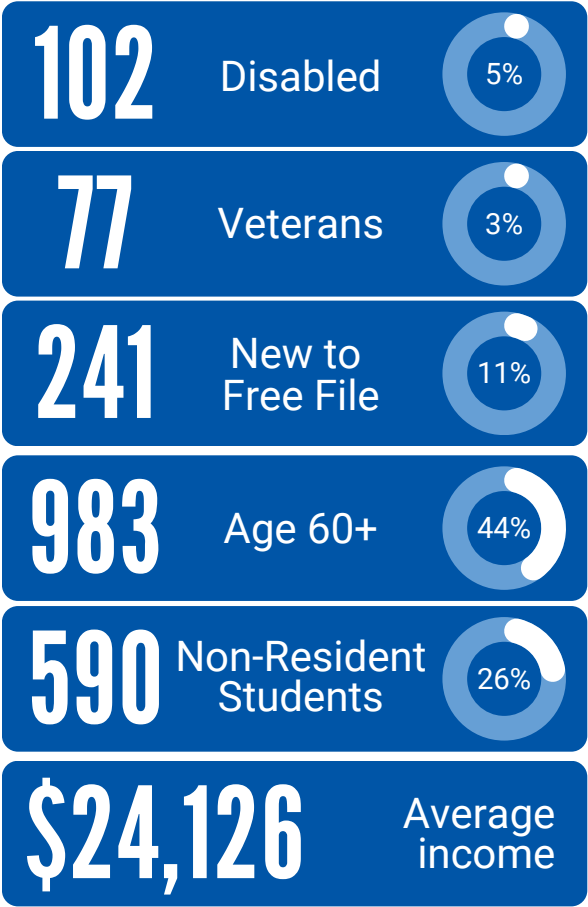
He was relieved when he called the IRS to inquire about options and was informed that he qualifies for free tax services through Free File.

Because of you, he can afford to purchase his medicine and fulfill his tax filing requirement.

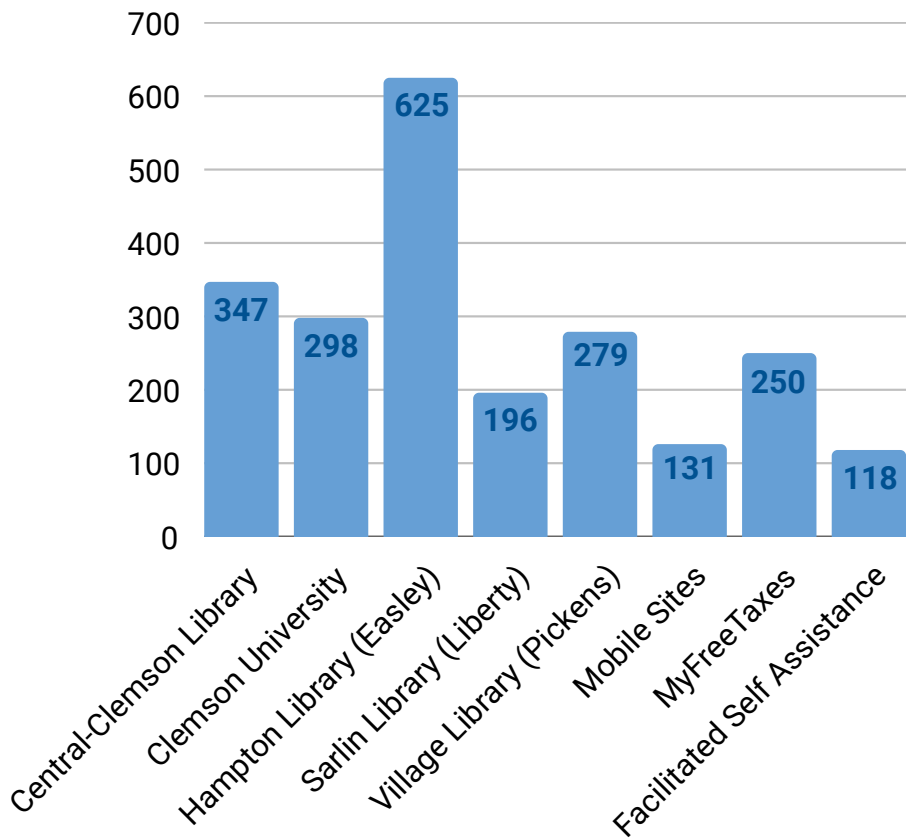
Bill and Francis have been using Free File for years. Last year, Bill started his own construction business. Because of his experience with Free File, Bill came in knowing that he would be required to pay business taxes, and that because he had not withheld taxes throughout the year, he would owe taxes. Francis kept his detailed expense records organized, and their preparedness paid off. Instead of the taxes owed being a burden, they were pleasantly surprised that the bill was less than expected.

BY THE NUMBERS: FREE FILE 2025

Who We Served



Returns Prepared by Site



TOTAL RETURNS FILED:
2,244



TOTAL IMPACT: \$2,211,197

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

Each year, Free File appointments at Clemson University fill up within the first few weeks of tax season. This high demand is largely due to the program's unique offering: Foreign Student Tax Preparation. International students who study in the U.S. and earn income are required to file a U.S. income tax return. However, their tax obligations differ significantly from those of U.S. citizens. Due to special rules and tax treaties between countries, these returns are more complex. To assist with them, volunteers must earn an additional certification—the Foreign Student Tax Certification—qualifying them to support international students effectively.

In 2025, determined to support more students, our team introduced classroom-style sessions designed to deliver tax return guidance to larger groups at once. These sessions, called Facilitated Self Assistance (FSA), allow the students to prepare and file their own tax return using free software, with instruction and guidance from several IRS-certified volunteer tax professionals. With nearly 1,700 international students at Clemson University, the need is great. In 2024, we prepared 465 international student tax returns. This year, that number rose to 590, including 118 students who were served through the new classroom style approach. The early results are promising, and with continued effort, we believe this approach will allow us to reach and assist even more students in the future.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Keyla Zhao

Keyla Zhao has been a rock star high school volunteer. For two summers, she interned with us at Camp iRock. This spring, she added Free File to her list of volunteer activities when she completed all of the training and became an IRS certified Tax Preparer. Now a high school graduate, we asked Keyla to share her Free File volunteer experience with us. This is what she had to say:

Transformative. This is the word I would use to describe the Free File program. Volunteering for Free File for the first time this year has made me realize the importance of free services in helping people gain tax credits and refunds that can transform their finances. It has also personally been an unmatched experience for me.

As a high school senior looking to go into finance and interested in expanding financial literacy, volunteering with Free File allowed me to work with real people in real scenarios. While volunteering with Free File this year, I can 100% say that it is a crucial program in Pickens County that can truly brighten someone's day. Not only did I enjoy learning about taxes, seeing the smiles on people's faces, and their gratitude once we helped them successfully file their taxes, is inspirational.



Volunteering gave high school senior Keyla hands-on experience in her future profession, and insight into Free File's positive impact on neighbors in our community.

One taxpayer I vividly remember helping was Maria, a widow with two young children whose husband recently passed away a year ago. She told me she discovered the Free File program from a sign at the Hampton Memorial Library and decided to schedule an appointment. As a newly single mother who had never done her taxes, Free File became a game-changer for her.

When I began doing her taxes, I noticed that she was working multiple jobs and even doing DoorDash as an extra stream of income. She explained her struggles managing finances while raising children by herself and grieving over her husband's passing. Learning about her story made me even more ecstatic when I was able to help file her taxes.

While filing her taxes, I informed her about how she could get a business tax credit because DoorDash counted as a self-employed business, something she never knew before. Despite only interacting with her for 20 minutes, her story truly showed me how impactful Free File is. **It's a program that can lift a burden off someone's already heavy shoulders.**

YOU HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE LIVES

Free File is one of the most impactful and appreciated services offered by United Way of Pickens County.

It serves hardworking families and elderly individuals who are often struggling just to make ends meet. Free File connects them with compassionate volunteers who truly care—and it comes at no cost, saving clients significant filing fees. We also emphasize how waiting just a few weeks for their tax return helps them avoid high-interest loans and costly fees.



Many of the people we serve live on the edge of financial insecurity. Often, they were never shown healthy financial habits. Free File gives us an opportunity not only to assist with their taxes but also to educate them and help build a stronger financial foundation.

Through this program, we meet individuals with pressing needs—needs that often go unseen. Free File opens the door for us to connect them with vital services and support systems. And it gives you the power to be part of that impact.

Your donation to United Way of Pickens County helps provide critical information and referral services, guiding people to the help they need. It also supports our other financial literacy programs, like Pathways, that equip our neighbors with tools for long-term stability.

Our vision is to make Pickens County a “financially capable” community—because when our neighbors are stable, the entire community thrives.

It’s really such a beautiful thing.

THANK YOU IN ADVANCE!

Your generosity will make a real difference for hard working Pickens County neighbors who are struggling to make ends meet. Your compassion TRULY does so much good.

My gift to support my neighbors:

☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$_____ to help as much as possible.

Donate securely online at www.uwpickens.org/donate or scan the QR code with your phone’s camera. Make checks payable to United Way of Pickens County and mail to PO Box 96, Easley, SC 29641.



Scan with your phone's camera
to donate securely online.

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