Why I Became a VITA Volunteer

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by Ling Zeng

As a graduate accounting student, I'd been thinking of how I could contribute my knowledge and skills in order to give back to the community. Food Bank For New York City's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offered me the perfect opportunity. However, it was not easy for an international student like me, who wasn't familiar with the U.S. tax system, to get the tax preparation certification. Fortunately, the veteran instructors at Food Bank were really patient and friendly with their teaching methods. And I'm proud to say that I did pass the exam and earned my certification.

Through Food Bank's VITA program I gained hands-on experience interacting with clients. Working one-on-one with people and helping them get all the refunds to which they're entitled is my passion. It's what I want to do in my future career. One of the things I enjoyed most as a VITA volunteer was seeing the smiles come across clients' faces when they realized how much money they were getting back from their tax returns. The sense of honor I felt assisting people who really need help can never be exaggerated.

One thing that I noticed was that many low-income families who need tax assistance are non-English speaking. That language barrier can be a challenge for both the volunteer and the client. Thankfully Food Bank's VITA program does have bilingual volunteers. But they can always use more. So I encourage multilingual speakers to join this important program and help these families in need. It's a wonderful experience.

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