

Unsung Hero Award: Laura Sudhoff

Laura is the third recipient of OEO's Unsung Hero Award.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in the winter of 2020, it became obvious that many aspects of our lives would be turned upside down. Because of the many disruptions created by COVID, the IRS extended the income tax deadline beyond April 15th two years in a row. Between changing deadlines, new tax credit programs and the logistics of safely gathering ID and paperwork in person, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs had to contend with a lot of change.

VITA:

- provides people who have low incomes with free tax assistance, and
- helps families access all the credits and refunds they are due.

OEO offers our latest “Unsung Heroes” award to Laura Sudhoff and the VITA team at Capstone Community Action for going above and beyond to ensure that central Vermonters with low incomes had access to tax assistance during the pandemic.

Early on, Laura and her team leapt into action creating a process that allowed filers to drop off paperwork and answer tax questions safely, quickly, and efficiently. Laura and her team completed taxes for everyone who asked right through the summer of 2020 — even filing extensions for those who missed the July 15th deadline. Always planning ahead, Laura began preparing for 2021 tax season in September 2020. Laura, along with the volunteers and site coordinators have put in countless unpaid overtime hours to make sure that the 2021 tax filing season is safe and secure for families who utilize the service. Laura is diligent, hard-working, and cares deeply about folks who need extra tax assistance; staff and volunteers follow her lead to make a strong community program.

One example of Laura in action can be found in her help of an older woman whose husband recently passed away. Due to an IRS error, the woman received a tax bill for over \$10,000. Crying and terrified, she called Laura who assured her she would help. Laura worked with the IRS tax advocate to help this woman. She went to her house to pick up her paperwork and calm her fears. Laura leads with her heart and it's clear that the team truly cares about each person who comes through the program.

Thank you, Laura and the Capstone VITA team for your care and dedication during this truly challenging time!