

Saving USA, One Person At a Time

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By Dominique R. Jones, Chief Program Officer, Food Bank For New York City

It's tax season. And undoubtedly, millions across the country have one thing on their mind...REFUND. And why shouldn't they? A refund can hold the promise of financial relief - life a little bit easier - and maybe even a month or two when struggling families don't have to choose between paying rent or buying food.

Just last week, Mayor Bloomberg hosted a press conference at one of the Food Bank's FREE income tax assistance sites in Corona Queens to commend programs like ours, especially in partnership with SaveUSA.

Media and attendees had an opportunity to meet a four-year client of the Food Bank's income tax assistance program, Ray. Ray has benefitted from the Earned Income Tax Credit which provides additional return monies to filers at a vulnerable income level. Last year however, Ray had the opportunity to participate in SaveUSA, a new program to encourage saving. Ray deposited money from his refund into a SaveUSA account and in one year, the program matched every \$2 saved with \$1 return. Now Ray joked that a 50 percent return on investment was better than any rate on Wall Street, but the real value is in the dignity and empowerment that comes with those savings. Ray can finally buy his son the new pair of sneakers he'd been waiting on.

At the Food Bank, our goal is not just to fight hunger, but to fight the conditions that LEAD TO hunger. We don't JUST want to help our neighbors keep food on the table, *though that's pretty important*. We want them to have the opportunity to rise out of poverty and become self-sufficient. I am very proud of the Food Bank's Free Income Tax Services program. Our tax service sites do more than just help New Yorkers file their tax returns - helping bring \$65 million in refunds and credits to NYC - we do EVERYTHING we can to help, from making referrals to our food stamp specialists and providing health insurance information AND, you guessed it, connecting our clients to SaveUSA.