**For Immediate Release Media Contact:**

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**More than 7,800 Colorado Families Received Free Tax Preparation Assistance through Student-Powered Program**

***Tax Help Colorado, funded by The Piton Foundation, helped connect students to community members, bringing in over $14 Million in Tax Refunds***

**Denver, CO -**  During the 2017 tax season, students at colleges and high schools throughout the state partnered with [Tax Help Colorado](http://www.piton.org/tax-help-colorado) to provide free tax preparation assistance to low- to moderate-income families in their communities. The Denver-based [Piton Foundation](http://www.piton.org/piton-foundation) launched the program to increase the number of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites in Colorado, as part of its efforts to increase the economic security for Colorado families.

Over 500 students participated in the program, volunteering countless hours to help 7,850 Colorado families claim $14.4 Million in tax refunds. “Tax refunds are oftentimes the largest lump sum of money low-income Coloradans receive each year, and they depend on it to pay bills, or save for the future,” said Courtney O’Reilly, Tax Help Colorado program manager.

Tax Help Colorado is one of many VITA programs throughout the state, designed to help families with household incomes of less than $54,000 receive free tax help.

The program partners with community colleges and high schools to certify students to file taxes. The students receive college credit, as well as financial literacy and customer service skills, while helping their communities. “You gain a lot of communications skills because you are dealing with different people from all walks of life, so you have to learn how to communicate with people. You have to meet people where they’re at and help them get to where they need to be,” Charlene says, a student volunteer at Community College of Denver. “I really like to talk to my customers. I learn something new from them everyday.”

Many of the taxpayers who visit free tax sites are also eligible for tax benefits for working families with children, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). One of the nation’s most successful anti-poverty tools, the EITC promotes employment while providing valuable refunds to Coloradans who struggle to make ends meet. They can also claim a state EITC, which is 10% of the federal EITC. This year, taxpayers at Tax Help Colorado sites claimed $4,548,442 from the EITC. The program also helped save low-income Coloradans more than $1.9 million in commercial tax preparation costs.

Learn more about the Tax Help Colorado program and The Piton Foundation’s EITC Outreach campaign at [www.piton.org/tax-help-colorado](http://www.piton.org/tax-help-colorado).

***About The Piton Foundation***

The Piton Foundation, which is part of Gary Community Investments, is a private, operating foundation established in 1976 by Denver oilman Sam Gary. It is committed to improving the lives of Colorado’s low-income children and their families by increasing access to quality early childhood and youth development opportunities and fostering healthy family and community environments. In addition to investing in creative solutions for Colorado’s low-income children and their families, Piton operates its own programs, including the Data Initiative, Tax Help Colorado, and the nation’s largest and longest-running Earned Income Tax Credit public information campaign.