Tax Charities: Interview with Rebecca Benneyworth

Briefings

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Alison Lovejoy talks to Rebecca Benneyworth about her support for the tax charities.

Rebecca Benneyworth is a past chair of the ICAEW Tax Faculty, a practitioner and popular tax lecturer. She is also a long-time supporter of both tax charities.

Image



How did you first get involved with the tax charities?

About 20 years ago, Rosina Pullman, then TaxAid's Director, asked me to present at one of TaxAid's fundraising CPD seminars. I did several, but then became more closely involved with the introduction of tax credits and developed and presented a course for accountants. I later rewrote this for Citizen's Advice Bureau staff and presented it on behalf of TaxAid around the country.

How did your interest in the work of the charities develop further?

I was keen to contribute more to the work of TaxAid, but being based in the south west of England made this difficult. However, I was introduced to Tax Help for Older People, whose working model suited me down to the ground, and I started work as a volunteer, visiting older people around Gloucestershire, solving their tax problems.

Where did this take you after that?

When I became chair of the ICAEW Tax Faculty, I was keen to ensure that the tax charities were supported at our flagship events. Collections were made at both the Hardman dinner and the Wyman debate each year. Personal circumstances forced me to take a year out to receive treatment for cancer but following this I was so

pleased to be able to contribute again. I currently lead and present one online CPD event a year, which raises much needed funds for the charities.

What are the major issues facing taxpayers today that the tax charities can help with?

Tax remains a mystery to many people – whether comfortably off or in financial need. I work with HMRC to help them understand the needs of a wide variety of taxpayers. And I am a passionate educator: I have presented sessions on tax in many local schools.

With a better understanding of tax, people would be better able to deal with their own affairs. But inevitably there will be some vulnerable people who can't cope, and who can end up in real difficulty – the tax charities are a huge help to them.

As technology becomes more embedded in the tax system, I regularly meet older people who have no way of accessing information or creating a HMRC personal tax account. They have no credit record, passport or any way of gaining secure access to the services they need. The world is running away from them just when they need things to be easier.

Finally, there is Making Tax Digital. Small businesses and pensioners in receipt of rental income will soon be required to keep digital records and make quarterly submissions to HMRC. This will be an important area for the tax charities to help with – both in spreading the word and providing advice and support to those who need it but are unable to pay.

So, plenty to do – and funds are needed for all of it! Dig deep folks – if everyone reading this annually donated their fee for just one hour of their time, it would make a huge difference. Just think, one hour out of the 8,760 in each year!

If you want to learn more about the tax charities, contact Rose Over at Rose.Over@taxvol.org.uk.