



# Montana Financial Education Coalition NOTES

— A National Jump\$tart Affiliate —

## A MFEC Partner - The Native Financial Education Coalition

The Native Financial Education Coalition (NFEC) is a group of local, regional and national organizations and government agencies working together to achieve its common goal of promoting financial education in Native communities. Started by the U.S. Department of the Treasury in 2000, the goals of the now independent NFEC are to exchange information, forge partnerships, identify and develop strategies for outreach and training, and identify gaps in information about financial education needs. Its membership is open to all organizations interested in improving personal financial skills in Native communities. The First Nations OWEESTA corporation serves as the NFEC's fiscal agent, and employs a part-time coordinator. The mission of the NFEC is three-fold: 1) to increase awareness of the need for adequate personal financial skills in Native communities; 2) to build the capacity of Native governments and organizations to provide financial education; and 3) to support each other's efforts to promote financial management skills through information sharing and collaboration.

In 2003, the NFEC hosted a policy development forum to identify key topics to address in its work plan, and it published the first comprehensive analysis of financial education in Indian Country, entitled *Financial Education in Native Communities* ([www.firstnations.org](http://www.firstnations.org)). Through the NFEC's efforts, more than 800 instructors have been trained to teach financial education in Native communities using the *Building Native Communities: Financial Skills for Families* curriculum.

### The MFEC and NFEC partner in a unique pilot with Chief Dull Knife College in Lambe Deer, Montana

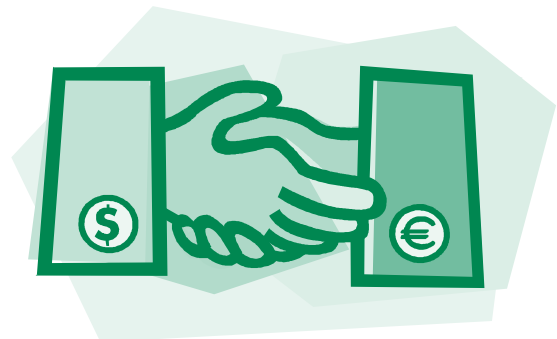
The NFEC has several committees, one of which is the "Tribal Colleges and Universities Initiatives." This committee provides a forum for tribal colleges and universities to network and coordinate their efforts to develop and implement curriculum and community-based financial education programs. Two of the MFEC's directors — Henry Thompson, Extension Service Director at Chief Dull Knife College, and Sue Woodrow with the Helena Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis — also sit on this NFEC committee. Several MFEC partners,

including Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Montana, First Interstate Bancsystem and the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, are collaborating in a unique partnership to develop a consumer credit counseling accreditation curriculum for tribal colleges as well as to bring much needed consumer credit counseling services into tribal communities. The pilot program is to be developed in a collaborative effort with Chief Dull Knife College on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in southeastern Montana. The hope is that this Montana pilot will serve as a model that can be rolled out to tribal colleges across the country with the support of the NFEC.

### Other NFEC Working Committees

The NFEC has several other working committees. The Youth Initiatives committee promotes financial education programs for youth K-12 schools and other community-based organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs. The New Assets committee is developing financial education resources on topics such as investing and retirement planning for Native communities with higher income streams from per capita payments and other tribal distributions. The Training Committee organizes instructor training courses using the *Building Native Communities* curriculum. The EITC committee develops resources and manages a listserv for local Native EITC campaigns.

For more information about the NFEC visit [www.nfec.info](http://www.nfec.info) or contact Coalition Coordinator Joanna Donohoe at 561-626-9700, or at [joanna@donohoeconsulting.com](mailto:joanna@donohoeconsulting.com).



## 66 Ways to Save Money

The Consumer Literacy Consortium, managed by the Consumer Federation of America (CFA), has released its newly revised brochure, "**66 Ways to Save Money.**" The brochure discusses key ways to save money in a variety of areas such as insurance, financial and credit products, transportation, housing, utilities and prescription drugs. An online version of the brochure is available at [www.66ways.org](http://www.66ways.org). Single copies of this brochure are available for \$.50 each from Save Money, Pueblo, CO 81009. For information on bulk orders contact: Save Money, Consumer Federation of America, 1424 16th St. NW Suite, 604 Washington D.C. 20036.

The Consumer Literacy Consortium is a working group of representatives from federal and state government agencies, consumer groups, business organizations, and educational institutions that seek to develop and publicize money-saving consumer tips.

## EITC: Helping Working Families Put More Money in Their Pockets

*Submitted by Priya Mahanti, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Montana, Inc*

*Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Montana, Inc (CCCS) will be opening six Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites in North Central Montana beginning February 1, 2005. In partnership with CCCS, sites will be co-sponsored by the Blackfeet Community College, Stone Child College of the Rock Boy Indian Reservation, Fort Belknap Community College, CCCS in Havre, the Office of Public Assistance in Great Falls, and one mobile site that will be at various locations throughout the Great Falls area. All sites offer low-income families free federal tax preparation and filing.*

The VITA sites are developed to assist eligible working families file their tax returns and claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Low-income singles or couples not raising children are eligible for a modest Earned Income Tax Credit of up to \$390. To qualify, one must have been between 25 and 64 years old by the end of 2004, and earned income of less than \$11,490 if you are single, and \$12,490 for a married couple. A single parent raising one child with earned income less than \$30,338 in 2004 can receive an EITC of up to \$2,604. A single parent raising two or more children and earned income less than \$34,458 in 2004, can receive an EITC up to \$4,300. Income limits for married tax payers are \$1,000 higher.

For more information please call Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Montana, Inc at (406) 761-8721

## FINANCIAL EDUCATION RESOURCES

[www.jumpstart.org](http://www.jumpstart.org)

[www.nefe.org](http://www.nefe.org)

[www.mymoney.gov](http://www.mymoney.gov)

[www.americasaves.org](http://www.americasaves.org)

[www.bizworld.org](http://www.bizworld.org)

## American Express Economic Independence Fund

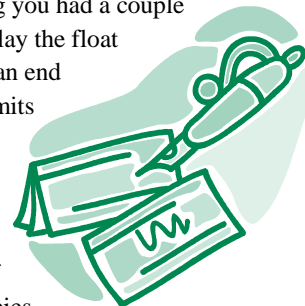
The American Express Foundation and the National Endowment for Financial Education® (NEFE®) are seeking applications for financial education projects whose purpose is to increase the financial literacy of underserved adult segments of the population. The American Express Economic Independence Fund (The Fund) will offer grants ranging from \$15,000 to \$30,000 for financial education projects of 12 to 24 months in duration that will benefit underserved adult populations including individuals moving from welfare to work, immigrants, new workers, and young employees. \$1 million will be awarded in 2005 to approximately 40 nonprofit organizations whose projects are selected for funding. Applications must adhere to requirements presented in the Request for Proposals (RFP) notice and be post-marked no later than March 4, 2005. The RFP is available at [www.nefe.org/amexeconfundrfp/](http://www.nefe.org/amexeconfundrfp/).



## Check 21 and Substitute Checks - A Guide for Consumers

Submitted by Sue Woodrow, Federal Reserve Bank Helena Branch

Have you ever made a purchase by check even though you didn't have the money in your account, figuring you had a couple of days to deposit funds in your account before the check cleared? This is called "float," and consumers play the float game regularly. However, a new federal law that went into effect in October 2004 will be slowly putting an end to the ability of consumers to count on float. The *Check Clearing for the 21st Century Act (Check 21)* permits banks to process check information electronically instead of moving paper checks from bank to bank. As more and more banks begin to participate, more checks will be handled electronically, anywhere from point-of-sale to clearing. Among other things, this means that your bank may receive electronic information on a check you write at point-of-sale almost immediately, increasing the risk that your check will bounce if funds are not in the account when you write the check. *Check 21* also creates a new kind of paper copy of an electronic image of a check called a "substitute check." Substitute checks are special copies of the front and back of the original check that can be processed as if they were original checks. You can use a substitute check as proof of payment just as you would use an original check. If your canceled checks are returned with your regular account statement or if you request copies of canceled checks, you may receive a mix of original checks and substitute checks. Under state and federal law, you are protected against errors in your account whether you receive canceled checks with your account statement, an account statement showing images of the checks you have written, or an account statement that simply describes your canceled checks. If you receive a substitute check and there is a problem or error with the check that causes you to lose money, *Check 21* provides a special procedure that permits you to ask for a refund.



Enclosed in this issue of *Notes* is a copy of the Federal Reserve's **Consumer Guide to Check 21 and Substitute Checks**. The Guide explains your rights as a consumer under *Check 21* as they relate to substitute checks. For more information, see the Federal Reserve Board of Governors' website at [www.federalreserve.gov/pubs/Check21](http://www.federalreserve.gov/pubs/Check21).

## April is Financial Literacy Month

April has been designated as Financial Literacy Month. Several organizations across the state are planning activities to reach out and provide financial education to the youth in Montana. This is a great opportunity to collaborate with the organizations in your community. As you plan activities for Financial Literacy Month consider contacting your local credit union, bank, or extension agent. Please let the MFEC know what you are doing to celebrate in April—the next issue of *Notes* will spotlight these financial education efforts.

**National Credit Union Youth Week**  
April 17-23, 2005 — [www.cuna.org](http://www.cuna.org)

**Teach Children to Save Day**  
April 26, 2005 — [www.aba.com](http://www.aba.com)

Thank you to the following organization for sponsoring this issue of *Notes*:

### Montana Credit Unions for Community Development

Montana Credit Unions for Community Development (MCUCD) is a nonprofit corporation established to assist credit unions in bringing specialized and innovative products and services to low income and underserved Montanans. Credit unions are not-for-profit financial cooperatives owned by its members (account holders).

MCUCD's current areas of focus are Financial Education, Individual Development Accounts, and Affordable Alternatives to Payday Loans.

Any person or group interested in financial education, IDAs, combating predatory lending, or the availability of affordable financial services is encouraged to contact MCUCD at 1-800-745-5546. Together, we can accomplish more!

# Great Falls Partners bring NEFE Curriculum to Skyline High School Students

Submitted by Tracy Nave-Heggem, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Montana, Inc



Through a grant from United Way of Cascade County, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Montana brought 18 hours of personal finance seminars to Skyline High School students last semester. Additional partners in the project include Skyline teachers, the Great Falls Teachers Federal Credit Union, and the Montana Credit Unions for Community Development. The National Endowment for Financial Education’s (NEFE) *High School Financial Planning Program* was used as the core curriculum for this program, covering topics such as budgeting, insurance, credit, higher education, and saving/investing. Four additional topics were added — being a good renter, high risk lending, using a checking account and financial institution relationships, and communication skills.

Students self-elected into the course, earning units toward graduation requirements in the Young Parent/Consumer & Family Sciences, Applied Math, or Business/Job Seekers department. Skyline is the local alternative high school where students normally complete course work at their own pace, and not in a traditional classroom setting. Because this course was provided in a more traditional setting, students were given an attendance incentive for every 3 classes attended – a \$5 gift card at the school coffee shop. Students especially enjoyed the guest speakers and hands on activities involved throughout the course, and all improved their test scores from the pre- to post-test.

The students who successfully completed the course will have the opportunity to begin using their new-found skills by opening a free savings account at the Great Falls Teachers Federal Credit Union. These students will also receive a free budgeting session with a CCCS counselor since many are living on their own or helping to support their families.

A new set of classes for Skyline High School students will begin in February. We are looking forward to another successful class!

NOTES readers are partners in our efforts to share the latest news from the financial education field. The newsletter is published quarterly by the Montana Financial Education Coalition (MFEC). It is designed to keep the MFEC partners informed about what is happening as well as communicating financial education efforts to other interested parties throughout the state. We welcome your questions and comments. If you are interested in receiving this publication regularly or would like more information on the MFEC, please contact Karen Dunn (editor) at [karen@mfec.org](mailto:karen@mfec.org) or Sue Woodrow at [Susan.Woodrow@mplsrb.org](mailto:Susan.Woodrow@mplsrb.org).

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