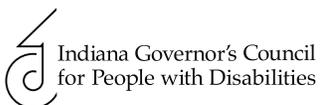


ignite thoughts into action

spark



Indiana Governor's Council
for People with Disabilities

nov/dec 2012
volume 3 number 1

in this issue on
**MONEY
MATTERS**



Finding stable
financial ground



Making your future
a financial success



Profiting from
social capital

in this issue on
**MONEY
MATTERS**

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The high cost of living outstrips the income of the average Hoosier. As reported by 2011 census data, the median household yearly income for Hoosiers is \$46,458. However, if you are enrolled in Medicaid or receive Social Security or disability insurance, your income is far less.

Faced with this stark reality, budgeting can be a real challenge. While planning for your basic, day-to-day living expenses, you must consider the rising cost of food, utilities, clothing, rent or a mortgage payment, property and income taxes, household maintenance and modification, health care, insurance coverage, transportation, recreation activities and education.

By learning to prioritize and find ways to economize and maximize resources, you can stretch your budget. Shop at a grocery store that honors coupons and offers a rewards program, find garage sales to purchase anything from clothing to cleaning supplies, or arrange carpooling and share the cost of gasoline. These are just a few ways to make your dollar go further.

In this issue of Spark, we explore an array of options we hope will provide a new way of painting your financial picture. Maybe you'll take a financial planning class or get help from a financial professional to stabilize your budget. Perhaps you'll consider investing in social capital for personal and community benefits. You might even explore new marketplace trends that allow you to use your time and talents for mutual gain.

In no way do these articles minimize the challenges faced by people on limited incomes, but they do illustrate the need for a sound public policy that addresses the underlying causes. We hope that the articles will serve to assist you in stretching your budget.

Sincerely,



Suellen Jackson-Boner
Executive Director

spark is a bi-monthly publication of the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities, an independent state agency that facilitates change. Our mission is to promote the independence, productivity and inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society. This mission is accomplished through planning, evaluation, collaboration, education, research and advocacy.

Suellen Jackson-Boner
Executive Director

Christine Dahlberg
Deputy Director



Finding stable financial ground: Daniel's story

Daniel Searles is glad to be on stable financial ground. After a nose dive of events – starting when his wife passed away and continuing until he reached the brink of homelessness – he came to a point where he gave up and admitted “I need help!”

After his wife died, Daniel stopped eating, sleeping and paying his bills. “My life was in shambles. I was starving, and at one point I was only eating from a peanut butter jar. I let everything pile up, and I was about to be foreclosed on my house.”

After being diagnosed and hospitalized for extreme anxiety, Daniel received quick assistance from the Elkhart County Council on Aging (ECCA), an organization he became familiar with when his wife first entered a nursing home. ECCA advised Daniel to join the AARP Foundation Money Management Program, a program

that utilizes trained volunteers to help low-income older adults and people with disabilities who have difficulty budgeting, paying routine bills and keeping track of financial matters.

“My life was in shambles. I was starving, and at one point I was only eating from a peanut butter jar. I let everything pile up, and I was about to be foreclosed on my house.”

– Daniel Searles

Daniel was overcome with debt, and he had no idea how to climb back out of the financial hole that left him seemingly lifeless. ECCA paired Daniel with a mentor who helped him get on his feet and back to living a healthy, stable lifestyle.

The AARP program offers two distinct services – a bill-payer service and a representative

payee service that helps people keep their finances in control. Both programs are delivered by volunteers who provide checkbook balancing and bill-paying services. The bill-payer service helps clients

who may need short- or long-term handling of checking and savings accounts. Through the representative payee service, a volunteer is appointed by a federal government agency to receive and manage government benefits on behalf of clients who are unable to handle their own funds.

Daniel's mentor became a regular part of his life and the foundation

Creating an inclusive financial education class

The AARP money management program is one of thousands of programs ready to help people get on track financially. If you're someone who wants to start a financial education class, make sure it is accommodating for all people. Here are some pointers:

1. Designing a separate curriculum isn't necessary. Instead, focus on inclusiveness, ensuring the same educational benefits are taught to everyone.
2. If your curriculum uses a video, make sure closed captioning is on at all times.
3. A leader should remember to read all questions aloud and make the discussion as interactive as possible.
4. Be mindful of a topic's relevancy. Discussing 401(k) may not be as important because of the limited financial resources of some of your audience.
5. Make sure all materials are accessible (e.g. large print, Braille). Balance visual information with oral presentation.
6. Allow additional time for participants to complete assignments or tests.

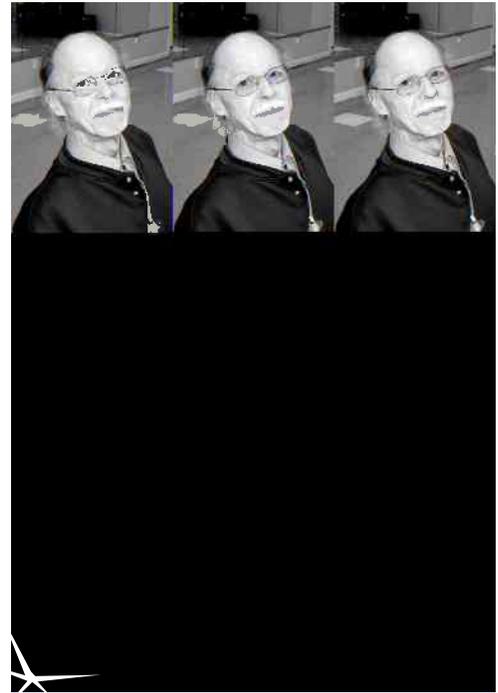
for Daniel's financial makeover. With the help of his mentor, Daniel sold his house a couple days before it would have been sent into foreclosure. He reduced his living expenses by moving into a federally subsidized apartment. His mentor also found a little extra cash in savings Daniel didn't even know was there. But most importantly, Daniel was able to once again afford food and regain his health.

"[My mentor] meets with me once a week to go over my finances. He takes care of paying the bills, but lets me know how much I've got and how much I need. I see everything in a spreadsheet, and I know where all my federal assistance is going. He also provides allowances for typical expenses like gasoline and groceries so everything stays budgeted. We are on a friend-to-friend level."

Daniel has certainly felt a change in lifestyle. His mentor was the first to tell him to "cut up the credit cards" after amassing too much debt, which he was able to pay off when his house was sold. He's also realized the need to give up cable, significantly reduced his eating-out habits, and learned the importance of clipping coupons.

Daniel's mentor also helps him look for ways to save money when purchasing items. He assisted Daniel when buying a piece of carpet for his apartment, making sure to get the lowest possible price – with delivery. Daniel's car was on its last legs, and his mentor was able to help find a good deal on a reliable used car. He's even found money in the budget to re-connect Internet access, something that Daniel has been getting used to living without.

"I admit, I was naïve about money. My wife would guide our money decisions," Daniel said. "But now that I'm on my own and experienced some really low times, I'm getting smarter."



AARP's money management program is found within more than 140 government agencies across the United States. In Indiana, the Family and Social Services Administration is responsible for the coordination of seven localized agencies who administer the program. And like Daniel's mentor, nearly 4,000 other volunteers provide services to more than 6,000 clients across the nation. In 2011, the AARP Foundation Money Management Program client satisfaction survey found that 98 percent of clients were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the assistance they received, and 85 percent of mentor volunteers were "very" satisfied with serving in these roles, making sure their clients are financially stable and debt free.

"The hardest part of the whole process was overcoming my ego," Daniel said. "But this is a program that I would very much recommend."

To learn more about the AARP Foundation Money Management Program, visit aarpmp.org. ✨

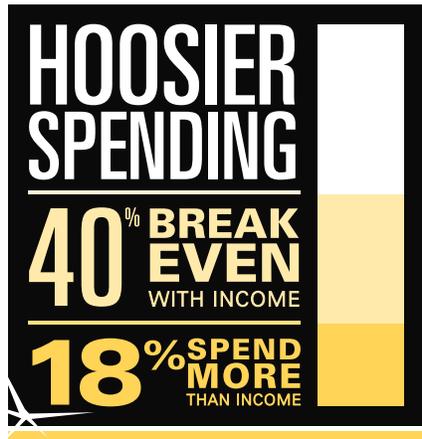
Getting an A+ in financial literacy

In 2010, the Financial Industry Regulation Authority (FINRA) Investor Education Foundation conducted a state-by-state study to determine current financial trends. Indiana data revealed the following:

- While 40 percent of Hoosiers break even on spending within their household income, 18 percent spend more than they bring home.
- About 64 percent do not establish rainy-day funds, and most of those people (70 percent) range in age from 18 to 34.
- Moreover, 62 percent of Hoosiers do not comparison shop for credit cards.

The National Disability Institute admits, “[Financial education] is an understudied, unfunded and mainly unrecognized part of the broad dialogue on reducing poverty and building economic independence and self-sufficiency for working adults with disabilities.” But, efforts are being made to reverse these discrepancies.

Starting in 2008, President George Bush created the President’s Advisory Council on Financial Literacy to implement a policy that would improve the level of financial knowledge among Americans. The Advisory Council achieved a lengthy list of accomplishments, including



launching the first-ever National Financial Literacy Challenge with more than 75,000 participants, endorsing several public programs and curriculums on money management, and creating a partnership with USA Freedom Corps to identify financial literacy volunteer opportunities around the country.

President Obama expanded this initiative with a community-centered approach. He created the President’s Advisory Council on Financial Capability (PACFC) that encouraged the creation of financial capability initiatives (knowledge, skills and access to financial management) aimed at communities’ economic well-being.

Still, the FINRA study, made possible with the support of PACFC, is a firm reminder that financial literacy is crucial to our national and community economic well-being. It has reinforced our need to be mindful

of our financial circumstances and informed about the options available to help us create, rebuild or maintain economic vitality.

Organizations like the National Disability Institute, Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy, and the National Financial Educators Council have made it their missions to teach, build awareness of and certify financial programs in homes, schools and communities to provide a better economic future for everyone.

Many of today’s financial literacy courses taught in schools and community centers have been shaped by national initiatives and inspired community partnerships. Indianapolis was even referenced in PACFC’s March 2012 Resource Guide for “Indy’s Campaign for Financial Fitness” (bankonindy.org). PACFC and the city hosted public listening sessions so many others could hear takeaways from the local initiative.

If you are interested in bringing a financial literacy course to your community, the National Disability Institute can work with you to develop strategies, offer training and provide resources so you can advance self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities and their families. Visit realeconomicimpact.org for more information. ✨

The Industrial Revolution 2.0: collaborative consumption

If you haven't used **eBay.com** or **craigslist.org** to sell or purchase things from others, you likely know someone who has. Websites like these have revolutionized the way we buy and sell products, giving consumers an alternate, cost-effective way to access goods and services.

Traditional sales methods like bartering, sharing and renting are re-emerging in today's digital era, a trend called "collaborative consumption." A spin-off of social media's original purpose, and further fueled by a downturned economy, consumers have discovered creative ways to get the things they want and need – from each other.

Collaborative consumption

"Time" magazine calls collaborative consumption one of the top 10 big ideas that will change the world. It is growing far and wide with innovative sites that allow consumers to market their resources and talents to draw income, make exchanges for others' goods, and even borrow money from complete strangers.

In her book, "What's Mine is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption," Rachel Botsman says, "... in the 20th century of hyper-consumption, we were defined by credit, advertising and what we owned; in the 21st century of collaborative consumption, we will be defined

by reputation, by community, and by what we can access and how we share and what we give away."

With so many new sites joining the movement, Botsman categorizes them in three groups: product service systems, redistribution markets and collaborative lifestyles.

Product service systems

Botsman describes this category as people using their goods to provide a service to others, allowing owners to make money and borrowers to enjoy and use the products without the hassle and expense of buying the goods themselves.

For instance, vehicles are only driven 8 percent of the time, according to **getaround.com**, one of the many websites in the vastly growing car-sharing market. **zipcar.com** has a current fleet of 8,900 vehicles that drivers can rent directly from the owners by the hour – allowing the owners to make money during the 92 percent of downtime when the car is not being used. For one-off trips, **zimride.com** organizes carpools to and from common destinations, such as concerts, school or other events. And for those who prefer a two-wheeled ride, **doliiquid.com** helps bicyclers find bikes for rent from either individuals or local bike-rental shops.

Snapgoods.com is a community-based site that allows people to rent and borrow various items from others in their local area. Here's an example: You're having a party and want to entertain guests. You could rent a karaoke machine from an owner in your local network. Currently, the site is most used in larger cities like Indianapolis, but anyone can start a network in his or her community.

Redistribution markets

Without spending a single dime, you can make an even exchange for someone else's product with something you have on **swap.com**. You can swap anything from CDs for books to a laptop for a TV.

Some sites are dedicated to particular types of products. **ThredUP.com** pays moms and families for their kids' gently used clothes. You can order a garment bag from the website and return it filled with your children's outgrown items. ThredUP will re-sell them through the website.

Say you have an old bathroom sink, or maybe you're in need of baby clothes, you can post your offer or request to a network of people on **freecycle.org**. This site allows people to exchange goods free of charge, which helps reduce waste and find a new home for items that someone else may need. There are more than 100

groups in Indiana participating on Freecycle today.

Collaborative lifestyles

This category involves people with similar interests and needs coming together to exchange and share less tangible assets, such as time, space, skills and even money. Websites like **taskrabbit.com** help people find extra assistance to finish specific tasks – house cleaning, painting, dog-walking and tutoring – on their to-do lists.

TimeBanks.org is a national initiative in which you “bank” your community service time in an online time bank with

“In the 21st century of collaborative consumption, we will be defined by reputation, by community, and by what we can access and how we share and what we give away.”

– Rachel Botsman, social innovator and consultant

others in your community. You may earn time – \$1 for one hour worked on community service or a community-building task – and spend what you’ve earned to gain someone else’s time on a project. Zionsville, Ind., currently has the only time-banking program in Indiana, and Rick Brooks, outreach program manager and speaker at the Council’s 2012 Conference for People with Disabilities, encourages the program’s growth across the state.

Affordable vacationing is another large niche of the peer-to-peer sector. In more than 190 countries and beating most hotel pricing, **airbnb.com** allows travelers to rent someone’s home or room for their stay. Vacationers can also switch

homes with other travelers in their intended destinations through sites like **LoveHomeSwap.com**. And, **couchsurfing.org** finds accommodations and connects travelers with local hosts who can share the area’s unique culture.

Sharing space of all sorts is a growing trend gaining momentum. **Parkcirca.com** and **ParkatmyHouse.com** connect people who have parking spaces sitting empty with individuals who need a spot. **SharedEarth.com** connects people who have unused land to individuals who can help garden the area, reaping profits for both parties.

The sharing economy has also opened an entrepreneurial door. The popular site **Etsy.com** is just one of many sites that allow users to create a virtual store to sell their items – anything from handmade goods such as jewelry and furniture, to vintage pieces and even supplies for things like craft-making and cooking.

The most bizarre online collaboration to date could be peer-to-peer lending. In lieu of traditional financial loans, people who have money are lending to people who need money. **Prosper.com** is one site facilitating such transactions. And like traditional loans, funders earn interest.

Finally, if you can’t remember all the specialty sites and services, **uniiverse.com** makes it easy by covering the gamut of the peer-to-peer marketplace.

But wait...is this really safe?

You can’t talk about sharing a stranger’s vehicle and staying in someone’s home in a foreign country without addressing safety.

Credible websites offer strong security features and ensure that safety information is readily available and clearly communicated. Look for specific pages or sections of the site for an explanation of consumer protections and privacy policies. Call customer support lines to clarify confusing points and ask questions.

TrustCloud.com is making an effort to establish a scoring system that will help consumers in the sharing economy measure the trustworthiness of others. TrustCloud monitors your online behaviors and transactions, then generates a TrustScore that can be displayed on your social networking and peer-sharing sites to let others know that you are a reliable consumer.

Experts don’t believe peer collaboration is a momentary trend. Botsman states, “I really believe the collaborative revolution could be as big as the industrial revolution... We’ll look back and see this as a turning point where we started to transform the way we matched wants and needs, the way we thought about supply and demand.”

To read more of Botsman’s insights, visit **rachelbotsman.com**. ✨



Make your future a financial success

There are many tools available to help you build a firm foundation for future financial success. Here's how you can take advantage of some of these financial tools today – for a brighter tomorrow.

Life care planning

For some parents of children with disabilities, understanding the cost of long-term care can be overwhelming. In life care planning, advisors work with families to create a dynamic document to plan current and future needs for individuals with disabilities. Such plans may outline situations requiring home remodeling or special equipment like cars, computers or wheelchairs.

Kevin Clasen, a certified financial planner and special care planner from MML Investor Services in

Indianapolis, says the most time-consuming part of the process is researching with physicians the types of therapy, equipment and medical care the child will need; however, “there are professionals

in this area who do the research to help quantify the cost of care,” Clasen said. “If we have an initial plan in place and review and update it annually, it will go a long way toward giving a family peace of mind that they are doing what they can.”

Special needs trusts

According to Gordon Homes, special needs financial planner with MetLife in Indianapolis, special needs trusts have become an essential part of planning for

“If we have an initial plan in place and review and update it annually, it will go a long way toward giving a family peace of mind that they are doing what they can.”

– Kevin Clasen, certified financial planner

the future of a family member with a disability because they enable a beneficiary to maintain eligibility for important government benefits, such as Medicaid and Social Security, and basic items like food and shelter. There are several types of special needs trusts for the

diverse circumstances that lead to such a need.

“One special needs trust could be established to hold funds received from a malpractice, personal injury or manufacturer’s liability settlement, and another to be funded by a parent or other family member,” Homes said.

There are some common misconceptions – one being cost. Homes believes setting up a special needs trust doesn’t have to be expensive, and most find the process to be very affordable when working with an attorney. Another misconception is that Indiana Medicaid will take what is left in the trust upon death of the trust beneficiary. “This is not the case with all special needs trusts,” Homes said. “It is possible for specified family members to receive what is left in the trust depending on the type of trust.”

The Arc of Indiana’s Master Trust is one option. Since 1988, this program has provided Hoosier families a way to fund the financial future of their loved ones with disabilities without affecting eligibility for government benefits. More information on The Arc Master Trust is at arcind.org through a dedicated link at the top of the page.

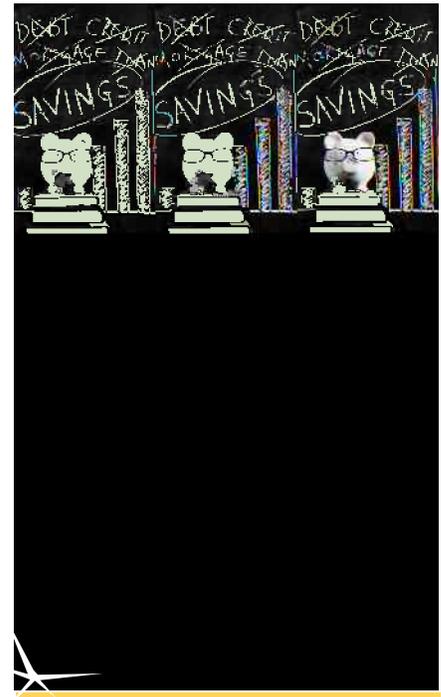
To contact Gordon Homes, call (800) 903-6380 ext. 5042, or email ghomes@metlife.com.

ABLE Act

The Achieving a Better Life Experience Act (ABLE Act) is a current piece of legislation written to help families with a child with disabilities plan for the future. The act, if passed by Congress, would create special savings accounts to be used for disability-related expenses without threatening other government benefits. Expenses covered under the ABLE Act would include education, transportation, employment support, housing and other expenses. If you would like to advocate for this bill, track its progress in Congress by visiting govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/s1872.

Individual Development Accounts

An Individual Development Account (IDA) is a special savings account, matched by federal and state dollars, open to individuals who are employed and earn incomes less than 175 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. The goal of the IDA program is to help low-income individuals and families find a path out of poverty. Account holders must agree to deposit at least \$400 each year, and that amount is usually matched 1 to 3. The state cannot match more than \$1,600 in savings. The holder must participate in the program for a period of time – usually three years – before the match can be spent. Participants



must also attend a financial education class.

To set up an IDA account, contact your local housing agency or call the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority at (800) 872-0371 to find a local contact number for your area.

These tools, among many others, will keep you focused on planning for the future. With research and the use of a certified financial expert, you can decide which tools will help you build a strong financial foundation. ✨

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Money in your pocket

From Brianne Lott, Anne Higley, and Teresa Grossi, the Center on Community Living and Careers, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, Indiana University

Everyone likes a little (or maybe a lot!) of spending money. Trouble is, sometimes it's hard to spread your money out over a whole month to buy all the things you want and need. That's where a budget comes in handy.

A budget is a plan. That's all. Sounds simple right? It can help you see how much money you receive – your income – compared to how much you spend – your expenses – each month. Budgets can also be very helpful if you want to save money, especially for something expensive like a vacation or a new computer.

Things do get more complicated, though, if you live in a group home or if you receive state or federal benefits like Medicaid, Social Security or food stamps. In that case, you can still use a budget to track your income, expenses and savings, but you might want to ask for some help or advice, either from the agency that provides you with disability services or from Indiana Works (see page 15).

A few things to know about making and using a budget:

- Your income should be more than or at least equal to your expenses. That means you shouldn't be spending more than you have each month.

A Sample Budget for a person receiving Social Security benefits

Income Source	Dollar Amount	Expenses	Dollar Amount
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	\$246	Rent/Mortgage	\$350
Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)	\$375	Food/Groceries	\$200
Part-time job (after tax)	\$258	Utilities	\$75
		Entertainment	\$50
		Transportation	\$45
		Savings	\$44
		Miscellaneous	\$65
Total Income	\$879	Total Expenses	\$829

This person had an extra \$50 last month ($\$879 - \$829 = \50), which she kept in her checking account. This gives her a little bit of a cushion in case she has extra expenses next month.

- Needs come before wants. Our budget has to list the things we need to buy every month first. We buy the things we want with the money that's left over.
- You control your budget, it doesn't control you. It's okay if you want to spend money at the movies one month, but you may want to give some to a charity the next month – as long as you've budgeted enough for those expenses.
- It's good to save a little money each month. In fact, you can plan to save by putting a savings line into your budget. Some experts say you should try to save at least 5 percent of your income every month.
- Use a calculator to make sure your budget is accurate.
- You don't need to record the cents. If your paycheck is \$115.32, just write down \$115. It'll make it easier when you add things up.
- Keep a small notebook in your pocket, purse or backpack, so you can write down the amount you spend on all of your wants or needs whenever you write a check, use your debit card or take money out of your wallet.

On the next page is a blank form you can use to fill in your own income and expenses. Don't worry if it takes a few months to get the hang of using a budget. Keep trying. Once you're on track, it'll help you understand how much you have and where all your money goes each month, making you a much better money manager. *

MONTHLY BUDGET WORKSHEET

Income Source	Dollar Amount	Expenses	Dollar Amount
Full-time job/Salary (after tax)	\$	Rent/Mortgage	\$
Part-time job (after tax)	\$	Food/Groceries	\$
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	\$	Health/Medical (medications, health insurance, etc.)	\$
Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)	\$	Utilities (water, gas, electric, phone, Internet, cable)	\$
	\$	Entertainment (restaurants, movies, concerts, games)	\$
	\$	Transportation (bus or gas, car maintenance)	\$
	\$	Savings (goes into my savings account)	\$
	\$	Miscellaneous (any unexpected costs that come up during the month)	\$
Total Income	\$	Total Expenses	\$

Profiting from social capital

Finances and capital involve more than just how much money we have in our wallets. Have you considered your budget of “social capital”?

The term “social capital” means individuals can leverage their social networks and relationships with others to produce mutual benefits. These benefits can range from improved health and overall happiness to even higher wages and greater employment opportunities. But, just like income, social capital must be earned.

Robert D. Putnam, well-known for his research into this concept and how it relates to civic engagement, believes there’s been a steady decline of social capital in the United States over the last 35 years. Fewer individuals participate in membership organizations, people are spending less time with friends, and civic participation and volunteerism are dwindling.

There is a real need for social capital. Al Condeluci, Ph.D., another thought leader on the topic, describes its relevance in employment, housing and transportation – topics important to everyone, but especially to people with disabilities.

Consider how most people receive their first job: through a friend or family member. These opportunities come from social capital. And those who find a job on their own use references from friends who can vouch for them.



In housing, most people choose to live with someone from their social network. Dr. Condeluci sees a clear break-down of social capital when people with disabilities find themselves in housing programs where roommates are selected for them by an agency or caseworker.

Lastly, social capital is best exemplified in transportation when you’re able to hitch a ride with friends after you miss the bus, your car breaks down or you’re unable to drive.

How can you increase your social capital?

Everyone has the ability to grow their portfolio of social capital. Consider these ideas for building connections and developing relationships:

- Be a community and/or church volunteer. Not only does volunteering help your community, but it also offers a chance for you to meet new people.

- Join a club or group so you can gain a sense of belonging, build interpersonal skills and trust, and take advantage of leadership opportunities. To find a club or organization, consider using Meetup.com. This website lists local groups – more than one in almost every Indiana town – covering a variety of interests.
- Just enjoy others! With all the social media sites that keep us virtually connected, research shows there has been a decrease in face-to-face socialization. Don’t fall into this pattern! When you’re about to type an email or send a text message, consider picking up the phone or scheduling a visit instead.

There are many articles and websites dedicated to the study of social capital. Search your web browser or local library to learn how you can make the most of your own networks and relationships. *

Investing intelligently and reducing risk

Americans lose an estimated \$40 billion each year to investment fraud, according to the North American Securities Administrators Association. Consumers who do their research and fully understand their finances are much more likely to make sound investments and avoid fraud. To help increase your investment IQ, use these helpful tips.

Set financial goals

Before investing, be sure to set financial goals. Are you saving for a house or home modification, a new car or retirement? With each goal, you must also be wary of the risks associated with any size investment. Consider how comfortable you are with small or big losses and gains before entering into any investment opportunity. And be aware that not every investment is what it claims.

Know the types of fraud

You can never be too cautious when understanding the risks involved in any investment, stock or other financial program. There are various types of fraudulent activities.

Fraud aimed at seniors and people with disabilities

Since many seniors and people with disabilities are on fixed incomes and must manage

mounting medical expenses, fraudulent investors try to sell this population on offers that claim to enhance the flexibility of their finances or help them tap into hard-earned savings. Fraud aimed at seniors or people with disabilities is commonly found in life insurance policy scams or from people posing as Social Security officers.

Affinity fraud

Affinity fraud occurs when a seemingly trustworthy member of a group, organization or community takes advantage of a fellow member. This type of fraud is especially prevalent among religious groups where fraudulent investors can easily disguise themselves as practicing members. Staggering amounts of money on the local and national levels are lost to affinity fraud each year.

Internet fraud

Laws governing investing and brokering online fall under the same state and federal statutes as investing in person, but the anonymity of the Internet creates a ripe environment for scam artists.

In 2009, an Indiana resident solicited investors through craigslist.org. She claimed that investors would not be directly involved in her company's day-to-day operations, but would still be given ownership. Instead, she used

investors' money for her personal expenses and was eventually charged with nine felony counts for violating the Indiana Securities Act.

Avoid fraud

- Ask questions. Be sure you have all the appropriate information before committing to an investment. A broker should be able to answer any question you have or help you find the answer.
- Meet in person. Discuss any investment opportunity face-to-face and require a contract in writing.
- Hand out personal information with caution. Until you know an investment is trustworthy, keep Social Security numbers, addresses and identification numbers private.
- If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. No level of return on investment is "guaranteed."
- Hang up on unsolicited calls. Ask them to take you off of their call lists.

Investigate, then invest

In Indiana, all securities and the people who sell them must be licensed and registered with the Indiana Securities Division. This is an important component to check prior to making an investment. Contact the Indiana Securities Division by calling (317) 232-6681 or visiting in.gov/sos/securities. *

Consumer protections for your wallet and well-being

Finding the best, most affordable and professional serviceperson or product can be hard, time-consuming work. We depend on the special skills and expertise of others, and we expect a fair, honest return on investment whenever enlisting their services.

Do your research

Finding a trustworthy professional is easier to do now that we have numerous consumer review websites that can help us decide whose services to use and select the best-performing products.

For a monthly or yearly fee, you can use Angie's List (angieslist.com) to find exclusive discounts and read detailed customer reviews on local professionals ranging from plumbers to dentists. Or, use the free website Home Advisor (homeadvisor.com), which can recommend top contractors and professionals in your area to carry out anything from auto repair to appliance maintenance. Those listed have been reviewed, highly rated and approved for the work they do.

Decide.com and Consumer Reports (consumerreports.com) are subscription-based resources you can use to find ratings on new and current products in the market.

Another important standard for consumer confidence is the certification that comes from the



Better Business Bureau. In many local Indiana communities, you can find businesses and charities that are accredited and have proven to uphold the bureau's eight standards of trust. Check out bbb.org to see what programs and advice your local chapter is currently hosting, and learn which businesses are trusted vendors and partners in your community.

Consult the Office of the Indiana Attorney General

According to the Office of the Indiana Attorney General, thousands of Hoosiers are victims of consumer fraud each year. To protect yourself from fraudulent and deceptive business practices, the Office of Consumer Protection in the state's attorney general's office provides a website full of consumer fact sheets and tips, text alerts about the latest fraud schemes and recalls, and directions on how to file an official

consumer complaint about a deceptive product or service. Find out how the Attorney General protects your wallet by visiting in.gov/attorneygeneral.

Understand the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

To help ease confusion and regulate consumer protection in the United States, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) was formed in July 2011. This federal agency employs three principles:

- Educate and inform consumers on how to defend against abusive practices.
- Enforce federal consumer financial laws.
- Study and gather information to better understand consumers, financial service providers and consumer financial markets.

In the past year, the CFPB has taken action to simplify the details involved with credit cards, student loan agreements, mortgages and other financial elements. The agency also began fielding consumer complaints about financial products, such as life insurance and annuities.

Whether you need information regarding finances, new products or other services, do your research and make sure your wallet and your well-being are well protected. ✨

Money Matters resources

Financial guidance

Indiana Community Action Association (IN-CAA)

incap.org
(800) 382-9895
(317) 638-4232

IN-CAA is comprised of 23 community action agencies in the state working toward eliminating poverty and promoting self-sufficiency. Your local agency can help with budgeting, saving and managing money.

Indiana Works, an Aspire Indiana program

aspireindiana.org
Northern and Central Indiana
(866) 646-8161
(800) 743-3333 (TTY)

Southern and Southeastern Indiana
(800) 206-6610
(800) 757-5834

The Indiana Works program, part of Aspire Indiana, provides benefits counseling, information on work incentives and more. Click on the Indiana Works link at the top of the website to learn about the program.

Money management tools

Mint

mint.com

Mint is a website that pulls all of your financial accounts into one place, allowing you to set a budget, track your goals and more.

MyMoney.gov

MyMoney.gov
1-888-MyMoney | (888) 666-6639
ofe@do.treas.gov

MyMoney.gov is an effort of the Financial Literacy and Education Commission and gives you access to financial information, resources and tools to help you make informed financial decisions.

Financial protection

Indiana Consumer Protection

IndianaConsumer.com

Information on current topics such as identity theft, schemes and scams in the marketplace, rising fuel prices, prescription medication and recalled products is just a click away.

Indiana Investment Watch

IndianaInvestmentWatch.com
(317) 232-6681

Created to educate Hoosiers on financial investments and how to avoid potential fraud schemes, this website offers information about personal finance, investment fraud and more.

Financial education programs

360 Degrees of Financial Literacy

financialliteracy@aicpa.org
(888) 777-7077

360 Degrees of Financial Literacy is a national volunteer effort through the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants whose goal is to help Americans understand their personal finances and how to develop money management skills.

Practical Money Skills for Life

PracticalMoneySkills.com
info@practicalmoneyskills.com

Credit card company Visa partnered with consumers, educators, policymakers and others to create Practical Money Skills for Life, an educator-developed website that allows anyone access to free educational resources about personal finance.

Financial Literacy Now

FinancialLitNow.org

Financial Literacy Now is an initiative led by the McGraw-Hill Company to raise awareness about the importance of financial literacy and provide greater access to financial literacy training, services and information.

ignite thoughts into action

spark

We welcome your suggestions
for newsletter content and
ideas concerning the actions
of the Council.

phone: (317) 232-7770
email: GPCPD@gcpd.org

in.gov/gcpd

Order Disability Awareness Month materials now!

March is Disability Awareness Month, and the Governor's Council is offering free materials to help you celebrate and spread awareness in your communities.

You can order your free materials by visiting IndianaDisabilityAwareness.org. You'll also find many resources, tools and information on the website.

This year's Disability Awareness Month theme is "Community Connections," reminding us that access, engagement and relationships are key to making our communities livable communities.

Help us celebrate Disability Awareness Month in March by hosting events and activities in your community!

