

## **NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS**

**Moderator: Michele Higgs**  
**November 13, 2007**  
**3:00 p.m. EST**

Operator: Good day everyone and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks' monthly conference call.

Today's call is being recorded.

At this time, I'd like to turn the conference over to Ms. Michele Higgs. Please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Keith. Welcome everyone to the Neighborhood Networks November conference call. I'm Michele Higgs and today I'm joined by Sheba Asberom. We represent the technical assistance team that works with you to address the needs of the various Neighborhood Networks Centers around the country.

I thank all of you for joining us for this month's call, which is, "Learning to Balance the Bucks - Approaches to Financial Literacy." Now, everybody's pockets are tight every now and then, but for some, pinching pennies is an everyday thing.

What we hope to do today is provide information about resources available for centers that will help residents learn to better manage their funds. Putting out financial fires is stressful. Creating a system of tracking and managing one's finances is empowering.

Today we have two speakers. Adriana Marmolejo is a financial education instructor with the San Diego Community Housing Corporation. We also have Carol Quiller, who is a Senior Tax Analyst with the Internal Revenue Service.

On today's call, one of our speakers is not feeling well, and the other is going to have to leave us a little early. So, I'm going to rearrange my comments, and have Adriana start the call. Sheba, would you like to introduce Adriana?

Sheba Asberom: Well, thank you, Adriana for joining us. Adriana is a financial education instructor with the San Diego Community Housing Corporation. She's been teaching financial education to low to moderate-income communities throughout California for the past two years. Thanks for joining us, Adriana. Would you like to start us off?

Adriana Marmolejo: Sure, absolutely. Thank you for having me. As you guys know, my name is Adriana, and I do work for the San Diego Community Housing Corporation (SDCHC), as its financial education instructor.

At SDCHC, we own, operate, and develop affordable properties, both for sale and rental.

Kimberly Paul, who is the vice president of community development, and my boss, came across a resident at one of our properties who posed this question to her: "How do poor people save?"

That question got her to thinking of the importance of implementing financial education in affordable housing. Kimberly is also the president of the California Neighborhood Networks Consortium, which is a group of developers, resident coordinators and residents that get together to support and provide resources to community centers throughout the state of California.

Because we do have such a large audience, we felt that additional support would be necessary to make a financial management program successful. Therefore, we teamed up with Washington Mutual. This partnership has been extremely beneficial.

Washington Mutual has CAN volunteers. CAN stands for Committed Active Neighbor's Program. They're available to teach at every workshop, along with us. Plus, because they have thousands of employees, we are able to provide the workshops in many languages. So far, we have provided workshops in Russian, Spanish, and Chinese and, of course, English.

As far as recruiting participants, the best and most important tools are your resident services coordinators and the residents themselves. I strongly do not suggest that you have workshops and properties where there is no resident services coordinator support.

Because we provide these workshops throughout the state, to hold successful workshops, we need two actions:

First, it takes a lot of organization. You must be organized when you're providing these workshops, especially for us who do them throughout the whole state. We have to have very, very clear guidelines as to what our plans are, how we're going to achieve them every month, and how we're going to be able to formulate workshops, on a monthly basis, throughout the whole state.

The other thing that's important is support, not only from your boss, but from your team, as well as from the properties where you will host the workshops. That means the property managers, the resident coordinators, the residents themselves, the developers; it takes a team effort to provide financial education.

A must, and I do suggest this as a preliminary activity, is to do a site visit before hosting a workshop. When I was traveling throughout the state, I noticed that a lot of the centers were not conducive to learning, because they were either really dirty, there weren't any chairs for people to sit in, or they were poorly managed, The computers were there, but they were not functioning. In places like that, you can't provide financial education, because it is such a touchy subject.

Also, while you discuss money with people, you have to be sensitive to the different cultures. We have so many different cultures throughout California that we have to know a little bit about the background of our audience, so that no one is offended. You need to provide support so that participants feel they are benefited.

A lot of times we go into centers and if the residents don't know you, they're not going to open up about their financial situation, their problems, and how much debt they're in.

So you have to really establish great relationships with the coordinators, the residents, and the property managers. The more people see you in the properties, the more success you'll have. For instance, the second time you go back to provide a different type of workshop topic, they'll already know who you are, and they're going to feel comfortable.

To conclude, I would just like to say that the most important thing to guarantee a successful program is to have great working relationships.

Our major partnership is with Washington Mutual. But, we also sponsor symposiums, as we did that this year, throughout the state. We needed to find more support, so we contacted other financial institutions that have helped us throughout the years.

These institutions are also nonprofit, but they have the same goal of providing educational resources in finance, to the residents and communities of San Diego and California.

Most important is to maintain a great relationship with the resident coordinators. When they work to support my workshop, more residents attend to the program.

Michele Higgs: OK. Let me just see if there are any questions on the line, and then I have one. Keith, is there anyone on the line with a question for Adriana?

Operator: Let me check. Ladies and gentlemen, if you'd like to ask a question, you may do so by pressing star one. Please make sure your mute function is turned off. We have a question from Mona Edwards from Parker Heights.

Michele Higgs: OK, Mona.

Mona Edwards: Yes. I just wanted to ask Adriana, how can I get the workshops to my community center?

Adriana Marmolejo: Where are you? What part of the state are you in?

Mona Edwards: Charlotte, North Carolina.

Adriana Marmolejo: You're in North Carolina?

Mona Edwards: Yes.

Adriana Marmolejo: Well, it depends. Do you have already a resource that comes to your center, to provide financial education?

Mona Edwards: Yes, as far as the computers.

Adriana Marmolejo: Well, I would recommend that you contact whichever bank is nearest. What's your nearest bank?

Mona Edwards: Probably Bank of America.

Adriana Marmolejo: Bank of America has a really great curriculum that will go into the centers and provide workshops on different topics regarding to finance. All you have to do is contact the manager of the bank.

Mona Edwards: OK.

Adriana Marmolejo... Let them know who you are, that you're nonprofit, and work with low-income residents. Just give them background information; and normally they'll be more than happy to send volunteers to provide those services, at no charge to your residents.

You could also contact Washington Mutual as they have these CAN volunteers nationwide. They have a curriculum that's for everyone.

So, we have a curriculum for toddlers. We have a curriculum for young adults, older adults and seniors. So, they can actually make it really specific to your resident population.

Mona Edwards: OK.

Michele Higgs: Thanks for calling in. Now, let me just put a little information out there. Adriana is really not feeling well today, and I promised her we'd do one or two questions, and then let her go.

And Mona, the question that you asked was basically the one that I had, and that is, how do centers conduct outreach to organizations to get onsite services. I know that you said that there were things you look for; that it has to be clean and that it has to have sufficient resources.

Adriana Marmolejo: Here in California, we're all kind of lucky because we have been able to offer the program to the whole state through the consortium.

So if you don't already belong to a consortium in your county, then you might want to consider contacting one. If you don't have a consortium in your county or state, then maybe the next state has one or at least has a relationship with these consortia. The consortia can provide you with the resources to find people that will provide you with financial education.

Michele Higgs: One of the things available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site is information about consortia around the country. That is an excellent resource.

Adriana Marmolejo: It is.

Michele Higgs: And Adriana, I thank you very much for staying with us. I know you're not feeling well, so I'm going to let you go. For those who are calling in, we have the Neighborhood Networks Online Message Board.

This is an excellent opportunity for you to make use of it. By going to the Web site, which is [www.neighborhoodnetworks.org](http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org), you'll find the Neighborhood Networks online message board.

You can share information, post news, and ask questions.

And, it gives you the opportunity to ask questions that you haven't been able to address on the conference call. I would suggest that if you use the online message board, be certain to list your contact information, so that your question can be responded to directly.

Be aware that this is not a real-time resource yet. So, you can post your information on the board and then return to the board, in a day or so, to see the responses you have received. Again, you just go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.neighborhoodnetworks.org](http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org), and click on the Neighborhood Networks online networking link, to the right, under the green banner labeled "helpful tools".

Reference this call. When you get there, go to "enter online discussion". You can check it out, post a message, ask a question. And one thing I didn't note is that this call will have a transcript available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site, in about two weeks. Adriana, are you still there?

Adriana Marmolejo: I am, Michele.

Michele Higgs: Oh, take care.

Adriana Marmolejo: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, again. We're going to go on to our next speaker.

Adriana Marmolejo: Wonderful. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: All right.

Sheba Asberom: At this time, I'd like to welcome Carol Quiller. She's a senior tax analyst with the Internal Revenue Service. Carol specializes in the research and development of partnerships with educational institutions and government entities, to reach low to middle-income taxpayers.

Carol will speak with us about the IRS programs to assist low to moderate-income residents.

Thank you for joining us Carol.

Carol Quiller: Well, thank you for having me; I do appreciate the invitation. Thanks, Michele, for asking me to talk about Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, or as we call it, our VITA program.

I think some of your Neighborhood Networks centers are probably very familiar with VITA and its outreach capabilities. We want to thank those that are involved, or had been engaged prior to this conference call, in the VITA efforts, because we are doing a very good job with our VITA programs.

We've been able to prepare more than 2.2 million returns last filing season, and we have 11,000 VITA sites nationwide. So, for those centers that are involved, we really do appreciate your involvement; and for those that aren't, this is the opportune time to now think about it.

We're now in November, which is a little late to get engaged as a VITA site, but it's never too late to promote a VITA site, or find that there's one near you that can help your residents throughout the filing season.

Again, VITA is a program that provides an alternative to paid tax preparers. An individual can have a tax return prepared for free, plus have the opportunity to use the monies that they've earned through the income tax refund program, EIPC.

We're not knocking the paid preparer, because we know that it's about convenience and needing your money right now. But, if you can just wait a little longer to get the tax return, you can use all of the refund, instead of just a portion of it.

VITA promotes this on every level. And the Neighborhood Networks centers are VITA places that can be used in communities to promote VITA, on every level. Again, if you're not a VITA center, or have not participated in a VITA, you can always talk about it.

If there's one in your neighborhood, direct your residents to go and get their tax returns completed. That's also a good opportunity to talk about financial preparedness. What will you do with that refund, once you get it? The earlier you start having those conversations with your residents, the more they understand the importance of having some financial responsibility, as well as planning what they can do with their refunds.

We have VITA sites all over. We use nonprofit organizations, or the church up the street or the bank in those communities where your centers are located.

VITA sites are not discriminatory. We try to be everywhere, in as many places as we can. However, since we have limited resources, we come to places like the Neighborhood Networks centers, to have them take an active role in the outreach and the education efforts that we offer through our VITA program.

Plus, by having VITA centers in your neighborhoods, you become a voice, not for the IRS, but for your residents, teaching them the responsibilities of filing the tax return, and then using the refunds for something positive.

If it's not for education purposes, is it for paying some bills, getting caught up with the bills, maybe putting a down payment on a car, so that they can get to work when they need to?

Usually, our summer months are when we plan to start our VITA sites, June, July and August, and September. By November, we have gotten our VITA sites in order, and know where we're

going, because you have to order software. The software's provided free-of-charge by IRS for tax return preparation.

Training is conducted either at the beginning of December or right after the Christmas holiday, in January. So, November is a planning period that's transitional, getting ready for the filing season. But again, it's never too late to promote and educate your residents about the VITA site.

There are several different ways that you can find out where the VITA sites are in your neighborhoods, beginning in January. Usually, we open around January 15<sup>th</sup>. You can find out where the local VITA site is by calling 1-800-829-1040, and they will give you a list of the VITA sites in your area.

Also, if you have a 211 information line in your state, they also provide information on local VITA sites.

I do suggest to those centers that service working residents that need help with their tax returns, to direct them to the VITA sites, because there's no better way for them to get the fullest potential from their refunds.

Again, it can cost them up anywhere between \$200, \$300 to get a tax return prepared if I go to a VITA site, and I'm getting a \$1,000 refund, then I can use all of the \$1,000 that's being returned to me. But if I go to a paid preparer, I'm only getting the benefit of about \$500, \$600, or \$700.

So, there is a difference, and when you need your money, you need your money; and not just some of it, all of it. So, I encourage you to get involved in VITA if you haven't been involved previously. It doesn't have to be this year. It could be next year.

If you want to be involved in outreach, talk to your residents early. Talk to them often about the different options for getting their returns prepared. Also, even after the filing season, if you have residents come in, ask them about the refunds that they receive, and how they got their refund. What did they do with that refund? These are “teachable moments.”

Teach them about bank accounts. Teach them about making investments in their future, with education opportunities, or even starting a small business, if that's where their interests lie.

So if you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us. Contact me. Michele has my information, and we can talk about it again. I thank those centers that are involved in our VITA efforts. For those who are interested, please do not hesitate to call us next year, to get us ready, so we can get you ready.

Michele Higgs: So, do you have a second for a quick question?

Carol Quiller : Sure.

Michele Higgs: OK. Sheba has one. On the VITA site?

Sheba Asberom: We were just wondering if you can repeat the 1-800 number?

Carol Quiller: It's 1-800-829-1040.

Michele Higgs: That's the number for all information regarding the IRS?

Carol Quiller: Right. Our Web site for the IRS, [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov), is a good resource, although it will not give the VITA sites online because the VITA sites sometimes change. So you wouldn't get live

information on that, but the toll-free number keeps an updated list, and they can provide you with the nearest VITA site.

Michele Higgs: OK. OK. Now, with regard to registering for next year, is there a specific office that centers would call? You said that the summer's a good time to start.

Carol Quiller: Yes, during the summer months we conduct our recruitment process. Most states have a local office that can get you involved or get you started. Or just start having the conversation about how to become a VITA site, or how to get involved with the VITA initiative in your area, because you may not have to be a VITA site.

Maybe you can just join one that's already developed, maybe up the street from your center. You can get in touch with me, and I can get you in touch with the local person that's involved with the VITA program in each state. . There may be one person for several states.

Michele Higgs: OK. OK. I'm going to ask if there are any questions, say maybe one or two questions for you.

Carol Quiller: Sure.

Michele Higgs: OK, excellent. Thank you. Keith?

Operator: Yes.

Michele Higgs: Is there anyone on the line for Carol?

Operator: We do have questions. We'll go first to Gisela Acfalle with Waipahu Towers.

Carol Quiller: Thank you. Hi Gisela.

Gisela Acfalle: Hi, Carol. Yes, I just wanted to know, are there any brochures that you could provide my center, to learn more about the assistance that is provided?

Carol Quiller: Sure, I could. There are electronic versions that you can get through our Web site, if you want brochures. Also, if you give me an e-mail address, I can send you an electronic version with some information or you can just write or tell me exactly what you need, and I can mail you information.

Gisela Acfalle: Oh, OK.

Michele Higgs: We'll handle that for you, Gisela. We'll give you the information, Carol.

Carol Quiller: OK.

Michele Higgs: Yes. Anything else Gisela?

Gisela Acfalle: No, that's it. I thank you very much.

Michele Higgs: OK, thanks. And we'll take one more for Carol.

Operator: We'll go next to Carolyn Nelson with Housing Authority.

Michele Higgs: OK. Hi Carolyn. You're there?

Carolyn Nelson: I think I am. Can you hear me now?

Michele Higgs: OK, there you go.

Carolyn Nelson: Actually I had something else that was for Adriana but I didn't get in at that time. But I want to say that this will be our first year as a VITA site.

Carol Quiller: Great, where are you?

Carolyn Nelson: We are in Fort Pierce, Florida.

Carol Quiller: Great.

Carolyn Nelson: We actually have two sites and the program that Adriana was talking about, as well as this program, is an offshoot from our family self sufficiency program offered by our housing authority.

Carol Quiller: Very good Carolyn.

Carolyn Nelson: We have training coming up in the next week for our VITA site and we are very fortunate because we have a total of four computer labs with about 40 computers total.

The thing that I wanted to say about the VITA site is the ability to convince our clients that this is a better option. I know that working with low income families, when they see the possibility of getting \$1,000, \$2,000 or \$3,000, they want it instantly.

Carol Quiller: Right.

Carolyn Nelson: One thing that I want to mention is that we have incorporated. We have partnered with a local bank to do IDAs, that's an individual deposit account. The banks have worked with us so that residents only need a minimum deposit of 20 dollars to open a new account. As a result of

partnering through the VITA, we have community partners who have agreed to match those funds if they make a deposit into the IDA. So that was just a suggestion that I had and it works out really, really great for us.

Carol Quiller: That is a great idea, Carolyn, because incentives are a big part of getting your clients or residents into your centers and encouraging them to save money especially if it is going to be matched with an individual development account.

Carolyn Nelson: Exactly, I know that was one of the things that Adriana touched on was how poor people can save.

Carol Quiller: Right.

Carolyn Nelson: All of a sudden they have \$4,000 and we are encouraging them to put 10 percent of their return into this IDA. Our partner is the Homebuyer Education and Assistance Team, which we call HEAT.

They have agreed to match those funds through their organization's various funding programs. So we have about a half dozen banks, some builders, some developers, our local CRA, and our lending consortia, that have agreed to match whatever funds we can get our residents to deposit into these IDA's.

Carol Quiller: Very good.

Carolyn Nelson: I just wanted to mention that because Adriana asked that question, how do poor people save, but you are talking about doubling whatever you deposit almost instantly.

Carol Quiller: Exactly, and homeownership is a big part of it. I mean the residents hear about it and talk about it but never really think that it is attainable.

Carolyn Nelson: We had 13 people buy homes this year, so it works for us.

Carol Quiller: Very good, very good.

Carolyn Nelson: I just wanted to mention that as a possible option.

Carol Quiller: This is great. Thanks so much Carolyn. Now I don't want to, I know you have to dash  
Carol do you have time for one more?

Carol Quiller: I'm listening, I'm listening.

Carol Quiller: All right. Keith, have we anyone else on the line?

Operator: We do. We will go next to Marisa Connaughton with DB Consulting Group.

Michele Higgs: Hi Marisa.

Joyce Mortimer: Hi there Michele. I wanted to suggest that we can put information about the FDIC's self  
paced modules on the Web site, so that listeners can access that information.

. They can get the CDs for free through the FDIC and load them on their computers to begin  
orienting and providing information about financial literacy for residents of all ages.

I also wanted to stress the importance of incentives and how do less fortunate people save, since  
the training begins in December. I think it really is important to tell your residents that this service  
will be available as soon as they get their tax information that they can expect to get a return  
quickly if they come in early.

If people know that they can come in by the last week in January then that will prevent them or at least make them think before they go to one of the commercial preparers.

Michele Higgs: Great idea, thanks Joyce and I will put together a list of links. Money Smart, the program that you are talking about, is on the list so that folks can go online check it out.

I am going to ask if there are anymore questions. Just one or two more; Carol's got to dash, so I don't want to hold her up too long.

Operator: We have a couple of questions; we will go to Helen McClaine with Norwegian Housing.

Helen McClaine: Hi can you hear me?

Michele Higgs: Yes ma'am.

Helen McClaine: All right I am wondering if the VITA sites have electronic filing available. Also is it possible to file electronically without having an automatic deposit account?

Carol Quiller: Yes and yes. We file electronically to transmit most returns; there are very few paper returns.

If the client does not have an account, there are some partners that will set up accounts for clients while they are filing the tax returns.

They will set up a temporary account or sometimes issue a debit card with the refund amount.

The debit card can be used in lieu of a checking account.

So there are several different options that financial institutions have for electronic deposit instead of paper checks.

Helen McClaine: Excellent, thank you so much.

Carol Quiller: You are welcome.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, thanks so much. Keith, have anyone else?

Operator: We do; we will go next to Joseph Mayerhoff with the Kraus Organization.

Michele Higgs: Hi Mr. Mayerhoff. How are you?

Joseph Mayerhoff: Good afternoon how are you?

Michele Higgs: I am doing good thanks.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Good. I have been really reluctant to participate in the VITA program, because I am concerned with liability. What happens if somebody comes into the center and prepares a tax return and they make a serious mistake that results in either somebody paying taxes that they don't have to pay or not getting enough of a refund?

I am really concerned that although they have training, we are still not dealing with experienced professionals here and I think people coming in know that. Nevertheless I am just worried that somebody is going to come in and the person preparing their return is going to make a mistake and it's going to create a big mess down the road.

Carol Quiller: Well let me explain first of all, every volunteer that prepares a return in the VITA site is covered under the Volunteer Protection Act. That states that as long as I don't exchange money for doing this return, I am covered as a volunteer so there is no liability.

Also, our training is quality driven. We want your volunteers to be comfortable in preparing the returns. You've got some really basic returns most people who are coming in who are low income wage earners.

They are not going to have a complex return that requires a lot of schedules and attachments. The returns are going to be simple; where there is income, there may be a simple deduction for child tax credit, or there may be some earned income tax credit but beyond that it should not be so extensive that your volunteers can't prepare it.

If there is any return that comes in and they don't feel comfortable, then they don't have to prepare. It is their choice. The simplest of returns are the majority of those at a VITA site.

Joseph Mayerhoff: OK.

Michele Higgs: OK thank you much. Keith, I am going to ask if there is anyone else on the line.

Operator: Yes there is; we have others in the queue. We will go with Sonia Brown with Everett Housing.

Michele Higgs: Great thank you, Sonia Brown.

Sonia Brown: Good afternoon Carol. I was just hoping to get your e-mail address.

Carol Quiller: Sure it's Carol.Quiller@IRS.gov

Sonia Brown: OK, Quiller at IRS

Carol Quiller: Dot gov.

Sonia Brown: And then also I was hoping to provide my e-mail address

Carol Quiller: Sure

Michele Higgs: We will have that information and I will be sure to get it to Carol. We don't want to give that out.

Carol Quiller: Sonia, what is it that you needed?

Michele Higgs: What's your name again and what center are you calling from?

Sonia Brown: Sonia Brown. I am with the Housing Authority. I wanted to pass along my information to the young lady from Florida.

Michele Higgs: OK we can do that.

Sonia Brown: Awesome, my e-mail address.

Michele Higgs: OK the one from Fort Pierce? Carolyn?

Sonia Brown: Yes the one that was discussing what she is doing with VITA.

Michele Higgs: Got you.

Carol Quiller: Very good.

Sonia Brown: Appreciate it.

Michele Higgs: I can handle it.

Sonia Brown: Got it, thank you.

Michele Higgs: OK, thank you. You are awfully popular today Carol. Can I get one more question?

Carol Quiller: Yes ma'am.

Michele Higgs: OK. Keith?

Operator: OK. Derrick King from Denver Housing Authority.

Derrick King: Can you hear me?

Carol Quiller: Yes.

Derrick King: Sorry, we have fire alarms going off over here so it is kind of hard to tell, but I have a question. I keep hearing the term VITA is that an acronym?

Carol Quiller: Yes, for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance.

Derrick King: Volunteer Income Tax Assistance?

Carol Quiller: Yes, sir.

Derrick King: That was my question.

Michele Higgs: OK, OK. Great thank you so much. Keith, is there anyone else?

Operator: We have one question in the queue. Last question is from Orlando Lorie with the US HUD.

Michele Higgs: Hi Orlando.

Orlando Lorie: Hi, how are you. I was listening to the Money Smart program information; we have that here in Lubbock, Texas. I was wondering is there still the train-the-trainer program from FDIC?

Carol Quiller: Yes, there is.

Orlando Lorie: We contacted FDIC people in our region. They provided us with online materials for the Money Smart program as part of their community affair.

Michele Higgs: OK so they provided you with the CDs at no charge.

Orlando Lorie: Right; and you can go online and take the course without having any expenditure.

Michele Higgs: Oh, that's perfect. Well that's going to be one of the links that we provide so I appreciate that.

Orlando Lorie: They can also call the office in their region because they should have all the materials available.

Michele Higgs: OK well this is terrific, thank you so much for the information.

Orlando Lorie: Take care.

Michele Higgs: OK, you do the same.

Orlando Lorie: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: All right.

Carol Quiller: Michele, I'll provide you also with some Web sites you can add to the transcript.

Michele Higgs: OK. Yes that will be great, that will be great, just send them to me and I will add them right on in.

Carol Quiller: OK

Michele Higgs: OK thanks a lot. Can you take one more?

Carol Quiller: I really have to go but if you will tell them to send me the question via e-mail I will be glad to respond.

Michele Higgs: OK. I will do that. Thanks so much for staying with us; I appreciate it.

Carol Quiller: No problem, thanks everybody for calling in.

Sonia Brown: Thanks Carol.

Carol Quiller: Yes bye

Michele Higgs: Thanks again. Carol had to leave but we're going to continue for awhile. I am going to again tell you about accessing the online message board.

You get to it through the Neighborhood Networks Website, which is [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org). On the home page on the left hand side you will see a green banner that says helpful tools.

Follow the instructions in the guidelines and learn how the site works, or enter online discussions. You can select the area for conference calls, identify this call, which is "Learning to Balance the Buck", or you can just enter the Financial Management call and place your question or your information there.

I will ensure that your question is distributed and you get an answer to your question. I am going to go ahead and give the comments that I ordinarily give at the beginning of the call. But I also want to say something in addition to Carolyn's comments, who called from Fort Pierce Florida.

I had found a success story that we had covered in 2005 about a Roxbury, Massachusetts center, the Madison Park Development Corporation Technology Center.

The center offered its residents the opportunity to learn about money management, budgeting for both in the present and the future, improving credit scores and other financial matters. The program had the support of the community, in the form of MIDAS, or the Massachusetts Individual Development Account solution.

You may have heard Carolyn mention IDA. In the middle of MIDAS is IDA. MIDAS provided a small stipend for participants to start savings accounts and by matching what they were able to

save. To see how things have progressed over these last two years, I contacted the instructor for the program, who is Jackie Cooper.

Cooper noted that of the 25 participants that she had been working with over the last couple of years, seven had become homeowners of affordable homes, five had started small businesses, one had used the funds to go to school, eight were still saving for their homes, and four had ceased participating in the program.

She noted that it took a commitment for folks to participate, and for those who made that commitment the rewards of the program turned out not just to be in dollars and cents. Cooper said that the sense of empowerment and confidence that came with accomplishing a goal encouraged participants to go onto other things such as seeking out educational opportunities or better paying jobs that allowed them to maintain their homes.

Just as Carolyn mentioned, other partners in the community provide resources. They also step up and match funds depending, of course, on your individual community. .

Programs focusing on personal finance education, also called financial management or financial literacy, blossomed nationwide. Their popularity increased as of the late 1990's as consumer debt deepened, the stock market tanked, Wall Street scandals surfaced, the battle over Social Security flared, and employer's outsourced jobs. Financial education is a hot topic today, not just for centers, but for their users and the public at-large.

Rising fuel prices, food prices, and uneven housing costs have made managing money for even the necessities a challenge. Of course no one is born with the ability to manage money, it is a skill that is learned through observation, education, experience and practice. You have to have money to manage it and you have to manage it to keep it.

Participants in a financial management program can learn about budgeting and establishing a relationship with a bank, they can learn about the importance of credit and how to use it, and they can learn how to plan for and address personal needs.

Money management is also about developing the discipline to delay satisfying wants over needs: rent is a need, food is a need; an iPod, a new DVD, a manicure are all wants. Now, squeezing a dollar until the eagle grins is not the recommended way of getting the most out of your money, learning how to manage it is.

Hopefully our speakers today gave you some details for making programs work for your centers to inform and empower your residents.

I do not want to forget that we have nine new centers to welcome to the Neighborhood today: The Leap Forward Learning and Technology Center in Ohio, The Shore Hill Neighborhood Networks Center in New York, Missions Senior Community Neighborhood Networks Center in New York, Park Terrace Help Neighborhood Networks Center in Texas, the Villa Felix Neighborhood Networks Center in Texas, West Side Senior Housing Neighborhood Networks Center also in Texas, Cedar Garden Neighborhood Networks Center in California, Heritage Terrace Neighborhood Networks Center in New Hampshire and the Sheppard Park Computer Center in Connecticut.

I also want to remind you about the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, which is also known as the START business plan. START helps you examine the capacity of your center and provide the foundation upon which you can organize your activities.

It will help you assess the needs of your residents, and determine what resources in the community can help you meet those needs. Finally, START is a key to developing partnerships

because it is a true business plan that strengthens the center's profile as a business and makes the center more attractive to potential partners.

If you have questions about the START business plan, resident surveys, or general questions about Neighborhood Networks, you can call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line at 888-312-2743. If you forget how to access the online message board, you can call the Neighborhood Networks information line at 883-312-2743.

Again, I have mentioned the Neighborhood Networks Web site but I will repeat it; its [www.neighborhoodnetworks.org](http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org). I remind you again that you can use the Neighborhood Networks online message board if you were unable to have a question answered by our speakers this afternoon.

I want to remind you of upcoming calls. The next one is in December. All of our calls are going to continue to focus on helping you to build the capacity of your centers.

The next call is December 11th at 3:00 p.m., entitled, "It Takes a Village - Connecting Centers to Community Resources" and will focus on the strategic use of marketing tools to establish a positive image for your center. The New Year will find us discussing "Workforce Development: Programs that Work" on Tuesday January 8th at 3:00 p.m.

We will then share with you the work of a couple of centers that have been successful in developing programs that have enabled their residents to make strides in the work place. We say they have been successful at growing their workforce development programs. We want them to strut their stuff and tell you how it is done, so please save the date and mark your calendars.

Again, I'll touch on the resources available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. Because of time limitations, we do not always get to hear all of your questions.

If you have a question and did not get to air it during the call, don't forget this option. Visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site and post your question on the online message board. Staff will see to it that your question gets attention. Again, you can always call the toll-free line at Neighborhood Networks, 888-312-2743.

I want to thank Adrianna and Carol for sharing with us and Sheba for her assistance in pulling this call together today. I thank you for joining us, take good care everyone and we will talk to you next time.

Operator: Ladies and gentleman, this concludes today's conference call. We appreciate your participation and you may disconnect at this time.

END