U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

THE BRIDGE

THE OFFICE OF HOUSING COUNSELING NEWSLETTER

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BREAKING NEWS

HUD ANNOUNCES DISASTER ASSISTANCE FOR VICTIMS OF HURRICANE HARVEY

Housing Counseling Supports Millennials

HUD's First Certified Housing Counselor

Chicago, IL - Damian Zavala, a senior homeownership consultant for Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago (NHS), is the first certified housing counselor in the United States. Since joining NHS in 2008, Damian has dedicated his career to helping people, especially senior citizens, who are at risk of foreclosure. Damian's certification validates his commitment to helping clients preserve their homes.

Prior to joining NHS, Damian spent more than 25 years in real estate. When the foreclosure crisis hit, he found many of his clients and parishioners at his church in need of help. It was then that he decided to leverage his expertise to help people save their homes.

"Helping my clients overcome not only their housing hardships but the emotional impact caused by it is what motivates me to excel in my career," said Damian. "To see my clients' smile again once they know they are no longer in danger of losing their home because of the support I provided is the greatest feeling."

Damian is one of 12 certified Home Equity Conversion Mortgage (HECM) counselors in the state of Illinois and one of only five in the City of Chicago. In his role at NHS, he provides a variety of housing counseling and education services, including:

- Foreclosure prevention counseling,
- First-time homebuyer education workshops,
- Counseling clients with Freddie Mac-owned loans by preparing prospective buyers for homeownership or helping borrowers avoid foreclosure via the Freddie Mac Borrower Help Center.

"Damian's compassion and commitment to those he serves is relentless," said Gloria Yates, outreach manager at Freddie Mac.

Damian primarily works with clients seeking help with foreclosure prevention, HECM loss mitigation and reverse mortgages. Through the Illinois Hardest Hit Program, he has seen an increase in clients affected by rising property taxes and insurance premiums.

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FROM THE DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY

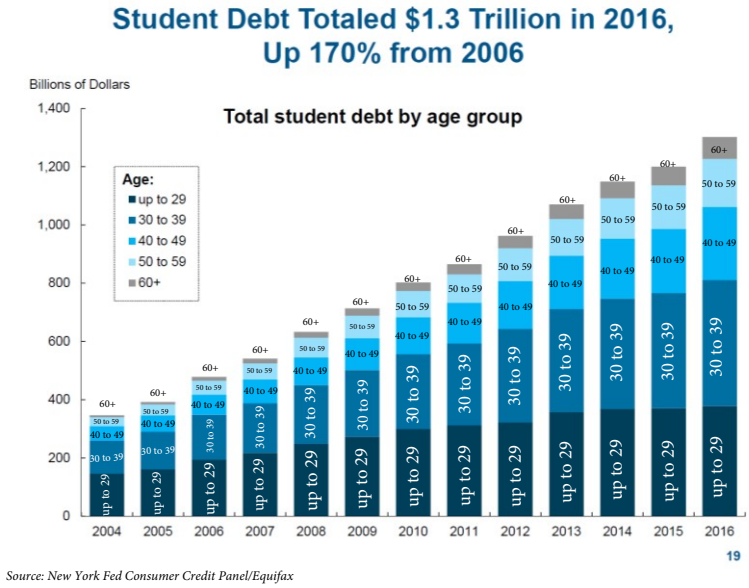
Sarah Gerecke
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Housing Counseling

Greetings,

The launch of the HUD Certified Housing Counselor Examination on August 1, 2017 was a transformational milestone for the housing counseling industry. Now, housing counselors from across the country can register and prepare to successfully take the certification examination to become a HUD Certified Housing Counselor. Be sure to register today if you haven't already done so at: HUDHousingCounselors.com.

During the month of September, many of our nation's children head back to school, while some of our young people begin their college experience. This month's edition of 'The Bridge' focuses on housing counseling for many of these young adults often referred to as Millennials. The U.S. Census Bureau defines Millennials as youth born between 1982 and 2000. Some of their general characteristics include being tech-savvy, having grown up with smartphones and computers; highly educated with 34 percent of 25 – 29 year olds with a college degree; civic-minded with a strong sense of community; and socially conscious as one of the most diverse generations in U.S. history.

Pursuing a college education is important to some Millennials and in pursuit of this goal, many of them become laden with student loan debt. According to a press briefing by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, student debt was 1.3 trillion at the end of 2016, an increase of about 170 percent from 2006. The average student loan debt for students graduating in the class of 2016, was over $30,000.



To address this growing concern, HUD-approved housing counseling agencies are helping students, graduates and their families to understand their financial situation and choices for loan repayment... one less obstacle for affording safe and appropriate housing.

Sarah

HELPING MILLENNIALS ACHIEVE THEIR DREAM OF HOMEOWNERSHIP

Rockville, MD - Asian-American Homeownership Counseling (AAHC) was established to empower and inspire immigrant communities to achieve and maintain the American dream of homeownership by providing counseling, education, tools, and resources. AAHC is an affiliate of HUD-approved, National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development and offers an array of housing counseling services.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other immigrant homeownership communities are considered underserved in the housing industry and in financial literacy education services. Thus, they face a great challenge in sustaining and improving their circumstances in American society. AAHC aims to assist all immigrant, minority and low-income communities including members of the millennial or Generation Y group in achieving the American dream of homeownership and to provide the financial literacy education that will allow them to keep and maintain their homes for a lifetime.

Two of its millennial clients were eager to share their experience working with AAHC. Maya works as an environmental engineer at a water and sewer utility, while Feola worked as an engineer and now practices law. The couple faced a great challenge common to many millennials – their two university degrees combined, cost as much as some mortgages and they were still paying for student loans 10-years post-graduation. They knew a house would be the biggest single purchase of their lives and wanted to enter the home buying process with as much knowledge as possible.

One day Maya came across an article that changed her life. It was a notification of a first-time homebuyer education workshop hosted by AAHC's Maryland Branch. She eagerly attended, took extensive notes, asked pertinent questions, and left a much better educated homeowner-to-be. The couple followed-up by scheduling a one-on-one counseling session to discuss their finances and credit history. Maya writes, "It felt as if I was being given the pieces to a bigger puzzle and the final result would be to close on a home."

They had one-on-one personal finance sessions with Song Hutchins, Founder and CEO of AAHC. Song showed them how to improve their credit scores, provided references for loan products and mortgage lenders, and advised them on down payment options.

With the homeownership counseling support of AAHC, Maya and Feola were able to navigate the complex homebuying process and purchase the home of their choice. Maya shared that the mortgage application experience was not a fun series of tasks at any step of the way, but knowing what to expect helped tremendously.

Despite the intensity of it all, she would still highly recommend that potential homebuyers dive in completely when purchasing a house. Maya and Feola agree that home buying education and counseling from a qualified non-profit is the foundation to becoming a successful homeowner. The couple closed on their first home in February 2017.

L to R - Song Hutchins, CEO, AAHC; Feola & Maya; & Sarah Gerecke, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Housing Counseling, HUD

TIPS TO LIGHTEN THE BURDEN OF STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Columbus, OH - Ohio State University Extension (OSUE) is a HUD-approved housing counseling agency offering Housing Counseling Services in Financial Management/Budget Counseling, Home Buyer Education and Money Management.

OSUE confirms outstanding student loan debt has become a national issue. The balance of outstanding total federal student loans has surpassed to more than $1.3 trillion dollars, and over 44 million people now owe against federal student loans. What's more, the average graduating senior in 2014 left college with nearly $30,000 in outstanding student loans – an amount that increased by more than two and half times the rate of inflation over the previous decade (TICAS 2016). Finally, default rates on student loans have skyrocketed to their highest level in over 20 years.

Despite these dire statistics, there are good reasons to take on student loans, even large ones, in order to get an education. College graduates continue to out-earn high school grads by a lot, with the lifetime earnings of the average college educated man and woman surpassing those of their less-educated counterparts by $600,000 and $300,000, respectively (Avery and Turner 2012). With such a large earnings boost, a college degree remains a good investment, even if students must take on large loans to achieve it.

However, there are several issues that complicate the question of whether student loans are a good bet. First, a college degree will only pay off if students successfully earn their degrees. Students who drop out are left with heavy student loan burdens without the increased earning potential associated with a college degree, and struggle to repay their loans.

The statistics show this: over half of the people who default on their loans owe less than $10,000 in debt. Default is a big problem, both for the federal government who still provides about 90 percent of student loans, and for individuals whose financial health can be weakened for years.

A second issue that all borrowers face is the fact that the bill for post-secondary education needs to be paid at the time of attendance – usually around age 20 – but the financial benefits of a degree take a lifetime to accumulate. This means that many graduates face a large, monthly student loan repayment bill just at the moment when they are beginning their financially independent lives, trying to buy a house or a car. Some worry that large loan burdens in early adulthood are making it difficult for young people to purchase homes, fueling the trend of millennials staying at home for longer (Bleemer et al. 2014).

While the debate on this continues, what's clear is that college attendees today face much larger student loan repayment burdens than did graduates from previous generations.

How should we address these two issues?

Here are some tips to help lighten the burden of student loan debt.

- First, limit the required monthly payment that graduates must pay to a portion of their earnings. By linking payments to income, the burden of monthly payments will remain within reason. In fact, such a program already exists in the U.S., Income Driven Repayment, but is vastly underutilized. Simply making this program a default option could significantly reduce repayment difficulties.

- Secondly, extend the timeframe students are given to repay their loans. At present, students are given a 10-year time horizon, squeezing repayment of a large debt into a relatively short amount of time. By extending repayment to 25 years, as is the standard in many other countries, graduates will be less burdened by loans in their early 20s when their earnings are lowest and when they are looking to invest in homes.

GETTING OUT OF THE STUDENT LOAN BUBBLE

Washington, DC - Consumer's seeking to make a more informed choice concerning repayment options on their student loan debt should consider consulting with an impartial and trusted advocate, especially one that has experience helping consumers overcome debt challenges. That is why the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC) developed its own Student Loan Counseling program.

Founded in 1951, the National Foundation for Credit Counseling is dedicated to improving people's financial well-being. A HUD-approved housing counseling agency, the NFCC has over 50 years' experience helping consumers navigate complex debt challenges, and has successfully assisted millions in developing strategies to improve their financial lives. First launched in 2015, the NFCC's Student Loan Counseling programs take a holistic approach to addressing student debt. Since its program launch, the NFCC has helped thousands of consumers facing student debt issues.

Each NFCC certified student loan counselor goes through a rigorous training and certification program that prepares them to provide sound guidance for addressing student debt, all in the context of a consumer's complete financial picture. Whether the goal is to develop strategies for making student loan payments more affordable, to pay off student debt as quickly as possible, or learn the best options for getting defaulted student loans back on track so that they can continue their college education, NFCC certified student loan counselors can provide expert advice and help consumers successfully fit their student debt obligations into their overall financial life.

NFCC student loan counselors work individually with each consumer by first determining their concerns and financial objectives. Taking a holistic counseling approach, they then review the consumer's income, living expenses, student, and non-student debt, so that they can help determine the best possible options that have the best likelihood of helping the consumer reach their goals and find success.

Each consumer leaves the student loan counseling session with a better understanding of their current situation and the most appropriate options for addressing their student and non-student debt. All of this is then detailed in a written action plan for the consumer.

If the consumer needs assistance with executing their plan, their NFCC certified student loan counselor can help with this as well. This includes working with their student loan servicer to get answers to questions they may have, or applying for repayment options. Member agencies can offer services for nominal fees to cover the cost of delivering the counseling based on their current funding status.

Funding for operations and services comes from an ever-changing combination of federal, state and local government grants, as well as donations from financial industry participants and private donors.

To learn more about NFCC student loan counseling or to reach an NFCC student loan counselor, visit www.studentloanhelp.org.

GENERATION WH(Y) HOMEOWNERSHIP FORUM

L to R - Laura Kusisto, Wall Street Journal Reporter and Moderator; Skyler Yost, WeWork Manager and recent homebuyer; Bradley Brookens, Accountant and potential homebuyer; Lauren McLaughlin, Housing Counselor at Hudson River Housing, Inc.; & Dr. Ben Carson, HUD Secretary

Washington, DC – HUD Secretary Dr. Ben Carson, Office of Public Affairs, and WeWork, a shared workspace provider and community for entrepreneurs, freelancers and start-up businesses, hosted the Generation Wh(Y) Homeownership forum to discuss homeownership and Millennials in Washington, D.C.

Panelists included Skyler Yost, WeWork Manager and recent homebuyer; Bradley Brookens, Accountant and potential homebuyer; and Lauren McLaughlin, Housing Counselor at Hudson River Housing, Inc. in Poughkeepsie, NY. Laura Kusisto, Housing Reporter for the Wall Street Journal, moderated the panel discussion.

Dr. Carson shared with the audience that the housing market is becoming a lost dream for some millennials and that HUD is working to create more viable options for credit-worthy millennials. One such option is the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which has helped over 46 million Americans buy or refinance their homes. An estimated 40 percent of first-time homebuyers use FHA for financing and new data shows that 35 percent of all FHA loans were closed by millennials.

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Damian Zavala

In addition, he leverages his expertise to help fellow parishioners and the surrounding community prepare for homeownership by hosting homebuyer education workshops and one-one-one counseling.

Through his work, Damian is helping NHS fulfill its commitment to strengthening households and communities through homeownership. As part of the national NeighborWorks® Network, NHS empowers people to be successful and sustainable homeowners.

Damian had been waiting to take the new Housing Counseling Certification exam since it was announced in December 2016. He said, "I took the exam for my clients both past and present to demonstrate that I am a trusted and knowledgeable resource committed to helping them solve their housing needs in their best interests." Damian feels empowered by obtaining his certification and encourages other housing counselors to take the exam.

After Damian passed the certification examination, he authorized Hudhousingcounselors.com to submit his information to HUD. Then he applied for HUD Certified Housing Counselor status through HUD's FHA Connection and his agency's FHA Connection Application Coordinator verified his employment with the agency. Instructions on this process can be found at FHA Connection.

CONGRATULATIONS DAMIAN ON PASSING THE EXAM AND BECOMING THE FIRST HUD CERTIFIED HOUSING COUNSELOR!

ANTICIPATING THE URGENT NEED FOR STUDENT LOAN DEBT COUNSELING

Washington, DC - It is no secret that the level of student loan debt in this country is at an all-time high and with the cost of a higher education continuing to rise at epic proportions, the cap on this debt is nowhere in sight. Currently, 44 million borrowers owe $1.3 trillion in student loan debt — that is more than the total U.S. credit card debt.

At some point, those saddled with excessive student loan debt, both graduates and non-graduates and in many cases their parents or family members, will reach out to the non-profit counseling community for support, advice, resources and assistance. In anticipation of this need, credit.org, a 501(c)(3) organization, developed their student loan holistic education and counseling platform. Over the past few years, it has invested heavily to build systems, enable training and certification of its highly-seasoned counselors or "trusted advisors," who are ready to support consumers.

Credit.org is a HUD-approved housing counseling agency formed in 1974 with a simple yet vital mission: to improve the lives and financial well-being of individuals and families by providing quality financial education and counseling.

While the process of getting a student loan is relatively easy, understanding all of the various types of loans and their specific repayment terms, rates and conditions can be quite challenging under the best of circumstances. Add the burden of a potential or actual default scenario, the myriad of options and resolutions available to the student loan borrower increases tenfold. Credit.org student loan counseling breaks down the process into understandable and tangible objectives:

- Educate the borrower on all federal program options.
- Provide an explanation of benefits and drawbacks of repayment options.
- Offer step-by-step guidance through the application process.
- Create a workable budget.
- Produce a customized and easy to follow client action plan.

Many student loan borrowers have multiple loans that are a combination of private and federal, carry different terms, have different consumer protections, and are spread among multiple servicers. Each servicer has a different application process that can be extremely burdensome for a borrower to manage. Credit.org's goal is to help alleviate some of this burden by evaluating each person's situation and providing them with insight to all available options and solutions, thereby removing any obligation to enroll in any program. Credit.org's focus is to provide trustworthy and impartial advice.

In the initial year of launching the platform, credit.org counselors have helped over 200 borrowers best understand their repayment options, assisted borrowers in applying for help, and provided holistic counseling to manage overall debt. On average, borrowers had $30,000 in student loan debt and to further help, credit.org offered its comprehensive counseling at no cost to the borrower during this pilot period.

With the growing demand for its guidance and the dedication of counseling to evaluate each individual's unique situation, credit.org moved to a moderate fee-for-service of $199.00. Once it moved to a fee-for-service model however, credit.org experienced a decline in the number of consumers willing to pay for education and counseling. Potentially, an adverse bi-product of the industry wide lender messaging that consumers should not pay for services that assist with student loan debt, a message moreover intended to combat the for-profit companies that have extensive marketing resources and charge excessive fees. And while this messaging is intended to protect consumers from exorbitant fees, it has been an uphill battle for certified nonprofit counseling agencies to differentiate themselves.

At this time, Credit.org does not have any plans to adjust its pricing levels and will continue to educate potential clients on the value of its student loan counseling.

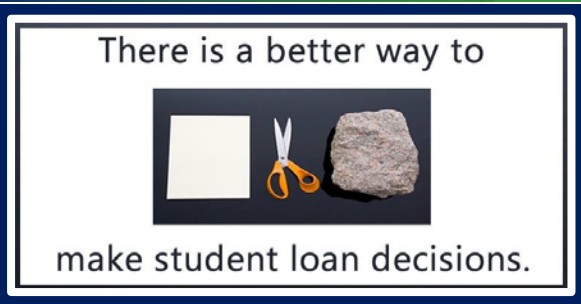
PRINCIPLES FOR HELPING STUDENTS MAKE SMART STUDENT LOAN DECISIONS

Logan, UT – In the August 2015 edition of *The Bridge*, colleagues at the Family Life Center Housing and Financial Counseling Clinic at Utah State University (USU), a HUD-approved housing counseling agency, addressed student loan debt. Specifically, the article focused on important principles for students including: spend time wisely, use the right budget, protect priorities, spend less than you earn, how to manage credit, and how to manage finances early. This article is a follow-up and update to the information provided in 2015.

At USU, 32 percent of freshmen take out loans averaging $5,713 to pay for college-related costs. Similarly, 33 percent of all undergraduate students at USU take out student loans, averaging $5,714 per year. This is among the lowest rate in the country and in 2017, U.S. News & World Report ranked USU seventh in terms of graduates with the least debt among public national universities. The default rate at USU is also lower than the national average.

Despite promising numbers in comparison to national averages, there is still much to do to help students at USU and across the U.S. understand the loan process to help them make smart decisions. In the rest of this article, USU will identify four additional suggestions it has found to be useful in its financial counseling work.

Suggestion #1: Develop institutional commitment to reducing student debt. In order to help students understand and manage student loan debt, there must first be a commitment by the institution to helping educate students. The Housing and Financial clinic at USU has worked with students and community members for the past 30 years to help educate them on issues related to debt, credit, budgeting, and buying a home. Its mission is to develop, through counseling and education, a community of people and families who are knowledgeable about housing, and who effectively manage their financial resources. Having these services in place demonstrates that university administrators are committed to addressing these issues for students and the community.



Suggestion #2: Foster awareness and a future perspective. Students often enjoy the relative ease with which they can borrow money with little thought into potential future consequences. As a result, it is easy to forget about the student loan they will have to pay back. When they do this, they can sometimes sacrifice long-term security for short-term rewards.

For that reason, helping students understand the repayment process and forecast projected earnings after college is an important step. It is important that students understand that, for many student loans, the repayment process begins six months after the borrower leaves school, graduates, or drops below half time enrollment. They also need to be aware of how interest works and when it begins accruing on the debt. Many financial experts suggest that borrowers should not incur student loan debt above what their first year annual salary will be. This rule-of-thumb will help make payments more affordable and keep debt-to-income ratios reasonable when purchasing a home.

Suggestion #3: Keep expectations realistic and continually monitor needs versus wants. It can be quite overwhelming when it is time for a borrower to start repaying student loans. As a result, an important step for students during the borrowing process is to keep track of how much they are borrowing and keep their expectations realistic. Students should only accept the loans they need and not the total loan amount offered to them. Put another way, students should not use loans to support a particular lifestyle. They need to be very aware of what they need in terms of expenses and avoid using loans to satisfy their wants. Knowing the difference between needs and wants helps borrowers make better choices.

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COLLABORATING TO EDUCATE & SERVE

Community Flower Garden

Durango, CO - Two nonprofit organizations, Housing Solutions for the Southwest, a HUD-approved housing counseling agency and the Durango Adult Education Center have partnered to pilot a Transitional Housing Program for undereducated adults. The Transitional Housing Program serves students enrolled in educational programs at the Durango Adult Education Center, including English as a Second Language or high school equivalency classes.

Both agencies have served the rural communities in Southwest Colorado for 30 plus years, each with a shared vision that community members can transition to self-sufficiency, often by completing educational goals to provide more long-term career options. To accomplish those goals, secure and safe housing is important. The pilot program provides transitional housing for students, primarily youth, many of whom could not attend class regularly due to homelessness or unsafe living environments.

The history of how this partnership developed shows that with creative collaborations, transitional housing can continue in communities even without federal funding. After federal transitional housing funds were repurposed on a national level, Housing Solutions sought new partnerships to continue the successful transitional housing model in its community. When HUD changed its funding focus from transitional housing to rapid rehousing in 2015, Housing Solutions lost its long-standing HUD Transitional Housing funding designated for a property owned by the agency. At this point the brainstorming began.

During the prior year, as a result of collaboration between Housing Solutions, Durango Adult Education Center and the Women's Resource Center, a new program called BOOST, was set up to enhance the support of students working with Durango to complete their GED or other basic educational classes.

When the collaboration with Durango began, Housing Solutions rehabilitated its transitional housing property to create co-housing, dorm-style living. This made the project affordable and provided a positive environment of like-minded residents actively engaged in education. HUD was instrumental in this transition by allowing the last year of HUD funding to be dedicated to rehabilitating the building as Housing Solutions was determined to continue to serve community members who needed transitional housing to move towards self-sufficiency. A local foundation, which has funded transitional housing programs in other communities, enthusiastically partnered with Housing Solutions to fill the funding gap and to specifically repurpose several units for co-housing for students.

With secure housing, the students in the pilot program are thriving, completing their educational goals and moving to stable housing, usually in a period of approximately four months. Housing Solutions started the pilot program in fall 2016 and doubled the number of students served in spring 2017. During the first year of the pilot program, accomplishments include GED graduates, ESL graduates, students moving into affordable housing and one student moving back to her home country to start a business. No students have returned to homelessness. One of its current participants is a Mom fleeing domestic violence. She is studying for her GED and her teenage son attends high-school. All of the students, except one who is recovering from surgery, are working.

As one of the BOOST students told Housing Solutions, despite multiple challenges, the BOOST educational program is "the one thing that grounds me." The pilot program was created from scratch with no model to meet the unique needs of its rural community and can be recreated in other communities by following a similar collaborative structure.

BUILT TO LAST, BUILT FOR CHANGE

Washington, DC - HUD-Approved Intermediaries, State Housing Finance Agencies and Multi-State organizations participated in HUD's Office of Housing Counseling's (OHC) Educational and Networking Conference on August 9, 2017.

Over 100 participants attended the conference to get updates from OHC staff on key housing counseling program issues, requirements, and guidance. Attendees were briefed on the latest program updates, including hot topics such as:

- Housing counseling program outcomes and impacts,
- Initiatives across HUD's Office of Housing Counseling,
- External policy updates,
- Billing methodologies and best practices.

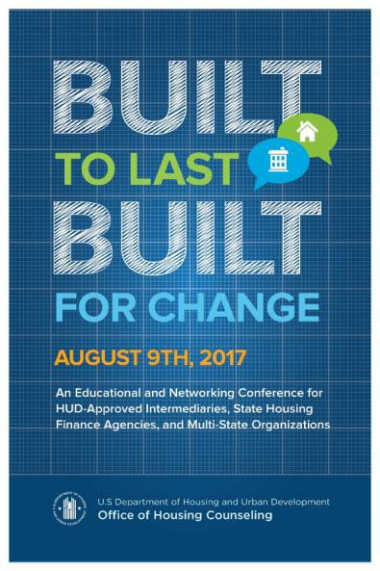
The meeting discussed the most up-to-date information on the value of housing counseling from two perspectives:

1. HUD's Office of Policy and Development Research and
2. OHC's Housing Counseling Awareness and Visibility efforts.

Participants also engaged in peer-to-peer break-out sessions on:

1. Sharing Needs on Client Management Systems: Needs for a virtual series on technology, platform, topics to cover, audience, etc.
2. Limited English Proficiency: Identifying and serving LEP persons in their housing counseling programs.
3. Housing Counseling Handbook: Changes and rule making feedback.
4. Network Capacity: Sharing lessons learned and best practices for right-sizing network.

All related materials of the 2017 Conference for HUD-Approved Intermediaries, State Housing Finance, and Multi-State organizations are available at: HUDExchange.



(continued from pg. 8 – Principles for Helping Students Make Smart Student Loan Decisions)

Suggestion #4: Understand options for managing student loan debt. Student loans can create a burden on a monthly budget, causing a ripple effect that leads to rising credit card debt and risking student loan default. It is important that students understand that there are several repayment plans available that may provide the payment flexibility they need.

Borrowers should keep in mind they can switch to a different repayment plan at any time to suit their needs and goals. Income-driven repayment plans, which allow for monthly payments to be adjusted based on the borrower's income, are one option. Other ways to paying off student loan debt include: federal repayment plans, student loan forgiveness programs, residential reimbursement programs, and career-based options. There are many financial aid options to consider, so it is important for borrowers to understand their repayment options and be a responsible borrower.

Overall, following these suggestions empower students to understand their loans and be more proactive in managing them. Although, much of this information is available to students and even provided to them during pre-loan information sessions, it is important that student borrowers are regularly reminded of their responsibilities as well as their options. This will provide them a greater likelihood of achieving long-term financial stability.

INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

The Office of Housing Counseling (OHC) launched the HUD Certified Housing Counselor examination on August 1, 2017. Individuals that pass the certification examination can then apply for HUD Certified Housing Counselor status with HUD. This month's segment provides some tips for taking and registering for the examination and explains the role of the agency's FHA Connection Application Coordinator (FHAC) in the certification process. Complete information on the housing counselor certification process can be found on the HUD Exchange's Housing Counseling Program Certification webpage including recently updated Frequently Asked Questions.

Q: What tools are available to help prepare housing counselors for the certification examination?

A: Counselors have several options available to prepare for the examination. HUDhousingcounselors.com offers free on-line training that covers all topics tested in the certification examination and includes knowledge checks. Recommended time to complete the training is approximately 10 -12 hours.

A downloadable study guide in both English and Spanish is also available on the website, including a free practice examination in English and Spanish. To access the training tools and register for the certification examination, you must first create a user account.

HUD's training partners also offer examination preparation classes. This training is available on-line and in-person. Scholarships may be available, so please check the links to these training partners on the HUD Exchange for more information.

Q: Why didn't I receive a score for the practice exam and how do I interpret feedback?

A: The practice exam is designed to give candidates a feel for the format and style of test questions and the breadth of the subject matter. The practice exam does not provide numeric scoring because performance on the practice exam does not guarantee passing results on the certification exam.

Following completion of the practice exam, candidates receive a performance report with recommended areas for improvement. The recommendations are based on how well candidates perform in each content area of the examination. Areas in which candidates perform well receive a recommendation for additional review for continued success; areas in which performance was marginal receive a recommendation for additional study for moderate improvement; and areas in which performance was weak receive the recommendation for significant study for considerable improvement.

Q: What recommendations do you have for individuals prior to registering for the certification examination?

A: Prior to registration, individuals must determine if they want to take the certification examination on-line using their own equipment or in-person at a proctoring center. Test-takers that have created a user account on www.hudhousingcounselors.com can find information on testing requirements under the Kryterion/Proctoring link under 'Taking the examination.' This links to information that will help test-takers determine if they have adequate equipment and internet speed for on-line test-taking use or identify the proctoring center that is most convenient for them.

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(continued from pg. 11 – Inquiring Minds Want to Know)

If you have questions about proctoring, please contact Bixal through www.hudhousingcounselors.com under the 'Support' box. Do not register for an account through Kryterion. Also carefully consider what date(s) work best for your schedule before registering. There may be cancellation and no-show fees assessed if you do not take the examination when scheduled and you fail to cancel timely.

Q: What is the proctoring no show/cancellation policy for the certification examination?

A: The certification examination will follow the policies for proctoring regarding no show/cancellations outlined below:

No Shows and Cancellations:

- ONLINE PROCTORING. You cannot reschedule or cancel this scheduled test session with less than 24 hours' notice and rescheduling or cancelling requires you to contact your test sponsor. If you reschedule or cancel your registration with less than the notice listed above, you may be required to pay an additional fee.
- ONSITE PROCTORING. You must provide at least 72 hours notice to cancel or reschedule a test session scheduled at an onsite test center. Test fees, vouchers, or coupons used to pay for the exam will not be refunded for sessions cancelled without proper notice.

Q: What is an FHAC Application Coordinator and why does an agency need at least one FHAC Application Coordinator for the HUD Certified Housing Counselor process?

A: An FHAC Application Coordinator is critical to the HUD certified housing counselor process. The application coordinator verifies the employment status of individuals who work for a HUD-participating housing counseling agency. HUD recommends an agency designate two application coordinators.

Q: Who can become an FHAC Application Coordinator?

A: Any individual(s) designated by the HUD-participating agency to verify the employment status of individuals who work for their agency can become an FHAC Application Coordinator. Agencies with limited staff may consider appointing a board member to serve as the agency's FHAC Application Coordinator.

However, an agency's FHAC Application Coordinator cannot be any individual who is currently registered in eLOCCs (e.g. the agency's LOCCs coordinator or LOCCs administrator).

Q: Can FHAC Application Coordinators verify their own employment?

A: No. If an FHAC Application Coordinator is also applying for HUD Certified Housing Counselor status or HECM Roster status, then another FHAC Application Coordinator must be designated by the agency to verify his/her employment.

CHAMPION AGENCY

Eatonville, FL – HELP CDC was established in 2005, borne out of the quest by the founders of the Life Center Church to provide housing services to low- to moderate- income families in Eatonville, FL (the oldest black incorporated municipality in America - 1887) and surrounding communities. At that time, HELP CDC was a small HUD-approved housing counseling agency, started with just one staff person.

Helping Everyone Live Prosperously Community Development Corporation (HELP CDC) began to provide first-time homebuyers education and counseling. In the first year, 12 individuals – dared to DREAM, dared to BELIEVE, dared to REACH, and dared to ACHIEVE their American dream of owning their own home through improved credit, savings plan, money management education and counseling. Year after year HELP CDC saw the growth and need for these services.

During the onslaught of the foreclosure crisis from 2009 – 2012, HELP CDC's one-person staff grew to three counselors providing foreclosure intervention counseling and services to thousands of clients.

The Florida Hardest Hit Fund (HHF) Program created an opportunity for HELP CDC to expand its services, but also to serve a wider market. This program provides mortgage assistance to unemployed and underemployed homeowners who cannot make their mortgage payments due to death of a spouse, divorce or disability and underwater homeownership. As a result, the agency's local services expanded to include homeowners in all 67 counties in Florida.

HELP CDC was among the first group of agencies trained on the eligibility process for this program when it started in April 2011. With the overwhelming impact of the three HHF programs, the agency grew to an additional four full-time and three part-time HHF Advisors serving thousands of clients.

The impact of the foreclosure crisis in the State of Florida created communities of underwater and vacant properties throughout Central Florida. As a HUD-approved housing counseling agency, HELP CDC saw another way to best serve its community and clients. The agency began a community revitalization program, restoring lives in the communities through acquiring and renovating blighted properties. Over 140 properties have been renovated.

One of the programs that the agency is most proud of is its Veterans' services. Partnering with Tree of Life Ministries, a community agency providing services to homeless veterans, HELP CDC provides financial literacy and capability counseling and education to the residents. Its aim is to provide a continuum of service for those veterans who are employed and have attained savings accounts and established banking relationships to assist them in securing affordable rental housing or homeownership.

HELP CDC's mission is to inspire and empower families to build financial security, stability and wealth through financial education and counseling.

Congratulations HELP CDC For Being a Gold Star Agency!

HUD OFFICE OF HOUSING COUNSELING
HURRICANE HARVEY RESOURCES

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) issued a Major Disaster Declaration for the State of Texas on August 25, 2017. Read the Texas Hurricane Harvey (DR-4332) disaster declaration. FEMA also issued an Emergency Declaration for the State of Louisiana on August 28, 2017. Read the Louisiana Tropical Storm Harvey (EM-3382) emergency declaration.

All HUD participating housing counseling agencies impacted in Texas, Louisiana, and the surrounding region are encouraged to review the Housing Counseling Disaster Recovery and Emergency Preparedness Toolkit located on the HUD Exchange. It contains disaster recovery and emergency preparedness resources specifically for housing counseling programs. The toolkit provides immediate access to Disaster Recovery Flyers, the Housing Counseling Disaster Program Guide and other HUD, FEMA, and other helpful resources.

Individuals and business owners who sustained losses in the designated area can begin applying for assistance by registering online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (3362). Disaster assistance applicants, who have a speech disability or hearing loss and use TTY, should call 1-800-462-7585 directly; for those who use 711 or Video Relay Service (VRS), call 1-800-621-3362. The toll-free telephone numbers will operate from 7:00AM to 10:00PM (local time) seven days a week until further notice.

Reminder: Housing Counseling Handbook 7610.1, Chapter 5-11, B. 3-d, requires when any aspect of an agency's purpose is impaired and can no longer comply with programmatic requirements, regulations or grant agreement (e.g., not functioning due to a disaster or emergency), the agency must notify HUD (their point of contact) within 15 days. Please send your questions to: housing.counseling@hud.gov and type "DART" on the subject line.

Hurricane Harvey News and Updates

- President Donald J. Trump Approves Texas Disaster Declaration
- Housing industry gears up to face Hurricane Harvey
- FEMA Louisiana Declaration
- HUD Announces Disaster Assistance for Victims of Hurricane Harvey

Resources for Residents Affected by Hurricane Harvey

- FEMA Harvey Resource Page
- DisasterAssistance.gov
- American Red Cross
- Red Cross: Find Open Shelters
    - View a PDF of Shelters in Texas
    - View a PDF of Shelters in Louisiana
- Catholic Charities USA: Disaster Operations
- UnidosUS: Hurricane Harvey Response Resources
- Hurricane Harvey and General Disaster Resources from the Counselor's Corner
- Fannie Mae Reminds Homeowners and Servicers of Mortgage Assistance Options for Gulf Coast Area Impacted by Hurricane Harvey
- Freddie Mac Confirms Disaster Relief Policies as Hurricane Harvey Approaches Texas

General Disaster Recovery Resources

- Granting Immediate Foreclosure Relief
- Making Mortgage Insurance Available
- Making Insurance Available for Both Mortgages and Home Rehabilitation: 203(k) Rehab Mortgage Insurance

View a centralized list of Hurricane Harvey Disaster Assistance resources from all HUD Programs and Federal Partners here.

HURRICANE HARVEY INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR HUD GRANTEES, PARTNERS, AND RESIDENTS

Individuals and business owners who sustained losses in the designated area can begin applying for assistance by registering online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (3362). Disaster assistance applicants, who have a speech disability or hearing loss and use TTY, should call 1-800-462-7585 directly; for those who use 711 or Video Relay Service (VRS), call 1-800-621-3362. The toll-free telephone numbers will operate from 7:00AM to 10:00PM (local time) seven days a week until further notice.

HUD and Federal Partner Press Releases

- August 30, 2017 - Ginnie Mae Extends Assistance to Harvey-Impacted Issuers
- August 28, 2017 - HUD Announces Disaster Assistance for Victims of Hurricane Harvey
- August 28, 2017 - HHS Establishing Medical Shelter to Aid Those Affected by Hurricane Harvey

Resources for HUD Grantees and Partners

- HUD Hurricane Harvey Latest News
- HUD Disaster Resources
- Office of Housing Counseling Hurricane Harvey Resources Page
- CDBG-DR Toolkit
- Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit
- Housing Counseling Disaster Recovery and Emergency Preparedness Toolkit

Resources for Residents Affected by Hurricane Harvey (HUD and Non-HUD)

- HUD Hurricane Harvey Latest News
- DisasterAssistance.gov
- FEMA Harvey Resources
- American Red Cross

- Red Cross: Find Open Shelters
  - View a PDF of Shelters in Texas
  - View a PDF of Shelters in Louisiana
- Catholic Charities USA: Disaster Operations
- UnidosUS: Hurricane Harvey Response Resources
- Fannie Mae Reminds Homeowners and Servicers of Mortgage Assistance Options for Gulf Coast Area Impacted by Hurricane Harvey
- Freddie Mac Confirms Disaster Relief Policies as Hurricane Harvey Approaches Texas
- Granting Immediate Foreclosure Relief
- Making Mortgage Insurance Available
- Making Insurance Available for Both Mortgages and Home Rehabilitation: 203(k) Rehab Mortgage Insurance

Animal and Pet Assistance during Hurricane Harvey

- How You Can Help Animals Impacted by Hurricane Harvey
- Hurricane Harvey Help for Pets

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Education
Student Loans, Forgiveness

Choose a repayment plan, pay on time, avoid default, and get help with problems.

Federal Trade Commission – Student Loan Debt Relief

Student loans are debt you have to pay back, even if you don't finish your degree. But depending on your situation and what kind of loans you have, you might be eligible for a different repayment plan or to get your loans forgiven.

www.studentloanhelp.org

Student loan counseling resources from the National Foundation for Credit Counseling.

StudentLoans.gov

Federal student aid, an Office of the U.S. Department of Education.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

The office of Federal Student Aid provides grants, loans, and work-study funds for college or career school.

Federal Reserve Bank of New York

Press briefing on household debt with focus on student debt.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

Student loans are complicated. We have answers to questions about how to pay off your loans and the repayment programs available to you.

U.S. Department of the Treasury
Bureau of the Fiscal Service

Website for defaulted federal student loans. Learn more about available repayment options and other ways to resolve your loan.

THE BRIDGE is pleased to recognize Champions of Service who have provided exemplary service in the Housing Counseling arena and Success Stories highlighting client's achievements. Nominations of persons both inside and outside of HUD are welcomed. Please send your nominations by the 20th of each month to: thebridge@hud.gov.

OCTOBER TRAINING

October 10-12, 2017	RCAC Training: Core Competencies for HUD Certification 3-Day Workshop (Phoenix)
October 13, 2017	RCAC Training: Tips and Tools to Optimize Counseling for Your Clients (Phoenix)
October 18, 2017	NCRC Webinar: How to Track Participants and Follow-Up
October 24, 2017	RCAC Training: HUD Requirements for Housing Counselors (Denver)
October 25, 2017	RCAC Training: Fair Lending and Loan Document Review
October 26-27, 2017	Housing Action Illinois: 2017 Housing Matters! Conference (IL)

Visit the Office of Housing Counseling webpage to keep up-to-date on the latest training, events and webinars. If you missed a webinar, visit the Webinar Archives webpage to access previously recorded sessions.

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