

# we can \$ave campaign



## **A Workbook for People in Recovery** Seeking Economic Self-Sufficiency



New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services  
sponsored by the New York State Office of Mental Health



# Contributors

## **New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS)**

Oscar Jiménez, MPH, Director of Community and Economic Development, NYAPRS  
Leslie Kuhn, MPH, Research Assistant, NYAPRS  
Kelly Stengel, MPH, Research Assistant, NYAPRS  
Lara Wojcik, MPH, Research Assistant, NYAPRS  
Chacku Mathai, CPRP, Associate Executive Director, NYAPRS

## **Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey (CSP-NJ)**

Peggy Swarbrick, PhD, OTR, CPRP, Director, Institute of Wellness and Recovery Initiatives, CSP-NJ  
Mark Duffy, MSW, CPRP, Director of Operations, CSP-NJ  
Jay Yudof, MS, CPRP, Wellness Dissemination Coordinator, CSP-NJ

## **What is WE Can Save?**

*WE Can Save* is a campaign with the purpose of building hope and sharing information so that all people in recovery can achieve economic self-sufficiency.

## **Project Director**

Oscar Jiménez, MPH  
Director of Community and Economic Development  
NYAPRS  
oscarj@nyaprs.org

# Acknowledgements

*WE Can Work/WE Can Save* is a campaign coordinated by NYAPRS with the participation of multiple volunteer organizations and individuals throughout New York State, and the support from the New York State Office of Mental Health and the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law under contract with the Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene (RFMH). We want to thank our Advisory Committee members for their hard work and leadership in making this campaign possible.

## **Campaign Advisory Committee**

Oscar Jiménez, MPH, NYAPRS, Albany  
Mira Bowin, NYAPRS, Albany  
Maura (Marcie) Kelley, Western NY Independent Living, Buffalo  
Leslie Saunders, Western NY Independent Living, Buffalo  
Kellie Trombley, MHA in Essex, Ticonderoga  
Angela Vickroy, MHA in Essex, Westport  
Carina Parrow, Behavioral Health Services North, Plattsburgh  
Sabrina Johnson, Westchester Independent Living, White Plains  
David Eckert, Coordinated Care Services, Rochester  
Mark Purcell, NYS Department of Labor  
Carla Rabinowitz, Community Access, NYC  
Seth Margolies, NYC  
Eva Dech, MHEP, Albany



# Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Lesson One: Why is economic self-sufficiency important to our recovery? .....</b>	<b>3</b>
What is economic self-sufficiency? .....	3
Why is economic self-sufficiency important for our recovery? .....	7
Personal stories of recovery and economic self-sufficiency: James Fludd.....	8
<b>Lesson Two: What can we do to achieve self-sufficiency?.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Step 1: Thinking about our life dreams and aspirations.....	11
Step 2: Assessing how ready we are to pursue self-sufficiency .....	12
Step 3: Developing our readiness to pursue self-sufficiency .....	13
Step 4: Creating a plan of action to achieve self-sufficiency.....	14
Step 5: Developing our skills and capital to achieve self-sufficiency .....	16
Step 6: Connecting with self-sufficiency services and supports .....	17
Personal stories of recovery and economic self-sufficiency: Annette James.....	18
<b>Lesson Three: Thinking about our life dreams and preparing ourselves to pursue self-sufficiency .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Step 1: Thinking about our life dreams and aspirations.....	21
Step 2: Assessing how ready we are to pursue self-sufficiency .....	23
Step 3: Developing our readiness to pursue self-sufficiency .....	27
Personal stories of recovery and economic self-sufficiency: Michael Nugent .....	38
<b>Lesson Four: Creating a plan of action to achieve self-sufficiency .....</b>	<b>41</b>
Creating a plan towards self-sufficiency .....	41
Clarifying our goals and setting objectives.....	42
Identifying the capital we have to achieve our goals.....	46
Defining a plan of action: what, who and by when.....	55
Personal stories of recovery and economic self-sufficiency: Linda Terry.....	59
<b>Lesson Five: Developing our skills and capital to achieve self-sufficiency.....</b>	<b>61</b>
Skill 1: Budgeting .....	62
Skill 2: Accessing work incentives to increase income .....	66
Skill 3: Filling taxes .....	72
Skill 4: Saving .....	77
Skill 5: Avoiding the credit trap and predatory lending .....	81
Skill 6: Clearing and building credit.....	86
Skill 7: Dealing with addictions and financial stressors.....	90
Skill 8: Building our social capital to achieve self-sufficiency.....	93
Personal stories of recovery and economic self-sufficiency: James Kennedy.....	101
Personal stories of recovery and economic self-sufficiency: Tracy Sault .....	103



# Introduction

**T**his workbook is for people who want to become more self-sufficient. It has been developed by a partnership of people in recovery and practitioners with experience in helping individuals achieve self-sufficiency. For many of us, the issue of poverty is a personal one. We identify with many people receiving mental health and substance addiction services who feel trapped between poverty and public benefits; with those who fear that increasing earned income or accumulating assets will mean losing their safety net.

Poverty and dependency threaten the wellness of people in recovery. Poverty often means not having enough money to eat well, or have a safe and decent place to live. Dependency not only limits our choices but also destroys our self-esteem. Poverty and dependency bring about depression and anxiety, and can be much more disabling than our own diagnoses. It is because of all of this that self-sufficiency is essential to recovery and wellness.

Our conversations with hundreds of individuals have shown us that people receiving mental health and substance addiction services want to, and are able to, have control over their own finances, earn income, build assets, and achieve greater levels of economic self-sufficiency. However, the path towards self-sufficiency is not an easy one. There are many programs and resources available that can help us achieve economic self-sufficiency, but most people in recovery, and their providers, know little about them. Service recipients and providers have been disconnected from the economic supports that can help. We must change this, and we can start by using this workbook. The purpose of this workbook is to offer individuals in recovery information and tools to build a path towards self-sufficiency and take advantage of the services and supports available.

If you are a person in recovery who depends on public benefits to meet your basic needs, the idea of becoming more self-sufficient and risking losing your benefits is probably overwhelming. First of all, we want to tell you that you have taken the most important step, that is, to start thinking and talking to others about it. Secondly, we must tell you that there are many federal, state, and private supports to help you become more self-sufficient without losing many, or any of your benefits. In this workbook, you will find information about many of those supports and how you can access them.

If you are a service provider, you may be overwhelmed knowing that you want to help but do not know how, or where to start. We have good news for you. Our team has also developed *A Provider's Guide to Promoting Economic Self-Sufficiency: A Recovery-Oriented Approach*. The goal of this companion provider guide is to offer practitioners concrete tools and curricula to support people in recovery, either individually or in group settings. Contact us to find out how you can get a copy of this guide, as well as training to help you use it effectively.

We truly hope that you will find this workbook helpful. Please let us know what you find useful and what you would improve. We also hope that, in time, you will share with us and with others your own story of recovery and economic self-sufficiency achievements. There are many people in recovery living in poverty who need the inspiration of your personal story.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Oscar Jiménez, MPH  
Director of Community and Economic Development  
New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS)  
oscarj@nyaprs.org • www.nyaprs.org



# Lesson One:

## Why is Economic Self-Sufficiency Important to Our Recovery?

### Lesson one at a glance:

#### In this lesson we will learn:

What economic self-sufficiency is:

- How poverty and dependency can affect our recovery and wellness.
- Why self-sufficiency is important to recovery and wellness.



#### THINGS TO KNOW:

##### **Economic self-sufficiency**

**(ESS):** Is being able to provide for ourselves in order to meet our essential needs and wants. When we are self-sufficient, we are financially independent. When we have independence we can pursue the life we want for ourselves.

### What is Economic Self-Sufficiency?

**B**eing self-sufficient means several things. To see how self-sufficient we are, let's ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Do I have control over my money?
2. Do I rely on programs that limit my choices (Examples: SSI, SSDI, Food stamps, housing programs)?
3. Do I have enough income?
4. Do I have assets (Examples: savings, high school diploma, college degree, car, a house)?
5. Am I independent enough to be able to give back to society?

#### Question #1: Do I have control over my money?

What we mean by this is that a lot of times we may not have complete control over our money and the way we spend it. Sometimes we may have people close to us who not only help us, but also make decisions for us in regards to our money.

##### **Examples that you may relate to:**

- Someone in our family (mom, uncle, sister, etc.) or provider (residence manager, human service agency, etc.) who holds onto our money, makes decisions for us, buys things we need, or cashes our checks.
- Someone has put our money into a 'trust' where others make decisions for us.



I handle my own finances with minimal assistance. People show me respect. I feel spiritually better"

– Christopher Glaser

## Question #2: Do I rely on programs that limit my choices?

Do you receive food stamps? Do you depend on housing services? When we are a part of some of these programs we are often told what we can and cannot do. For example, if we receive food stamps, we can only buy certain foods, and we can't buy other things that we might need.

### Examples that you may relate to:

- We can only live in places that take Section 8 or public assistance.
- Our choices are limited when we use food stamps or Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program checks.
- Social Security may decide what our income is, and how much we can save, or what we can have.

## Question #3: Do I have enough income?

Having enough income means to make plenty of money to be able to afford basic living expenses, pay off our debts, and save for our future needs and wants. For most of us, making enough is only possible through employment or self-employment.

### Examples that you may relate to:

- We may have enough for food but not enough for a decent place to live, or for good clothing.
- We may have enough for our basic needs, but not enough to pay off our debts, or invest in our future.



Eventually it became impossible for me to work and take care of my child. My last resort was applying for welfare and food stamps. A lot of people assume if you're on welfare and you're receiving food stamps that you can survive, you're able to make ends meet. That simply is not true. I never had enough money to keep up with my bills, and food stamps wouldn't pay for some necessary items like diapers. I fell further and further behind on my bills. I didn't see a way out, budgeting was not an option"

– Annette James

## Question #4: Do I have assets?

A car, a house, savings, and other personal property are all examples of assets. Assets are important because they give us something to fall back on, if we lose a job or our income is reduced. Assets can also be things that can help us increase our income, such as having a high school diploma, a trade, or a college degree. Assets give us a more control and independence in our lives.

### Examples that you may relate to:

- We have a car that can bring us to and from job interviews and work.
- We have set aside enough money so if we run into problems we will still have enough to pay for the things we need.
- We have a trade or college degree to get a certain job.



In 2000, I bought a house and was part of a neighborhood. I couldn't believe that for six months I was living in my car, and today I own my own house."

– Maura (Marcie) Kelley

## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Earned income:** Money we earn by working for someone else (employment) or through our own business (self-employment).

**Assets:** The things that we have to “fall back on” or that can help us increase our income (For example, savings, high school diploma, a certificate, a house, a car, or a retirement account).

**Debt:** The money we owe to people, companies, or the government.

**Savings:** Money we have put away to help us deal with a “rainy day” or achieve our long-term goals (For example, buying a car, a computer, or a home).

## Question #5: Am I independent enough to be able to give back to society?

When thinking about this question we have to ask ourselves: Are we relying on benefits like food stamps, SSI, SSDI, etc.? OR...Are we working in our communities? Or are we doing both? Another way to think about this is to ask ourselves...even if we are taking...are we also giving back?

It is perfectly fine to need to use programs to help us pay for the things we need. However, it is a good feeling to be able to be employed in the community and be able to ‘give back’ to our communities! It can give us a sense of belonging.

### Examples that you may relate to:

- Because we pay taxes, we feel like we are part of the larger society.
- We volunteer because it makes us feel like we are giving back by helping others.
- It feels good when we can give some money, even if it’s not a lot, to charities, or places we want to support (For example, churches, Alcoholics Anonymous, shelters, humane societies, food pantries, or thrift shops).

“I believe in the power of tithing, that is, to give at least 10% to my local church. In the lean years I often didn’t have two nickels to rub together and once borrowed gas money from my pastor to get to a job lead. But God is faithful. When money was tight, my church would help with a car repair, they helped pay for a new furnace for my new home, or allowed me to take part in the local food pantry giveaways. It was a hand up not a hand out”

– Tracy Sault



# What is Economic Self-Sufficiency?



1. What is **economic self-sufficiency**?

In your own words, what is economic self-sufficiency?

---

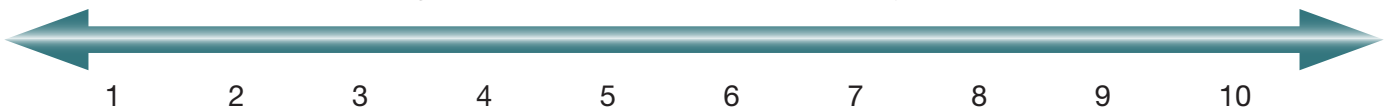
---

2. Are you economically self-sufficient?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Maybe \_\_\_

3. How economically self-sufficient are you?

a. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest), how self-sufficient are you? (Circle the best number)



b. Do you have **control** over your own money? If not, who does (for example, my residential program is my representative payee, or my brother is my guardian)?

---

---

c. Do you rely on programs that **limit your choices**? Which programs do you rely on (for example, SSI, SSDI, food stamps, or housing programs)?

---

---

d. Do you have **enough income** earned through work?

---

---

e. Do you have **assets**? What assets do you have (for example, savings, a car, a GED, a college degree, or a house)?

---

---

f. Are you **independent enough** to be able to **give back** to your community? What are some of the ways you are able to give back to your community (for example, donating to Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, your church, or the SPCA)?

---

---

---

# Why is Economic Self-Sufficiency Important for Our Recovery?

Not having enough money, living in poverty, or living in dependency, can have an impact on every part of our WELLNESS.

**Our wellness is made up of different parts, including:**

**Financial:** Not having enough money and assets can have a negative impact on all areas of our wellness.

**Emotional:** Not having enough to pay rent and buy food every month with the money we have can make our lives very stressful and affect our emotional wellness. Actually, not having enough can sometimes be one of the main reasons why we feel anxious, depressed, or even experience psychiatric relapses.

**Physical:** If we don't have a lot of money we may not be able to buy foods that are healthy for us, or we may not be able to go to the doctors or the dentist as often as we may need to stay physically healthy.

**Spiritual:** When we are worried or anxious about money, it is hard to feel at peace with ourselves and the universe... If we are sad and negative a lot of the time we may feel disconnected with the spiritual part of ourselves that can help us through tough times!

**Environmental:** If we don't have a lot of money we may have to live in neighborhoods with drugs, crime or unsafe buildings. This can be dangerous for our families, our health and for our recovery.

**Occupational (work):** Not having enough money may make it hard to pay for transportation to bring us to and from work (such as the bus, the train, or our cars). Not having a computer can make it difficult to look for jobs. Not having savings or



good credit can make it hard to go back to school or change careers.

**Social:** When don't have some money in our pocket it is hard to spend time in our communities, with friends, and to meet other people. If we don't work or aren't active in our communities, perhaps the only people we know are other people that attend mental health programs or our providers.

**Intellectual:** If we don't have some money it may be hard to get a book we want to read, the newspaper, take a class we want, or attend college.



## Personal Stories of Recovery and Economic Self-Sufficiency

*At some point in our recovery process, many of us have thought that becoming more self-sufficient was impossible. At NYAPRS, we know the stories of hundreds of people who once had doubts and fears, but they did not stop dreaming. They did not give up on their dreams and, most importantly, they did not give up on themselves.*

*At the end of each lesson we will share with you some of these stories. Unfortunately, we are not able to share with you all of the stories we have heard. We have chosen just a few to show the diverse paths that some individuals have taken to become more economically self-sufficient. We hope that you can identify with something in each one of these stories. If, after reading these stories you don't really identify with them, do not stop trying. Keep asking and searching, because eventually you will find someone who has walked in your shoes.*

*We also hope that one day you will also share with others your own story of recovery and economic self-sufficiency. There are many people in recovery who have forgotten their dreams. Perhaps inspiring one of them is the reason why you are working so hard to become self-sufficient.*

James Fludd



GROWING UP I NEVER FELT confident in myself, and I always felt I was the problem. At 14 years old, I ran away from home after a series of mental and physical abuses from family members. I began

living on the streets and on trains. I thought that being on the streets was better than being at home. I lost hope when I was home and when I was on the streets, I lost hope in trusting authority figures and people having friendly faces. I didn't lose hope of living, just the façade of people I looked up to for guidance and support. The people who were supposed to protect me were the people hurting me.

I knew I wanted a better life than what I had on the streets. I wanted to be like my friends who dressed better, looked better, and smelled better. I was tired of being cold and hungry while living on the streets. I always knew that one day I was going to be alright, that everything wasn't always going to be like this. But I had no confidence while on the streets. I

***I wanted to be like my friends who dressed better, looked better, and smelled better. I was tired of being cold and hungry while living on the streets.***

smelled badly. I had crabs and lice. I had frost bite on my feet. I

lived on the streets for four years from the age of 14 to 18 years old. Family members took me in and I became financially dependent on them. While living with family members I sold drugs, robbed people, and worked as a male dancer. I lived with family members for two years.

At the age of 21, I was sentenced to 20 years in prison. While in prison, I learned how to get organized. I was forced to do things in an orderly manner: get up, bathe, and go to mess hall. After



prison I went to the Bronx State Psychiatric Center for three years. I knew I didn't want to go back to the streets and to my life before prison. No organization wanted to take me after seeing that I was in prison and a patient at the Bronx State Psychiatric Center. I was rejected from organization after organization.

In 2008, I went to Services for the UnderServed (SUS) for an interview. Even after seeing my horrendous record, SUS gave me an interview and asked me, "How can SUS help you?" instead of interrogating me. SUS empowered me. After the first interview, I was invited back for a second interview. SUS told me they would give me an opportunity. They said they wouldn't judge me for what I did in the past, but for what I could do academically, emotionally and spiritually in the future. I finally felt good, like someone listened to me. SUS made me feel like someone heard me.

This was the first time I felt I got a chance without any conditions. I was able to use my own success or my own failure. SUS placed me in transitional housing, and gave me a key for my own apartment. I never had a key to my own place in my life. SUS also gave me a MetroCard to go see my psychiatrist at the Bronx State Psychiatric Center.

I understood that knowledge was powerful and that knowing more about mental illnesses would allow me to become a positive force in advocating for myself and my peers. I enrolled in SUS' Peer Specialist Training Program. Today, I am proud to say that I am working two part-time jobs as a Peer Specialist.

With my jobs, I know I can do anything I put my mind to. I am now responsible for paying my bills. I pay my rent and I pay my car insurance. Financial independence has given me organization and helps me prioritize. It also gives me a quality of life that

helps me feel that I fit in with the working class. I now have the option to travel to another state or travel abroad. I can also eat in quality restaurants and buy quality clothes, which is something I longed for while living on the streets.

I always dreamed of going back to school. In addition to working, I am also attending Mercy College studying towards an Associate Degree in Business. SUS helped me realize my dream by helping me get a disability scholarship which covers my tuition. I buy my own text books

with the money I earned working. Once I receive my degree, I want to work in the administrative field at SUS or a psychiatric center like Bronx State.

My economic independence also gives me prestige. It makes my family proud. I can see the gleam in my mother's eyes. It's hard to put into words but it's a great feeling. For the first time in my life my kids are calling me dad; they've never done that before. It's brought back dignity and self-respect. I want people to understand that mental illness is not a stumbling block or a hindrance to becoming a role model and making a positive impact in the community.

***My economic independence also gives me prestige. It makes my family proud. I can see the gleam in my mother's eyes. It's hard to put into words but it's a great feeling. For the first time in my life my kids are calling me dad; they've never done that before. It's brought back dignity and self-respect.***



# Lesson Two:

## What Can We Do to Achieve Self-Sufficiency?

### Lesson two at a glance:

In this lesson we will learn about the six steps to achieve economic self-sufficiency:

1. Thinking about our life dreams and aspirations.
2. Assessing how ready we are to pursue self-sufficiency.
3. Developing our readiness to pursue self-sufficiency.
4. Creating a plan towards self-sufficiency.
5. Developing our skills and capital to achieve self-sufficiency.
6. Connecting with self-sufficiency services and supports.



#### THINGS TO KNOW:

##### **Economic self-sufficiency (ESS):**

Being able to provide for ourselves in order to meet our essential needs and wants. When we are self-sufficient, we are financially independent. When we have independence we can pursue the life we want for ourselves.

#### STEP 1: Thinking about our life dreams and aspirations

**E**very person has dreams and aspirations. Struggling to “make ends meet” on a daily basis may have clouded them. Life may have shattered them time and time again. However, no matter how much hope we may have lost, the heart of every person harbors at least one dream; one thing that we would like to accomplish in our lifetime.



The one thing I was sure of was that I wanted to stay clean and sober and I wanted to work.”

– Juanita Andujar

Our first step in pursuing self-sufficiency is allowing ourselves to dream again, and to get in touch with the things we want for our lives. What is your dream? To get married and start a family? To go back to school? To not ever go back into a hospital or treatment facility? To regain custody of your children? To support your elderly parents? To give hope to other people in recovery? Or to simply feel whole again? No matter how big or small our dreams are, they are the fuel that can help us look towards the future and do the hard work involved in improving our economic lives. Thinking about our life dreams and aspirations is our first step because they are the reasons why we will do everything else. Going back to work, learning to budget, filing taxes, making tough choices to save money, or letting go of some public benefits, are all hard things to do. When the work gets hard, it is important to have a reason that can help us keep our “eyes on the prize.” Something to remind us why it is all worth it.





## STEP 2: Assessing how ready we are to pursue self-sufficiency

**O**ur next step is to find out how ready we are to seek self-sufficiency. Doing everything that needs to be done to pursue self-sufficiency requires a lot of commitment, just as any other big change in our lives. Have you ever tried to change something in your life and realize that it was extremely hard? Quitting smoking? Eating healthier? Exercising more? Losing weight? Stopping alcohol or drugs? Sticking to a new medication regimen?

Let us just think about one of them. Many of us have tried to quit smoking. We have told ourselves many times that we had to do something about it; that we did not like how we felt when we smoked; that we were afraid of getting lung cancer; that we did not want our family to be exposed to smoke; that we hated to see how much money we spent every month on cigarettes; and so on. Yet a few days or weeks later we found ourselves smoking again. So, let us consider more carefully about all the things that seemed to weigh into our commitment to quit:

- How much did we feel that smoking was a problem in our lives? Was it a big problem or just an inconvenience? Were we trying to quit because we really wanted to, or because other people told us to?
- How willing were we to do all the footwork involved? To withstand the craving? To reach out to our supports when we wanted to smoke? To consult with a professional? To change our routines so we did not get so stressed? To stop hanging out at places where other people smoked?
- Did we really believe we were capable of quitting? Did we hold any self-defeating ideas? Did we still believe that we really needed cigarettes in our lives? That we could not face live stressors without them? That we were just hopeless and helpless? Did we know anyone like us who had quit successfully?
- Did we believe our lives would be better off without cigarettes? Was all the footwork worth it? Was all the discipline and reaching out worth it in the end? Were there more pros than cons?
- Did we believe that there were people or supports that could help us quit? Or did we think that we were alone in this? Did we know the supports that were available in our community to help us quit?
- How willing were we to seek the supports that could help us? Did we have peers and professionals who could support us through the process of quitting? Were we willing to reach out to them? Were we willing to develop new relationships and expand our social networks?

To find out how ready we are to pursue economic self-sufficiency, we use similar questions. Here are some of the questions we can ask ourselves:

1. Are poverty and dependency real problems for us?
2. How committed are we to stick with it, even if the work to become more self-sufficient is hard?
3. How willing are we to do all the footwork involved in becoming more self-sufficient?
4. Do we believe that we can be more self-sufficient or are we still holding onto self-defeating ideas?
5. Do we know people or places that can help us?
6. How willing are we to make connections with those who can help us become more self-sufficient?

### STEP 3: Developing our readiness to pursue self-sufficiency

If we have taken the previous step, we have faced the truth about how committed we really are, what doubts we may still have, and what we may still need to do to prepare ourselves to do the work involved in achieving self-sufficiency. If we have found out that we are not all that ready or committed, we may want to take some actions to develop our readiness.

Let us go back to our experience with quitting smoking to consider what could help us become more committed and prepared to quit in the future:

- ✓ If we are not so sure about our need to quit smoking, perhaps we could do some more research about the health consequences of continuing to smoke. Perhaps we could sit down with someone and add up how much we spend on cigarettes every month. We could talk to people who have lost relatives to lung cancer. Or perhaps we could talk to our family members or close friends and ask them how they really feel about our smoking.
- ✓ If we do not believe we can actually quit, perhaps we ought to look for people who we identify with and have stopped smoking. We could ask them how they did it, what helped them, and if they ever felt that quitting smoking was as difficult as it seems to us.
- ✓ If we think we are alone in this, perhaps we could find out what supports there are available in our community. Are there Nicotine Anonymous meetings in my area? Are there free programs to help us quit?

Perhaps we could look on the internet or phone book for resources in our area.

- ✓ If we do not feel we have people in our lives who can help us quit, perhaps we can write down all the names of the people we know and start asking them if they know anyone who has quit smoking.

We follow the same logic to develop our readiness to pursue self-sufficiency. For example:

- ✓ If we are not sure we really want to stop depending solely on public benefits, we can find out how living with the stress of poverty can be a barrier to recovery. We can learn how not having enough to eat healthy can affect our physical health, cause heart disease and other chronic problems, and shorten our lives.
- ✓ If we don't have hope and don't believe we can really become more self-sufficient, perhaps we can look for and talk to people who were in our shoes

“I was afraid of going back to work because I did not want to lose my health benefits. I had been paying a spend-down of \$200.00 per month and thought that I'd have to pay even more if I went back to work. But my counselor at Behavioral Health Services North told me about the Medicaid Buy-In program. When I learned that the Medicaid Buy-In would help me keep my health benefits, I couldn't wait to start working.”

– Kevin Riggs

#### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Desire:** An intense want or longing for something.

**Self-efficacy:** To believe that we have the ability to do something.

**Positive Expectations:** Believing that making a change will be worth it for us in the long run.



I had a plan to buy a house when I came to SUS (Services for the Underserved). I knew I wanted to get my daughter out of the projects. After living in an SUS studio apartment, they offered me a scattered-site apartment but I said no thank you. I couldn't take an apartment to live by myself while my daughter was still living in the projects."

– James Kennedy

in the past and today are accomplishing their life dreams.

- ✓ If we don't believe there are any services or supports that can help us become more self-sufficient, perhaps we can find out if we will really lose all our benefits if we go back to work. Perhaps we can learn how the Trial-Work-Period can help us continue receiving our full SSDI checks for a period of time. Perhaps we can find out how the Medicaid Buy-In for Working People with Disabilities can help us keep or get full Medicaid while working. Maybe we can learn how many hundreds or thousands of dollars we could get back in tax returns through the Earned Income Tax Credit.

#### **STEP 4: Creating a plan of action to achieve self-sufficiency**

**W**hen we feel ready enough, our next step is to create a plan of action to achieve self-sufficiency. A plan is a tool to

help us get started and follow a path towards self-sufficiency.

Let us go back to our experience with quitting smoking to understand how a plan can help us achieve our economic goals. Here is an example of the steps involved in coming up with a plan of action:

1. **Remembering the dream:** Enjoy a long healthy smoke-free life with our loved ones.
2. **Setting our goal:** Stop smoking cigarettes.
3. **Setting short, intermediate, and long-term objectives:**
  - Our short-term objective: cut down our smoking to half a pack per day.
  - Our intermediate objective: cut down our smoking to two cigarettes per day.
  - Our long-term objective: stop smoking altogether.
4. **Identify our capital (assets and liabilities):**
  - Assets: having a great deal of determination; having the support of our family; and having a physician who supports our goal to quit smoking.
  - Liabilities: having several friends who still smoke; and not knowing about Nicotine Anonymous meetings in our neighborhood.
5. **Planning our action steps (Who-What-When):**
  - Talk to our support network and set a date to start quitting within a month.
  - Set up an appointment with our physician and discuss nicotine-replacement therapy within the next two weeks.
  - Find out the schedule of Nicotine Anonymous meetings in our neighborhood within the next week.





Remember “D-G-O-A” (Dream-Goal-Objectives-Action steps). We follow the same formula to come up with a plan of action around our economic lives, and we ask ourselves:

- What are our life dreams and aspirations?
- What economic goals would bring us closer to our dreams?
- What objectives can serve as stepping stones towards our economic goals?
- What are our assets to achieve our economic goal and objectives? What are our liabilities (or barriers) that can make our goal and objectives harder to achieve?
- What action steps make sense to build on our assets and reduce our liabilities?

**Here is an example of the steps we can take in creating a plan to achieve our self-sufficiency goals:**

1. **Remembering my dream:** Be able to support myself and end my dependency on cash benefits (SSI)
2. **Setting my goal:** Get off SSI
3. **Setting my short-term, intermediate and long-term objectives:**
  - Short-term: Go back to a school to learn a new trade or skill
  - Intermediate: Get a job and increase my income
  - Long-term: Rely less on cash benefits and one day get off SSI completely
4. **Identifying my assets and liabilities:**
  - Assets: I am disciplined and like going to school and I have friends with different trades or skills that could help me get a job.
  - Liabilities: I don’t know anything about work incentives, savings programs, or tax credits
5. **Some of my actions steps:**
  - Talk to a career counselor to find out about trades in high demand in my community within the next month.
  - Call my independent living center within the next week to get benefits advisement and learn about work incentives that can help me transition out of SSI.
  - Get a part-time job within the next two months to help me save money for school.
  - Visit my local credit union within the next two weeks to learn if there are Individual Development Accounts (IDA) in my community that can match my savings for things I will need to go to school or to start a business (such as tools, uniforms, a computer or a truck).
  - Make an appointment by next Monday with a free-tax preparation assistance site to learn if I qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and find out how much money I could get in a tax return.

Keep in mind that the more specific our goals and objectives are, the more likely we will know what action steps we need to take. Also, make sure that our action steps not only say what we will do, but also who will be involved, and by when we will do it. This will increase our chances of actually following through.

## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Skills:** The talents that you have or the things you are good at. (Example: “I am good at using a computer.”)

**Capital:** Something you have that gives you an advantage or power. (Example: “I am very social and good at making friends and networking.”)

## STEP 5: Developing our skills and capital to achieve self-sufficiency

**N**ow that we have a plan of action to achieve our self-sufficiency goals, we must get to work!

For most of us, taking action means to learn new skills and increase our “capital.” For many of us, our plan involves learning to handle our money, such as creating and keeping a budget. Our action steps may involve learning about the supports that can help us save money or go back to work without losing our cash benefits. For some of us, a plan may include learning how we can repair and build our credit. For most of us, our plan may involve expanding our social networks (or social capital) so we can increase our connections to those with work and economic opportunities for us.

### Here are some examples of new skills we may have to learn or capital we may need to gain in order to achieve our economic goals:

- Creating and keeping a budget.
- Understanding the world of benefits and work incentives in order to increase our income through employment or self-employment.
- Filing our taxes.
- Saving our money and build assets.
- Repairing or building our credit.
- Avoiding the credit trap and predatory lending.
- Expanding our social networks (or social capital).
- Getting help with addictions and financial stressors.





Thanks to God today I am financially self-sufficient. I still have the car loan, mortgage and student loans to pay but they are within my budget to do so. What I would say to anyone struggling to become financially self-sufficient is to strive for excellence and never give up. Take advantage of any free programs offered by local agencies. They offer subjects on financial matters, how to cut costs in your food budget or learning how to budget your money in addition to weatherization of your home and many other programs. And never give up!"

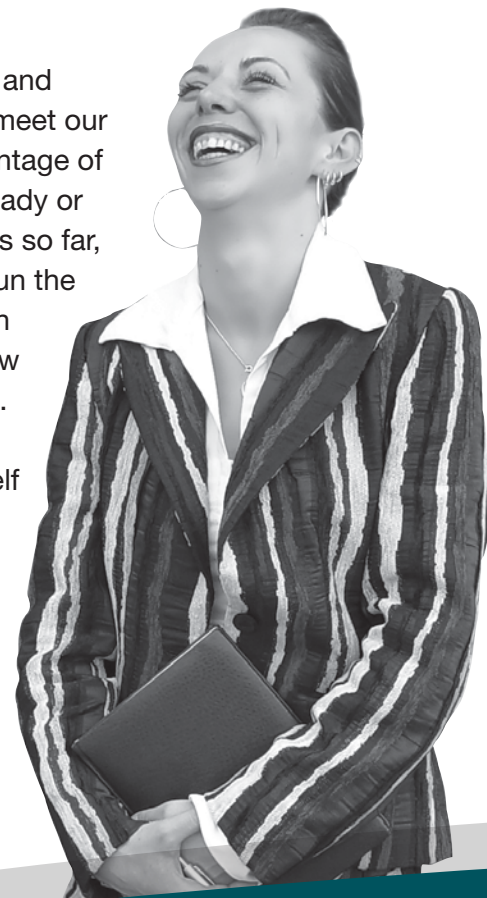
–Tracy Sault

## STEP 6: Connecting with self-sufficiency services and supports

**O**ur final step in becoming economically self-sufficient is to connect with the services and supports that can help us meet our economic self-sufficiency goals. There are many supports that can help us to:

- Go to work and maintain some or all of our cash benefits, such as the Trial Work Period, and Special SSI Payments.
- Keep or even get health benefits while working, such as the Medicaid Buy-In.
- Save money to achieve our self-sufficiency goals and still be able to maintain cash benefits, such as the Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS) plan.
- Get each dollar we save matched with one dollar, two dollars or even more dollars through Individual Development Accounts (IDAs).
- Get hundreds, if not thousands of dollars in tax returns, through programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

These, and many other resources and supports are available to help us meet our life and financial goals. Take advantage of them. If you are overwhelmed already or have more questions than answers so far, do not despair. You have just begun the journey towards self-sufficiency. In the following lessons we will review each of these steps in more detail. We will also offer you suggestions and questions you can ask yourself in order to take each of the six steps. Stay with us. It will be worth it.



## Personal Stories of Recovery and Economic Self-Sufficiency

Annette James

LET ME BEGIN by telling the story of why I came to Services for the UnderServed. Having financial difficulties at an early age was one of the main reasons. I had a baby and became a single mother. It's very hard to be a single mother, especially without the proper support. I tried everything to keep my job, three different babysitters, even bringing my daughter to work, but none of them were a good long-term solution. Eventually it became impossible for me to work and take care of my child. My last resort was applying for welfare and food stamps. A lot of people assume that if you're on welfare, and you're receiving food stamps, that you can survive; that you're able to make ends meet. That simply is not true. I never had enough money to keep up with my bills, and food stamps wouldn't pay for some necessary items like diapers. I fell further and further behind on my bills. I didn't see a way out and budgeting was not an option.

My life took a horrible turn when I was jailed for child abuse. The day I was bailed out I was evicted from my apartment. I found myself without my child, a job or a home. I tried to stay with my sister, but after a while she didn't want me around. I stayed with a friend for a year, but eventually he didn't want me either. I bounced around for a while between friends and

relatives, but eventually I ended up in a homeless shelter. It was there that I was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Between dealing with my mental illness, not having anywhere to live, the loss of my daughter, and appearing in criminal court and tenant court, I couldn't stop spiraling downward. A

bench warrant landed me in jail once again, this time on Riker's Island. There I was told that I my schizophrenia was misdiagnosed and that I no longer needed to take my medication.

After my release I returned to the shelter system. This time I was placed in a shelter that offered me the additional support I needed to start to turn my life around.

There were people there who were dedicated to helping me find the resources I needed. They directed me again to the welfare office. I was enrolled in Medicaid and was able to visit a physician who re-diagnosed me with schizophrenia. He said that I definitely needed medication. It was the first time in a long time I felt some hope.

From there I was referred to Services for the UnderServed for an interview. My interview went very well and soon I was living in supportive housing at the YWCA. There I received 24/7 care. I had my own room and shared a bathroom and kitchen with other residents. It was here that I started to dream about getting my life back on track. I began to learn how to take care of myself again.

Two months into living with SUS I was offered a part-time job, working 12 hours a week for minimum wage. I was given a referral for the local food pantry and

***Between dealing with my mental illness, not having anywhere to live, the loss of my daughter, and appearing in criminal court and tenant court, I couldn't stop spiraling downward.***



received \$40 a month in food stamps. My case manager also directed me to the SSI office, and helped me sign up to receive Social Security benefits as well. This still was not enough to live on, or repay my debts, but SUS was paying my rent and I was on the right path. I attended weekly tenant meetings that focused on budgeting. We were taught how to spend our money. I finally realized that even with people there to direct you, it's up to you to follow through. No one can make you change; you have to want to do it for yourself.

Every Friday I would attend the Supportive Employment Program (SEP) group meetings that focused on financial matters and budgeting. They would invite JP Morgan Chase representatives to talk to the group about opening up checking and savings accounts. In the end I opened up a checking account, but at a bank of my choice. The case managers emphasized that the first thing you do when you get a pay check is pay your rent, pay your utilities and put aside money for transportation to get to and from work. If you have anything left over try to save

***I think the biggest impact of financial freedom on my life has been my sense of independence. I have reassurance that I can take care of myself, and maybe one day take care of my daughter.***

at least \$25 a month. I'm still trying to reach that goal, it's hard, but the SEP is very encouraging. If you fall behind or slip, the SEP is there to support you and get you back on your feet.

The way SUS is structured, you can never lose hope. They have every area of life covered, especially finances. There is always someone to talk to, and if they can't help,

they find the right people who can. My SUS job coach has been a big part of my financial progress. The coaches are there to keep you at your job; if you have problems they will come and help you solve them.

Before SUS I was in a never ending situation, especially financially. I kept praying, asking God to help me find a way out of the system. In the system I lost hope. Now I dream of owning my own home or condo and my own car. Accomplishing that would make me feel good about myself. Before SUS, before I got my apartment and job, I would never have dreamt that I would be living the way I am now. It would have been impossible.

Now as a peer specialist with SUS, I have my own caseload of peers. I work under the wellness coaches and follow up with peers who are just starting their journey. I can relate to them and they find it easy to talk to me and share their fears and frustrations. Keeping a steady job and budgeting has allowed me to pay off five out of seven of my credit cards. Being free of credit card debt is something that the SEP emphasizes.

I think the biggest impact of financial freedom on my life has been my sense of independence. I have reassurance that I can take care of myself, and maybe one day take care of my daughter. Society accepts you when you have a financial place. It has also freed me physically as well. I don't stress as much. I don't have the physical pain I did, or suffer from asthma anymore. I only need to visit my psychiatrist once a month, along with having my medication cut in half. Being financially free has made me feel like a human being again.



# Lesson Three:

## Thinking About Our Life Dreams and Preparing Ourselves to Pursue Self-Sufficiency

### Lesson three at a glance:

#### In this lesson we will:

- Think about our life dreams and aspirations.
- Find out how ready we are to pursue economic self-sufficiency.
- Learn about George's story and brainstorm ideas of how to help him develop his readiness.
- Think about how to develop our own readiness to pursue self-sufficiency.



“Once I got clean I wanted to be a constant figure in my daughter's life. I didn't know my father growing up, so I wanted to be there for my daughter.”  
—James Kennedy

“I dream of owning my own home or condo and my own car”  
—Annette James

### STEP 1: Thinking about our life dreams and aspirations

**H**ope is essential in the recovery process and is a fundamental element of human life. Dreams and aspirations are the fuels that keep hope alive. Our daily struggles may cloud our dreams. Tragedies and losses may have shattered our aspirations time after time. However, no matter how much dust may have covered our dreams, the heart of every person harbors at least one thing that we would like to accomplish in our lifetime.

What is your dream? Getting married and starting a family? Going back to school? Starting a business? Regaining custody of your children? Supporting your elderly parents? Giving hope to other people in recovery? Feeling whole again?

No matter how big or small our dreams may be, they are the fuel that allows us to look forward and keeps us motivated to do the hard work involved in improving our lives.

Going back to work, learning to budget, filing taxes, making tough choices to save money, or letting go of some public benefits, are all hard things to do. Thinking about our life dreams and aspirations is our first step because they are the reasons why we will do everything else. Our dreams and aspirations are like the foundation of a road. Without a solid foundation, a highway will start to sink. Have you ever seen a road dipping or sinking because it did not have a strong foundation? The same thing could happen to us as we build our road towards self-sufficiency. Our life dreams and aspirations are the foundation of our paths. They will help us decide our goals, objectives, and future actions. They will keep our roads from sinking when the work ahead gets heavy.

“I'd like to feel whole, I want to feel like a person.”  
—Female focus group participant

“I don't just want a job. I want a career that can last a lifetime”  
—Male focus group participant

# My Dreams

## Now ask yourself...

- What are your life dreams and aspirations?
- What would you like your life to be like in five years? In ten years?
- What would you like to have? What would you like to be doing? Where do you want to live?



Remember...No dream is too big or too small! Think about different dreams you might have in every area of your life. (Examples: recovery, family, friends, travel, school, work, health, etc.)

Use this sheet to write down your dreams.

### Examples:

- “I want to have a family”
- “I want to retire to Florida”
- “I want to get a college degree”

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## STEP 2: Assessing how ready we are to pursue self-sufficiency

**N**ow that we have taken the courageous step of thinking and writing about our dreams and aspirations, let us take a look within ourselves to find out how ready we are to pursue the self-sufficiency necessary to achieve them. This is a fundamental step that we must not skip. Our readiness is like the asphalt that keeps all the stones and gravel together. If we skimp on the asphalt, the road will crumble very soon. The higher the quality of our asphalt, the stronger our path will be. Just like the asphalt in a road, the higher the quality of our readiness, the stronger our path towards self-sufficiency will be.

### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Assess:** To take a look at something and figure out how much of it there is. For example, we can assess the level of damage from an earthquake, the safety of a vehicle, or the willingness of an individual to make a personal change.

**Readiness:** How prepared we are within ourselves to take an action or make a change in our lives.

To assess our readiness to pursue self-sufficiency, we take look within ourselves to see how prepared we are to follow through with the steps in achieving our economic goals.

Now that we understand what assessing readiness means, we are probably wondering how we get to find out how prepared we really are. Before taking a look within ourselves, let us take a read a story about a man named George.

### George's Story

George was diagnosed with a psychiatric condition when he was 19 years old. He was hospitalized once but he was able to live on his own and graduate from an auto mechanic school two years after he left the hospital. He got a job as an auto mechanic technician and did really well for three years. He enjoyed his job and got along very well with his co-workers and supervisor. During that time George married his high school sweetheart and they had a child together.

But life changed pretty quickly for George. His symptoms began to take over his life. George started experiencing hallucinations on the job and began believing that people in his life wanted to hurt him. George had increasing conflicts at work, with his wife, and most of his friends. He was hospitalized six times in a year. Although George's employer really liked him, he was let go. His wife started fearing that George would become violent, and eventually divorced him and obtained sole custody of their daughter. George's symptoms spiraled and he could no longer work. For seven years he was in and out of hospitals and, after many struggles, he obtained Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Three years ago George started attending The Center for Wellness and Recovery (CWR), a recovery-oriented program that has been made a big difference in his life. Cindy, his primary counselor, encouraged him to go back to work part-time and think about his life goals. A year ago George got a part-time job as a custodian at the local high school, but he doesn't like the job, and it doesn't pay him well. George talks about his daughter all the time, and the thing he wants the most is to be in her life and one day share custody with his ex-wife. His ex-wife seems to be willing but the court will only allow him to have partial custody if he lives independently in an apartment large enough for his daughter to have her own bedroom. For George, this is something that, right now, seems a long shot.

For the past ten years George has been living at a residential program. For most of that time his program was his representative payee, but a year ago he decided he wanted to have control over his own money. He could make a lot more money as an auto mechanic but he has not had a job in his trade in more than ten years. George spends a lot of his free time (and money) on auto mechanic magazines. At times George has borrowed money from his friend Raul and obtained pay-day loans to buy more magazines. George hopes that reading these magazines will keep him up to date with new automotive technology, but he is getting more and more in debt; and his dream of living independently seems to be getting farther away. George's social life is very limited. His friend Raul, who is also a mechanic, is one of the few people that has stuck with him during all these years.

George knows he wants to make changes in his life to become more self-sufficient, live independently, and not be "broke" all the time, but he is not sure he wants to stop spending money on auto magazines. George really wants to get off his cash benefits one day, but he is afraid of getting sick and ending up in the hospital again. Despite of all his doubts and fears, every time George talks about his daughter he lights up and says he is willing to work very hard to one day live with her again.

## George's Level of Readiness to Pursue Self-Sufficiency



Now that we have met George, and heard about his life, let's help him assess how ready he is to pursue self-sufficiency.

### George's Life Dream:

Before we get started, what seems to be George's main life dream?

---

---

---

To help George determine how prepared he is to pursue his dream and economic aspirations, we will address the following topics:

- How much he feels the **need** to become more self-sufficient.
- His **commitment** to pursue self-sufficiency.
- His awareness about his own economic **values and preferences**.
- His awareness about the **economic supports** available to him.
- His current **social connections** and willingness to expand his social capital.

### 1. How much he feels the need to become more self-sufficient:

Does George see the need to become more self-sufficient? What does he feel needs to change?

---

---

---

**2. His commitment to pursue self-sufficiency:**

What is he willing to change? What is he not willing to change? How willing does George seem to make changes in his life and sticking with them?

---

---

---

Does George feel that all the footwork will be worth it in the long run? What will he gain if he becomes more self-sufficient? What might he lose?

---

---

---

Does George believe he is capable of becoming self-sufficient? What is he afraid of?

---

---

---

**3. His awareness of his own economic self-sufficiency values and preferences:**

What is important to George around money and self-sufficiency? What are his preferences and values in relation to money and independence?

---

---

---

**4. His awareness of the economic supports available to him:**

Does George know about resources and supports that can help him become more self-sufficient? What resources and supports does he know about? What does he not seem to know about?

---

---

---

**5. His current social connections and willingness to expand his social capital:**

Does George feel that he has support to make a change in his life? Is he aware of whom he has in his life to support him? Is he willing to reach out to other people or supports? Is he willing to establish new relationships to expand his social capital?

---

---

---

Imagine you are George's peer and you have to give him feedback. How ready do you think George is? What would you tell him? Circle what you think his level of readiness is.

**Not ready at all      Not too ready      Sort of ready      Very ready      Extremely ready**

What would you tell George about his level of readiness? What seems to be his strongest points? What seem to be his weakest points?

---

---

---





### STEP 3: Developing our readiness to pursue self-sufficiency

**N**ow that we have helped George figure out how ready he is, let's think about what he could do to become more prepared to pursue self-sufficiency goals. In other words, let's help George figure out what he could do to:

- Feel stronger about his need to become self-sufficient.
- Increase his commitment to pursue self-sufficiency.
- Become more aware of his own economic values and preferences.
- Become more aware of the supports available to him.
- Become aware of his social connections and more willing to expand his social capital.

#### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Develop:** To improve something or make something more available.

**Readiness:** How prepared we are within ourselves to take an action or make a change in our lives.

**To develop our readiness towards self-sufficiency:** To do something to make us more prepared to pursue economic self-sufficiency, our life dreams, and economic aspirations.

#### Here are some of the examples of things that we could suggest to George as ways of increasing his level of readiness to pursue self-sufficiency:

- Keep a journal to write down what he wants, and how he feels.
- Find out how much money he has spent on auto magazines during the past year, and talk to his support network about it.
- Discuss with his provider, friends and family the things that he wants and the things that are important to him.
- Talk to people who have gone back to work or achieved self-sufficiency. Ask them what they did to pursue their goals and how they feel now about their lives and recovery.
- Ask his provider to help him find out about programs that can help him go back to work and keep his benefits, learn about money, and save without losing his benefits.
- Visit different auto mechanic jobs and find out about volunteering opportunities that can help him decide if he would like to go back to his old trade.
- Ask his friend Raul if he could help him network and learn about work opportunities.

## Assessing and Developing My Level of Readiness



Now that we have practiced how to assess readiness with George's story, it is time to look at within ourselves to see how prepared we are, and to develop our own readiness.

Don't worry... there is no right or wrong answer! This is just to help you see where you are at. If you are not so ready, the questions and exercises that follow will help you become more ready.

### Remembering your life dreams and aspirations:

Earlier in this Lesson (Step 1) we had the chance to think and write about our own life dreams and aspirations. Summarize below your top three dreams:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Remember that there aren't right or wrong dreams. Different people have different dreams and aspirations. What matters the most is to have dreams, because they are the fuel of our recovery process; the flame that keeps hope alive.

#### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Readiness:** How prepared we are within ourselves to take an action or make a change in our lives.

### How much do you feel the need to become more self-sufficient?

Let's ask ourselves: Do we need a change? Do we think that we need to make a change in our lives to be able to reach our dreams and aspirations?

1. Are you happy with your level of economic independence?

**Yes**                      **No**                      **Maybe**

2. Do you depend on public benefits? If you depend on benefits, how happy are you about it? What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?

---

---

---

3. Do you have enough money to pay for the things that you need (Examples: health insurance, transportation, food, etc.)?

**Yes**                      **No**                      **Maybe**

4. Do you have enough money to pay for the things you want (Examples: to live independently, take a vacation, save money, etc.)?

**Yes**                      **No**                      **Maybe**

5. What are some of the things that you want or need that you cannot afford now?

---

---

---

6. How much more money do you need to be able to have the things you want or need?

**I don't need any more**                      **I need a little bit more**                      **I need a lot more**

7. Do you have control over your money and the way that it's spent?

**Yes**                      **No**                      **Maybe**

8. If you don't have control over your money, are you happy with the way your money is managed by other people?

**Yes**                      **No**                      **Maybe**

9. Would you like to have more control over your money?

**Yes**                      **No**                      **Maybe**

10. What are some of the things that are standing in your way of earning more money, having more assets, and being more financially independent?

---

---

---

11. What would you need to learn in order to take more control over your own money? What are the things you need to change to become more self-sufficient? (Examples: get more education, learn about money, learn how to budget, file taxes, etc.)

---

---

---

12. Are you aware of the negative consequences poverty can have on our mental and physical health?

---

---

---

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

**Commitment:**

Sticking with something that we said we would do.

**Desire:** An intense want or longing for something.

**Self-efficacy:** To believe that we are capable of achieving something.

**Positive Expectations:** Believing that making a change will be worth it for us in the long run.

**Your commitment to pursue self-sufficiency**

Let's ask ourselves: How ready are we to commit to self-sufficiency? Are we ready to take the steps we need to increase our level of economic self-sufficiency? Will we stick with it even if things get tough?

**Desire:**

1. What changes are you willing to make in order to become more self-sufficient?

---

---

---

2. What changes are you not willing to make in order to become more self-sufficient?

---

---

---

**Positive expectations:**

3. Will making these changes in your level of self-sufficiency bring good things to your life? What are these good things?

---

---

---

4. Will making any of these changes bring bad things for you? Will you lose anything important to you? What could you lose?

---

---

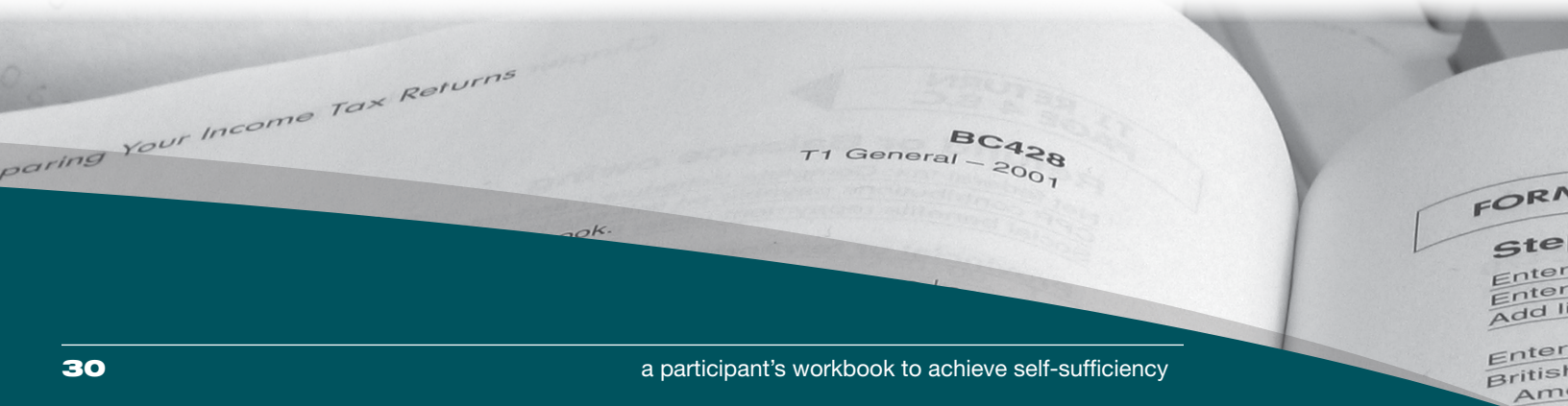
---

5. What is the final balance? Are there more positives or negatives?

---

---

---



**Self-efficacy:**

6. How difficult will it be for you to take the steps necessary to achieve self-sufficiency? Do you believe you will be able to make the necessary changes to improve your financial situation?

---

---

---

7. What are some of the things that may be difficult for you to do? What are some of the things you worry about?

---

---

---

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

**Values:** Things important to us; the principles we use to make our decisions.

**Preferences:** Things that we would like to have in life if we were able to choose.

**Your awareness of your own economic values and preferences**

Let's ask ourselves: How aware are we of our economic values and preferences?

1. When referring to money, what are some of the things that are important to you? (Examples: Be independent from benefits? Be a tax payer? Have control over your own money? Have your own bank account?)

---

---

---

2. What are some of the things you would like to do or have in life? (Examples: Go back to school? Have a family? Regain custody of your children? Start a business?)

---

---

---

3. If you had more money, what would you do differently in life?

---

---

---



4. What are some of the things that you value the most and that you would like to be able to spend your money on?

---

---

---

5. What are some of the things that you value the least and would like to spend less money on?

---

---

---

### Your awareness about the economic supports available to you

Let's ask ourselves: How aware are we of resources that can help us achieve our self-sufficiency goals? Do we know about the programs, organizations, and resources in our community that we can use to help us achieve economic self-sufficiency?

#### Examples of Economic Supports:

- Personalized Recovery-Oriented Services (PROS) programs, or other outpatient services in your town or state
- ACCES-VR (Adult Career and Continuing Education Services– Vocational Rehabilitation, formerly known as VESID), or the vocational rehabilitation agency in your state
- Medicaid Buy-in for Working People with Disabilities
- The Ticket-to-Work program
- Financial education programs

1. What **resources in your community** can help you become more economically self-sufficient? (Examples: Programs to save money? Make my credit better? Lower my debt? File taxes? Apply for Earned Income Tax Credit?) If you don't know what some of these things are that's okay! We will get to it!

---

---

---

2. If you wanted to find out about other resources that could help you become more economically self-sufficient, how would you find them? How could you find them?

---

---

---

3. What resources or supports have you used before to improve your financial situation? How did you they help you?

---

---

---

### Your current social connections and willingness to expand your social capital

Let's ask ourselves: what social connections do we have? How willing are we to reach out to new people and establish new relationships?

Social connections are not only important to recovery but are essential in achieving our economic goals. Our social connections are just as much a part of our capital as our trade, skills, or tools are.



**“It is not what you know but who you know that matters”**

#### **DID YOU KNOW...**

- **That most of people find their jobs through the people they know, and not through the newspaper or internet advertisements?**
- **That our social connections also affect our economic opportunities?** For example, who we know can affect if we get a promotion or a better-paying job.
- **That many times it's not having close relationships that matters, but knowing a lot of people?** For example, knowing the friends of a close friend; the colleagues of a former supervisor; the clients of a client. If we only know a few people our networks are much more limited. If we know a lot of people, even if we don't know them very well, we have many more potential connections.

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

**Resources:** The people, places and things in our communities that can help us achieve our economic goals.

1. Who do you have in your life to help you **make decisions about money**? (Examples: how to spend money, how to save, whether or not to borrow money, how to get off of benefits, etc.)

---

---

2. Who in your life could help you **improve your financial situation**? How could they help you? (Examples: to budget, save, prepare taxes, build credit, etc.)

---

---

---

3. How comfortable do you feel to **reach out to people you know** in order to help you improve your financial situation and meet your economic dreams and aspirations? If you asked them for help, what would they say? Would they help you?

---

---

---

4. How willing do you feel to **meet or contact new people** to help you achieve your self-sufficiency goals?

---

---

---

5. What are some of the **qualities you would look for in people** to help you achieve your self-sufficiency goals? (Examples: trustworthy, supportive, good listener, someone who pushes me, etc.)

---

---

---

## Summarizing your level of readiness

Now, think about all of your answers and about your own level of readiness to pursue economic self-sufficiency. How ready do you think you are? Circle what you think your level of readiness is.

**Not ready at all**

**Not too ready**

**Sort of ready**

**Very ready**

**Extremely ready**

What are your strongest points?

---

---

---

What are your weakest points?

---

---

---

### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Develop:** To improve something or make something more available.

**Readiness:** How prepared we are within ourselves to take an action or make a change in our lives.

**To develop our readiness towards self-sufficiency:** To do something to make us more prepared to pursue economic self-sufficiency, our life dreams and economic aspirations.

### Strategies to develop our level of readiness

Throughout this lesson we have spent a lot of time asking ourselves questions about how ready we are to pursue self-sufficiency. In answering these questions perhaps we have realized that...

- We would like to become more self-sufficient but the process seems like too much work...
- We are afraid of losing our benefits and prefer to keep things as they are ...
- All of this may be too overwhelming and we are afraid we may end up relapsing...
- We don't know much about people or programs that can help us... or
- This is the first time in a long time we have really thought about what we want for our lives and these life dreams seem almost impossible...

If you are feeling doubts about how ready you are to pursue your life dreams and economic aspirations, that's okay. What matters the most is that now we know where we stand.



I think the biggest impact of financial freedom on my life has been my sense of independence. I have reassurance that I can take care of myself, and maybe one day take care of my daughter. Being financially free makes me feel like a human being again. Society accepts you when you have a financial place."

– Annette James

The good news is that there are things we can do to improve our readiness.

During the last three lessons you may have noticed that you have already learned certain things, or even become open to some new ideas. Well, there are more things you can do to develop your readiness to pursue your life dreams and become more self-sufficient. In other words, there are things you can do to help you:

- Feel stronger about your need to become self-sufficient;
- Increase your commitment to pursue self-sufficiency;
- Become more aware of your own economic values and preferences;
- Become more aware of the economic supports available to you; and
- Become aware of your social connections and become more willing to expand your social capital.

If after working on the first three lessons of this workbook, you still feel that your level of readiness is not ideal, here are some exercises that may help you:

- **Explore your doubts and fears:** One of the most important things that you can do is to share your doubts with someone you trust. Having courage means to understand our fears and know that they exist, but not to let them crush our hopes and dreams. Sometimes doubts are essential in building a commitment. Have you ever doubted your faith and later realized that your faith only got stronger? Have you ever doubted your commitment to something or someone, and later realized that this doubt only helped you become more certain? Fears are part of being human. What matters the most is to recognize our doubts and fears, and share them with someone we trust.
- **Allow yourself to dream:** Many of us have spent many years in programs that did not allow us, or encourage us, to dream. Dreaming is an essential ingredient to develop our readiness. Keep a journal about the things you want for your life. You do not even have to share your dreams with anyone until you are ready.
- **Explore your options:** Some of us do not know what our options are and need to explore them a bit more before moving forward. Take a volunteering job. Talk to people with different trades or careers. Talk to people who have bought a house and others who rent. Talk to people who have a steady job and others who own their own business. Explore your options.
- **Look for inspiration:** We are all surrounded by people who have achieved what seemed impossible. Going back to work, buying a house, driving again, saving for college, or starting a business. Talk to people with whom you identify, and listen to their stories. Ask them how they felt when their dream seemed far away, what they did to achieve their goals, and how their lives are today.
- **Learn as much as you can:** Information is power. Find out about programs that can help you. For example, learn about programs that can help you go back to work and keep some or all of your benefits, save without losing your benefits, match your savings, or get money in tax returns. The more we know, the more prepared we will feel.
- **Face the truth:** When you feel ready, put it down in pen and paper. Find out what it will take to achieve your dreams; and think about what you will need to do. For example, find out how much money you will need to get a car and keep a car on the road; find out the cost of the house you look at all the time; find out what it would take to start the business you have been thinking about for years; and so on.
- **Surround yourself with supportive people:** Many of us have heard too many times that we must not “rock the boat” and that we should just be happy we have benefits, that getting on SSI or SSDI was too difficult to risk losing for our “loosey-goosey” dreams. Tell anyone who discourages you why being more



self-sufficient is important to you, and ask them to help you instead of bringing you down. If someone in your life continues to discourage you, find other people who will support you. It is okay to look for a new psychiatrist or therapist. It is okay to walk away from people who continue to block your dreams.

- **Ask for help:** Talk to your providers, friends and family and ask them for help. If you do not know how they can help you, ask them to help you figure out how they can help you.
- **Take chances:** You have probably already taken a lot of chances to get this far in your recovery process. Achieving self-sufficiency will require taking a lot of chances. Meet new people. Go to new places. Make phone calls. Look it up on the internet. Just do it. What is the worst thing that could happen? That someone will say no? It never hurts to try!

Whatever you do, take time to explore and expand your readiness. Remember that readiness is like the asphalt in a highway. It is what keeps the stones and gravel in place, without it, the road will crumble very quickly. Readiness is what makes the path towards self-sufficiency a solid one, what binds our actions. If you feel that your readiness is strong, you are now ready to start creating a plan to take action and pursuing your self-sufficiency goals.



## Personal Stories of Recovery and Economic Self-Sufficiency

Michael Nugent

I'LL BEGIN MY STORY AT THE TIME of being released from prison when I was 23 years old. From the age of seventeen I had experienced oratory hallucinations and these psychotic episodes were exacerbated by drug use and other negative behavior. I was sentenced to a 1 to 3 prison term when I was 21 and spent most of the next 3 years in prison. On top of this, my parents moved out of New York City, so when I was released from prison I was on my own. I was released into a homeless shelter. Luckily I had begun to get a handle on managing my mental health toward the end of my sentence and when I was released I can say that I was in control of managing the symptoms of my condition.

In the shelter I was able to earn food stamps and welfare but was turned down for SSI. It was determined that when I was on medication I was able to work and “function” properly. Still, in spite of this decision by Social Security, I was nervous. I had doubts about my ability to function in the “real world.” I was determined though, at least to survive.

I was able to manage my money. I relied on the food provided by the shelter to sustain me and I saved my money, even illegally selling my food stamps for a smaller amount of money than they were worth so I could put away more cash. I used the services of the shelter to get into a vocational program and to find supportive housing. Finally, a couple of months after I had found housing I was able to find a steady job at Kinko's through the vocational training program that the shelter and the mental health clinic I went to had helped me to get into.

***It was determined that when I was on medication I was able to work and “function” properly. Still, in spite of this decision by Social Security, I was nervous. I had doubts about my ability to function in the “real world.”***

I now had a steady source of income and I was able to pursue bigger goals and aspirations.

I had always been interested in social justice and fighting against exploitation wherever it was and in whatever form it took. I used my steady source of income to get involved in political movements against police brutality, against unjust wars, and against economic injustice. I was also able to go back to school. I earned my BA in History and then an MA also in history. I wasn't only surviving anymore; I was engaged in activity I believed in and that fed my appetite for justice and learning. All this was possible through gaining economic self-sufficiency.

After working and going to school full-time for about seven years, I was able to find a job where I could put my education and my passion for justice to work full-time. I

was able to find a job as an employment specialist at Baltic Street, AEH Inc. Baltic Street is an agency run by mental health peers that assist others, that have been through experiences similar to mine, get back on their feet by helping them find housing, employment, or apply for and obtain their benefits. Now I was actually earning a living through helping people like myself to chase their dreams. I had moved far beyond mere survival for sure.

My story of economic self-sufficiency is not over and it is not unique. I was able to obtain economic stability through using the resources I learned about at my shelter and through the social workers at my clinic. These included learning how to apply for benefits and also learning about different vocational trainings and programs. Utilizing these resources is crucial. So is utilizing the help of social workers who are working with you. This gives you the chance to learn what your options are and to develop a strategy for obtaining your goals.

I say that my story of obtaining economic self-sufficiency is not over because for all of us climbing out of poverty is a struggle. I still have college debt and other debts I must

take care of. But through obtaining the skills and knowledge to find work, resources, and to navigate through economic obstacles to budget my money correctly and in such a way as to be able to also do the things that are important to me. It is a struggle I am equipped to win.

***I was able to obtain economic stability through using the resources I learned about at my shelter and through the social workers at my clinic. ...Utilizing these resources is crucial.***



# Lesson Four:

## Creating a Plan of Action to Achieve Self-Sufficiency



### Lesson four at a glance:

#### In this lesson we will:

- Identify our economic self-sufficiency goals.
- Learn about the importance of developing our capital, increasing our assets, and reducing our liabilities.
- Learn more about George and his capital to achieve his self-sufficiency goals.
- Practice tools that can help us create a plan of action towards self-sufficiency.

#### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Readiness:** How prepared we are within ourselves to take an action or make a change in our lives.

**Assess our readiness to pursue self-sufficiency:**

To take a look within ourselves to see how prepared we are to follow through with the steps in achieving our economic goals.

**Develop our readiness towards self-sufficiency:** To do something to make us more prepared to pursue economic self-sufficiency, our life dreams and our economic aspirations.

**W**hat is a plan of action to achieve self-sufficiency? A plan of action is like the map we need in order to build a highway. Before we start building it, we must first find out what our ideal route would be and if there are any obstacles that we will have to deal with. Are there any hills or mountains that we will have to go over or around? Do we need any bridges to go over creeks or rivers? Are there any swamps that can erode the highway over time? What are the flat and firm areas that our road can be best build upon?

Just like when building a road, we need a plan to guide our route and actions to achieve our life dreams and self-sufficiency goals. Our plan will build on the things we have on our side (our assets), and help us avoid the things that could work against us (our liabilities).

### Creating a Plan Towards Self-Sufficiency

Creating a plan to achieve self-sufficiency involves three key steps:

1. Clarifying our goals and setting our objectives;
2. Identifying the capital we have to achieve our goals and objectives; and
3. Defining action steps: what we will do, who will be involved, and by when we will do it.



## 1. Clarifying our goals and setting objectives

The most important step in creating a plan towards self-sufficiency is to know what we want for our lives. In Lesson Three we thought about and recorded our dreams and aspirations. Now it's time to think about some of the goals and objectives that we can set for ourselves so we can start taking steps towards these dreams.

Here are some key ideas to keep in mind about goals and objectives:

- **Goals** are the things we need to accomplish to achieve our life dreams.
- **Objectives** are the targets or landmarks that bring us closer to our larger goals.
- **Objectives can be short-term, intermediate, or long-term.**
- **Short-term objectives:** Things we would like to accomplish as soon as possible (within a few weeks or months).
- **Intermediate objectives:** These are targets that require a significant amount of work and time (usually a year or more).
- **Long-term objectives:** These are things we would like to accomplish sometime in the future but usually require many different steps and a lot of hard work and time (usually several years).

Here are some examples of how our goals and objectives can help us achieve our life dreams:

### Example 1:

**My Dream:** To work as a substance abuse counselor.

**My Goal:** To get an associate's degree in substance abuse counseling.

**My short-term objective:** Get connected within the next three months with programs that can help me pay for school.

**My intermediate objective:** Complete my application within the next six months to the two community colleges in my area.

**My long-term objective:** Get accepted to a college within the next year.

### Example 2:

**My Dream:** To be totally independent from SSI (cash) benefits.

**My Goal:** To get a well-paying full-time job.

**My short-term objective:** Receive benefits advisement within the next month to find out what work incentives can help me go back to work and maintain my SSI for a period of time.

**My intermediate objective:** Get a part-time job within the next three months and maintain some of my SSI benefits.

**My long-term objective:** Get a better-paying full-time job and start transitioning off of SSI within the next year.

### Example 3:

**My Dream:** To get married and start a family.

**My Goal:** To buy a home.

**My short-term objective:** Receive financial education for first-time home buyers within the next three months and find out about the Individual Development Accounts (matched savings programs) available in my area.

**My intermediate objective:** Get enrolled within the next year in a first-time home buyer program that helps me save for a down payment on a house.

**My long-term objective:** Save enough money within the next three years for a down payment on a house.

### Some tips for clarifying goals and setting objectives:

- Keep in mind that our goals are going to depend on where we are in our own lives. It doesn't matter what other people's goals are, **our goals are made especially for us.**
- Sometimes, we work "backwards" from our bigger dreams and goals to more specific or shorter-term objectives. For example, we first think about what our dream is. Then, we think of what goals we would need to accomplish to achieve our bigger dream. Finally, we think about our more specific targets (long-term, intermediate, and short-term objectives). For instance, if my goal is to own my own business distributing office supplies, here are some objectives that would make sense for me to have:

Long- term objective:

Buy a truck within two years



Intermediate objective:

Open an PASS plan that allows me to save money for a down payment



Short -term objective:

Receive benefits advisement and information about PASS

Hopefully, creating goals and objectives makes a little more sense now. Let's try to think about some of the goals and objectives we have for ourselves.



# My Goals and Objectives



Below is a worksheet where we can brainstorm and try to come up with our own short-term, intermediate, and long-term objectives based on the goals and dreams that we have.

Try to think about what you will need to do in your life to be economically self-sufficient and to reach each of the goals that you have. If you run out of space, grab a piece of paper to write them down. You can never have too many goals, and your goals can never be too big or too small!

**“If you don’t know where you are going. How can you expect to get there?”**

–Basil S. Walsh

**My Dream:**

---

---

---

**My Goal:**

---

---

---

**My short-term objectives:**

---

---

---

**My intermediate objectives:**

---

---

---

**My long-term objectives:**

---

---

---



**My Dream:**

---

---

---

**My Goal:**

---

---

---

**My short-term objectives:**

---

---

---

**My intermediate objectives:**

---

---

---

**My long-term objectives:**

---

---

---



## 2. Identifying the capital we have to achieve our goals

### What is Capital?

'Capital' is just another word for resources. The reason why 'capital' is important is because it can help us become economically self-sufficiency and stay that way. There are three forms of capital that we are going to talk about in this section: human, material, and social.

### Human Capital

Human capital is the training and abilities that we have as individuals that can help us perform certain tasks. Having education and specialized skills are examples of human capital.

#### Hard skills:

When we are talking about having hard skills, we are talking about the special abilities or skills we have to do certain things.

#### *Examples:*

- Being able to use computer programs like Microsoft Word
- Being good at looking things up on the Internet
- Being able to prepare a budget
- Being able to prepare and file our own taxes

These skills are easy for other people to see and they can be measured. For example, we can even time how fast we type so we can show employers our skill level. Being able to show off our skills can be very helpful when we are trying to get a job because it might give us an edge over another person who is applying for the same job.

#### Soft skills:

When we are talking about soft skills, we are talking about 'people skills.'

#### *Examples:*

- Being able to communicate effectively with other people.
- Being able to work in teams.
- Being able to resist unplanned buying.
- Being able to negotiate deals.
- Being able to advocate for ourselves with debt collectors.

Soft skills aren't as easy as hard skills to see or measure, but they are just as important. Soft skills can be the difference between getting a job or not, or being considered for a promotion or not. In relation to our economic progress, soft skills can help us get a better deal when buying a car, or negotiate a better term to repay our debts.

#### Self-efficacy:

Another important example of human capital is self-efficacy. Having self-efficacy is having the belief that making a change in our lives is possible and we can become economically self-sufficient!



## Material Capital

When we are talking about material capital, we are talking about the ‘things’ we have.

*Examples:*

- Work Incentives to help us keep some benefits while working.
- Reliable transportation so we can get to places on time (car, bus, etc.).
- Safe, stable, and decent housing.
- Nice clothes for us to wear to interviews or to work.
- Money that we have saved over time (our ‘savings’).
- The assets that we have (car, house, GED, college degree, etc.).

Material capital is important for us to have, especially as people with disabilities, because we may need some of these things, like transportation and assets to be able to get a job to become economically self-sufficient.

## Social Capital

Social capital refers to the relationships and connections with people who can help us become more economically self-sufficient.

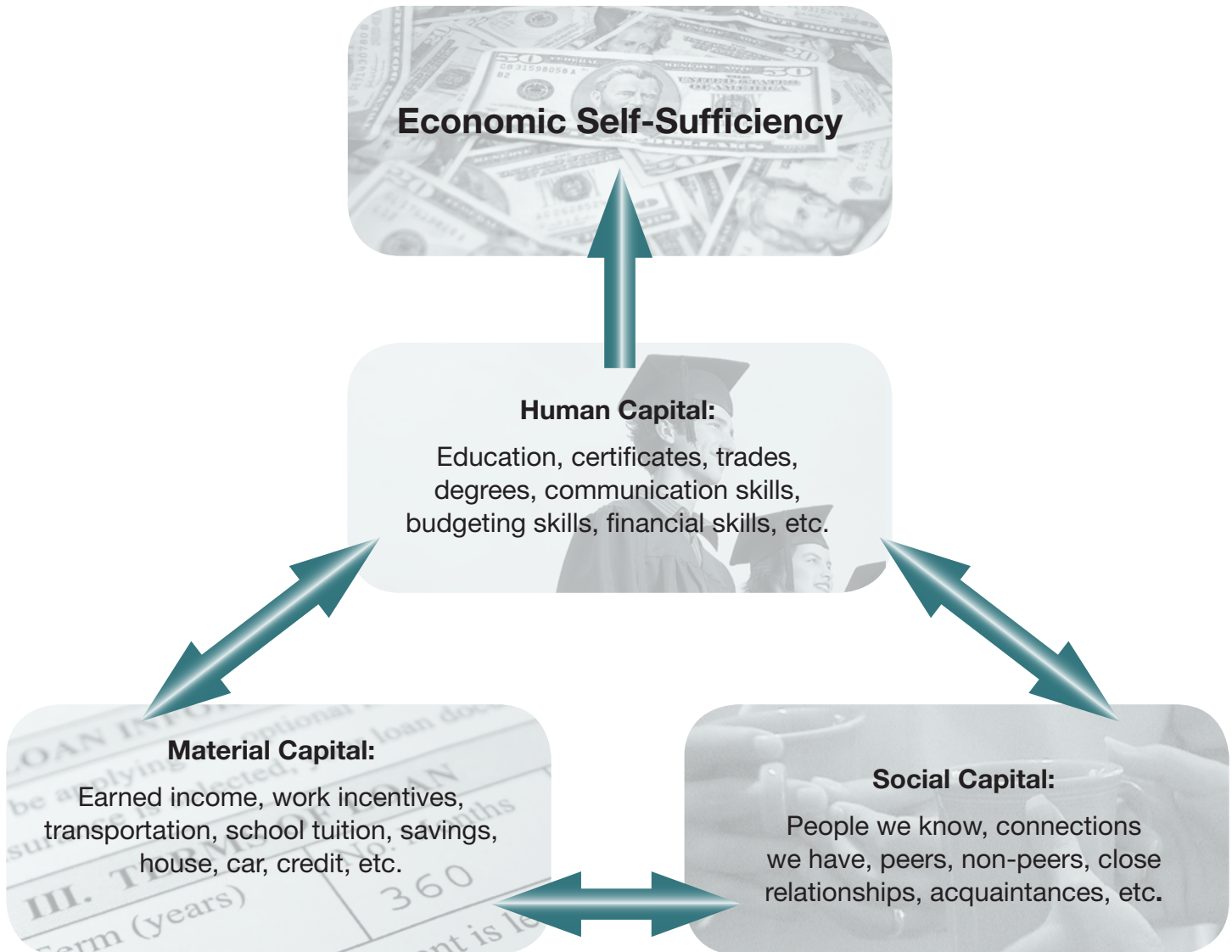
*Examples:*

- Having large and diverse social networks.
- Having people who can give us a reference or an emergency loan.
- Having peers who can share their self-sufficiency experiences.
- Knowing “people who know people”.
- Knowing people who we may not be close to, but who can help us (the friend of a close friend, the client of a good client, the friend of a close neighbor, etc.).

Having social capital is good for us because the more diverse our relationships are, the more useful connections we will have, and the more resources we will have access to. Knowing a greater number of people (and from different circles) can help us hear about jobs, work incentives, programs, houses, cars, and other economic opportunities. It is also important that we develop connections outside of the mental health system. While our providers and peers can be very supportive, the more diverse people we know, the more connected we will be.

## Economic Self-Sufficiency and Types of Capital

Below is a diagram that shows how human, material and social capital are connected, and how they are all important to achieve self-sufficiency.



## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Social network:** All the people we know, including relatives, friends, providers, and acquaintances. It also includes all the social connections among the people we know.

**Peer support network:** Individuals with whom we share a personal experience who can provide us with information, emotional support, and practical support.

## Identifying George's Capital: his assets and liabilities

Earlier in this guide we read a story about a man named George and helped him find out how ready he was to pursue economic self-sufficiency. Now, we are going to read George's story once more to refresh our memory. After reading his story, we will think about the different kinds of "capital" he has, and we will help him develop a plan of action to build on his assets (the things he has on his side) and to reduce his liabilities (the things that could work against him).

### George's story

George was diagnosed with a psychiatric condition when he was 19 years old. He was hospitalized once but he was able to live on his own and graduate from an auto mechanic school two years after he left the hospital. He got a job as an auto mechanic technician and did really well for three years. He enjoyed his job and got along very well with his co-workers and supervisor. During that time George married his high school sweetheart and they had a child together.

But life changed pretty quickly for George. His symptoms began to take over his life. George started experiencing hallucinations on the job and began believing that people in his life wanted to hurt him. George had increasing conflicts at work, with his wife, and most of his friends. He was hospitalized six times in a year. Although George's employer really liked him, he was let go. His wife started fearing that George would become violent, and eventually divorced him and obtained sole custody of their daughter. George's symptoms spiraled and he could no longer work. For seven years he was in and out of hospitals and, after many struggles, he obtained Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Three years ago George started attending The Center for Wellness and Recovery (CWR), a recovery-oriented program that has been made a big difference in his life. Cindy, his primary counselor, encouraged him to go back to work part-time and think about his life goals. A year ago George got a part-time job as a custodian at the local high school, but he doesn't like the job, and it doesn't pay him well. George talks about his daughter all the time, and the thing he wants the most is to be in her life and one day share custody with his ex-wife. His ex-wife seems to be willing but the court will only allow him to have partial custody if he lives independently in an apartment large enough for his daughter to have her own bedroom, for George, something that, right now, seems a long shot.

For the past ten years George has been living at a residential program. For most of that time his program was his representative payee, but a year ago he decided he wanted to have control over his own money. He could make a lot more money as an auto mechanic but he has not had a job in his trade in more than ten years. George spends a lot of his free time (and money) on auto mechanic magazines. At times George has borrowed money from his friend Raul and obtained pay-day loans to buy more magazines. George hopes that reading these magazines will keep him up to date with new automotive technology, but he is getting more and more in debt; and his dream of living independently seems to be getting farther

away. George's social life is very limited. His friend Raul, who is also a mechanic, is one of the few people that has stuck with him during all these years.

George knows he wants to make changes in his life to become more self-sufficient, live independently, and not be "broke" all the time, but he is not sure he wants to stop spending money on auto magazines. George really wants to get off his cash benefits one day, but he is afraid of getting sick and ending up in the hospital again. Despite of all his doubts and fears, every time George talks about his daughter he lights up and says he is willing to work very hard to one day live with her again.

### Here's a quick recap:

#### **His life dreams and financial goals**

- Wants to regain partial custody of his daughter
- Wants to one day be independent from cash benefits
- Wants to get a full-time job working as an auto mechanic
- Wants to get an apartment with two bedrooms so he can have his daughter stay part-time

#### **His readiness to pursue self-sufficiency**

##### **Felt need to pursue self-sufficiency:**

- Is unhappy with his current situation and wants to live independently
- Is tired of being "broke" all the time

##### **Commitment to pursue self-sufficiency:**

- Is willing to work hard
- Is not sure he wants to reduce his spending in auto magazines
- Is afraid of getting sick and ending up in the hospital again

##### **Awareness of own economic values and preferences:**

- Wants to be independent
- Wants to be a good father and provider to his daughter

##### **Awareness of the economic supports in his environment:**

- Doesn't know about work incentives?

##### **Social capital:**

- Has a good friend Raul, who is still a mechanic
- Has a provider who has been supportive, Cindy

Now that we have read George's story again, we are going to help George identify the capital he has available, that is, his assets and liabilities.

#### **THINGS TO KNOW:**

**Assets:** Things we have on our side, the resources we can tap into (for example, our savings, car, house, college degree, willingness/determination, social connections, etc.).

**Liabilities:** Things that can work against us in trying to achieve economic self-sufficiency (for example, our debts, bad credit, weaknesses, addictions, lack of skills, gap in employment, etc.).



Examples of Assets		
Human Capital	Material Capital	Social Capital
Technical skills	Earned income	Social networks
Trade	Benefits (SSI, SSDI, etc)	Peer support
College education	Work incentives	Relatives
“Soft” skills	Car/transportation	Friends
Interviewing skills	Work clothes	People who know people
Discipline	Housing	
Budgeting skills	Savings	
Knowledge about taxes	Investments	
	Retirement accounts	
	School tuition	

Examples of Liabilities		
Human Capital	Material Capital	Social Capital
No education	Debts	Small social network
Little job skills	No transportation	Weak peer support
Gap in employment	Poor housing	Connections limited to the mental health community
Poor interviewing skills	No savings	
Lack of hope	Poor credit	



## Identifying George's Capital



What are some of George's human capital **assets**?

---

---

---

What are some of George's human capital **liabilities**?

---

---

---

### Material Capital

What are some of George's material capital **assets**?

---

---

---

What are some of George's material capital **liabilities**?

---

---

---

### Social Capital

What are some of George's social capital **assets**?

---

---

---

What are some of George's social capital **liabilities**?

---

---

---



## Identifying My Capital (Assets and Liabilities) to Achieve Self-Sufficiency



Now that we have helped George to find out about the human, material and social capital he has, it is time for us to think about the assets and liabilities in our own lives. Before we do, let us remember our life dreams, goals and objectives. Keeping these in mind will help us find out what things we have on our side or the resources we can tap into (our assets), and the things that can work against us (our liabilities) in trying to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

**Your life dreams and aspirations:**

---

---

---

**Your goals:**

---

---

---

**Your short-term objectives:**

---

---

---

**Your intermediate objectives:**

---

---

---

**Your long-term objectives:**

---

---

---

## Human Capital

Thinking about your life dreams, goals, and objectives, what are some of your human capital **assets**?

---

---

---

Thinking about your life dreams, goals, and objectives, what are some of your human capital **liabilities**?

---

---

---

## Material Capital

Thinking about your life dreams, goals, and objectives, what are some of your material capital **assets**?

---

---

---

Thinking about your life dreams, goals, and objectives, what are some of your material capital **liabilities**?

---

---

---

## Social Capital

Thinking about your life dreams, goals, and objectives, what are some of your social capital **assets**?

---

---

---

Thinking about your life dreams, goals, and objectives, what are some of your social capital **liabilities**?

---

---

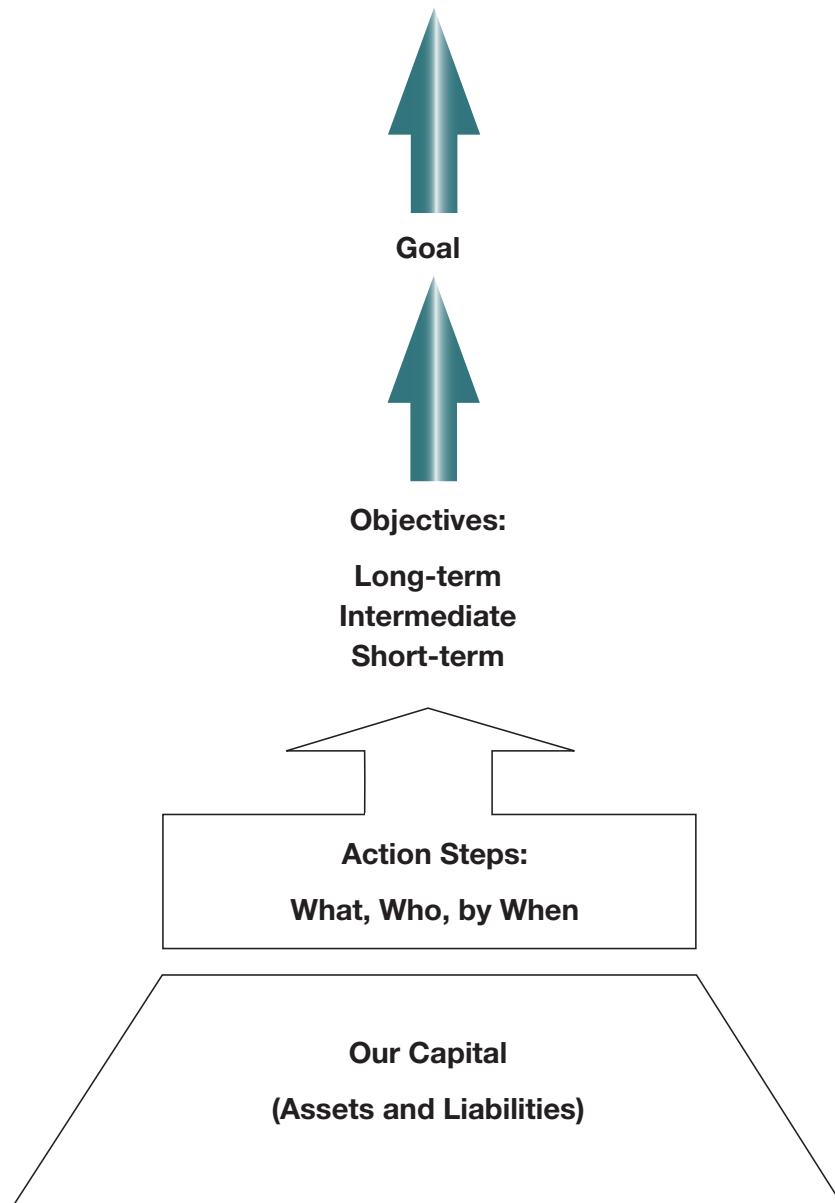
---

### 3. Defining Action Steps: what, who and by when

Now that we have identified the capital that can help us pursue economic self-sufficiency, it is time to define a concrete Plan of Action. A Plan of Action is a specific list of what we will do, who will be involved, and by when we will do it.

Here is how a Plan of Action can help us build on our assets (or reduce our liabilities), and thus assist us in achieving our (short-term, intermediate, and long term) objectives; our economic self-sufficiency goals; and, ultimately our life dreams and aspirations.

#### Life dreams and aspirations



**“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”**

–Larry Elder

Below is an example of how an objective can be broken down into concrete action steps.

**Example:**

**My long-term objective:** Obtain a well-paying supervisory full-time job within the next year.

**My intermediate objective:** Get a part-time job at the local grocery store within two months.

**My short-term objective:** Create a “functional” resume (a resume that highlights skills and experiences rather than listing jobs in order) within the next two weeks.

**My assets (the things that I have on my side)**

- I’ve had several jobs and have many skills (such using cash registers, computers, professional cleaning).
- I have a provider who is very supportive.
- I know people who know people.

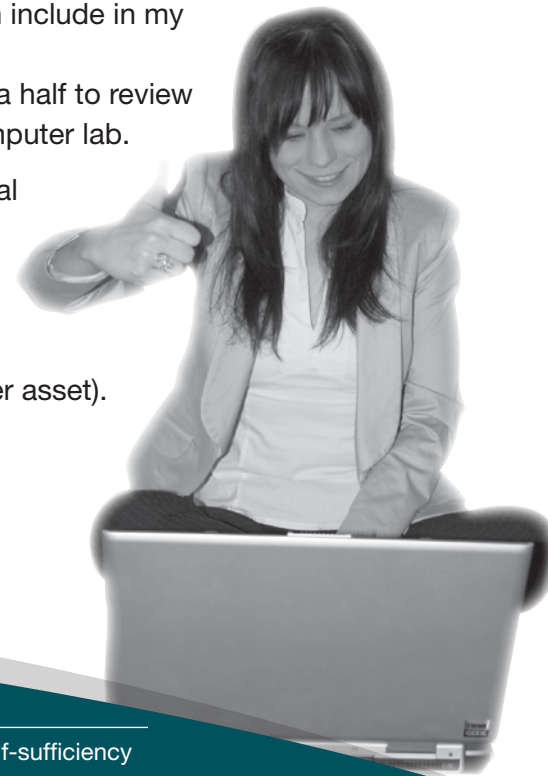
**My liabilities (the things that can work against me):**

- I have a five year gap in my resume
- I have never created a functional resume that highlights my skills and experiences

**Actions steps (WHAT I will do to reach my objective, WHO, and by WHEN):**

- **Action step 1:** I will go to the library within the next week and review several examples of functional resumes.
- **Action step 2:** I will write down within the next week everything I can include in my functional resume.
- **Action step 3:** My provider and I will meet within the next week and a half to review my ideas and create my new resume using Microsoft Word in the computer lab.

The person in this example knows that her gap in employment is a potential liability. She has heard about functional resumes that highlight skills and experience, as opposed to the traditional resume which lists the chronological order of previous jobs. So she thinks that a functional resume may help her. Although she does not have experience in creating this type of resume (a liability), she has a supportive provider who does (her asset).



## Creating a Plan of Action



**Now, let's think about the things you can do to reach your objectives.**

Breaking down our goals and objectives into several action steps is not the only way to create a plan of action. However, breaking them down into smaller steps may help us to have a better idea of what we need to do in order to reach our goals and it may make the process less overwhelming.

**Your Goal:**

---

---

---

**Your Objectives:** (Choose to focus on one or more)

---

---

---

**Your Actions Steps:** (Don't forget to include **WHAT**, **WHO**, and by **WHEN**)

- ---

---
- ---

---
- ---

---

**Your Goal:**

---

---

---

**Your Objectives:** (Choose to focus on one or more)

---

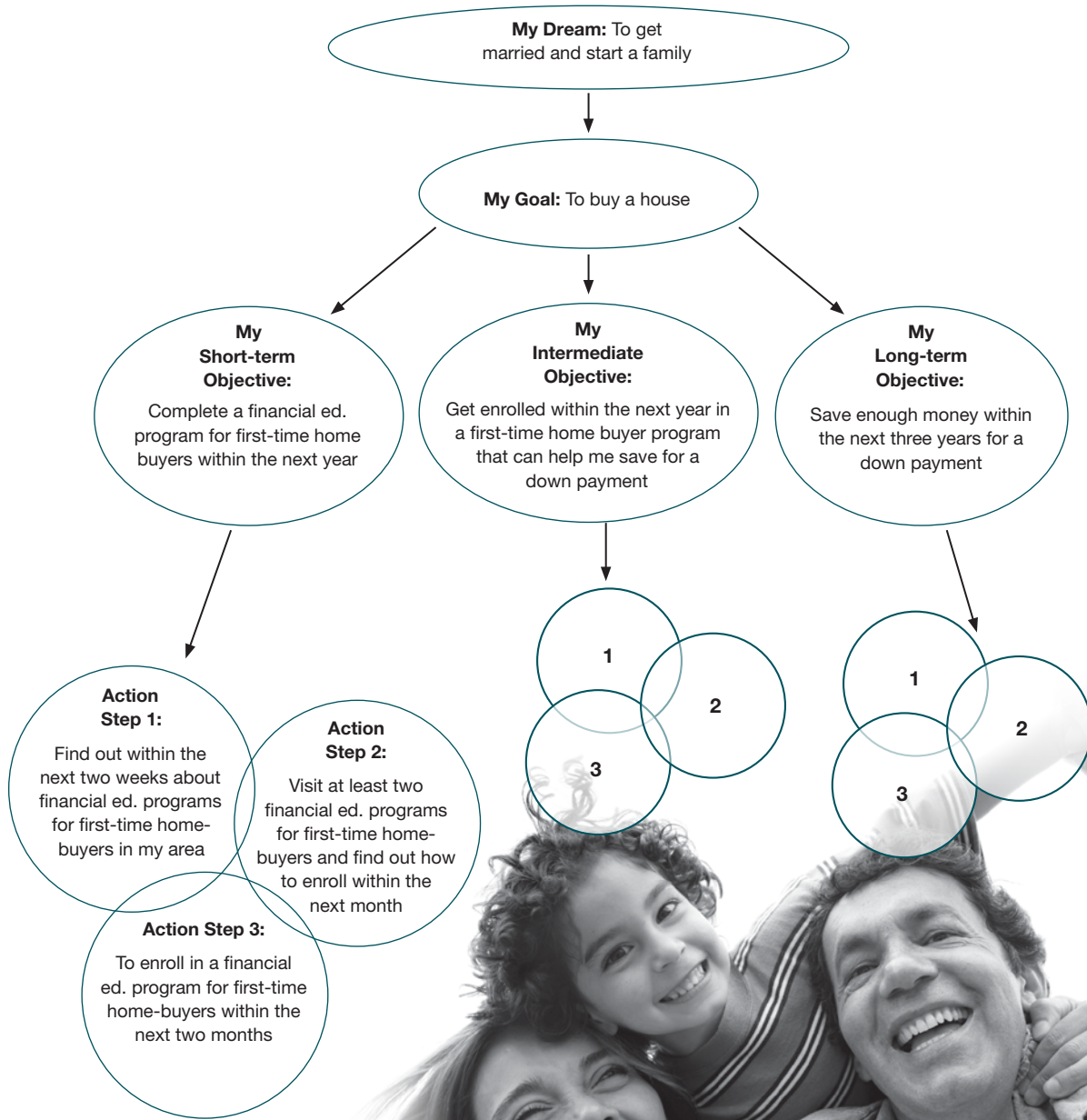
---

---

**Your Actions Steps:** (Don't forget to include **WHAT**, **WHO**, and by **WHEN**)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

This diagram shows an example of how our dreams and goals can be broken down into more simple objectives; and to reach of those objectives we can set smaller action steps.





## Personal Stories of Recovery and Economic Self-Sufficiency

Linda Terry



THE MESSAGE THAT I WOULD MOST LIKE TO CONVEY is that WORK is good for you and for me, and that it is the greater part of why I am doing so well in my recovery!

I have a long history of Bipolar Disorder I must say that it has mostly been a blessing, by a long shot!!! Having this illness has given me the direction that I want to pursue with my career. Helping people with psychiatric disabilities is what I feel most passionately about. I have a job today as an Advocate at the Mental Health Association of the Southern Tier. It is extremely rewarding as well as challenging on a daily basis. At this time I only work part time (20 hours). I feel that I could probably work more, however I am also attending classes at Binghamton University. I am in a program leading to a Bachelors degree. I earned my Nursing degree in 1996 and have worked in the mental health field since that time. Since graduating, I have worked as an Advocate, a Supportive Case Manager and as an Intensive Case Manager. I feel that my own experience as a recipient of mental health services has enhanced my ability to work with others with similar backgrounds. Currently I am still receiving SSD. However, I plan to work full time and be completely financially independent as soon as I receive my Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing in 2012. I would love to continue to work at the Mental Health Association doing what I am doing today. I love my job that much. However, I try to stay in today as much as possible so I really don't know what graduation time will bring for me. Good things I am sure!

My recovery path has been long and sometimes difficult. I have been severely affected with Bipolar Disorder since my son was born in 1981. Since that time I

***I have had more than 15 hospitalizations, have lived in poverty, and have struggled to obtain my education as well as to simply keep my head above water.***

have had more than 15 hospitalizations, have lived in poverty, and have struggled to obtain my education as well as to simply keep my head above water. I raised my son as a single parent. He has become a very successful person, having graduated from Boston College and then with a Master's in Public Administration (MPA) from the University of California. He holds a very good job, has purchased a home and successfully manages his own problems with depression.

During the time since my son was born, I worked as much as I could and had dreams of becoming a nurse. It was a long and difficult struggle to reach my goal. There were times that I could not work, so I received Public Assistance for a short

time. I started in nursing school back in 1986 and six weeks before graduating, I was hospitalized and was not able to graduate with my class. I held nearly a 4.0 average during the time I was in school and it did wonders for my self esteem. I suffered an extremely difficult period of severe depression for two years afterward until I gathered the wherewithal to go back and finish my degree. Eight years later I received my Associates Degree in Nursing with Honors and passed my state boards to become a Registered Nurse. I have worked in mental health ever since. I continued to have difficulty with my illness throughout the years, after I became an RN, until the present time. I have not been hospitalized for almost three years.

I have learned some very important wellness interventions that I utilize every day. I am conscientious about my work and am a reliable employee, reporting for work every day with few exceptions. The reason I am able to do this is because, I LOVE MY JOB! I take my medications every day and see my psychiatrist and therapist on a regular basis to maintain my stability. I have found that one of the things that helps me most in my recovery is being kind to ME in my thoughts. This is so important. It can make a difference in the way we think about ourselves and the things that we are able to do. Please Keep Your Self Talk Positive!

***Eight years later I received my Associates Degree in Nursing with Honors and passed my state boards to become a Registered Nurse.***

I have had the benefit of utilizing the Working People with Disabilities-Medicaid Buy In program. It is essential that I take care of my physical health in addition caring for MIND AND SPIRIT! Programs such as this enable and support individuals in achieving their goals. One of which may be financial independence, as in my case. I am one year away from this and I have to say that the process has been as good as I expect that the end results will be.

I am very happy to be an example of a success story, despite having a serious and persistent psychiatric disorder. If only to show others that this can be done! There IS recovery from psychiatric disorder and YOU can be instrumental in helping others to achieve this. Get involved in your local peer-run support groups or organizations. BE THERE for someone that you know who is having problems. And most of all, be good, kind and generous to YOU!

REACH FOR YOUR DREAMS AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!!!

# Lesson Five:

## Developing Our Skills and Capital to Achieve Self-Sufficiency

### Lesson five at a glance:

#### In this lesson we will learn:

1. How to budget.
2. How to access work incentives to increase our income.
3. How to file taxes and access tax credits.
4. How to save.
5. How to avoid the credit trap and predatory lending.
6. How to clear and build credit.
7. How to deal with addictions and financial stressors.
8. How build our social capital to improve our self-sufficiency.



**T**his lesson covers eight different skill areas. Each skill includes key definitions, a few exercises, and some tips to help us develop the human, material, and social capital that we need to achieve our economic self-sufficiency goals.

Here are some tips that may help us while working through each of these skills:

- **One step at a time, one skill at a time:** Focus on one skill at a time. Many of us grew up in environments where people did not talk openly about money. So it can be hard, confusing, and even discouraging trying to learn too many money skills at once.
- **Practice, practice, practice:** Reading about a skill will give us information. Practicing a skill will give us experience. Remember that most of us will forget easily what we simply read, but we will probably remember what we put into practice. It takes some effort to remember a good idea we have heard about, but it takes much more to develop a new skill. Dealing with money effectively is not about “book smarts,” but it is about developing skills.
- **Progress, not perfection:** What matters the most is to get a little better each time, not to get it perfectly the first time. It’s about not repeating the same mistakes. For example, it’s about not falling into the same credit trap or learning to make better purchases.
- **Easy does it, but do it:** If you forget to track your expenses for a couple of days (or to complete an important step in your plan of action), be patient with yourself, and just get back on track. Be easy on yourself, but do it.

## Skill 1: Budgeting

**C**reating and keeping a budget is a key skill in achieving self-sufficiency. A budget is a list of the income we expect to receive, and the money we plan to spend. We will learn more about budgeting in a few minutes. First, let us review why budgeting is important for us and our recovery.

Do you remember the eight areas of wellness we talked about in Lesson One?



Having a budget has a positive effect on all of these areas of wellness. Here's why...

When we don't have a lot of money and are always worrying about how we are going to afford food, rent, childcare, transportation, clothing, so we can get very stressed. By budgeting, we can keep track of the money we have, and how much we can really spend on things we need and want.

**There are many benefits to budgeting! Here are a few...**

- Find out how much money we will need for each day, week, month, or year.
- Make better decisions about how to spend the money we have.
- Have a plan to avoid wondering if we will have enough money. Remember, vagueness leads to stress!
- Be able to save money for a "rainy day" or to invest in our future, such as buying a home, going to school, or starting a business.



## Creating My Budget



### Practice

Try to think about all your sources of income. Include everything! Don't forget any money you get for working, SSDI, SSI, food stamps, Veteran's checks, public assistance, etc. Make sure you also write down any money that you get from friends and family!

### My Sources of Income per Month

Employment: \_\_\_\_\_

SSI: \_\_\_\_\_

SSDI: \_\_\_\_\_

Food Stamps: \_\_\_\_\_

Entitlements & Benefits (General Assistance, TANF): \_\_\_\_\_

Other income (gifts, borrowed money): \_\_\_\_\_

Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**For one week, write down everything you spend your money on** (food, housing, gas, transportation, coffee, cigarettes, lottery tickets, everything!) and how much each thing costs. Make sure you save all your receipts and, if they a cashier doesn't give you one, make sure to ask for one. Count everything you spent in cash, credit or debit cards, or with checks. A dollar here, a dollar there doesn't seem like much but it can add up!





### What I Spent This Week

Below is the table where you can enter your purchases for the week.

	What I spent money on	How much it cost
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

**Total amount I spent this week: \$** \_\_\_\_\_

Now, use the same sheet to keep track of all your expenses for one month, and add it up.

**Total the amount you spent in one month: \$** \_\_\_\_\_

Now, compare what you spent in a month to your total income, ask yourself:

*Did you spend more money than you had?*

*Did you spend too much on things you did not need?*

*Did you run out of money for things you really needed?*

If you think you might need to spend less money or be more careful about what you are spending it on, take another look at what you bought and think about what you could do differently. You could ask someone you trust to help you track your expenses and give you feedback or suggestions.



## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Expenses:** The things we spend our money on.

**Interest rate:** The money that a bank, company, or person charges us for what we borrowed from them. This is usually a percentage of what we owe, per year (annual rate).

**Late fee:** The money we are charged when we do not pay a bill on time.

**ATM (Automated Teller Machine):** The machine where we can withdraw or deposit money to/from an account using a debit or credit card.

## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Transaction fee:** The amount a bank or ATM company charges us for utilizing their machine.

**Checking account:** An account that can be used to write checks to pay for bills, make purchases, or take money out using a debit card.

**Debit card:** A card we can use at an ATM to withdraw money or make a purchase against the balance of a checking account.

**Check register:** A book that helps us to keep track of our deposits and withdrawals into/from our checking accounts.

## And don't forget!

One big reason budgeting is a good thing is because *life happens*....Cars break down, cell phones need replacing, and people get sick. Even when we are careful, we still may have to spend money we haven't planned for. If we budget, and are able to save some of our money, we will have something to fall back on when *life happens*.



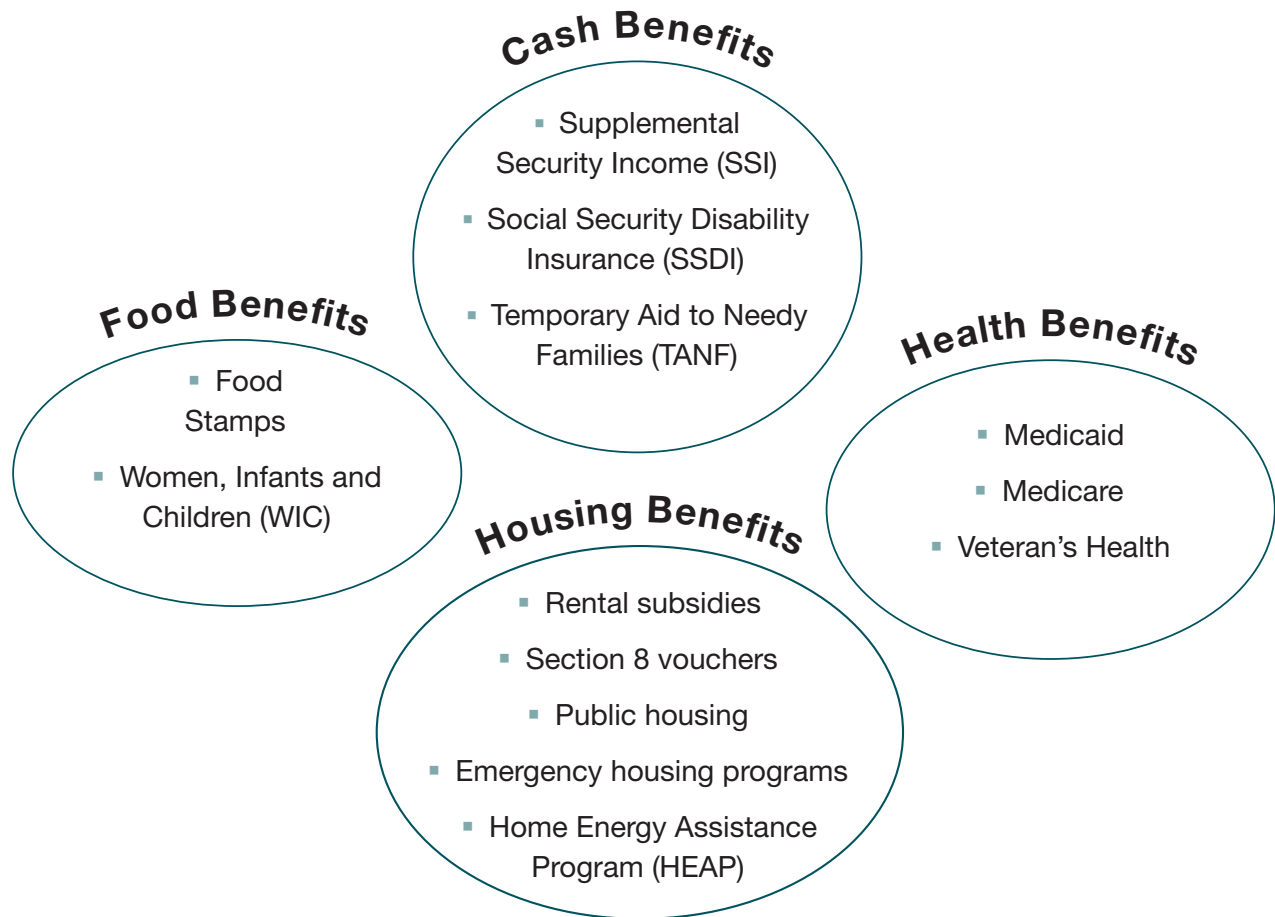
## Here are some 'two cents' for you!

- Plan for things you need first, and then for things you would like to have or do.
- Keep taxes, interest rates, and late fees in mind.
- Remember, money can add up quickly.
- Keep a monthly budget to keep track of what you spend and how much money you have.
- Don't charge small things to your credit card. You may have to pay a high interest rate and end up paying a lot more for that "small" thing.
- Buy things in bulk.
- Split expenses with friends.
- Shop around. Sometimes the same grocery store has different prices in different neighborhoods.
- When buying fruits and vegetables, try to buy those "in season." Find out what the best fruits and vegetables for each season are. Fruits and vegetables in season tend to be much cheaper.
- Avoid buying groceries at small stores (such as gas stations, convenience stores, bodegas, delis, etc.). They are usually much more expensive than bigger grocery stores.
- Make a list of what you need before going to the grocery store. Avoid buying things near the cash register. Stores are designed to make customers buy things they do not need at the cash register (such as magazines, candy, etc.).
- Plan for the cash you need and get it from your own bank. Try not to spend money on transaction fees (that extra \$1.50) to use other ATMs.
- Try not to cash checks at cash checking locations—they charge you much more than a bank!
- Look for coupons and sales.
- Make your own coffee at home instead of buying it out.



## Skill 2: Accessing Work Incentives to Increase Income

Many of us who are living with a disability get some sort of **public benefits** to help us meet our needs.



**T**hese benefits can be very helpful to us if we are not able to work, if we don't work a lot of hours, or if we don't make enough money to support ourselves. A benefits advisor can help us get more information about these benefits and how we can access them.

### Is it always good to depend on benefits?

Benefits can be very helpful and sometimes we may need to rely on them. However...

- Benefits can be very complicated and confusing.
- Depending on benefits can limit our choices about where we can live, whether or not we can save, and how much we can earn.
- Benefits can make us feel "trapped between a rock and a hard place," between poverty and a steady check that is just not enough.
- Depending on benefits can make us feel like we are receiving handouts and that we will never get out of poverty.

## Have you had any problems because you depend on benefits? What are they?

---

---

---

### Thinking of letting go of some benefits can be very stressful and scary!

Many of us do not want to go back to work because we fear we will lose the precious benefits that took us years to get.

We may be worried that we won't be able to meet our basic needs, such as medication, food and housing; let alone save to pay for things we want, such as going back to school or taking a vacation.

### So what shall we do?

We have good news for you. There are several federal programs called Work Incentives. Some Work Incentives can help us go back to work and keep all or many of our benefits. In some cases we can continue receiving many of the same benefits for a long time. This way, we can work, increase the income we earn through work, and keep some benefits at the same time.



“I’ve achieved a certain level of security [by receiving benefits]... I am scared to let that go based on faith in myself.”

–Male focus group participant



## What work incentives can help me if I receive SSI?

Here are some work incentives that can help those of us who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI):



### The 1619(a) Program: Special Payments for People on SSI

When we receive SSI and start working, our SSI check will be reduced. However, we will most likely end up making more than what we were making on our SSI check alone. Here is what we need to know:

- The first 85 (eighty-five) dollars we make will not affect our SSI check at all.
- After the first 85 dollars, Social Security will deduct 1 (one) dollar for every 2 (two) dollars we make.

**Example:** Jamila receives \$750 on SSI every month. Recently she took a part-time job making \$785 per month. Let's see what will happen to her SSI check:

Step 1: Let's see what Jamila earns each month at her new job:	\$ 785
Step 2: The first 85 dollars doesn't affect her check:	- \$ 85
Step 3: Total income that will be used to calculate the deduction:	\$ 700
Step 4: Deduction (one dollar out for every two dollars):	\$ 350 ( $\$700 \div 2$ )
Step 5: Jamila's new SSI check will be:	\$ 400 ( $\$750 - \$350$ )
Step 6: Her total income (monthly earnings plus her new SSI check):	\$1,185 ( $\$785 + \$400$ )

As you can see, although Jamila's check was deducted, she is better off working. The 1619 (a) program is helping her keep part of her SSI check and she still gets her full salary through her job.



### Student Earned Income Exclusion

This program can help those of us in high school, college or trade school to save money while we are in school. The Student Earned Income Exclusion lets us "leave out" some of our earnings when calculating our SSI check. As long as we are under 22 years of age, this program can be very useful.

**Example:** Demitri is working part-time and going to school to become a substance abuse counselor. The Student Earned Income Exclusion program allows him to "leave out" some of his earnings to make up for his school-related expenses. This is helping him to support himself while going to school because his SSI check is not being deducted as much.



## Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)

People receiving SSI typically cannot have more than \$2,000 in savings or investments. The PASS allows us to set money aside to buy what need to achieve our employment or self-employment goals, without affecting our eligibility for SSI. Our goals can be things like saving up for school, buying a car to go to work, or starting our own business.

**Example:** Wanda wants to start a flower business. A few weeks ago, she met with a benefits advisor, wrote up a PASS plan, and Social Security approved it. Now Wanda is putting money aside from her part-time job to save enough to buy a used van. Wanda is confident that in a year's time she will be able to save up the \$5,000 she needs to buy a van and start her own business!



## Property Essential to Self-Support (PESS)

A person receiving SSI typically cannot have more than one car, more than one house, and he or she cannot have many other assets. However, if a person on SSI owns a business, property essential for running the business may be excluded from these rules. PESS is a program that helps those who own businesses to maintain SSI eligibility and still keep the things they need to run their businesses, such as trucks, trailers, tools, etc.

**Example:** Once Wanda starts her own business, she may be able to own her personal car and the van for her business, and still maintain her eligibility for SSI.

### THINGS TO KNOW:

#### **Self-Employment:**

When we work for ourselves and own a business.

## What work incentives can help me if I receive SSDI?

Here are some work incentives that can help those of us who receive Social Security Disability Income (SSDI):



### Trial-Work-Period

The Trial-Work-Period lets us try out work while continuing to receive our full SSDI check for several months. During this period of time, Social Security will pay us ALL of our disability benefits, and it doesn't even matter how much we earn. We get 9 months of Trial-Work-Period (and we may also be eligible for a three-month extension). Every month we make more than \$720 per month counts as one Trial-Work month.

**Example:** Carlos has recently gone back to work in computers and he was offered a very good job making \$3,500 per month. Because he had not worked at all since he got on SSDI seven years ago, he has not used any of his 9 Trial-Work-Period months. During those 9 months he will continue receiving his full SSDI check (and the \$3,500 he makes on the job).

## THINGS TO KNOW:

**SGA:** Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) is the amount that Social Security considers as substantial work. For the year 2011 this amount is \$1,000, and it can change every year!



### The Extended Period of Eligibility

After the nine months of Trial Work Period (and sometimes a three-month extension), a person receiving SSDI will typically stop receiving an SSDI check when she or he makes more than \$1,000. That amount is called the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) level.

However, there is a work incentive that can help us get back on our SSDI check if we fall under the SGA level again. This is called the Extended Period of Eligibility. This is just a way of saying that a person who was eligible for SSDI, and stopped receiving their check because he or she made more than the SGA level, could get back on SSDI without a lot of problems. The Extended Period of Eligibility lasts for thirty-six

months (3 years) after the Trial-Work-Period begins, and it is helpful as long as the person is still considered disabled.

**Example:** After receiving SSDI for several years Mary Jo decided to go back to work. She got a job making \$2,500 per month working at a law firm. For twelve months she continued to receive her full SSDI check. After the Trial-Work-Period (and the three-month extension), her SSDI checks stopped, but she was happy because she was able to save some money and buy a reliable car. But about a year later, she started experiencing a lot of anxiety and had to stop working. Because she was eligible for the Extended Period of Eligibility, Mary Jo was able to easily get back on SSDI and hopes to give it another try in a little while.

## What work incentives can help me if I receive SSI or SSDI?

In this section we will tell you about work incentives that can help those of us who receive SSI or SSDI. If you receive both SSDI and SSI, the good news is that you have access to the work incentives of both programs. The downside of receiving SSDI and SSI is that you have to follow two sets of rules, which can be very complicated.



### Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE)

This program lets us “leave out” expenses for things that relate to our disability that we need to stay on the job. “Leaving out” some expenses helps us to make up for the costs involved in working.

**Example:** Mary makes \$1,200 per month through her job (\$200 over the SGA limit). Mary already used her Trial-Work-Period, so she would probably lose her SSDI check every month she makes over \$1,000. But Mary is paying \$300 per month in job coaching, out of her own pocket. This expense can be “left out” and not count towards her income. If Social Security approves this expense, Mary will be able to keep receiving her SSDI check although she is making more than \$1,000 per month!



**THINGS TO KNOW:**

**Vocational**

**Rehabilitation:** This type of rehabilitation helps us prepare for a job, get a job, and keep a job.



**Continued Payment under a Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Section 301 Payments)**

Under this program, a person attending a vocational rehabilitation program will continue receiving their SSI or SSDI checks, even if she/he is considered “medically recovered.” SSI or SSDI payments will continue as long as we continue to participate in the vocational rehabilitation program.

**Example:** Even after George is considered ‘recovered’ he may still get his SSDI or SSI check because he is attending vocational rehabilitation at the Center for Wellness and Recovery.



**Ticket-to-Work Program**

This program gives us a ‘ticket’ that we can take to any provider authorized by Social Security (Employment Network) to pay for the supports we need to go back to work. It is like a voucher. We can get training, vocational rehabilitation, job referrals, and other support services from the provider we choose, and it’s free for us! Another benefit is that while we are utilizing our ticket and making progress toward our goals, social security will not review our disability.



**Medicaid Buy-In for Working People with Disabilities (MBI-WPD):** The Medicaid Buy-In allows us to keep or get full Medicaid coverage even if we make a lot more money than the regular Medicaid limits. In 2011 a person could earn up to \$55,476 per year (and have \$13,800 in savings/assets) and still be eligible for this program in New York State, while a couple could earn up to \$74,580 per year (and have \$20,100 in savings/assets). The only other requirements include being between 16 and 65 years of age, having a disability, and working part-time or full-time. There is no spend-down and no premium. People on SSI or SSDI can get it, and we can have the Medicaid Buy-In and Medicare at the same time.



**Accessing Work Incentives**

Have you ever used any of these work incentives? Which work incentives could help you the most to achieve your economic self-sufficiency goals?

---

---

---

What questions do you have about these work incentives? What would you ask an expert benefits advisor if you had the time to chat with her or him about your personal situation?

---

---

---

## Skill 3: Filing Taxes

**A**pril 15th (The last day to file our taxes) can be a stressful time for many of us. However, filing our taxes is very important. We could actually get money back that we didn't even know we qualified for.

### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Taxes:** Money that we have to give the government so they can provide us with support or services. They can tax us on our income, homes, cars, groceries, clothes, etc.

**Income Tax:** Money that is taken out of the income we earn. The federal government takes money out, and the state takes money out. (So we should file BOTH state and federal tax returns!)

**Dependent:** Someone who relies on us for financial support.

### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Refund:** Money that we get back from the federal or state government because we paid more taxes than we had to.

**Tax return:** Forms that we fill out with information about the income that we have earned during the past year. These forms are sent to the IRS to be reviewed.

**IRS:** Internal Revenue Service. They keep track of the taxes that we owe and the money we get back.

### We should always file our tax returns

If we don't owe taxes because of our income levels, or if we are considered 'dependent', we might not have to file our taxes. However! The IRS might owe us money in the form of a refund. The catch is that in order to get a refund from the government, we must file our tax returns. We should always file our state and federal tax returns because we could get money back from each place.

Another reason we should always file our tax returns, even if we don't owe taxes, is because we could get in serious financial and legal trouble if we don't. We might not even realize that we are supposed to file a return, so we don't, and then we could face serious consequences. Keep that famous saying in mind when tax season rears its ugly head... "It's better to be safe than sorry!"

### Some reasons we might have a tax refund coming to us...

- If taxes are taken out of our paychecks or in some other payments and they take more than what we actually owe.
- If we ever want to get a stimulus payment, we need to file a federal tax return.
- We may qualify for tax credits. We can qualify because we have bought a home, a car, or have paid for childcare. What's especially important for us is that we might be able to get Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

**Form 1040** Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service  
**U.S. Individual Income Tax Return** 2010  
 For the year Jan. 1-Oct. 31, 2010, or other tax year beginning 2010, ending 20  
 OMB No. 1545-0074  
 See separate instructions.  
 Name: John Doe  
 Address: 123 Main St, Anytown, CA 90210  
 Filing Status: Married filing jointly  
 Exemptions: 2  
 Income: \$80,000  
 Adjusted Gross Income: \$72,000

## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Stimulus checks:** Checks that we get from the government to give us a little extra money to help make ends meet. This can change depending on the year.

**Tax Credits:** Set amount excluded from the money that a taxpayer owes the federal or state government.

## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Investment Income:** The interest or profit we earn from having money in an “investment” account, such as savings, money market, stocks, retirement, etc.

## What is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)?

### What we need to know about the EITC...

- It is a refundable tax credit that may help us get money back.
- It is for people with OR without disabilities, even if we didn't earn a lot of money during the last year.
- There are two main purposes for the EITC:
  - To help those of us who are low-income workers be able to make ends meet.
  - To give us an incentive to work.

### To be able to get Earned Income Tax Credit, there are some requirements we must meet. Here is a list of how to qualify for the EITC...

1. Have an **earned income**. Most of the benefits we receive as people with disabilities (SSI, SSDI, etc.) do not count as earned income. But...if we have a spouse who works, and who worked during the tax year, we might be able to qualify for EITC together!
2. Be **at least 25** years of age, and **under the age of 65**.
3. Have an **investment income** of \$3,100 or less in a year. Investment income is the earnings we make as a result of any investments we own (such as stocks, retirement accounts, etc.). This is the maximum investment income amount for the year 2010, but it can change from year to year.
4. We have to **file your taxes** in order to qualify for the EITC.
5. We **cannot go over the income limit** that is set according to how many children we do or do not have. This may change over time too...so we need to keep track of the limit if we are filing our taxes.

**Earned Income Credit (EIC) Worksheet—Lines 41a and 41b**

**Part 1**  
All Filers

1. Enter your earned income from Step 5 on page 20.
2. Lock up the amount on line 1 in the EIC Table on pages 42-58 to find the credit. Be sure you use the correct column for your filing status and the number of children you have. Enter the credit here.
3. Enter the amount from Form 1040A, line 22.
4. Are the amounts on lines 3 and 1 the same?  
 Yes. Skip line 5; enter the amount from line 2 on line 6.  
 No. Go to line 5.

**Part 2**  
Filers Who Answered "No" on Line 4

5. If you have:
  - No qualifying children, is the amount on line 3 less than \$7,500 (\$8,200 if married filing jointly)?
  - 1 or more qualifying children, is the amount on line 3 less than \$16,450 (\$21,500 if married filing jointly)? No. Lock up the amount on line 3 in the EIC Table on pages 42-58 to find the credit. Be sure you use the correct column for your filing status and the number of children you have. Enter the credit here.   
Look at the amounts on lines 5 and 3. Then, enter the smaller amount on line 6.

**Part 3**  
Your Earned Income Credit

6. This is your earned income credit.

**Reminder—**  
If you have a qualifying child, complete and attach Schedule EIC.

If your EIC for a year after 1999 was reduced or disallowed, see page 20 to find out if you must file Form 8862 to take the credit for 2010.

Form 1040  
U.S. Individual Income Tax Return  
Department of the Treasury  
For the year Jan. 1–Dec. 31, 2010  
Your first name  
If a joint return

**In 2010, these were the Earned Income Limits and Credits...**

<b>If you earned less than...</b> ↓	<b>...And have...</b> ↓	<b>...You may get a tax refund of up to...</b> ↓
<b>\$43,352</b> (\$48,362 if you are married and file with your spouse)	with 3 or more qualifying children	\$5,666
<b>\$40,363</b> (\$45,373 if you are married and file with your spouse)	with 2 qualifying children	\$5,036
<b>\$35,535</b> (\$40,545 if you are married and file with your spouse)	with 1 qualifying child	\$3,050
<b>\$13,460</b> (\$18,470 if you are married and file with your spouse)	with no qualifying child	\$457

**Some helpful things we should also know...**

- EITC will not affect our eligibility for benefits like Medicaid, SSI, food stamps, veteran’s benefits, or federally assisted housing!
- Medicaid and SSI only allows us to have \$2,000 in assets. If we receive more than \$2,000 through the EITC, we should think about ways of investing that money into a car, home, or other special accounts within 9 months.
- We may still be able to get money back by filing our taxes for the last 3 years if we didn’t apply for the EITC in the past.
- We may be able to get a ‘split refund’ which means that if we have filed for EITC, we will get half of the refund, and the other half will go right into a savings account. This is an automatic way to start saving our money and may be helpful if we want to save money to buy a car or a home with an Individual Development Account (IDA). IDA is a program that matches our savings to pay for things we need to go to school, start a business, or purchase a home.

**Another type of tax credit we may be able to receive is called the Child Tax Credit.**

**What is the Child Tax Credit (CTC)?**

- It is a refundable federal tax credit. (This means that we get money back).
- It is for those of us who are in low-income jobs and who pay taxes.
- We must be parents, step-parents, grandparents or foster parents of a child who we are responsible for taking care of.
- We may be able to get CTC even if we don’t owe any taxes.



### Here's how it works...

- We may be able to lower our federal income tax by up to 1,000 dollars for each child that we are responsible for, that is under the age of 17.
- We must make sure that we claim our child(ren) as 'dependent' on your tax return.
- The child or children must be a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national, or a U.S. resident alien.
- The child or children must have lived with us for more than half of the previous year.
- The credit may get us less money back if our 'modified adjusted gross income' is above a certain amount. (For married taxpayers who file together - \$110,000, for married taxpayers filing separately - \$55,000).

### Maybe some of us are still wondering things like...

#### THINGS TO KNOW:

##### **Modified Adjusted Gross**

**Income:** is a calculation used by the IRS to determine if we can get back any credits or use certain deductions.

*"Will I be able to get money back for Earned Income Tax Credit, or Child Tax Credit?"*

*"How can I file my taxes? I can't do it myself, and it costs money to hire someone to do them for me..."*

These are good questions to have...To answer them, there are places called VITA programs that can help us figure out whether we are eligible for tax credits and can help us do our taxes, **for free!**

### Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)?

VITA programs are free tax-preparation assistance sites located throughout the state and county. If we want to find a VITA site close to us, we can call this number:



**1-800-829-1040**

**(Monday through Friday, 7am - 10pm)**



The last day we can usually file our taxes is April 15th, but many VITA sites can help us file taxes until October or even December!

The 'Pros' of doing our own taxes	The 'Cons' of hiring somebody
It won't cost you money	It can cost you money
Learn about taxes and the rules	You have to depend on someone else
If you use a computer, taxes are processed much faster than when you mail in a tax return	You may have to wait longer to have your taxes processed



## Accessing Tax Services

1. What tax credits do you think you might be eligible for?

---



---



---

2. What do you think are the benefits of having a VITA site help you with your taxes?

---



---



---

### Child Tax Credit Worksheet—Line 51

Keep for Your Records



- To be a qualifying child for the child tax credit, the child must be under age 17 at the end of 2004 and meet the other requirements listed on page 37.
- Do not use this worksheet if you answered "Yes" to question 1, 2, or 3 on page 37. Instead, use Pub. 972.

1. Number of qualifying children: \_\_\_\_\_ × \$1,000.  1  
Enter the result.

2. Enter the amount from Form 1040, line 45.  2

3. Add the amounts from Form 1040:

Line 46 \_\_\_\_\_

Line 47 + \_\_\_\_\_

Line 48 + \_\_\_\_\_

Line 49 + \_\_\_\_\_

Line 50 + \_\_\_\_\_ Enter the total.  3

4. Are the amounts on lines 2 and 3 the same?

Yes. **STOP**  
You cannot take this credit because there is no tax to reduce. However, you may be able to take the additional child tax credit. See the TIP below.

No. Subtract line 3 from line 2.

5. Is the amount on line 1 more than the amount on line 4?

Yes. Enter the amount from line 4. Also, you may be able to take the additional child tax credit. See the TIP below. **This is your child tax credit.**

No. Enter the amount from line 1.



You may be able to take the additional child tax credit on Form 1040, line 67, if you answered "Yes" on line 4 or line 5 above.

- First, complete your Form 1040 through line 66.
- Then, use Form 8812 to figure any additional child tax credit.





## Skill 4: Saving

If we want to be more economically self-sufficient and live a more independent life, most of us need to learn about things that can help us save money, such as:

### THINGS TO KNOW:

#### Financial Literacy:

Knowing about money and understanding how to make good decisions with it.

- Knowing about checks and credit cards.
- Understanding what debt is.
- How to pay bills and write checks.
- Being able to budget.
- Knowing how to save money.
- Understanding the benefits we have.
- Know when to ask for help with our money, and who to ask for help!

### Have you thought of saving?...

Has there ever been anything that you really, really, wanted but knew that you couldn't afford? Maybe you wanted to buy a car, or to go back to school. Maybe you wanted to own your own house so you could have a big family, or own your business so you can work from home and spend more time with your kids.

You've probably thought once or twice about being able to have these things, but tried to erase them from your mind because you never thought it could happen.

For most of us it is almost impossible to have some of things we want in life because public benefits can limit our choices. We may fear that, if we make more money, we might lose our benefits...or that if we save too much money we could get in trouble and then we would definitely lose our benefits.

Saving money while on our benefits is NOT impossible! There are programs out there that can help us set aside money to be able to buy things that can help us with our work goals and life dreams; like buying that house, or being able to pay for a car so we can drive to work.

### Here are some savings programs to keep in mind...



#### Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)

This savings program "matches" each dollar we save with one, two, three or even four dollars. This means that if we have a 2 to 1 match, we set aside the money we have, and the program gives us twice as much. Sounds like a pretty good deal, doesn't it?



Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are especially helpful to people with disabilities because the money we set aside is not counted as an “asset.” As we know, when we have some assets (such as savings, retirement accounts, etc.) these can be counted against us when we are receiving SSI, food stamps, public housing, or other kinds of benefits. But the money we save under an IDA will not affect our eligibility for benefits.

**Example:** George wants to save up to buy a house for himself and his daughter. He goes to his provider, Cindy, and asks about ways he can save money, even though he is on SSDI and SSI. Cindy tells him about IDAs and George thinks it’s a great idea. For every 25 dollars that George puts into his account, the program will give him 50 more dollars. Now he has a total of 75 dollars! He knows it will take some time to save up enough, but at least he is taking steps in the right direction!

### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Investment:** Saving money in a safe place so that it can increase in value, or earn interest.

**Interest:** An amount of money that a bank or financial program gives us for saving our money with them OR an amount of money our bank or financial program charges us for borrowing money from them.



### Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)

As you probably remember, we went over this program when we talked about work incentives. A PASS plan lets us save a decent amount of income for something we want to buy. These can be things like school tuition, a car, money to start up a business, or anything else that can help us get off benefits. Remember, this program is just for those of us who are on SSI. This program can be kind of tricky, so we should plan to meet with a provider to talk more about it.

**Example:** Wanda’s dream is to own a business. She has the goal of buying a van so that she can distribute flowers. Wanda uses the PASS program to set aside \$200 every time she gets paid so she can save up to buy a car, and whatever she saves will not affect her SSI.

The take-away message...

The main message to take away from this section is to be mindful of our money. If we save the \$1.50 that we would spend on a candy bar every day, and put it in a “rainy day” fund, we may be surprised at how much we could save in a year’s time.

**“A penny saved is a penny earned”**

– Benjamin Franklin

## THINGS TO KNOW:

### **Minimum balance:**

An amount of money we need to be able to open an account or keep an account.

**Bonds:** Money that we loan to the government for a period of time. Over time, our bonds will 'mature' which means that we will get more money back.

**Stocks:** If we own a stock, we own a piece of a company. That way, if the company makes money, we make money. On the downside, if the company loses money, we lose money.

**When we save money, we have the choice to be able to set it aside in many different ways.**

**Here are some of the ways we can save our money...**

- **Short-term investment:** When we invest money that we will need sooner, rather than later. We don't get as much interest, but we can take our money out whenever we need to.
- **Long-term investment:** When we invest money that we need for much later, like money to buy a house. These investments can make us more money because they usually pay higher interest over time.



**Bank Savings Accounts:** A type of short-term investment that we have through a bank. These have the lowest interest rates we can find, and they don't have a lot of restrictions when we want to take out our money. Also, they tend not have a minimum balance to get a savings account, which is a plus.



**Certificate of Deposit (CD):** These have the highest interest rates of any savings plans that banks have. The downside of a CD is that we can't take money out of our account any time we want to. If we do, we can be charged withdrawal fees, and those can be very high.



**Credit Unions:** These are like banks, but they are owned by people who use them, like you and me. They also tend to offer high interest on savings.



**Money Market Funds:** These are kind of like bank savings accounts but, we can usually get better returns. This means that we could get more money back by using them because our money is put into bonds or other investments!



**Mutual Funds:** A mutual fund pools together money from many people, and then they buy stocks and bonds with that money. If we give money to one of these kinds of funds, we are part of the bigger investment. This can be really helpful if the stocks and bonds make money!

Although these definitions and programs might be complicated, and we might not use them on a daily basis, they can be helpful if we are learning about saving money.



## How Much Could I Save?

Let's try a short exercise and think about how to save our money.

First, here's a quick example...

Cody buys a breakfast sandwich for **2 dollars every day** at breakfast.

At the **end of the week** Cody has spent **14 dollars** on his breakfast.

▪  $(\$2 \times 7\text{days/wk} = \$14)$

At the **end of the month** Cody has spent **60 dollars** on breakfast.

▪  $(\$14/\text{wk} \times 4.3 \text{ weeks})$  (there are about 4.3 weeks in a month)

If Cody spends 60 dollars every month, just think how much money he spends on breakfast sandwiches **every year....more than 720 dollars!**

*If Cody had packed a breakfast or had eaten breakfast before he left his house every morning, or even just some mornings, he would have more money left at the end of the month.*

Think about something that you buy on a regular basis. This could be gum at the check-out counter, coffee at a gas station or coffee shop, lottery tickets, food, etc.

Now, think about how much that item costs you **every day**.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_/day

Next, figure out how much that item costs you every week (7 days)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_/day  $\times 7 =$  \$

Now, take your total for every week (the number in the box above), and figure out how much that item costs you in one month (4.3 weeks) (there are on average 4.3 weeks in a month)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_/week  $\times 4.3 =$  \$

Were you at all surprised about how much you spent on this item in a month?

---

---

What if you saved this money instead of spending it? Do you think that this extra money could be helpful to have saved?

---

---

Is there anything else you spend your money on that you think you might be able to save instead?

---

---



## Skill 5: Avoiding the Credit Trap and Predatory Lending

### Avoiding the Credit Trap

**C**redit, or our ability to borrow money, can be very helpful to us. It helps us pay for our homes, cars, groceries, clothes, education, healthcare, prescriptions, etc., when we do not have the cash to do it. It helps us ‘ride the ups and downs’ of our lives.

Credit can be very easy to get, and might even be offered to us multiple times a day. Some of us have probably experienced this when we have been shopping and a store clerk tries to convince us to sign up for a store credit card. He or she usually offer them along with some catchy sounding deal, like...

*“...If you sign up today, you will get 20% off on your purchase!”*

This may sound like a deal, but having credit cards can be risky. It might be more tempting to buy things and charge them to our credit cards when we don’t have to pay it back right away. But, money on credit cards adds up quickly, and before we know it, we might be up to our necks in debt.

#### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Minimum payment:**

The smallest amount of money that we have to pay by the date our credit card or loan payment is due.

**Principal:** The actual amount of money we borrowed, not including the interest. For example, the original amount we borrowed on a car or a house.

**Interest rate:** The money that a bank, company, or person charges us for what we borrowed from them. This is usually a percentage of what we owe, per year (annual rate).

#### The credit trap

Many people fall easily into the **credit trap** and then they end up owing more than they can repay. This happens for two reasons:

1. They have to **keep charging items** they buy because they are in debt and don’t have cash to pay for them.
2. When it comes time to pay their credit card bill, they might **only be able to pay the ‘minimum payment’**.

The problem with this situation is that the amount they owe in interest will keep going up, and it will take longer and longer for them to be able pay the money back!

#### Here is an example of how easy it can be to fall into the credit trap...

Kelly and Michael just moved into an apartment together and they had their eyes on a bedroom set that would be perfect for their new home.

They see the price tag on the set, and realize that it’s much more than they can afford. The price for the furniture set is \$1,666.00. They talk it over and decide that they will try to save up their money over the next three months and come back.

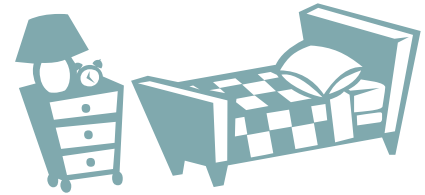
The store clerk overhears them talking about how much they like the bedroom set, so she goes over to talk to them. She tells Kelly and Michael that if they sign up for a store credit card, she would take 10% off and they would only have to pay \$45 a month!

This sounds like a great idea to Kelly and Michael. The store clerk also informs them that the interest on the set is only 21%. Kelly and Michael do the math and figure out that since they are getting 10% off of the set, because they are signing up for a credit card, they will only have to pay an interest rate of 11%. This is how they came to this conclusion:

$$21\% - 10\% = 11\%$$

Kelly and Michael think that the interest rate will only be 11% (because they got 10% off). Not a bad deal, right? They try to figure out how much money they will have to pay in total, when they take into account the 10% discount and the 21% interest rate.

<b>Step One:</b>	Original cost of the bedroom set =	\$1,666
<b>Step Two:</b>	Discount (10% x \$1,666) =	- \$ 166
<b>Step Three:</b>	Base price they will pay (\$1666-\$166) =	\$1,500
<b>Step Four:</b>	Interest (21% ) (\$1,500)=	+ \$ 315
<b>Step Five:</b>	Total price they will pay when everything is said and done (\$1500+\$315)=	\$1,815



Only \$1,815! Doesn't sound bad at all when the original price was \$1,600 and they will only pay \$45 dollars a month over the span of four years.

### But, are they right?

Unfortunately, they are **NOT** right. What the clerk did not tell them was that \$45 was the **minimum payment**, and if they only paid the minimum amount, it would take 51 months to pay off the bedroom set.

Because it will take them so long to pay it back, the interest will keep accumulating the longer they take. When the store clerk told them that they would only have to pay 21% interest, she meant that they would *have to pay that interest per year on the amount that they still owe*. The total amount they **will end up paying back is \$2,295** (and not \$1,815). So the total interest they will pay is \$795.

Let's see what really happened below:

<b>Step One:</b>	Total amount they will have to re-pay:	(\$45/month x 51 payments) =	\$2,295
<b>Step Two:</b>	Total interest they will end up paying	(\$2,295 - \$1,500) =	\$795



What Kelly and Michael thought would be a good deal, put them in a credit trap that seemed to never end. This is what happened:

- When Kelly and Michael made their first \$45 payment, most of it went to pay the total interest that they owed, and only a little went to pay for the actual price of the furniture set (or “principal”).
- Each month they made a minimum payment, most of the \$45 went to pay the interest and not the “principal.” The amount they still owed only decreased by a few dollars and the 21% interest rate that they paid per year was added onto what they still owed. By paying only the minimum payment, they barely made a dent on the total amount they owed. So they began to owe more and more interest.
- At the end of the 51 months (four years and three months), they ended up paying \$795 on top of what the furniture set (\$1,500).
- \$795 is approximately a 51% interest (This is NOT the good deal of 11% interest they thought they be paying!).

Kelly and Michael spent *over fifty percent more* than the furniture set was worth because the store clerk only told them part of the story.



### **What is the take-home message?**

Sometimes we may need to charge things to credit cards and won't be able to pay them off right away, but be careful.

Try to keep in mind that there is a difference between what we want and what we need. Make sure to read the fine-print, and ask the hard question that most store clerks do not want to answer: “How much will I end up paying when everything is said and done?”

Kelly and Michael found out the hard way that it would have been best for them to save money for a few months and pay for the bedroom in cash, and not get into this furniture credit trap!



### Tips to Avoid the Credit Trap

- Compare credit card companies to get the card with the lowest interest rate.
- Keep track of your interest rates because companies cannot raise them without warning.
- Pay your bills on time, and try to pay more than the minimum balance.
- Limit the number of credit cards you have.
- Make sure to read and understand the rules of each of your credit cards because rules and rates might all be different.
- Try not to charge more than 30-50% of the money your credit limit. Your credit score can go down and this usually means you are getting into more debt than you can handle.
- Credit card companies may try to get you to buy insurance and protection from identity theft. We usually don't need this. They are just trying to make a quick buck.
- Try to only charge what you can pay for.

## Avoiding Predatory Lending

If we think of the saying, “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is,” we are on the right track to understanding how to avoid predatory lending. Predatory lending is a fancy way to describe practices, such as lending money to a person in unfair ways, that essentially rips him/her off. Sometimes, another term for a predatory lender is a ‘loan shark.’

Most likely, at one time or another, we have all heard advertisements on the radio that say things like “call to get rid of your bad credit!” and “get rid of your loans, it’s quick and simple!” Here is where the quote “if it sounds too good to be true,” comes into play.

Saving up to pay off debt or to buy a car or a house takes time and patience. When we are offered a “quick and easy” way to get out of our debt, it can be very tempting. However, when things like this are offered, there is almost always a catch, so be sure to read the fine print.



### Predatory Practices

- Predatory lenders charge very high interest rates so you have to repay much more money than what you originally borrowed.
- Predatory lenders offer to loan you more than you can afford, and many times encourage you to keep borrowing more and more.
- They offer deals that seem too good to be true.
- They try to pressure you into making quick decisions and borrow as much money as possible by offering you “deals.”
- They ask you to sign forms that are difficult to understand.

Things predatory lenders might tell you...

**“No credit or bad credit? Car loans guaranteed”**

**“We can get you out of financial trouble!”**

**“Fast and easy cash”**

### Here are some examples of short-term predatory lending...

**Payday Loans:** This type of lending can also be called a ‘cash advance’. It is when our checking account information is traded to someone for a short-term loan. In order to do this, all we need is a form of ID, a checking account, and income from a job or from benefits (like SSI or SSDI). These usually have very high interest rates that are difficult, or impossible to pay off quickly.

**Overdraft “Protection”:** Banks offer these loans to customers with the promise that they will cover overdraft fees in case there isn’t a sufficient balance in our account to cover a check or debit. Sounds like a good idea, right? What they don’t tell us is that they may still charge us between 20 and 30 dollars each time we use the overdraft “protection.” Some banks even charge between 2 and 5 dollars every day until we repay the overdraft and have a positive balance.

**Car Title Loans:** This kind of loan is known as a small emergency loan. These loans can trap us in a cycle of debt that we may never be able to fully pay back. Car title loans have a triple-digit annual interest rate (more than 100%)! These predatory lenders require us to pay back the money we borrowed within one month, and the loan is made for much less than the car is actually worth. These loans can put us at a high risk of losing our cars, an essential tool we use to maintain our self-sufficiency.

**Tax Refund Application Loans (RALs):** These are short-term cash advances that we can get if we expect to get an income tax refund. They are offered at very high interest rates from 40% to 700%! They claim that they speed up the refund process, and get our money to us faster, but only by about a week or so. Some tax companies may offer this loan by saying “get your refund now!” This may sound like a great deal, especially if we need our refunds as quickly as possible, but we should be careful. We may be spending a lot more money in the end.

#### Our final tips on predatory lending:

Again, we know...**life happens.** We get sick, things break and need fixing, and sometimes we need to pay for things that we can’t afford. The important things to keep in mind when ‘life happens’ are:

- **If you have to borrow money, borrow it from people you know and trust;** and
- **Try not to borrow more money than you will be able to pay back.**

- **Also, if you see this truck...**

**Run!**



**C**redit is our ability to borrow money.

## Skill 6: Clearing and Building Credit

### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Credit History:** Detailed information about the history of what we have borrowed, what we have paid back, how much we have paid back, and if we have paid our debts or bills on time.

We have learned earlier in this workbook that, when we purchase something on credit, a lender expects us to pay back what we borrowed plus a certain interest rate. The same happens when we get a loan for a car or a house.

Lenders decide what interest rate they will charge based on the credit history and credit score of an individual (or couple, if a purchase is made by both individuals).

**Good Credit** means that our credit history is good, that we have handled our money well, we have paid our bills, and we have paid them on time.

Good credit is important to have because lenders, such as credit card companies, will feel more confident that we will pay our debts, and be more likely to lend us money. When we have good credit, companies feel that the risk they are taking in lending us money is lower, so they will charge lower interest rates. Typically, the better our credit is, the lower the interest rates we will be charged.

Having good credit is especially important when we have to make large investments, such as getting a car loan, a tuition loan, or a mortgage.

### Some ways to build good credit...

- Having a steady work record.
- Paying our bills on time, or as soon as we can.
- Opening a checking and savings account.
- Apply for small loans or credit cards that we know we will be able to pay back, paying more than the minimum, and paying them on time.
- Not using up more than 30%-40% of our total line of credit.

**Bad Credit**, on the other hand, might give us some problems. Bad credit can happen when we have had money troubles and may not have paid our bills on time, or at all. This can make lenders, such as banks or credit card companies, not want to lend us money, or charge much higher interest rates.

Bad credit can also affect other areas of our lives. For example, having bad credit can affect the cost of our car insurance. It can also prevent us from obtaining a lease for an apartment in a decent and safer neighborhood. Nowadays many companies also check the credit score of their applicants, and depending on the job, bad credit may disqualify an applicant.

## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Security deposit:** Amount of money that a company or individual asks to hold onto for letting us use something or providing us with a service. For example, an electric or phone company may ask for a deposit to turn on the utility, they will keep this deposit if we do not pay our bill; landlords may ask for security deposits to make sure we take care of their property.

**Creditors:** These are people or companies that lend us money or things. A bank is a type of creditor. Other types of creditors are: a landlord who leases an apartment to us; an electric company who provides us with heat.

## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Credit Report:** A report with information about who we are; our credit history, loans, and late payments.

**Bankruptcy:** Is when we declare that we are no longer able to repay our debts. Declaring bankruptcy often means that we will have to return assets we have purchased (such as cars or houses), and our credit score will be lower to a point where most companies will not allow us to borrow money for several years.



## DID YOU KNOW...

**That when we have bad credit we may face consequences like these:**

- Not getting a loan, or getting a loan with very high interest rates.
- Not qualifying for a credit card.
- Not getting the apartment we want because landlords are afraid we won't pay our rent on time, or at all.
- Having to pay a security deposit for electric or phone service.
- Not getting a job, because employers check credit records and might not want to hire someone who may not be responsible at work.
- Affecting our personal relationships with people we care about.
- A friend might not want to co-sign an apartment lease with us because they may fear that we won't pay our share of the rent on time.

### Things that can create bad credit...

- Paying our loans late, or not paying them at all.
- Paying other creditors late, or not at all.
- Paying our utilities late, such as our phone, gas, or electricity.
- Not paying our taxes, traffic tickets, child support, alimony, or other payments that we are required to pay by law.

### Clearing and rebuilding our credit

Unfortunately, sometimes we end up having bad credit because *'life happens'* and we fell into debt when:

- We, or someone we love, went into the hospital and had to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars a day in healthcare costs.
- Someone in our family caused damage to someone else's property which was not covered by insurance.
- We lost a job and had to borrow money to support ourselves and our family for several months.

Our first step in clearing and rebuilding our credit, is to get our credit report.

### Getting a credit report

To find out how good our own credit is, we can get something called a credit report. A credit report is a record that has information about who we are, our credit history, any loans that we have had, any bankruptcies, and any late payments we have made.

It is important to get our credit report once every year. We can request a free copy of our credit report from each of the three major credit companies in the U.S. Call or go online to see how to get your copy.





Phone : 1-877-322-8228

Website: [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)

We should not request our credit report too often. Once or twice a year will be enough, because every time someone asks for our report, our credit score may go down.

### Some other tips about credit reports

#### Watch out for the not-so-free “free credit reports”

Have you ever heard those catchy little jingles on the radio or TV that offer “free” credit reports? Well, they might let us get our credit report anytime we want, but it could cost a monthly fee of up to 20 dollars.



### Check for errors on your credit report

People make mistakes, and that includes people who keep track of our money. We need to make sure that what we have already paid is actually listed as paid for. We should check to make sure that no one took our credit card information or our identity and used it to buy things for themselves.

We are not responsible for debts that someone else created if they stole our credit card or wrote a bad check. But it is our responsibility to report our stolen identities to the three credit companies.



### Credit Companies

Equifax: 1-877-576-5734; [www.alerts.equifax.com](http://www.alerts.equifax.com)

Experian: 1-888-397-3742; [www.experian.com/fraud](http://www.experian.com/fraud)

TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289; [www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com)

### Credit Counseling Agencies (CCAs)

Depending on what we find when we get our yearly credit report, we may be able to clear up our credit and get it under control, but we might need some extra help. Credit counseling agencies, or CCAs, can help us make a spending plan that will allow us to repay our debt, and they may be able to lower the amount we owe, like interest and other fees. Keep in mind:

- **Credit histories do not just disappear:** When we don't pay a bill or we make late payments they are on our credit record for good. Credit does not erase and start over when a new year comes along. This is why it is very important to be aware of how we manage our money.
- **CCAs can not erase our credit history, but they can help us improve our credit score:** If we work on repairing and building our credit, our bad credit histories will be less and less important to lenders over time.



## Reviewing My Credit History



Try to think about one of the dreams or long-term goals you want to meet in your life. What is it? Choose one that was very important to you.

---

---

---

Now think about how much money you might need to meet that goal or make that dream come true. Do you have enough money now? How much do you think you might need? Will you have to borrow it? Who would be willing to lend you the money you would need?

---

---

---

**Homework:** Go online and request a free copy of your credit report. Review it, line by line, and if you need it, ask for help from someone who may have more experience reading credit reports.

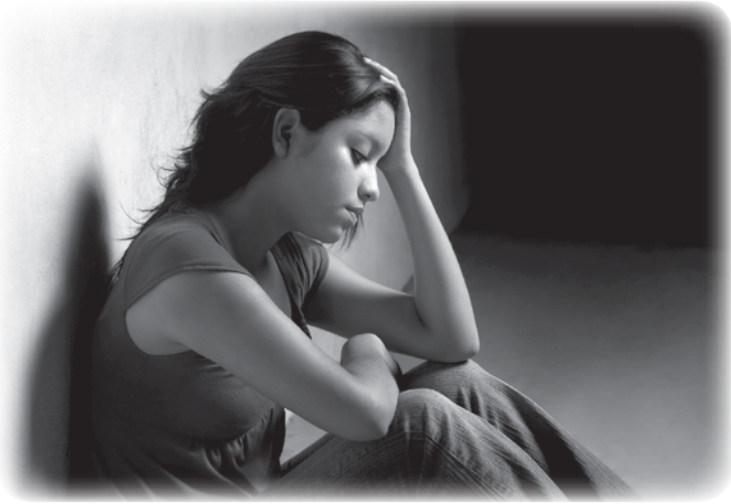
Now that you have your credit report, what is your credit history like? What are the strengths of your credit history? What are the weaknesses of your credit history? Do you have any large debts? What are your debts?

Strengths	Weaknesses

What actions can you take to clear and build your credit? (Remember, **what, who, by when**)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

## Skill 7: Dealing with Addictions and Financial Stressors



**M**any people are able to get their finances in order, pay their bills, pay off their loans, and keep good budgets. Just because some people are able to do something, it doesn't mean everyone can do it as easily. Some of us may need help. Family, friends, service providers, credit counselors, support groups, psychiatrists, and our religion can all help us, and there is nothing wrong with that.

Some of us have gotten into debt during psychiatric episodes, hospitalizations, or because we have dealt with an addiction. We may have done some uncontrolled spending during a manic episode, have large hospital

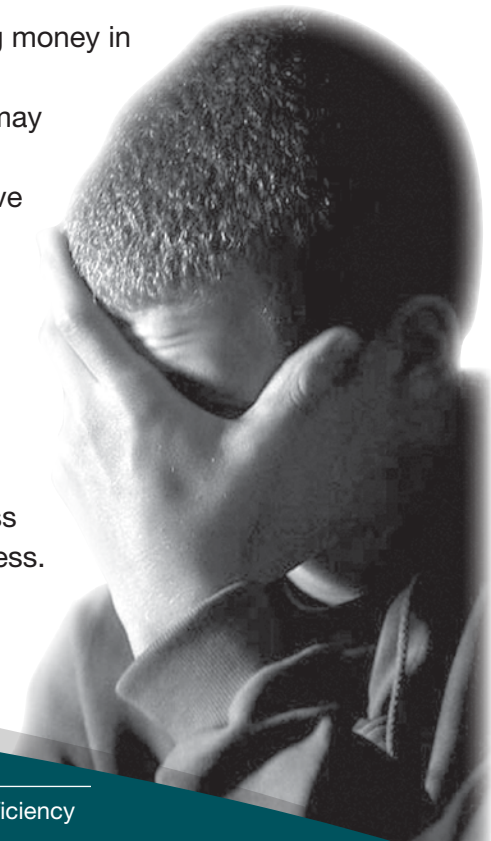
expenses as a result of acute episodes, or had car accidents due to our alcohol use. Professionals and peer support can be very helpful in these times, and can help reduce the chance that these events will happen again.

### Addictions Can Cause Financial Stress

Addictions can be very expensive. Those who struggle with addictions like gambling, shopping, food, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, sex, etc., can end up spending a lot more money than they want to because of their addictions.

**Below are 6 reasons why addiction can lead to financial stress.**

1. The activity costs money (buying drugs, buying cigarettes, paying for sex, losing money in gambling, etc.).
2. When our minds are affected by a substance or our behavior, decision-making may be impaired.
3. Addiction is a disease. When we are addicted, we may spend the money we have for the things we need (such as food or rent) on our addiction instead.
4. Addiction can cause guilt and shame. Feeling this way may make us embarrassed to ask for help, and it could delay the treatment we need.
5. The effects of addiction may have financial consequences in the future. We could lose our job, get into debt, have to spend our money on lawyers and legal fees, and create more mental or physical health problems that will require expensive treatment.
6. Treating addictions can sometimes be very expensive, and the treatment process may be long and require that we do not work, which can add to our financial stress.



## Estimating the Costs of My Habits



### Let's try something...

Think of a habit that you spend your money on regularly. This doesn't have to be an 'addiction' (such as drugs or alcohol), it can be things like coffee, candy, magazines, or lottery tickets. Whatever it is, write it down and think about how much it costs you every day.

### Here is an example...

#### Habit: Smoking cigarettes (1 pack a day)

Cost every day:	\$10 dollars
Cost every week:	\$70 dollars (10 x 7 days)
Cost every month:	\$300 dollars (10 x 30 days)
Cost every year:	\$3,600 dollars (300 x 12 months)
<b>Cost every 10 years:</b>	<b>\$36,000 dollars (3,600 x 10 years)</b>



### Now think of a habit that you spend your money on...

Habit: \_\_\_\_\_

Cost every day:	\$_____ dollars
Cost every month (30 days):	\$_____ dollars
Cost every year (12 mo/yr):	\$_____ dollars
Cost every 10 years:	\$_____ dollars

Did this amount surprise you at all?

---

---

---

Your spending may or may not be connected to an addiction. If you feel it is an addiction (such as taking drugs), we hope this exercise has not made you feel guilty, but instead more aware. We also want to tell you that addictions are hard to control, but recovery from them is possible. We can get better.

Recovering from an addiction may not be easy; it will probably be a lot of hard work. The good news is that we are not alone in the process. Twelve-step programs, peer support or professional care can help us deal with our addictions and financial stressors.

## Some things to keep in mind when getting help for an addiction...

### THINGS TO KNOW:

**Addiction:** A disease which can cause us to be physically and psychologically dependent on a substance or a behavior (drugs, alcohol, eating, sex, gambling, etc.).

- Look for a therapist to help you with your mental health diagnosis AND your addiction. Seeking help for one, without talking about the other, may not be very helpful.
- If you have two providers, one for your addiction and one for your mental health, make sure they work with each other to give you the important information you need and the help that you deserve.
- Take advantage of peer support groups. Talking to people who have had similar experiences as us may make us feel better and know that recovery is possible.
- If you attend AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) read the brochure “The AA Member-Medications and Other Drugs.” This can help you deal with your dual diagnosis.

Addictions are not easy to deal with, but do not give up. Here are some resources that might help...

- American Self-Help Group Clearinghouse, [www.selfhelpgroups.org](http://www.selfhelpgroups.org)
- Alcoholics Anonymous, [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)
- Debtors Anonymous, [www.debtorsanonymous.org](http://www.debtorsanonymous.org)
- Double trouble in Recovery, [www.doubletroubleinrecovery.org](http://www.doubletroubleinrecovery.org)
- Dual Recovery Anonymous, [www.draonline.org](http://www.draonline.org)
- Gamblers Anonymous, [www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)
- Narcotics Anonymous, [www.na.org](http://www.na.org)
- Nicotine Anonymous, [www.nicotine-anonymous.org](http://www.nicotine-anonymous.org)
- Overeaters Anonymous, [www.oa.org](http://www.oa.org)
- Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org)
- Sex Addicts Anonymous, [www.saa-recovery.org](http://www.saa-recovery.org)
- Sexaholics Anonymous, [www.sa.org](http://www.sa.org)
- GROW, which offers 12-step support to people with a wide variety of substance addictions, process addictions, and mental health/emotional issues, [www.growinamerica.org](http://www.growinamerica.org)
- Smoking cessation resources in many states include a free QuitLine. A gateway to many of these and other services is through [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)

### Help for Family Members:

Sometimes family members of people dealing with addiction benefit from attending family focused twelve-step programs, such as:

- Al-Anon and Alateen, [www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org)
- Nar-Anon, [www.nar-anon.org](http://www.nar-anon.org)
- Gam-Anon, [www.gam-anon.org](http://www.gam-anon.org)
- S-Anon, for sexual addictions, [www.saa-recovery.org](http://www.saa-recovery.org)



## Skill 8: Building Our Social Capital to Achieve Self-Sufficiency

In lesson four, we reviewed the importance of having different types of capital:

- human capital (skills).
- material capital (resources).
- social capital (connections).

In this section, we will take another look at why social capital is such an important asset for us to become more economically self-sufficient. Sometimes we have many of the skills we need to become more self-sufficient, but we may not have the social connections that can really help us get the resources and supports we need to be able to achieve our goals and aspirations.

### What is social capital?

Social capital refers to the relationships and connections we have that can help us become more economically self-sufficient.

#### ***Some examples of social capital are:***

- Having large and diverse social networks.
- Having people who can give us a reference or an emergency loan.
- Having peers who can share their self-sufficiency experiences.
- Knowing “people who know people.”
- Knowing people who we may not be close to, but who can help us (the friend of a close friend, the client of a good client, the friend of a close neighbor, etc.).

Having social capital is important because the more diverse our relationships are, the more useful connections we will have, and the more resources we will have access to. Knowing a greater number of people (and from different circles) can help us hear about jobs, access work incentives, get good deals on houses or cars, get good job references, and learn about new business or economic opportunities. This is why developing connections outside of the mental health system is key. While our providers and peers can be very supportive, the more diverse people we know, the more connections we will have. Social connections are not only important to recovery, they are essential in helping us achieve our economic goals. Our social connections are as important as our trade, skills, or tools are.



## THINGS TO KNOW:

**Social network:** All the people we know, including relatives, friends, providers, and acquaintances. It also includes all the social connections among the people we know.

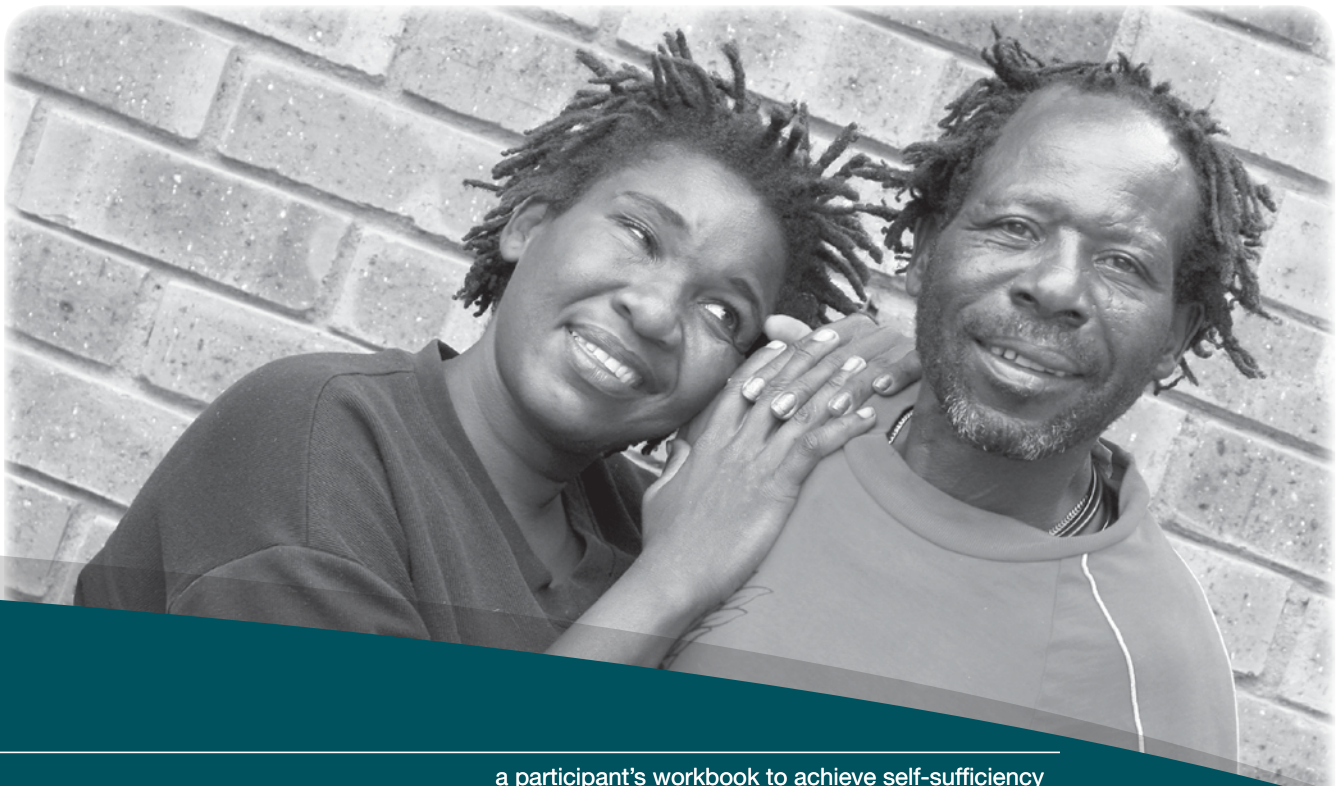
**Peer support network:** Individuals with whom we share a personal experience who can provide us with information, emotional support, and practical support.



**“It is not what you know but who you know that matters”**

### DID YOU KNOW...

- **That most people find their jobs through the people they know, and not through the newspaper or internet advertisements?**
- **That our social connections also affect our economic opportunities?** For example, who we know can affect whether or not we get a promotion or a better-paying job.
- **That many times it’s not only having close relationships with people that matters, but also knowing people that we are not close to?** For example, knowing the friends of a close friend; the colleagues of a former supervisor; the clients of a client. If we only know a few people our networks are much more limited. If we know a lot of people, even if we don’t know them well, we will have many more potential connections.





## Do You Know What Your Social Capital Is?



Now that we know the importance of social capital, it is time for us to take a look at our own social networks. Maybe some of us have never thought about this. So we are going to break it down in several questions.

### Skills

Who do you know that can help you develop the **skills** you need (such as training, certificates, degrees, etc.)?

The skills you need	Who can help you get these skills? <i>List the name/s of people or organizations who can help</i>
Computer skills	
A trade (plumbing, welding, carpentry, etc.)	
A certification (Certified Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioner-CPRP, office assistance, etc.)	
College education (an associate's degree, bachelor's, master's, etc.)	
"Soft" skills (communication, team-work, etc.)	
Budgeting skills	
Knowing how to prepare and file taxes	
Negotiating with credit card companies	
Other human capital you need _____	



## Resources

Who do you know that can help you get the **resources** you need (such as earned income, housing, transportation, credit, etc.)?

The resources you need to...	Who can help you get these resources? <i>List the name/s of people or organizations who can help</i>
Get a paid job (such as a reference, a job lead, a good-word, etc.)	
Start a business (such as counseling for small business owners, small business loans, etc.)	
Buy a computer	
Buy tools for your job or business	
Benefits advisement and access to work incentives	
Open an Individual Development Account to save for school, business or buy a home	
File taxes and access tax credits (such as the Earned Income Tax Credit)	
Safe and decent housing	
Car or other transportation	
Credit (such as access credit, repair your credit, build your credit, etc.)	
Emergency (“rainy day” ) loans	
Loans for larger purchases (examples: car, computer, school tuition)	
Other material capital you need _____	

## Support

So far we have listed the people who can help us get the human capital (skills) and the material capital (things) we need to achieve our economic goals.

As you already know, the process of becoming self-sufficient is not an easy one. It takes a lot of courage and hard work. At times we may feel discouraged, afraid, or depressed. At times we will want to celebrate and share our successes, or simply wonder if we are making the right decisions. During these times our social networks can give us the support we need.

So let’s ask ourselves, who do we have in our life to support us through the doubts, fears, and joys we will face on the path towards self-sufficiency?

Who do you have in your life to help you **make decisions about money**? (For example, whether or not to take a job offer, buy a car, or choose a bank, etc.)

---

---

---

Who do you have in your life to **talk to** when you start feeling that achieving self-sufficiency is too hard, and you feel discouraged, have doubts, and want to give up?

---

---

---

Who do you have in your life that will be there to **celebrate your successes** (For example, when you get the job you want or the promotion you worked so hard for; when you buy the car you have been saving for; or when you graduate from school)?

---

---

---

### Mapping your social capital for self-sufficiency

Now it is time to get a better sense of what social capital we have and start thinking about how you can build it up.

Use the worksheet **“Mapping My Social Capital”** to write down all the names of all the people or organizations that you can think of. The map is divided in four types of social connections:

- Those who can help develop the human capital (skills) you need.
- Those who can help get the material capital (economic and material resources) you need.
- Those who can give emotional support.
- Those who can offer more social connections (people who know people).

#### Steps in writing your social capital map:

1. Write down your name in the center of the sheet.
2. Write down the names of the people you listed on each of the questions about skills (a), resources (b), and support (c). Write down the names of the people who you know well closer to your name (closer to the center of the circle). Write down the names of people who you don't know well further away from the center of the circle.
3. Now think about who can help you meet new people and write their names at the bottom (where it says “new social connections”). These are the people or organizations that can help you meet new people and make your social network larger and more diverse.

## Mapping My Social Capital



### Skills:

People or organizations that can help us get more education, certificates, money skills, etc.

### Support:

People or communities that can provide emotional and social; support on our journey towards self-sufficiency

Your  
Name

### Resources:

People or organizations that can help us increase our earnings, access work incentives, build our credit, get loans, etc.

### Connections:

People who can connect us with others  
“People who know people”





## Strategies and tips to build our social capital

Now that you know what social capital we have, let us think about what we can do to increase it.

Here are some suggestions that may be helpful:

- **Write, write and write:** Write down all of the names of the people you can think of. Next, put this list down, and come back to it a few hours later. When you come back to it, write some more names and put it down again. Come back to it tomorrow, and write down some more names. Put the list down again and come back to it the next day. Do this for several days. You will be surprised how many names you can come up with after a few days of writing and thinking.
- **“Weak” ties are important:** Earlier we talked about how important it is to have people we know, even if we don’t know them well. Sometimes we find out about good opportunities not through the people we are close to, but through the people we barely know (our “weak” ties).
- **Put yourself out there and take chances:** Tell people you know about your goals and objectives (that you’re looking for a job, or a better-paying job, that you’re looking for a car, that you want to rebuild your credit, etc.). If the opportunity seems appropriate, ask the people you know if they have any thoughts, or know anyone who could help you.
- **Invest in your relationships:** Make an effort to spend time with friends or relatives and strengthen your relationships. This is not only good for our emotional health but it may also pay off economically. Develop as much trust as possible with those close to you.
- **Don’t burn your bridges:** We never know when we may need the support, even if it is from someone we don’t get along with. Be true to yourself, but always try your best to leave relationships on good terms.
- **Volunteer:** For many of us, getting a well-paying job is part of our self-sufficiency goals, but volunteering can be one of the best investments we can make. If we have been out of the employment market for a while, or if we are entering a new career, volunteering can be a good investment of our time. Being engaged in a meaningful activity is not only good for our mental health recovery, it can pay good economic returns. Through volunteering we may learn about new job opportunities, increase our chances of getting a good reference or recommendation, or even learn about economic supports or opportunities to help us achieve our self-sufficiency goals.
- **Share what you have to give:** It seems to be a universal law that “what goes around comes around.” (The good and the bad.) If we put forth our best energy and are generous with our time and with what we have, the universe may return our energy and generosity. We hear stories all the time of people who volunteered at their church or temple and received invaluable help when they needed it, or people who have touched the hearts of others and are given cars, computers or other assets as a reward for their hard work.
- **Use new technologies:** Are you on Facebook? or Linked-In? These are online networking sites that can help you get more connected socially and professionally, expand and broaden your social networks, and open up your economic opportunities. Do you know how to access them on the internet? If you don’t, ask someone in your network who currently uses these websites.

## Building My Social Capital



Let's take the time to brainstorm some of the actions you could take to expand your social networks and build your social capital. Volunteering? Attending church functions? Networking on Facebook or Linked-In?

What will you do?	Who will be involved? Who will help you?	By when?
Example: Create a Facebook account	My friend Peter (he uses it a lot!)	Next Sunday after church



I am healthier and stronger now that I am back working. My ability to focus is much better. I have a social life. I HAVE GOALS, HOPES, AND DREAMS! I handle my own finances with minimal assistance. People show me respect. I spiritually feel better. I have been able to acquire different work skills – an experience I have never had before. I enjoy more things in life – better music, foods, and entertainment. I'm inspired to keep moving ahead in life. Looking back I see how my life has changed”

– Christopher Glaser





## Personal Stories of Recovery and Economic Self-Sufficiency

James Kennedy



I BELIEVE MY ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY began when I dropped out of high school in the 12th grade. Soon after, I signed up for the military and I was sent to Vietnam.

Prior to Vietnam, I was a recreational drug user. I was in Vietnam for one year before being sent to Germany for 18 months. While in Vietnam, I was awarded a Bronze Star for heroic efforts. However, at the time I did not understand, nor did I appreciate the honor and significance of such an award. I engaged in more drug use while enlisted in the military, and I developed a chronic heroin habit. After completing my military service in 1973, it was hard for me to find a job because I was a veteran. At the time there were a lot of negative connotations associated with the Vietnam War. We were thought of as “baby killers”. I engaged in more drug use and criminal activity. I went to jail from 1975-1982. When I was released from jail, I couldn’t find a job with my criminal record.

A friend told me to go to the Brooklyn Veterans Administration to get a job. I was able to find a job working at the Brooklyn VA part-time in the kitchen from 1983 to 1985. In 1985, I was granted a request to be transferred to the Post Office. I was

***After losing my job with the Post Office, I ended up couch surfing at friends’ places.***

still using drugs and drinking and I started smoking crack. While on my lunch break one day, I got caught using drugs. The Post Office sent me to a rehabilitation program in Upstate New York. I was thrown out of the program for fighting. After Vietnam I was always angry. I started using drugs again on my first day home from the program. As part of the conditions for remaining employed at the Post Office, after my drug offense, I was given random drug tests upon my return from rehab. I failed my urine test and lost my job in 1990.

After losing my job with the Post Office, I ended up couch surfing at friends’ places. I went to Borden’s Avenue for Veterans. They gave me a room in 1994. In order to stay at Borden’s they required you to attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings and take random drug tests. I got clean while I was at Borden’s and I remained there for sixteen months. While at Borden’s I was diagnosed. With this diagnosis, I finally understood why I used drugs. I knew something was wrong with me. I knew I was angry, sad, and depressed. I just couldn’t pinpoint it, so I self-medicated my depression and feelings of sadness. Due to my drug use, my relationship with my daughter’s mother suffered. Once I got clean I wanted to be a constant figure in my daughter’s life. I didn’t know my father growing up, so I

wanted to be there for my daughter. I was finally at a place in my life where I was able to look at my past and know I didn't want to go back there.

I went to Services for the UnderServed (SUS) in 1995. They helped me get an apartment at St. Marks/Classon. SUS suggested I get involved with therapy and I started taking medication for my illness. I went to counseling two days a week for ten years. Now that I was living on my own, I needed to learn to budget my Veterans benefits. SUS provided the foundation for my recovery by providing me with stable housing. At this point, I was starting to like myself. I never really liked myself before. I wanted the world to see what I had to offer.

SUS took me to a 60-day program in Pennsylvania to address trauma from the Vietnam War. The program didn't want to keep me after learning that I had been in prison. They suggested a program in California. I didn't want to leave my daughter

to go to a program half way across the country. I came back to New York City and continued outpatient therapy.

SUS provided me with a furnished studio apartment. While I was grateful for the help SUS provided to get me on my feet, I

knew I wanted to be financially independent. I eventually replaced the furniture SUS bought with items I purchased myself with my own money. I was managing my Vets benefits and working. I had a plan to buy a house when I came to SUS. I knew I wanted to get my daughter out of the projects. After living in an SUS studio apartment, they offered me a scattered-site apartment but I said no thank you. I couldn't take an apartment to live by myself while my daughter was still living in the projects. I stayed in the studio for a little bit longer, then I purchased my own brand new home and my daughter and her mother moved into the house.

I am proud to say that I have owned my own home for the past eleven years. I am presently happily married, of course, to my daughter's mother. Now we live in the same neighborhood where I used to use and sell drugs as a kid. My wife and I sent my daughter to college.

Through my church group "Wounded Healers". I help vets and anyone else with any type of dependency issues. I still attend peer support meetings. I also always carry my identification card from the Veterans shelter to remind me of where I came from.

***I am proud to say that I have owned my own home for the past eleven years.***

## Personal Stories of Recovery and Economic Self-Sufficiency

Tracy Sault

SHORTLY AFTER MY HUSBAND LEFT me with two young daughters to care for, I became ill with clinical depression. It was not diagnosed until I had a major breakdown in 2003. We had been living in poverty up until then, depending on food stamps, welfare and other subsidies to get by. Times were tough. At one point cash was so tight we had to use washcloths as toilet paper while living in a one bedroom apartment. After getting my driver's license and taking a short course in computers at BOCES, I began looking for work in the private sector, eventually landing in a job at a food service software company. Through Better Housing I was able to purchase a house even though I was still on food stamps. However, I hated my job because I was still living in poverty. I was one of the working poor. I also wanted more for my daughters.

After witnessing something really wrong at work, I came to realize that furthering my education was the only way I could both make a difference and increase my marketability. I turned to VESID for financial help with books and tuition. It was not a pleasant experience because they did not support my dream of helping the underserved Deaf population, and insisted I would declare a major. Just to

***I hated my job because I was still living in poverty. I was one of the working poor. I also wanted more for my daughters.***

appease VESID I chose human services as a major. However, things turned out just as they were supposed to. While taking an introductory course to human services course I realized that the field was exactly where I belonged. My

focus shifted towards helping people with disabilities of varying degrees.

Financial self sufficiency came very slowly for me. Once I graduated from community college I went to work at an independent living center. The job was part time and I had to supplement it with food stamps and Family Health Plus for myself and Child Health Plus for my then teenage daughters. My oldest daughter required multiple reconstructive ear surgeries between the ages of three and sixteen, and a heart surgery as a young child, all paid for my Medicaid. Today she is a physically healthy young woman with her whole life ahead of her. Without the medical insurance she received there is no telling where she might be.

I also received help doing my taxes and I qualified for earned income tax credit. The weatherization program made sure my home was well insulated so I could save money on my electric and heating bill. All these programs were wonderful but I wanted to be financially self-sufficient so I could be an example to my family. Jobs that I knew I could do required a bachelor's degree. I realized I had to return to school.

When I returned to school to get my bachelor's degree I had to take a few student loans out, but I also received some scholarships. I received counseling services on campus after a breakdown prior to starting school again. After two and a half years of hard work in direct care I was promoted to my current position. I earn more per hour than I ever dreamed I would, and I love the position. I still owe money on student loans and a PLUS loan for my oldest daughter, but I have also applied to graduate school to further my education and have further increased my earning power.

I believe in the power of tithing, that is, to give at least 10% to my local church.

In the lean years I often didn't have two nickels to rub together and once borrowed gas money from my pastor to get to a job lead. When money was tight my church helped me with a car repair, they helped pay for a new furnace for my new home

***I'm still getting used to the idea of having disposable income, but I also am saving for retirement through an employer-sponsored 401K. I can take care of myself better by buying healthier foods, taking advantage of a gym membership and being at peace, knowing that because the fuel bill is paid, and that my heat won't be turned off for lack of payment.***

and allowed me to take part in the local food pantry giveaways. It was a hand up not a hand out. Often times it was at the midnight hour when God showed up, but he always did; in the form of a \$100 anonymous gift for Christmas, a gift basket at my doorstep and even a new car.

My depression is treatable with medication and continued therapy. My finances are such that I am paying for my own health insurance including co-pays. The quality of my life is much improved. I can attend a concert or a play because I can afford to. I'm still getting used to the idea of having disposable income, but I also am saving for retirement through an employer-sponsored 401K. I can take care of myself better by buying healthier foods, taking advantage of a gym membership and being at peace, knowing that because the fuel bill is paid, and that my heat won't be turned off for lack of payment.

Thanks be to God! Today I am financially self-sufficient. I still have the car loan, mortgage and student loans to pay, but they are within my budget to do so. What I would say to anyone struggling to become financially self-sufficient is to strive for excellence and never give up. Take advantage of any free programs offered by local agencies. They offer subjects on financial matters, how to cut costs in your food budget, and how to budget your money for the weatherization of your home and many other programs. And never give up!



“Never, ever accept ‘No’ for an answer. Don’t let other people say you can’t do it, because you can. You are not alone and you are worth it. Having a mental illness does not exclude us from having a fulfilling life, and being self-sufficient!”

–Maura (Marcie) Kelley

This workbook is not intended to replace individualized benefits advisement or financial education. All persons with disabilities considering going back to work, transitioning out of public benefits, or making any financial decisions, are encouraged to seek specialized advice from experts in benefits and financial matters.

WE Can Work and WE Can Save Campaign

New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS)

