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PROFILE: ECONOMIC AWARENESS COUNCIL

Reality TV is called a lot of different things, but 'educational' is not usually one of them. One look at *Get Real: Financial Decisions in the Real World*, an audio-visual program produced by the [Economic Awareness Council](#) (EAC) in Hinsdale, Illinois, will change that.

Get Real is designed to motivate and inspire 13- to 18-year-olds to develop the financial management skills they will need for life after high school. The program consists of video clips of real young people talking about real-life situations, followed by how-to lessons based on actual personal finance scenarios. "That's what gets students interested and focused," says EAC executive director Tracy Frizzell: "Hands-on examples of how to pay bills, balance check books, budget and track expenses." *Get Real* has been successfully used throughout the Chicago area at public high schools, libraries and non-profit organizations, and the EAC has been awarded a grant from CFP Board to expand the program's reach.

One of the stars of *Get Real* is a young woman who tells the story of how she did well in high school, went to college, then got into credit card debt after her car was vandalized and she couldn't afford the repairs. "She didn't have any emergency savings so turned to credit cards instead," Frizzell explains. "She eventually managed to work herself out of debt, and now she's an advocate for doing monthly budgets and paying for purchases with checks or debit cards. She still has a credit card, but she doesn't overuse it."

Frizzell says these kind of practical tips, delivered by young people themselves, have the biggest impact on students. Each video clip is followed by lessons that cover everything from setting short- and long-term financial goals to developing a savings plan to creating a positive credit record. Sessions are conducted using simple language, to accommodate a wide range of reading levels, and the interviews feature kids from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

"We emphasize the importance of earning at a young age," Frizzell says, "and how to increase earning potential through education. We explain how even saving as little as a few dollars a day can add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars in retirement. Lots of kids have never heard that before, and it really changes their perspective. They realize that saving and investing isn't just for the wealthy; it's for everyone."

Demand for *Get Real* workshops is so high the EAC can't keep up. The grant from CFP Board will be used to conduct train-the-trainer sessions to expand the EAC's instructional capacity. Teachers experienced in working with youth deliver the most effective financial education, Frizzell says, so the EAC will train youth service professionals in the basics of financial planning. Support will come through email Q&A sessions with volunteers from the financial services community. Students will be recruited through partnerships with the non-profit organizations that already serve them.

"The aim of the *Get Real* program is to prepare kids to handle money when it becomes available to them," says Frizzell. "Many of them are just starting to earn, through summer jobs, for example. We try to help them avoid just burning through it. We point out how financial management can make a positive difference in their lives." And unlike so many reality TV shows, *Get Real* has a happy ending. Whatever happened to the young woman who dug herself out of credit card debt? She finished college and recently got her first job — as a teacher.

For more information about EAC's programs and opportunities for CFP® professionals to contribute, visit www.econcouncil.org or send a request to volunteer@econcouncil.org.

[Read more](#) about projects receiving funding through CFP Board's 2007 Financial Planning Grants program.