

FOCUS e-newsletter: Headliner  
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**“I never thought I was a saver, but I can [do it]”**  
By Sheila Parocai, Economic Development Specialist (Retired)

This exclamation came not from me, but from one of the students I helped. A dedicated group of community volunteers gathered at the Prince William County Juvenile Detention Center in Manassas, Virginia last August. They met to host a Financial Reality Fair which would provide a unique opportunity for students housed at the facility, a hands-on chance to simulate some of the financial challenges of being a self-sufficient adult.

Through the simulation, the student participants had a chance to select a career and, based on the starting salary, complete a household budget for their monthly expenses. Some of the expenses the students had to budget for included the basics such as housing, utilities, transportation, clothing, and food. Additional expenditures such as entertainment and travel were also factored in. Throughout the fair, there were temptations for additional spending challenging the students to balance their wants and needs and remain solvent. After the students navigated to several booths representing these key financial realities adults face, they sat down with a financial counselor to review their performance.



Above: Then EDS Sheila Parocai (right) with another volunteer lend their support during the Financial Reality Fair. Below: Set-up for the “financial life” stations.



Last year was the second year that the facility hosted the event. It was truly a collaborative one. Volunteers from two credit unions - Delta Payne of HEW FCU and Gregory Gutierrez of Apple FCU - provided on-site guidance to the teens and training to the volunteers. HEW FCU is a low-income designated credit union in Alexandria, VA; Apple FCU is located in nearby Fairfax, VA. The National Credit Union



Foundation provided the educational materials. I, as the coordinator, was among the volunteers who devoted their personal time to support such a worthwhile cause.

We provided financial education and counseling to 32 teens who ranged in age from 13 to 17. Although constrained by strict time limits and the required security at the facility, the event was very successful and appreciated by the detainees and facility staff. The comments they shared after the experience reflect how well the message of savings was received:

- *I loved the savings at the end of the month.*
- *I am going save more than I did before this event.*
- *I've always saved some money but this showed me how to save more.*
- *My budget was fun to set up; I juggled some of the things I needed to get what I wanted...*
- *I need to look for a better job...I want to make more money.*
- *I see why education/training is important to make more money.*

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