

Collector: Web Link 2 (Web Link)
Started: Friday, November 12, 2021 9:53:58 AM
Last Modified: Friday, November 12, 2021 10:57:43 AM
Time Spent: 01:03:45
IP Address: 72.184.89.28

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Q1

Applicant Information

Name	Tarrel Davis, Executive Director
Company	Mulberry Community Service Center
Address	211 NW 1st Ave
Address 2	211 NW 1st Ave
City/Town	Mulberry
State/Province	FL
ZIP/Postal Code	33860
Email Address	mulberrycsc@gmail.com
Phone Number	8634251523

Q2

Name and E-mail address of Primary Contact for Grant Implementation (type "same" if it is the person listed above.)

same

Q3

Yes

Is your organization a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or government-based agency that provides adult basic education/literacy, ESOL and/or family literacy instruction in Florida?

Q4

Nonprofit Community-Based Organization

Organization Type

Q5

Organization's total operating budget (school districts and community colleges may use the adult education program budget.)

300,000.00

Q6

No

Does your organization charge a fee for instructional services?

Q7

Number of adult ESOL and/or family literacy students provided instruction during fiscal year 2020-21.

693

Q8

Number of volunteers (if none, enter "0")

55

Q9

Number of paid instructors (if none, enter "0")

3

Q10

Number of students to be provided with instructional services under this grant.

40

Q11

No

Are you a 2020-21 recipient of this grant?

Q12

County or counties served by this grant.

Hardee, Highlands and Polk



Florida Financial Literacy Initiative

A statewide Initiative managed by the Florida Literacy Coalition and supported by Wells Fargo

2021 APPLICATION

Part I: Narrative

1) Project Abstract/Summary

The Mulberry Community Service Center (MCSC) provides a comprehensive financial stability program that encompasses free financial education, coaching, savings incentives, credit restoration, job credentialing scholarships, income tax preparation, and a \$2,000 Saving for Assets matching program. All services are free of charge and available to residents of Polk, Hardee, and Highlands counties.

2) History and Accomplishments

MCSC Mission Statement: To create financially stable households through financial education.

MCSC has served the Mulberry, Florida community since 1979 as a support service provider to the local community with food bank services, a thrift store, free school uniforms, and school supplies to youth (K-8). Our experience working with the community revealed that the continued need for support was caused in part by a lack of household budgeting skills and knowledge of how to manage finances. The MCSC Board of Directors acted to provide financial literacy services to those we serve. This program has grown to such an extent that MCSC created the Personal Finance Center of Polk County (PFCPC), supported by the United Way of Central Florida, to administer the financial stability program. MCSC, through PFCPC, now provides the premiere financial literacy program in our tri-county area. MCSC has also been awarded a 2022 Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) grant through IRS.

During the three previous fiscal years (July 1, 2018, through June 30, 2021) a total of 941 individuals attended PFCPC financial classes; 555 graduated; and 174 saved at least \$300 in a savings account and collected the \$150 financial savings incentive. The total saved by the participants was \$77,018. Adding the total incentive payments of \$26,100 yielded a total savings increase of \$103,118.

During this same period, 21 savers actively participated in the \$2,000 Saving for Asset Matching program, and four have successfully saved at least \$2,000 to earn the \$2,000 match. The assets purchased were two vehicles for reliable transportation, tuition for a nursing

degree, and a food trailer for a new business. The remaining 17 savers continue to work closely with the Financial Coaches to stay on track for their goals. While they are saving, we work with them to improve their credit scores.

Also, during the three previous fiscal years, we provided ten \$300 job credentialing scholarships to eligible participants. Of these, five were for Home Health Aid, three Phlebotomy certifications, and one to become a self-employed Notary. We also worked with two other individuals to complete their resumes resulting in their first employment.

Through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, we prepared 3,680 free tax returns for tax years 2018, 2019, and 2020. We encourage taxpayers to directly deposit their refunds to a savings account. For tax year 2020, ten percent of all filers saved their refunds, resulting in \$216,019 deposited to savings accounts. This coming tax season, Spring 2022, we will operate eight locations with a goal of 2,000 tax returns and an increased savings rate.

Furthermore, in the previous fiscal year Mulberry Community Service Center provided total basic needs assistance of \$41,082 to 737 households. This assistance was in the form of \$19,182 in utility bill assistance to 96 recipients; \$7,105 in rent/mortgage assistance to 12 households; \$11,815 in emergency food to 518 individuals; \$223 in prescription assistance to three recipients; and 108 students in kindergarten through 8th grades received \$2,757 in uniforms and school supplies. In addition, MCSC also operates for mobile food pantries per month in two locations.

In addition to our normal operations, during CY 2020, Polk Unites tasked our agency with the administration of \$500,000 provided by the CARES Act for families who had suffered a financial loss directly related to COVID. We determined eligibility and provided \$2,000 to each of 250 households.

3) Needs Statement

Fifty percent of the labor force in Polk County is between 25 and 64 years old. According to the Florida Department of Health 2020 Polk County Community Health Assessment, of Polk County residents over 25 years old, 13.6 percent have less than a high school education, 29 percent have a high school education; 20 percent have some college or vocational school but no degree or certification, totaling 62.6 percent.

The same Assessment states the Polk County 2013-2017 mean household income was \$12,000 less than State of Florida. For the same years, 12.9 percent of Polk County families lived below poverty level and an additional 34 percent fell below the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) threshold. So, almost half of Polk County households (49 percent) are struggling to afford basic needs.

In general, PFCPC's clients have little understanding of finances, no savings accounts, and credit scores below average when they enroll for the program. Many live from paycheck to paycheck and seek knowledge to break the cycle. PFCPC is able to provide that knowledge, as well as follow-up coaching and other services to help our clients attain their goals.

4) Objectives

- PFCPC will schedule at least one series of Financial Stability classes each month.
- Participants will establish and maintain a monthly budget.
- Participants will establish and maintain an emergency savings fund.
- Participants will set financial goals for their families and save to meet those goals.
- Participants will improve their credit scores to a ranking of “Fair” or better (credit score of 640 to 739)

5) Project Description

Curriculum: MCSC utilizes certain modules from the FDIC Money Smart Financial Education Program.

Program Components: The pillars of our Program are free financial classes; financial incentives to encourage systematic saving and personal development; coaching in the areas of personal finance and credit repair; and free tax preparation.

The PFCPC classes are a series of four sessions that focus on budgeting, debt reduction, saving and investing, and maintaining healthy credit reports. We offer at least one series of classes per month. The classes are usually an hour, once a week, offered live and through ZOOM. Participants who are unable to attend the scheduled classes can access the material 24/7 through the FDIC MoneySmart computer-based training; however, it is preferable for participants to attend our coach-led classes to develop a relationship with the coach.

During the course, the participant will establish goals and actively plan their family’s financial future using the exercises in the classes. Goal Number One is for each participant to realize the need for, and establish, an emergency savings account. Beyond that, the participant sets their own financial goals. The financial coaches are available during class and after completion of the course to work with the participants to achieve their goals through debt reduction, saving, improving credit scores, and increasing earning potential through employment or job credentialing.

Because the first goal for all should be an emergency savings fund, we offer a \$150 financial incentive to anyone who saves \$300 and resides in the tri-county area. To be eligible, the participant must complete all four classes and provide savings account statements to show the goal has been reached.

Once the \$300 goal is attained, we encourage the participant to continue saving through the \$2,000 Savings for Asset Match. The participant sets a goal of either a first-time home, reliable transportation, education, or starting a small business. They meet with their coach quarterly and provide savings account statements to document the savings gains. When the participant is ready to purchase their asset, and has satisfied all requirements of the program, we match their savings up to \$2,000 and provide the funds directly to the vender (for example, the dealership, college, etc.)

We also coach individuals in credit restoration. We meet with them to review their credit reports and obtain a starting credit score. We help them write letters to credit bureaus or reporting entities to resolve discrepancies or disputes. We coach them on how to take care of their finances to increase their credit scores, and work with them to monitor those scores.

We also provide free income tax return preparation through the VITA Program sponsored by the United Way of Central Florida. We operate multiple tax preparation sites from the last week of January through the first week of April each year to complete current tax returns; however, the PFCPC at MCSC prepares prior year returns for filers throughout the year.

Target Population: Free financial education and coaching is available to all residents of Polk, Highlands, and Hardee counties. Group classes are hosted throughout the year in various locations within the three identified counties and through ZOOM.

6) Collaboration and Partnerships

Mulberry Community Service Center collaborates with United Way of Center Florida to provide financial literacy workshops throughout the tri-county area and with IRS to provide free income tax preparation through the VITA program. We also partner with churches, schools, and community service agencies throughout our service area.

7) Recognition

Mulberry Community Service Center will recognize Wells Fargo on all marketing materials, our websites (*FinancePolk.com* and *MulberryCSC.com*), and social media sites. Special recognition of award will be presented to the Board of Directors and posted on the websites and social media sites.

8) Timeline

- 30 days from award: Recognition: PM is presentation to the Board of Directors
- 60 to 90 days from award: PM -- Class schedules (dates, locations, and times) will be determined, and posted on our website, *FinancePolk.com*, and social media accounts.
- 6-month point: PM recipients will be actively participating in Financial Stability classes.
- 12-month point: We project 400 recipients will have completed a four-week financial stability course. PM: Recipients received financial education and have taken steps to increase savings and credit scores.

9) Evaluation

Active participation is measured by class sign-in sheets, completion of required course work, documentation of savings goals attained, and credit score improvements. We maintain an electronic database to record and track participation and attainment of goals.

Part II: Budget

2020-2021 BUDGET

REVENUE	Amount
Florida Financial Literacy Initiative Grant	
United Way of Central Florida	102,000
TOTAL REVENUE	102,000

PROJECT EXPENSES	Grant Amount
Salaries and Benefits	
Financial Specialist #1 (4 hours @ \$10 per hour x 25 weeks)	1,000
Financial Specialist #2 (4 hours @ \$10 per hour x 25 weeks)	1,000
Financial Specialist #3 (4 hours @ \$10 per hour x 25 weeks)	1,000
Total Salaries and Benefits	3,000
Other Expenses	
Printing Supplies	600
Mileage	400
Meeting/Classroom	1,000
Total Non-Staff Expenses	
TOTAL EXPENSES	2,000

IN-KIND RESOURCES (Optional)	
Description	Amount
Space in kin	9,000
TOTAL IN-KIND RESOURCES	9,000