



National Federation of
Community Development
Credit Unions

Disability Outreach Project 2004 Annual Report



Asset Accumulation and Tax Policy Project (AATPP)



March 2005



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Disability Outreach Project

Summary of Year One Activities and Results

I. Introduction

In October 2003 the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions (the Federation) and five partner organizations received funding from the Department of Education to extend services to the disability community under the Asset Accumulation Tax Policy Project (AATPP). This grant will enable the Federation to test effective ways to extend financial services to people with disabilities through community development credit unions (CDCUs). The grant included partial funding for research, education, training and pilot activities in two sites: Bethex Federal Credit Union (Bronx, NY) and Communities United Credit Union (Wichita, KS).

The Federation established the **Disabilities Outreach Project** to coordinate activities related to this grant. The following report discusses the Federation's activities and results during the first year of this project, including the significant achievements of the two pilot credit unions.

II. Federation Activities

Three departments carried out the Federation's project activities.

- The **Research Unit** conducted a survey of CDCUs to estimate the number of people with disabilities currently served by CDCUs, and the prevalence of special products or services being delivered to this community.
- The **Education and Training Department** began to develop special training modules for the CDCU Institute™ and the *Each One, Teach Many* financial literacy instructor training program.
- The **Americorps*VISTA** has received approval from the Corporation for National Service to place up to 15 VISTA volunteers in CDCUs to work on special programs for people with disabilities.

In addition, the Federation expanded our network of institutions working on disability issues through individual meetings and public presentations. The following sections provide summaries of the key activities over the past year.

A. Research

In April of 2004 the Federation conducted a survey of its credit unions to understand the scale and scope of activities the credit unions were already undertaking and products and services they offered for with people with disabilities.

1. Analysis of Survey Results

Of the 43 CDCUs that responded to the survey, only 5 indicated that they track or keep data on members with disabilities, though 61% were able to estimate either a number or percentage of members living with disabilities (median of 3% and an average of 8% of membership). Binghamton Housing Authority FCU and Jemez Valley CU indicated by far the highest percentages of members living with disabilities; 33% and 21%, respectively.

Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated that their members received at least one of the following benefits associated with disability:

- social security disability benefits (70% indicated members with this benefit);
- special veterans benefits (49% indicated this benefit); or,
- supplemental security income (70% indicated this benefit).

Social security disability benefits were received by a median of 15 and an average of 96 CDCU members, while supplemental security income was received by a median of 16 and an average of 88 members. A median of 5 and an average of 26 members received special veterans benefits. Below is a table showing institutions with the greatest number of members benefiting from one or more of the three programs.

CDCU	Members Receiving Disability Benefits
O.U.R. FCU	2,430
Southern Oregon FCU	1,067
Union Settlement FCU	840
Jemez Valley CU	400
Community Choice FCU	310
New Horizons Community FCU	231
Denver CDCU	220
Brookland FCU	150
Binghamton Hsg Authority FCU	133

Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they had a relationship with at least one of the following:

- an independent living center (35%);
- a retirement community (19%);
- a home for the elderly (37%); or,
- another type of facility for the aged or those with disabilities (19%).

Seventy percent of respondents indicated that they have at least one type of special product or service tailored to persons with disabilities. The table below indicates the availability of different types of products or services tailored to persons with disabilities.

Special CDCU Products or Services Provided by CDCUs	Percentage of CDCUs Providing
Wheel chair accessibility	67%
Remote or home banking	16%
Special loans for specific needs arising from impairment	12%
Other	7%
Special marketing, education or outreach to people with disabilities	5%

Vermont Development CU makes all four of the above products and services available to members with disabilities.

2. Next Steps

Based on the survey responses, we can estimate the percentages of CDCU members with disability benefits. In 2005 the Research Unit will focus on a narrower sample of CDCUs most involved in serving members with disabilities for more detailed studies. The sample will be based on some combination of institutions that track members with disabilities; have the highest estimated number of members with disabilities; have the highest rates of usage of disability benefit programs; or, have a high awareness of this constituency as expressed in a relationship with a relevant outside facility or in offering specialized products or services.

The design and administration of this more detailed survey will be done in cooperation with our project partners and within the project research guidelines.

Access for All

Queen of Peace Arlington FCU recently moved into an office in the newly constructed Ministry Center building of Our Lady Queen of Peace Church. The first priority for the credit union was to provide equal access for all. According to CEO Dan Morrissey, “we wanted every member to know that that *they* are our most important asset. “

Members that use wheelchairs can now conduct business with ease from the low-level counter designed to allow them to roll directly up to the teller window for personal and confidential one-on-one service. A bonus to this new feature is that the next generation of credit union members – toddlers accompanying parents and grandparents – can now feel ‘all grown up’ when making their savings deposits from a counter that is just their size.

A handicapped-accessible restroom is available right next to the credit union and the building has an elevator. According to Morrissey, the church agreed to provide the credit union this prime location to enhance their visibility to members and potential members.

“The credit union truly enjoys a great working relationship with the church.”

B. Education and Training

In 2004 the Federation’s Education and Training Department began to develop special modules related to people with disabilities for its two major programs: the CDCU Institute™ and the *Each One, Teach Many* financial literacy program.

1. CDCU Institute™

In 1999, the Federation established the CDCU Institute™ to deliver an advanced business management curriculum for board members and staff of credit unions serving low-income and minority communities. The Institute offers CDCU officials the professional tools they need to strengthen the financial base of their credit unions, and strategies to improve their service and outreach to low-income and underserved communities.

In October 2004, the Institute introduced the first course specifically designed to address financial challenges facing people with disabilities. The Federation's Director of Education and Training coordinated the presentation with Toby Davies of Southern New Hampshire University, Megan O'Neil from the World Institute on Disabilities (WID), and Angie Franklin, Manager of Communities United Credit Union, the pilot credit union in Wichita, Kansas. The course was titled, *Disability Issues and Community Development Credit Unions*, and represented the first step in the development of a new disability module for the Institute.

2. *Each One, Teach Many*

In 2002 the Federation launched *Each One, Teach Many*, a program designed to train CDCU staff and volunteers as financial literacy instructors. The core curriculum for the financial literacy courses was developed through a collaboration between the Federation and the National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE). Within the first two years the project has trained more than 400 instructors who have, in turn, trained more than 7,000 residents of low-income communities in 26 states, and demand for training continues to grow.

Since 2002 the Federation has sponsored "Financial Literacy Day in New York" to recognize the program's achievements and highlight the challenges that lay ahead. In October 2004, AATPP partner Steve Mendelsohn made a presentation at the 3rd Annual Financial Literacy Day to explain the project and public policy issues surrounding asset accumulation from the perspective of people living with disabilities.

In 2004 the Federation applied for funding to expand the curriculum of this program to incorporate a special module for people with disabilities. Mizuho USA Foundation approved this request, and awarded a \$10,000 grant to the Federation to design and implement a disability module for our financial literacy program.

The Federation started working on this module in 2004. The Federation's Director of Education and Training met with FDIC to learn how their *Money Smart* program was being adapted for people with disabilities. The Federation also shared copies of the *Each One, Teach Many* curriculum and facilitator's guide with some of our AATPP partners to begin the development of a module that will address the special concerns of people with disabilities.

In March, the Federation will conduct an *Each One Teach Many* training session at the Seattle Speech, Hearing and Deafness Center for managers, staff and members of the Northwest Baptist FCU and residents of the Center.

In 2005, the main activities of the Education and Training Department will be to:

- Coordinate WID trainings at the Federation’s Annual Meeting and CDCU Institute™
- Develop and test the disability module for the *Each One, Teach Many* program
- Conduct *Each One, Teach Many* Train-the-Trainer sessions for CDCUs and other financial institutions and disability organizations that provide financial services to people with disabilities
- Coordinate WID training sessions for CDCUs, to be conducted by Megan O’Neil and Kathy Martinez in the following regions:

Location	Month
New York, New York	April
Portland, Oregon	May
San Francisco, California	June
Washington, DC	July

C. VISTA

The Federation’s AmeriCorps*VISTA program annually provides CDCUs with 30 to 40 VISTA corps members to work full-time on marketing, outreach, resource mobilization and product development, such as Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) and micro lending. In 2004 the Federation’s VISTA program presented the AATPP to VISTA Members at the Federation’s annual meeting. The purpose was to provide a briefing on the program and solicit their help with research and resource information regarding their CDCUs and surrounding community organizations.

The Federation also received approval from the Corporation for National Service (CNS) to recruit and place 15 VISTA volunteers to work specifically on disability programs in CDCUs. Starting in 2005, these volunteers will be responsible for developing programs for the credit unions and identifying linkages for the CDCUS with the disability community. The Federation VISTA program manager plans to provide specialized training for these volunteers at the Federation’s annual meeting in San Francisco in June.

D. Federation Networking

1. CDCU Outreach

In addition to the research activities discussed above and the pilot activities discussed further below, the Federation had a number of discussions with CDCUs about their current efforts to serve people with disabilities. These included:

- **Vermont Development Credit Union**, which manages the Adaptive Equipment Revolving Loan Fund, made possible through the Vermont Assistive Technology Project.
- **Missoula FCU**, which partners with the Montana Home Choice Coalition to finance homes for persons with disabilities that earn low- and moderate incomes.
- **Alternatives FCU**, which works with the Abilities Fund to support microenterprise for persons with disabilities (see box).
- **Westshore Community FCU**, which sponsored a VITA site (free tax service), for its members and also voluntarily traveled to a local center for the blind and prepared 30 tax returns for sight impaired individuals at no charge.

Good Business *CENTS*

Alternatives Federal Credit Union of Ithaca, New York was recently awarded a grant from the **Abilities Fund – Access to Capital Program**, which will allow the credit union to extend its small business program to incorporate working with members with disabilities. Currently, Alternatives runs a micro-enterprise training and technical assistance program called *Business CENTS – Community Enterprise Networking Training Services*.

CENTS offers an 11-week business planning class called “Getting Down to Business”, monthly seminars, and one-on-one business consulting. The *Business Cents* program will now be enhanced to integrate the needs of small business owners with disabilities.

The grant comes with a “loan loss reserve” for the credit union’s micro lending program and will support technical assistance for persons with disabilities to start their own business.

Alternatives, a 45 million dollar credit union with 7,000 members, will open this program to clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Center in Tompkins and surrounding counties. Staff training for this program will begin in May 2005.

2. Disability Networks

In 2004 the Federation sought to expand its network of partner institutions that work with disability issues, and publicize its new initiative among CDCUs and existing partners. These include:

- ***Concepts of Independence***: The Federation hosted a roundtable discussion with *Concepts of Independence*, a not-for-profit, consumer-managed corporation that enables people with disabilities to live independently through its consumer-directed personal assistance program. The discussion focused on current issues, financial access barriers, and best communication methods when working with persons with disabilities. Pilot site *Communities United* joined us for this discussion by telephone.
- ***World Institute on Disabilities (WID)***: The Federation continues to work closely with *WID*, and collaborated on an article about how a faith-based CDCU was recently remodeled to become barrier-free. In January the Federation hosted a

planning meeting with Kathy Martinez from WID to discuss future collaborations and funding possibilities. The meeting resulted in a decision to open WID technical assistance training to our entire CDCU membership, with at least 10 additional trainings projected for 2005.

- ***Abilities Fund Capital Access Program:*** As noted above, Alternatives FCU is working with the Abilities Fund to promote microenterprise for people with disabilities. The Federation has begun direct discussions with the Abilities Fund to explore potential for a wider collaboration.
- ***Hearing, Speech and Deafness Center:*** The Chair of the Federation's Disability Committee received a request from the Hearing Speech Disability Center to offer loans to their members to pay for hearing aids. As a result of this request, the Federation is exploring the possibility of assisting our credit unions in providing low cost loans for adaptive technology such as hearing aids, wheelchairs, brail machines, and others.

3. Federation Presentations

The Federation's Executive Director also made the following presentations during the past year to raise the awareness of the Disability Outreach Project

- Financial Institutions Roundtable, (Southern New Hampshire University, March 2004), "Expanding Access to Financial Services for People with Disabilities"
- Tax Facts Campaign (April 15, Washington, D.C.)
- National Conference of the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (October 2004, Lexington, KY)
- University of Iowa Center for Disabilities and Development (December 2004, Chicago), delivered the keynote address entitled "Economic Self-Determination: Credit Unions as a Model" at the conference on "Immersion Learning About Change for Prosperity."

III. Pilot Sites

A. Communities United Credit Union

Communities United Credit Union was selected as one of the two pilot sites because they have a large population of persons with disabilities within their field of membership (FOM), considerable experience working with disability organizations, and a strong commitment to expanding their outreach in this area.

For example, the credit union is planning to expand their charter to include select employee groups (SEGs) of disability service centers and specific living communities. They already work with the Chrisom Life Skills Center that helps young people with disabilities (aged 16-21 years) to learn life skills. Some of these young people currently

volunteer at the credit union. The credit union is also working with the Cerebral Palsy Center, which houses a state-of-the-art computer lab for people with disabilities.

These efforts have made the credit union a resource center for members with disabilities, but the management and board wish to go further. The credit union's VISTA volunteer will be working to develop new products, services and marketing strategies.

In 2004 the staff and management of Communities United received 'Disability 101' training from WID that included:

- guidelines for language & etiquette,
- contents of intake questionnaires,
- appropriate ways to ask persons about their disability
- how to determine and provide reasonable accommodations
- particular challenges in asset building
- marketing and outreach to the disability community.

The credit union also invited several organizations to be included in this training, and the following local partners participated

- Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation (CPRF)
- Independent Living Resource Center IILRC)
- Kansas Assistive Technology Cooperative (KATCO)
- Episcopal Social Services (ESS)
- Sedgwick Co. Developmental Disability Organization (SDDO)
- Community Housing Services (CHS)
- Social Security Administration (SSA)
- Internal Revenue Service (IRS)
- Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Communities United Credit (CUCU)
- Cessna Employees Credit Union (CECU)

Breaking Barriers

A new member of **Communities United Credit Union**, "Jim", has Cerebral Palsy and is studying for his Master's degree at Wichita State University.

Jim is compassionate about working with people with disabilities and is no stranger to hard work. In addition to his schoolwork he worked on voter registration in the last election. He was willing to travel 2 miles by wheelchair just to join the credit union. As a courtesy, the credit union manager personally brought the application to his home.

She also set up an account at the school bookstore; whenever Jim purchases supplies, the bill is faxed to the credit union and paid directly out of his account.

After checking out his government benefits to make sure their were no obstacles, the credit union set up a \$1,000 Line-of -Credit and now pays his tuition directly to the school.

The credit union is encouraging Jim to purchase a talking keyboard so he can better communicate

From this workshop, several collaborative efforts have taken place:

- For the first time CPRF and ILRC will host two VITA tax sites specifically for people with disabilities.
- Wichita was selected as one of twelve cities by the IRS to kick off a national campaign called, Tax Facts to promote tax benefits available to people with disabilities and their families, and Communities United will host a VITA Tax Site (free tax service) as part of this campaign.
- SSA and IRS have partnered to find ways to inform SSA beneficiaries of possible tax benefits available to them.
- A representative from the SSA after attending the workshop has become a very active volunteer at CUCU, currently serving on the loan committee.
- 3 members were referred to CPRF for benefits assistance
- 2 members were referred to KATCO for technology assistance.
- 7 prospective members referred to the credit union by other organizations

From April – December 2004 a total of 61 loans were given to people with disabilities for a combined total of \$93,958. More than half of these transactions (31) were classified as emergency payday-alternative loans (PALs) that help individuals avoid high-cost or predatory lenders.

The credit union also received a grant of \$40,504 from the Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Fund, a portion of which will be used to hire a consultant to develop a marketing plan that targets individuals living with disabilities.

B. Bethex Federal Credit Union

Bethex FCU was selected as a pilot site because they have a considerable number of people with disabilities within their field of membership and also have experience working with disability organizations such as the Independent Living Center and the Cerebral Palsy Center. Bethex has recently started to work with the local Albert Einstein Methadone Center and will provide direct deposit services for 22 of their members' social security checks. Bethex is also working with Jasmine Court, a housing complex for patients with AIDS and mental disabilities.

Building Bridges

"Marvin" from the Cerebral Palsy Center is helping **Bethex Federal Credit Union** to market its products and services to local business owners. He uses his wheelchair to go up and down the street near the credit union to collect names, addresses, and phone numbers from local business.

Once Marvin has collected this information, he plans to conduct a marketing campaign to make people aware of the many business services offered by Bethex, such as checking accounts, loans, and deposit and credit services.

Marvin would like to make the initial telephone contacts himself to solicit the business owners, but this might not be possible because of the difficulty some people have in understanding his speech. If he cannot make the calls himself, the credit union will ask the Cerebral Palsy Center for another person who can speak a bit more clearly and can team up with him on this project.

The manager of Bethex has made job training a top priority. Bethex has begun to provide on-the-job-training for individuals from the local cerebral palsy center, to perform tasks such as mailing statements to members. At the end of the training period, Bethex will provide the Cerebral Palsy Center with an assessment of job skills for that individual. Then Center will then try to find jobs based on skill level.

Bethex formed a new relationship with Citizens Advisory Bureau to offer direct deposit to people living in assisted living centers. Bethex automatically deducts the rent from the direct deposit and sends the payment to the Advisory Bureau, who then makes sure that their rent is paid on time to avoid the eviction of the resident. The people who live in these centers come from diverse backgrounds and many are vulnerable to predatory lenders and high cost check-cashers. Bethex also provides free tax preparation for individuals and their families living in the Assisted Living Center. The Bethex manager estimates that at least two out of ten people have some type of disability. The credit union recently received a Home Counseling Grant from HUD to provide similar assistance to people living in homes and apartments.