

Pay Down Debt: Using the Web for Extension Education

This paper is a summary of a presented poster at the 2004 Western Family Economics Association Annual Conference. The website described will be piloted beginning in January 2005.

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National consumer debt continues to reach an all-time high each year. Personal Bankruptcies also continue to grow. At the same time, personal savings continue at historic lows. As a pre-requisite to developing savings, many people need to repay debt to free up money for setting aside in savings.

In Nebraska very few consumers have voluntarily come to the local extension office to use PowerPay, a widely used extension computer program developed by Cooperative Extension in Utah. With the increase use of web-based curriculum in extension, the Financial Stability Work Group for the Building Strong Families extension action team at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln received financial from the extension director to develop a web-based educational program, Pay Down Debt. With the goal of helping consumers develop debt repayment plans, the website includes educational information, examples of worksheets to be used in developing a debt repayment plan, and web links to various sites offering information related to debt repayment. If the user chooses and pays a modest quarterly fee, access is given to an "ask an expert" button, the financial worksheets become interactive, and weekly motivational email messages are received from University of Nebraska Extension. Those who pay the fee also will receive expanded educational information and additional websites. Evaluation data will be collected from those who participate in the fee-based part of the website. Once they have their debt under control, they will be encouraged to check out the "grow savings" section of the website. This component will be developed in 2005.

Local extension offices are marketing the program and obtaining community support, including financial resources to offer partial scholarships for those households who are not able to pay the fee. Support has already been received from the credit union league and bankers' associations in the state.

Endnotes

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