

Non-profit and Point West Credit Union team up to teach kids about finances

By Charity Prater

When you went from being a teen to an adult – and began receiving all those credit-card applications in the mail – did you understand what signing those applications might do to your credit or how it might result in a bill you could never afford to pay? Perhaps you came to understand it after it was too late. Did you feel frustrated because no one told you what those actions might do to yourself and your credit?

Well, that's why the non-profit Banking on Our Future (BOF) and Point West Credit Union have teamed up to teach kids 8 to 18 years old the basics of the finances. Volunteers – including Mike Fletcher, who has a background in finance through Point West Credit Union – go into classrooms (including ones at Martin Luther King Jr.

what a credit card is and how to manage checking and savings accounts.

"We actually let kids write out a check with real checks from the Credit Union," says Fletcher. "It's amazing how little kids of even high-school age know about finance." David Bell, BOF program manager, agrees, saying, "kids in elementary school see their parents using ATMs and pulling out money and they think that these ATM machines are simply handing out free cash." Banking on Our Future's program has been taught nationally for years. It became available in Portland three years ago. During the past few years, its local volunteer base has grown significantly, making it possible for the non-profit to educate 189 kids in less than one year.

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Elementary School, Madison High School, Fernwood Middle School and Grant High School) and teach kids in a hands-on way everything from how to write a check to

"Most of the volunteers have backgrounds in teaching or finance," says Bell. "We have volunteers from all kinds of backgrounds, including banking, mortgage, small business



Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School students (left to right) Jakeshia Seamster, Jasmine Johnson and James Jones listen as volunteer Mike Fletcher explains the finer points of finances. The school offers classes from pre-kindergarten through the eighth grade. – Photo by Charity Prater

and real estate. If they are uncomfortable with being in a classroom, they can be reassured through our training classes and

in actuality we sell nothing. Parents, teachers and even kids who want to learn through this program can spread the word by speak-

observing other volunteers teach.”

The volunteers commit to what they feel comfortable doing. Some teach regularly while others teach only one class a year. Many volunteers, including Fletcher, teach in the classroom one hour per week for a total of four sessions with the same group of students.

Besides needing a strong volunteer base, the organization has encountered some difficulties getting into Portland Public Schools.

“Sometimes it’s difficult to get into the schools since the staff, including the principal, is really busy,” says Bell. “Many times they think we are there to sell a product, but

ing to people within their family and school.”

“The teachers love the program,” says Fletcher. “We come in with a set curriculum and teach them about a topic that they are already curious about.”

Banking on Our Future gains no financial reward from the program. As of this year, it has educated more than 5,000 kids in the high-need areas of Portland.

“It’s really scary to think that more young adults file bankruptcy than graduate with a four-year degree,” says Fletcher. “We want the children of our future to know how to handle their money and be successful as adults.”

For more information on becoming a volunteer or to find out how to get the Banking on Our Future program into a school, contact David Bell at david.bell@operationhope.org or visit www.bankingonourfuture.org. *