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## **Creating Economic Possibilities for All Louisvillians** <sup>[1]</sup>



To kick off April's National Financial Literacy Month, Louisville Metro Community Services and Bank On Louisville presented our second annual Financial Fitness Day on March 31, open to the entire community. All in attendance were invited to meet one-on-one with a certified financial planner at no charge and learn strategies and best practices that can make a difference in their financial lives. Like our community, the crowd was diverse and cut across all demographics. Among those in attendance, were many Louisvillians with disabilities. We here at Louisville Metro Government recognize the importance of reaching this often-overlooked population and empowering them to take a more hands-on approach to their financial health and future – especially at a time when nearly one in three live in poverty and the poverty rate for individuals with disabilities is almost two times higher than the rate for people without disabilities. We are working tirelessly to make change happen by transforming the lives of all people in our community, including persons with disabilities. Looking back on Financial Fitness Day, what impressed me the most was the enthusiastic participation from our partners, all for the common good. Apprisen, Legal Aid Society, ElderServe, Family Health Centers, a local social security-disability law firm and several banks and credit unions were among 15 service providers and community agencies joining together to provide multiple aspects of financial capacity building all in one location. The vast majority of these partners have been at our community's "financial empowerment table" since the inception of Bank On Louisville (BOL) in 2009. What began as a community response to assist the 76,500 unbanked and underbanked households in Louisville, has now grown into a collaborative comprised of more than 19 banks and credit unions, as well as more than 100 community organizations and faith-based and government agencies. Together we have opened numerous doors, helping more than 16,000 individuals gain access to bank accounts, but the strength of BOL's collaborative has had a much greater impact. BOL has served as an engine driving a community-wide system where partners take a look at our residents/clients holistically to see what assistance and resources we can offer to help them along the path to financial stability, no matter what door they enter through. Integrating financial capability services into existing programs and building the capacity of case workers are natural extensions of this cultural shift, and our community has made great strides in both of these arenas. One such example is the Community Financial Empowerment Certification and Training (CFECT) program, developed by Louisville Metro Government and partners, to further expand and professionalize the capacity of staff across agencies dedicated to financial empowerment work. Bank On Louisville's success, along with our community's success at convening stakeholders, has also opened doors for our participation with national organizations including: In 2012, Louisville became the twelfth member of the Cities for Financial Empowerment (CFE) Coalition; In 2013, Louisville Metro Community Services was invited to become a "Lead Local Organization" with the CFED's Assets & Opportunity Network; In early 2014, NDI's LEAD Center sought out Louisville as one of two cities to serve as a key partner to advance financial capability, related to employment goals, and improve positive financial behavior for individuals with disabilities, particularly those who use the workforce system. In May 2014, Community Services, Bank On

Louisville and the LEAD Center hosted an Economic Advancement Assembly which included numerous attendees, representing 30 organizations from the disability, employment, financial services, workforce and asset development communities. Attendees saw the critical need to continue working together – leading to the creation of the Workforce Development/ Financial Empowerment (WD/FE) Integration Collaborative. The focus of the WD/FE is not only on the integration of financial empowerment services and opportunities within the workforce development system, but also on increasing awareness across the community on making all services and resources more inclusive. As part of that effort, the WD/FE is currently crafting and beginning to execute a workplan that includes: Expanding provider training and developing a train-the-trainer series; Creating an online Financial Capability Toolkit for Workforce Development; and Expanding the existing Financial Capability Resource Directory and identifying gaps in services. Increasing our community's awareness of the need for greater access and coordination of services will help open many new doors, leading to a brighter future for all people in the Louisville area. We look forward to sharing lessons learned and helpful resources developed by the WD/FE as our work continues, as well as working with LEAD Center to ensure each and every American with disabilities has the opportunity to build pathways to a brighter economic future. --- Tina Lentz is the executive administrator of the Advocacy and Empowerment division and has served Louisville Metro Government's Department of Community Services since 1998. Ms. Lentz has extensive experience in creating and leading financial empowerment initiatives in an effort to transform the social service delivery system in order to increase opportunities for financial advancement for families at risk. These initiatives include: the Community Financial Empowerment Certification program; the Family Economic Success Network; Bank On Louisville; and the Workforce Development/Financial Empowerment Collaborative. In addition, she has represented Louisville as a member of the Cities for Financial Empowerment (CFE) coalition since 2012.

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