

A new unit and program on the differences between credit unions and banks, as well as Financial Literacy in the classroom provides solution to the growing need to educate today's youth on making informed financial choices that will last a lifetime.

Guelph, May 9th, 2013. The Ontario Co-operative Association (On Co-op) is addressing the significant concern of “financial illiteracy” among youth. It has created a new resource and program for teachers to engage their students with relevant, contemporary and instantly accessible information, which promotes budgeting/saving and credit unions. The new unit, an extension of the exciting and well-received *All 4 Each* co-operative curriculum “brand,” fits perfectly with the recent and substantial attention being given to teaching financial literacy in both elementary and secondary schools across Canada.

“The importance being placed on areas such as sustainability, fair trade, community, volunteerism and social justice are concepts that are really resonating with today’s youth,” says Kerr Smith, Education Manager with On Co-op. “Students want more meaning, satisfaction and balance in both their personal and professional lives.” Smith, previously an elementary school teacher, developed both the *All 4 Each* High School Curriculum – a resource on the co-operative model of business enterprise - as well as the new follow-up unit on Financial Literacy.

As one business curriculum supervisor noted, by being able to marry financial literacy and a concern for social justice, we have “lightning in a bottle” for educators. The *All 4 Each* Financial Literacy unit is a resource that combines all these elements; a marriage of the economical with the social welfare of our communities, which is so grossly lacking in the privatized world of corporate banking.

Smith adds that On Co-op, as an education association, is in a unique position to act as the bridge between credit unions and their local schools. By partnering with credit unions across the province and training their staff on how to present this program, On Co-op’s role as facilitators provides a win-win for teachers, students and credit unions. Notes Smith, “Due to the great success we’ve had with the *All 4 Each* High School Curriculum, we can help open the doors for credit unions to access and engage our leaders of tomorrow in their respective communities in a way they’ve never been able to before.”

The time is ripe for credit unions, as financial co-operatives, to sing their praises. The 2008 global economic crisis – the worst financial disaster since the Great Depression of the 1930s, is a perfect example. Among the key factors that caused the collapse were the unethical and greedy business practices of some of the largest financial institutions - privately-owned corporations which were deemed “too big to fail” by the American Government - which despite their corrupt ways, resulted in them being bailed out with taxpayer dollars.

Often overlooked is the fact that credit unions – banks that are actually owned and controlled by the very people (members) who use them, were not to blame for the cause of the crisis, and fared far better in the wake of the collapse. Type “Credit Unions” and “2008” into any search engine, and what you will find is a floodgate of articles singing the praises of the democratic, sustainable and co-operative structure of Credit Unions.

To learn more about this resource, or how you and your organization can partner with On Co-op on this exciting initiative, visit:

http://www.ontario.coop/programs_services/lifelong_coop_learning/all_4_each_coops_in_the_classroom or contact Kerr at ksmith@ontario.coop.

The Ontario Co-operative Association believes that co-operatives build a better world. We are the trade association that develops, engages, educates and advocates for Ontario's 1,300 co-operative businesses. Our Co-op is an information and resources network with a mission to **lead, cultivate and connect co-operatives**.

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BACKGROUND

"Financial Literacy" is a buzz word being tossed around a lot these days. A quick Google search provides the following definition: "the possession of knowledge and understanding of financial matters...the absence of (which) can lead to making poor financial decisions that can have adverse effects on the financial health of an individual." (<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/financial-literacy.asp>)

A recent 2012 survey where Canadian teens were asked about their financial expectations for the future is both telling and unsettling. On average, the youth polled believed that after five years of employment, they would be earning \$90,000 and that the probable peak salary they would attain in their career would be \$179,000!

Given that many other polls conducted point to the same problem of exaggerated expectations and money mismanagement among youth, it is paramount that we take the time to provide them - and future generations - with a reality check. And as we struggle, like most communities across the globe, to recover from the economic crisis, what greater gift can we offer our children than to make more informed and educated decisions about their future?

The *All 4 Each* Financial Literacy unit is attempting to do just that. It contains two complimentary booklets, the first of which tackles budgeting, savings and financial literacy, and the second is a set of interactive lessons which teach about the differences between banks and credit unions.

"Sadly, but not surprisingly, most of us never learned about credit unions because their mandate is to first serve the needs of its members and local community; a very different philosophy than the profit-first mindset of the banks which we have become so accustomed to," notes Smith. "With this unit, we are in a position to let teachers and students in on a best-kept secret," notes Smith. "The goal of the unit is *not* to knock or condemn any other financial institution...that is simply not the co-operative way. From what I've experienced in speaking with youths and teachers, the barrier has been the lack of basic education about what a credit union is."

Once they've been let in on this 'secret' that is the co-operative structure, the credit union model seems the obvious choice. These resources have been designed as tools to help teachers educate youth on the story and philosophy behind credit unions - and that they **DO** have choices when it comes to where they put their hard-earned money.

