

FINANCIAL WELLNESS

by Al Antle

Exactly what is financial wellness? Does it mean debt free status? Does it refer to the size of your RSP portfolio, your savings level or the amount you hold in stock? Does financial wellness and financial health mean a good understanding of money and how it works?

At the Personal Credit Counselling Service of Newfoundland and Labrador (PCCS) we believe financial wellness is all of these things and, at the same time, we believe it's only some of these things and in some circumstances, none at all.

Financial wellness, like any wellness, is a state of mind. From financial wellness flows financial health and ultimately financial contentment, stability and security.

Financial wellness though, is not a single, huge state of harmony. Rather it is a group of smaller pockets all working independently and well, and yet each contributing to the overall system.

Think of your finances as you would a body and think of the working or costs of your finances as you would the various systems within the body. For example, instead of a respiratory system, you've got "housing costs" etc. There are nine systems or cost areas within each household. These are: Housing; Food; Clothing; Transportation; Recreation, Entertainment, Reading, and Education; Health and Personal Care; Savings and Security; Debt Servicing; and Addictive Behaviour.

To assess your wellness, you would need to approach each of these "systems" critically and ask yourself how well you are doing in each area. For example, under "Housing" ask yourself are you over-housed? Is your house energy efficient or do you tend to defer maintenance? And under "Recreation" you might ask if you have an identified budget for spending time with your spouse, and do you use it? Under "Food," you could ask yourself if you rely a great deal on convenience foods, or have you forgotten how to cook?

If you are an average family, you'll find you're very good in some of these areas and very poor in others. In the majority though, you'll be average. The challenge is to improve your wellness, and only you can decide just how well you want to be. Becoming completely well financially, like becoming completely well physically, takes commitment, dedication, time and, in no small way, fate. In the end, you may have to accept that you're "weller" but not quite "wellest" and you are working on it.

Whatever you do, don't beat yourself up, just keep working toward wellness. And remember the words of Jerry Gillies in his text Money Love. "Money, how important is it? Prosperity is living easily and happily in the real world, whether you have money or not."

Personal Credit Counselling Service is a community based, charitable, Family Service Agency offering financial counselling and other services free of charge to consumers. What does PCCS do?

Counselling: We simply sit down with clients and help them find solutions to their financial concerns. This also includes helping clients work through a budget and to learn how to track and control their spending.

Creditor interventions: Sometimes our clients need us to intervene with their creditors - a third party to advocate or explain on their behalf why they cannot make full payments in the short term.

Debt Retirement Programs (DRP): As an alternative to bankruptcy for many clients, we can arrange extended repayment schedules with creditors which enables clients to repay their debts in full over a longer period of time.

Community Education: We are always happy to provide a speaker for school, community, church and employee groups interested in budgeting and credit issues.

With the Christmas season fast approaching you might find the following tips useful:

- 1) Start early and avoid the last minute panic.
- 2) Decide for whom you are shopping and how much you can afford to spend on each person.
- 3) Draw names instead of buying gifts for all of the adults in your extended family.
- 4) Give hand-crafted items or gifts of your time and service.
- 5) Shop around for the best price on an item before purchasing.
- 6) Leave your credit cards at home. (You'll spend 30% more if you have them).
- 7) Avoid using credit unless you are able and prepared to pay the extra cost of interest charges.
- 8) Don't use lavish gifts as a means of boosting your self-image.

Al Antle is Programme Manager with Personal Credit Counselling of Newfoundland & Labrador. If you would like more information about PCCS or would like to arrange a workshop with Al Antle at your school or with your NLTA branch, contact your EAP Program Coordinators at the NLTA, Kathy Burford (Ext. 242) or Claudette Coombs at (Ext. 265).