

# PROMOTING ECONOMIC SELF SUFFICIENCY: A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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“About 44 million Americans – one in seven – lived last year in homes in which the income was below the poverty level, which is about \$22,000 for a family of four. This is the largest number of people since the Census began tracking poverty 51 years ago.”

Washington Post, September 17, 2010

- For individuals with disabilities, current state of income that falls below the poverty level is at least double when compared to their non disabled peers (NY - 28% versus 14%)

- No group in America is more in need and more deserving of economic recovery

- For millions of working age adults with disabilities a dependence on public benefits for income, health care, food, and housing becomes a trap that requires staying poor to stay eligible

- In addition to income, another dimension of poverty is a lack of assets.

# Research has documented that assets produce

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- Improved economic stability
- Increased long term planning
- Greater educational attainment
- Increased civic engagement

# Why is it important?

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- Savings and asset building will:
  - ▣ Impact mental and physical health.
  - ▣ Impact positively self-concept.
  - ▣ Change status with other community stakeholders.
  - ▣ Directly impact quality of life.

- For people with disabilities, there is a new level of focus, energy, and commitment to build a roadmap out of poverty at a national, state, and local level.



# Where do we begin?

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## **Economic Empowerment**



# Economic Empowerment, What is it?

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A paradigm shift that moves us from

the acceptance of a life of poverty due to  
the need for public assistance

to

the right to *equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.*



# Why is Economic Empowerment important?

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- Economic Empowerment is a series of strategies that will:
  - ▣ improve your economic stability,
  - ▣ decrease stress and financial crisis in your life
  - ▣ provide opportunities for you to learn, earn, save and build
  - ▣ offer savings strategies that will not cause a loss of public benefit
  - ▣ put you back in control of your financial life

# Making the shift requires

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- New Focus
- New Tools and Strategies
- New Partnerships

# Focus on Economic Empowerment

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- Cross agency collaboration to remove policy and program barriers to self-sufficiency
- Increase awareness and understanding of ways social insurance, employment, and asset development programs work together rather than in conflict

# Focus on Economic Empowerment

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- Empower persons with disabilities with new knowledge, choices, and supports
- Shift employment from THE goal to ONE step towards financial stability.

# New Tools and Strategies

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- Increase access to health care through enrollment in the Medicaid Buy-In
- Increase access and benefit from the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and other favorable tax provisions
- Qualify for an Individual Development Account (IDA) to achieve an asset goal through matched savings

# New Tools and Strategies

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- Increase use of Social Security Work Incentives
- Benefit from financial education and affordable financial services
- Set savings and asset goals as part of peer-support strategies
- Consider the possibilities of self-employment

# New Partnerships

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- Establish community-wide savings and asset building work groups
- Build a bridge across disability and non-disability, public and private, for profit and not for profit entities

# New Partnerships

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- Mayor's Offices
- United Way
- IRS
- FDIC
- IDA Providers
- EITC Coalitions
- Financial Institutions
- Microenterprise Lenders
- Home Ownership and Credit Counseling Programs
- DD Council
- VR Agency
- Social Security Field Office
- WIPA Grantees
- Peer Support Groups
- Centers for Independent Living
- OMH
- Community Action Agencies



# National Level Snapshot

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- **Increased federal agency and cross agency activity**
  - ▣ Office for Community Services at HHS
    - TA to IDA Providers
  - ▣ US Department of Labor
    - Disability Employment Initiative
  - ▣ IRS SPEC
    - Real Economic Impact Tour and EITC
  - ▣ FDIC
    - Money Smart
  - ▣ CMHS
    - Transformation Grants
  - ▣ CMS
    - Medicaid Infrastructure Grants

# Public Policy Agenda

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- CCD Task Force on Asset Development
- Obama Administration
  - ▣ Bank On Initiative
  - ▣ Raise Asset Limits
  - ▣ American Opportunity Tax Credit

# Disability Community Initiatives

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- Achieving A Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act  
HR 1205 and S 493
- Saving for Working Families Act (SWFA)  
HR 2277 and S 95
- SSI Savers Act  
HR 4937  
1956 - \$2000 Limit

<http://www.realeconomicimpact.org/Public-Policy/Capitol-Hill-Briefings.aspx>

# Focus for the Future

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- Access
- Information and Education
- Incentives
- Policy Alignment
- Relationship Building
- Communication and Collaboration

# Focus for Today

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## How will you define your path?



# Start with 4 Strategies

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1. Join a Financial Institution (Credit Union or Bank)
2. Improve your Financial Literacy
3. Claim your Earned Income Tax Credit
4. Participate in a matched savings account (IDA)

# Learn More

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- ❑ NYC Office of Financial Empowerment

<http://nyc.gov/html/ofe/html/home/home.shtml>

Provides access to high-quality, low-cost financial education and counseling; income-boosting tax credits; safe and affordable banking and asset-building products and services.

- ❑ Assets for Independence (AFI) Program - [IDAresources.org](http://IDAresources.org)

- Issues of particular importance to individuals with disabilities are addressed at <http://idaresources.org/disability>
- NYC IDA Providers - <http://idaresources.org/Map?state=NY>

- ❑ Attend the *Can I WORK? Can I Save?* Mini-break to learn more .

# Resources

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- WID Equity Newsletter -  
<http://www.wid.org/programs/access-to-assets/equity>
- National Disability Institute –  
<http://www.realeconomicimpact.org/Resources/Links.aspx>
- The Corporation for Economic Development –  
[cfed.org](http://cfed.org)
  - CFED's IDA Network – [www.idanetwork.org](http://www.idanetwork.org)
  - Assets and Opportunity Scorecard -  
[scorecard.cfed.org](http://scorecard.cfed.org)

# Bottom Line

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“My American Dream seems simple: to live on my own and be self-sufficient, to live with dignity and independence. I struggle with my finances right now, but I am an optimist – I believe that I can make progress with my job, move forward and become part of the mainstream economy and achieve my goals.”

Cynthia Battles

2008 REI Tour Adult Blogging Contest Winner

Rutland, VT

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning.

– Frederick Douglass

# Contact Information

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