

Recovery Through Financial Capabilities and Homebuying

RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

OnTrack Financial Education & Counseling

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Application Form

Question Group

Buncombe County requests proposals for projects to help the community recover from and respond to COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts.

Buncombe County has been awarded \$50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Recovery Funding), as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. To date, Buncombe County has awarded projects totaling \$23,093,499, leaving a balance of \$27,639,791 available to award.

Visit <http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding> for details.

This infusion of federal resources is intended to help turn the tide on the pandemic, address its economic fallout, and lay the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery.

Buncombe County is committed to investing these funds in projects that:

- Align to county strategic plan and community priorities
- Support equitable outcomes for most impacted populations
- Leverage and align with other governmental funding sources
- Make best use of this one-time infusion of resources
- Have a lasting impact

Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this RFP and any addenda issued hereto.

[Click here for the full terms and conditions of the RFP](#)

Organization Type*

Nonprofit

Nonprofit documentation

If nonprofit, attach IRS Determination Letter or other proof of nonprofit status.

[OnTrack 501c3 and NFCC Umbrella Letter 2021.pdf](#)

Name of Project.*

Recovery Through Financial Capabilities and Homebuying

New/Updated Proposal*

Is this a new project proposal or an updated version of a proposal submitted during the earlier (July 2021) Recovery Funding RFP?

Updated version of previously submitted proposal

Amount of Funds Requested*

\$462,456.00

Category*

Please select one:

- Affordable Housing
- Aging/Older Adults
- Business Support/Economic Development
- Environmental/Climate
- Homelessness
- K-12 Education
- Infrastructure and/or Broadband
- Mental Health/Substance Use
- NC Pre-K Expansion
- Workforce

Affordable Housing

Brief Project Description*

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

.In addition to a health crisis, COVID-19 has been a financial crisis too. People lost jobs, struggled to meet basic needs, and scrambled for resources. OnTrack's "Recovery Through Financial Capabilities and Homebuying" (Affordable Housing category) supports clients' as they rebuild their lives.

Our proposal includes two components:1) FinCap: housing stabilization with focusing on financial/housing problems created by the pandemic; 2) Homebuying PILOT: in depth programming and matched savings for homebuyers.

- 1)FinCap: education, counseling, and support for low-income people hit hard by COVID. We help clients:
- budget to prioritize housing and build savings
 - address post-pandemic credit issues that negatively impact housing
 - take steps toward homeownership to build assets now and for future generations

2) Homebuying PILOT: homebuyer education and counseling as participants save monthly to receive a \$10 match for every \$1 saved (max. match \$15,000) to offset home purchase costs.

Project Plan*

Explain how the project will be structured and implemented, including timeframe.

Financial Capabilities (FinCap) is based on OnTrack's client centered approach which provides a clear path toward goals and improves outcomes. Our "Financial Capabilities Model" helps clients gain KNOWLEDGE through education, develop specific SKILLS in individual work with counselors, create action plans, and report specific ACTION STEPS taken.

Timeline: FinCap counseling/education is available now online/virtual; OnTrack's in-person services will reopen May 2022.

- **Money Management:** Clients attend in-person or online education, followed by counseling. Clients get help with emergency cashflow plans and housing strategies as they focus on recovering from the pandemic. Their goals include creating realistic budgets, dealing with debt, organizing finances, building savings, or finding affordable banking options.
- **Credit Builder:** COVID wreaked havoc on the credit of hardest hit households. In Credit Class clients learn the facts about credit reports/scores, overextended credit, collections, borrowing costs, and strategies for (re)building credit. Counselors review clients' credit reports/scores and help develop Credit Action Plans which clients use as a road map and report progress to their counselors.
- **Homebuyer:** In Homebuyer Education (in-person group classes or eHome online) clients learn about budgeting, saving, mortgages, and credit. Homebuyer Counseling includes customized housing affordability, local resources and Homebuying Action Plans. Clients follow-up with counselors on action plan progress.

The second component of our request is a Homebuying PILOT program which includes homebuyer education and counseling (including action planning and follow up support), and access to a savings account. Participants save \$50 or more per month for at least six months to establish a savings habit. To make the balance grow faster, lump sum deposits (like tax refunds or bonuses) can be added to reach a grand total of \$1,500. Once participants meet the program requirements and have \$1,500 in savings, they qualify for a \$10 to \$1 match of \$15,000! This match can be used for the costs of home purchase and is paid out when they are ready to buy their home.

Homebuying PILOT Timeline:

- Planning, Staffing, & Building Program Infrastructure: October-December 2022
- Partner Outreach & Recruitment: Begins January-March 2023 (ongoing)
- Enrollment: launches January 2023 ongoing, rolling basis until program is filled
- Program Activities (orientation, counseling, education): Begin February/March 2023 (ongoing through June 2025 or until the match funds are exhausted)
- Program Wrap Up and Reporting: June 2025

Statement of Need*

Describe the need that this project will address. Include data to demonstrate the need, and cite the source of the data.

Housing affordability in Buncombe County has never been more challenging. Home prices have skyrocketed and the inventory of affordably priced homes is nonexistent caused, in part, by construction slow downs during the pandemic. Developers and nonprofits are building to increase housing stock; however, homebuying was complicated, even more so now for low-income households with finances and credit that suffered during the pandemic. Down payment assistance (DPA) programs are available, but it often takes layers and layers of financial assistance to get potential homebuyers within range of affordability. OnTrack's FinCap programs and Homebuyer PILOT will help potential homebuyers remove barriers to homeownership (like bad credit and lack of savings) to be well-qualified, mortgage-ready borrowers.

People are struggling to survive the financial/housing impact of COVID-19. With the pandemic waning and businesses reopening, many families are dealing with the aftermath of months of reduced income, deferred rents, mounting debt, unemployment, and increased childcare costs.

Even before the pandemic, finding and maintaining affordable, stable housing was a challenge. The 2019 Bowen Housing Needs Assessment showed: 46.1% of renters and 21.3% of homeowners are paying over 30% of income towards housing (cost burdened); 19.4% of renters and 7.9% of homeowners are paying over 50% (severely cost burdened). And this study was BEFORE the economic fallout from COVID!

To deal with high housing costs and low wages, people need realistic budgets to meet living expenses and savings for emergencies. Potential renters need to address credit problems, because low vacancy rates give landlords the luxury of maintaining high credit standards. Homeownership seems out of reach for low-income clients, but information, resources, support and participation in OnTrack's Homebuying PILOT can change the outcome.

Link to COVID-19*

Identify a health or economic harm resulting from or exacerbated by the public health emergency, describe the nature and extent of that harm, and explain how the use of this funding would address such harm.

COVID's economic harm:

[Buzzfeed 2021] Before the pandemic, in 2019, US women were 35% more likely to live in poverty than men. Nearly one in nine women and more than one in seven children lived in poverty. Among adult women, elderly women, women of color, women with disabilities, and families headed by unmarried mothers all face even higher rates of poverty.

[Urban Institute 2021]: "Homeownership is one of the most widespread and effective ways families can build intergenerational wealth. But housing equity is not shared evenly. The homeownership gap between Black families and white families is wider today than in the 1960s, both because of structural barriers to homeownership and because the Great Recession, natural disasters and COVID-19 have hit Black households hardest."

[National Women's Law Ctr] Now, during an economic recession and pandemic, women bear the heavy burden of the current economic and health crisis. Job losses in every sector impacting women, and especially women of color, have pushed even more women closer than ever to experiencing poverty.

[Harvard 2020] "Minority homeowners were more likely to have trouble paying their mortgage and yet, they were less likely to receive a deferment than white homeowners. 44% of distressed white homeowners received a deferment, compared with only 31% of distressed non-white homeowners."

With this funding OnTrack's clients will emerge from the pandemic devastation with money skills, savings, housing solutions and realistic budgets. They will have access to credit expertise to address bad credit that is a barrier to affordable, sustainable housing. Homebuying PILOT's significant savings match, clients will be equipped to move forward towards their dream of homeownership and building assets.

Population Served*

Define the population to be served by this project, including volume and demographic characteristics of those served.

Even under the remote work constraints of COVID-19, we continued to help people deal with financial and housing crises. Agency client demographics show 74% had household incomes below 80% of AMI. Racially: 26% people of color, 74% white, 74% female, 15% were over 62 years old.

The population to be served by our 33-month grant request (October 2022 – June 2025), includes:

1) FinCap programs which will serve 1,405 households (1,897 people) from Buncombe County. The following highlights characteristics and demographics of typical clients of the FinCap service types:

- Credit Builder clients need help (re)building credit to qualify for rentals or better mortgage rates. Demos: 80% have incomes below the Area Median Income (AMI); 64% female; 47% people of color.
- Money Management clients want help to deal with debt, move out of poverty, save money or achieve other financial goals. Demos: 79% are below AMI, 74% female, 29% people of color.
- Homebuyer clients buying their first house aren't familiar with the process, resources available, how to assemble a team of professionals, or how changes in financial behaviors (budgeting and credit) can support sustainable homeownership. Some realize they need to improve their credit score or increase savings to qualify for a mortgage. Demo: 66% are below AMI, 40% people of color.

2) Our Homebuying matched savings PILOT will be open to households with incomes between 60% - 100%** of Area Median Income (AMI). We plan to enroll 45 people and anticipate 15 will complete all the program requirements to earn the \$15k match (see the breakdown in Results section). Since this is a relatively small pilot, we will focus our outreach and enrollment on OnTrack clients who are income eligible, clients and staff from agencies listed in the Project Partner section below, and if space is available, the general public. **NOTE: If a partner agency has lower AMI eligibility, its clients can participate in the pilot.

Results*

Describe the proposed impact of the project. List at least 3 performance measures that will be tracked and reported. If possible, include baselines and goals for each performance measure.

FinCap Results: We project that the 1897 clients will fall into these categories:

- 484 will be Credit Builder: 339 (70%) of clients will take at least one Credit Action Step within 60 days of counseling. Action Plan results are tracked in our client management system.
- 465 will be Homebuyer: 326 (70%) of clients will take at least one Homebuyer Action Step within 60 days of counseling. Action Plan results are tracked in our client management system.
- 949 will be Management: 854 (90%) of clients increase their knowledge/skills to manage/modify their monthly budget. Results of post-counseling client questionnaires are compiled in an excel spreadsheet.

In the Homebuying PILOT we anticipate the following participation during the grant period:

- 45 people will attend Orientation and open a matched savings account with Self Help Credit Union
- 41 will attend Money Management classes
- 34 will complete financial counseling
- 15 will complete the program and receive a \$15,000 savings match to become homeowners.

Even the Homebuying PILOT participants who do not achieve the \$15K match will experience some level of "success" as they learn from classes and counseling sessions, develop action plans, and build savings. As mentioned in other sections, homebuying is challenging, especially for people with low-to-moderate incomes with barriers including credit problems, job instability, and lack of savings. Our programs are configured so that even those who don't buy will benefit from the budgeting, credit improvement, and focus on savings.

Evaluation*

Describe the data collection, analysis, and quality assurance measures you will use to assure ongoing, effective tracking of contract requirements and outcomes.

FinCap counseling and education: At the completion of counseling and education, clients respond to survey questions to assess the quality and impact of the session. Counseling clients agree to take at least one step on their "Action Plan" within 60 days of their appointment and follow-up with counselors to report progress. Results are entered in the client management system, compiled, and aggregated to report results. Realizing that some clients need us to reach out to them, counselors setup ticklers for follow-up emails or texts. In addition, clients engage counselors in problem solving as they work on their action plans.

Homebuying PILOT: We measure program success by the number of people who enroll, open savings accounts, attend education and counseling, achieve consecutive months of savings, take action steps towards their goals, develop skills which result in positive behavior changes, and earn the match and achieve homeownership.

Our client management system and other tracking allow us to pull Buncombe County clients for reporting purposes.

Equity Impact*

How will this effort help build toward a just, equitable, and sustainable COVID-19 recovery? How are the root causes and/or disproportionate impacts of inequities addressed?

Although COVID-19 affected people from all demographics, people of color and families living in poverty were disproportionately impacted. OnTrack's Recovery Through Financial Capabilities and Homebuying can support people who face obstacles to stability and self-sufficiency.

Poverty is caused by policy and history, not the poor. Historically, the credit market has excluded the poor and people of color; OnTrack helps clients build credit and thereby gain access to affordable loans and financial products. Redlining and discrimination have prevented people of color from building home equity; OnTrack connects clients with down payment assistance and loan programs to make homeownership a reality. Policies gentrify neighborhoods; OnTrack helps people buy homes in their own community before rent increases push them out. Marketing and consumerism equate spending and possessions to self-worth; this is particularly detrimental to the poor who have limited, if any, discretionary income. OnTrack helps stabilize families by providing meaningful strategies for budgeting, planning for periodic expenses, dealing with debt, and building emergency savings. The significant racial disparities in homeownership rates, net worth, and even cash on hand have been exacerbated by the pandemic; OnTrack's programs build confidence and connections that sow seeds of empowerment and hope.

To help us address diverse community needs, improve our marketing/outreach and increase our sensitivity to marginalized and underserved populations, we are being intentional about staff training and community outreach. In summer/fall 2021 the Adaway Group conducted a racial equity audit which identified ways to improve our programs, services, staffing, board, policies and community engagement. Our entire staff is participating in Whiteness At Work, a webinar series that helps individuals and organizations identify and address white supremacy culture and blind spots that negatively impact our work.

Project Partners*

Identify any subcontractors you intend to use for the proposed scope of work. For each subcontractor listed, indicate:

- 1.) What products and/or services are to be supplied by that subcontractor and;
- 2.) What percentage of the overall scope of work that subcontractor will perform.

Also, list non-funded key partners critical to project.

Our project doesn't have any subcontractors; however, we do have an MOU with Self-Help Credit Union to provide the free savings accounts for Homebuying PILOT participants and monthly reports (authorized by each participant) of their savings account balances and deposit history. Additionally, SHCU's secured credit card can be opened for as little as \$250 which allows program participants who need to build/rebuild their credit to utilize this credit card with the strategies from OnTrack to improve their scores (with all three credit bureaus).

If this grant is awarded, during the first 3-6 months, we will connect with new partners and agencies whose clients and staff have benefitted from OnTrack's programs in the past. To acknowledge the value of the partners' collaboration, our budget includes stipends to support the staff time that these partnerships require. NOTE: To date we have not formalized partnerships because we were uncertain when the funds will be awarded and how much we will receive. Partners and possibilities include agencies we have worked with in the past and ones we would like to collaborate with post-pandemic:

- Housing providers: Mountain Housing Opportunities, Habitat for Humanity
- Programs focused on people facing barriers: The YMI's Successful Transitions Program (skill building and resources for those facing the benefits cliff as they transition off public assistance); Operation Gateway (for citizens reentering society after incarceration or substance use recovery); YWCA Getting Ahead Program (women co-investigate the causes of poverty, hidden rules of class, and community resources); and Asheville Housing Authority Family Self-Sufficiency (skill building and savings program for residents of public housing).

Capacity*

Describe the background, experience, and capabilities of your organization or department as it relates to capacity for delivering the proposed project and managing federal funds.

Organization: For over 48 years, OnTrack has provided high-quality, responsive programs to address emerging issues that threaten the stability of families and the community including recessions, foreclosure crises, high unemployment and now COVID-19. Our service quality, competence and professionalism are highly regarded by clients, partners, funders, and other nonprofits. OnTrack is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, has been HUD certified since 1979, and meets the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC) member standards of excellence. Staff receive training and pass certification exams through the NFCC, NeighborWorks, and HUD to ensure advanced knowledge and skill.

New Staff for a New Day: In September 2021 and in April 2022 we used our revised hiring policies from what we learned in the racial equity audit to advertise, interview and hire amazing people who are connected to the community to refill counselor and educator positions that were open due to the Great Resignation.

Matched Savings Programs: Our first matched savings program for homebuying launched in 2000 with Mission Health in partnership with the Affordable Housing Coalition. OnTrack assumed total management of the program in 2006 and provided Mission employees with financial skills and a savings match towards their first homes; in the 12 years OnTrack ran the program 108 low-to-moderate wage hospital employees bought homes valued at \$19.5 million! (HCA discontinued this program in 2018.) In 2011, The Biltmore Company

created Passport to Property for its employees to build skills and savings to achieve homeownership. To date, 38 Biltmore employees have graduated to receive matches and purchase homes valued at \$7.1 million!

Our program results demonstrate our commitment to helping clients stabilize financial/housing crises, repay unsecured debt, learn money management skills, improve credit, establish emergency savings, and build assets through savings and homeownership.

Budget*

Provide a detailed project budget including all proposed project revenues and expenditures, including explanations and methodology. For all revenue sources, list the funder and denote whether funds are confirmed or pending. For project expenses, denote all capital vs. operating costs, and reflect which specific expenses are proposed to be funded with one-time Buncombe County Recovery Funds.

Download a copy of the budget form [HERE](#). Complete the form, and upload it using the button below.

OnTrack Recovery Through FinCap and Homebuying BUDGET.xlsx

Special Considerations*

Provide any other information that might assist the County in its selection.

Examples of OnTrack Client Success.pdf

OnTrack's financial and housing programs are foundational for skill building and demystifying the complexities of money, credit, and housing. The two components of our program provide 1) FinCap programming to nearly 2000 Buncombe County residents AND 2) the Homebuying Pilot as a way to test a community-wide housing match to gauge the viability. With the results of the PILOT in hand we will be well-positioned to refine the program and seek funding from a national or regional foundation. The reason for the 33-month grant period is two-fold; first the recovery from the pandemic is going to take a long time; for many in Buncombe County our FinCap programs will be catalysts for their finances! Second, for participants to make their way through the Homebuying PILOT requirements and \$1500 savings goal and THEN find a home, will take time; the 33 months gives participants an ample runway for learning without being tempted to rush into homebuying because of the PILOT end date.

The Special Consideration attachment show four OnTrack Clients of the Year. Their stories exemplify the transformative impact of our FinCap and Homebuyer matched savings program with The Biltmore Company. Enjoy and be inspired! This is good stuff. Thank you for your consideration.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- OnTrack 501c3 and NFCC Umbrella Letter 2021.pdf
- OnTrack Recovery Through FinCap and Homebuying BUDGET.xlsx
- Examples of OnTrack Client Success.pdf

January 5, 2021

Ms. Celeste Collins
Executive Director
OnTrack Financial Education & Counseling
50 South French Broad Avenue, Suite 227
Asheville, NC 28801-3217

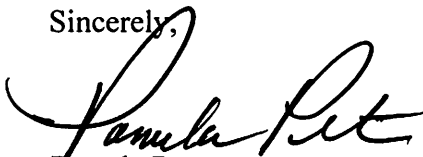
Dear Celeste:

This letter is to confirm that OnTrack Financial Education & Counseling is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code because it is a subordinate under a group exemption ruling issued to the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, Inc. ("NFCC"). Your organization is eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions in accordance with section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code.

Pursuant to IRS Publication 4573, donors may consult IRS Publication 78 to verify the NFCC's group exemption ruling and may rely upon this letter as verification with respect to the deductibility of contributions to your organization as a subordinate covered in a section 501(c)(3) group exemption ruling.

If you have any questions, please call me at (202) 677-4318.

Sincerely,



Pamela Peterson
Senior Director of Membership Operations

JUN 05 2005

Internal Revenue Service

Date: June 2, 2005

CONSUMER CREDIT COUNSELING SERVICE OF
WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA INC
NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR CONSUMER CR
50 S FRENCH BROAD AVE SUITE 227
ASHEVILLE NC 28801-3251 523

Department of the Treasury
P. O. Box 2508
Cincinnati, OH 45201

Person to Contact:

Ms Bradshaw #31-02167
Customer Service Representative

Toll Free Telephone Number:

8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. ET
877-829-5500

Fax Number:

513-263-3756

Federal Identification Number:

56-1056077

Group Exemption Number:

2545

Dear Sir or Madam:

This is in response to your request of June 2, 2005, regarding your organization's tax-exempt status.

Your organization is exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Code because it is included in a group ruling issued to NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR CREDIT COUNSELING INC , located in SILVER SPRING MD.

Our records indicate that contributions to your organization are deductible under section 170 of the Code, and that you are qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devises, transfers or gifts under section 2055, 2106 or 2522 of the Internal Revenue Code.

If you have any questions, please call us at the telephone number shown in the heading of this letter.

Sincerely,



Janna K. Skufca, Director, TE/GE
Customer Account Services



Doc ID: 031511920001 Type: CRP
Recorded: 12/13/2017 at 10:28:11 AM
Fee Amt: \$26.00 Page 1 of 1
Workflow# 0000445516-0001
Buncombe County, NC
Drew Reisinger Register of Deeds

BK **5619** PG **1090**

✓

ASSUMED BUSINESS NAME CERTIFICATE (NCGS §66-71.5)

Please print legibly.

1. The assumed business name is:
OnTrack Financial Education & Counseling; OnTrack WNC Financial Education & Counseling;
OnTrack WNC

(You may include no more than five (5) assumed business names on this form.)

2. The real name of the person or entity engaging in business under the assumed business name is:
Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Western North Carolina, Inc.
SOS ID 0033827

(Corporations, LLC's, limited partnerships must provide the exact name registered with the NC Secretary of State's office and the SOSID number assigned at the time of formation. Go to www.sosnc.gov/br/search to look up your information.)

3. The nature/type of the business is: Not-for-profit financial / housing counseling and education

4. The street address of the principal place of business is: (PO Boxes are not acceptable)
50 South French Broad Avenue, Suite 227, Asheville, NC 28801

5. The mailing address, if different from the street address, is:

6. The counties where the assumed business name will be used to engage in business are:
 All 100 North Carolina counties

This certificate is signed by the owner/legal representative of the person or entity named above, this 7 day of December, 2017.

Signature: *[Handwritten Signature]*

Printed/Typed Name: BRAD BLACKBURN

Title: BOARD CHAIR

(See instructions for who must sign for various business entity types.)

List expenses here			\$	-		
List expenses here			\$	-		
			Total	\$ 2,692,088.25		

CLIENT OF THE YEAR AWARD

Jordan Barlow



Jordan's energy and initiative are the perfect combination for success. She's a record holder! Just 6 months and 11 days after enrolling in Biltmore Passport to Property, Jordan purchased her home and became the program's quickest graduate.

As part of Passport to Property, she attended our Manage Your Money class series and was so inspired she paid off her credit card debt before her first individual counseling appointment with Amanda Hunsucker, OnTrack WNC's Matched Savings Coordinator. Jordan and Amanda created a Homebuying Action Plan, and Jordan completed three action steps in less than two weeks.

Through enthusiastic participation in Homebuyer Education, the Energy Efficiency Class, and counseling, she pursued her dream. Financial Coaching with Amanda helped Jordan refine her vision of the home that would fit her life and budget. To make sure she could truly afford homeownership, Jordan made "practice mortgage payments" into savings every month. Finding affordable housing is challenging, but Jordan persevered and found the perfect home and a great mortgage interest rate.

And, Jordan accomplished all this while working full-time at Biltmore as Catering and Conference Services Manager and pursuing three degrees simultaneously at AB Tech - Associates in Science, Engineering, and Aviation!

On January 18, 2018, Jordan became a homeowner – before the age of 30! Equipped with financial skills and savings, she is destined for success. The Passport to Property made possible this new financial journey!

Congratulations Jordan!

CLIENT OF THE YEAR AWARD

Latoya Gardner



"OnTrack WNC helped me to realize the importance of financial stability; a concept that I had not previously spent much time thinking about until I slipped out of middle class status."

Latoya said, "A series of unfortunate financial emergencies sent me back to the drawing board and it afforded me the time needed to reflect upon my needs." After losing a chance to purchase the home that she had spent months trying to secure, she attended the **Homebuyer Education** series followed by a budgeting session with OnTrack WNC counselor, *Kathryn Beach*. As Latoya put it "the numbers were grim" and she decided that it was not the right time to buy a home.

Latoya believes in her power to get things done, including financially. She put her determination and energy to work to decrease every possible expense, balance her budget and free up money to invest in herself. Latoya participated in the **SECURE** matched savings program. While she built her savings account for emergencies, she also learned the importance of talking about money and understanding it as a tool for accomplishing her financial goals.

Her passion for working to close the racial wealth gap, both on a systemic level and on a personal/family level, is inspiring. Now that she has the foundations of budgeting down, she has moved to her next goal of **building wealth** by contributing to her Health Savings Account and 401K plans as well as working with her family to start a pooled family savings fund.

As Latoya told women gathered for Real Women. Real Money Stories. *"This tracking thing is annoying, but now I know exactly how much I put in the pockets of Starbucks and I absolutely understand that is a debit from my dreams."* **Congratulations Latoya!**

CLIENT OF THE YEAR AWARD

Marie Collins



"When I started working with OnTrack Financial in 2016, I was in a very bad financial situation. But, I was determined to improve it."

Marie's first experience with OnTrack WNC was a **Budgeting and Debt** workshop, and her progress since then has been amazing. During the class there was lots of information to capture and Marie says she was taking notes as fast as she could.

After the class, Marie met with financial counselor *Amanda Hunsucker*; they worked together to create an initial budget and determined that a **Debt Management Program (DMP)** would be a good tool for managing Marie's unsecured debt on three credit cards. Marie took advantage of services from our **Women's Financial Empowerment Center** including financial coaching with Amanda and follow-up appointments with *Pete Wrublewski*. With tools in place, Marie committed to tracking, planning and having "money dates" to keep her financial focus. It worked! Marie says, "Consistently paying down my debt is one of my major successes during my time working with OnTrack." Her debt is now half what it was when she started. When needed, she uses one secured credit card in a way that helps build her credit score and doesn't increase her debt.

In addition, Marie participated in the **SECURE Savings Match** program. She consistently put aside money monthly for six consecutive months and attended education and counseling, to earn the \$3 to \$1 savings match money. That money helped with start-up expenses for the small business she has been building.

Marie's goals are to build her business using the money skills she learned from OnTrack WNC. She says, *"I am a therapeutic yoga teacher and have started building my business thanks in large part to the help and support of OnTrack WNC."* **Congratulations Marie!**

CLIENT OF THE YEAR AWARD

Brittany Ferguson



"When I first heard about OnTrack WNC I was working a part-time job with limited hours. I had debts in collections and just found out that I wasn't qualified for Medicaid anymore because I was making too much money."

When Brittany Ferguson and her four year old son moved out of public housing in March this year, she couldn't believe how much had changed since she first came to OnTrack WNC in the summer of 2018. Looking for a fresh start,

Brittany relocated from New York and immediately researched available programs and resources. Once she discovered OnTrack WNC she was quick to attend **SECURE Matched Savings Program** Orientation, our Manage Your Money education series, and individual counseling.

Brittany's accomplishments and dedication are inspiring. She completely embraced what she learned from the **Manage Your Money** education series and counseling. In less than a year, she moved from a part-time job to a salaried position with benefits. She keeps a budget on her refrigerator AND another one in her room, to review and update regularly. She saves money by bringing food to work and avoiding the vending machine. When it comes to grocery shopping, Brittany makes her list, gets what she needs, and doesn't let temptation get her off track.

She's also taking proactive steps with her debt. She canceled a contract with a debt settlement company and aggressively paid down active credit accounts. She continues to contribute to her SECURE savings account even after she graduated and received the match.

Brittany's goals include getting her GED and becoming a Habitat for Humanity homeowner. She says, *"I want better for me. I want better for my child. I'm willing to work hard for it."* **Congratulations Brittany!**