



Appalachian
OPPORTUNITY FUND

APPALACHIAN OPPORTUNITY FUND

Annual Report

2023

Our Programs

Appalachian Opportunity Fund is on a mission to build community wealth through **free financial coaching** and **affordable lending** to residents of the Appalachian Highlands.

Financial Freedom Fund (FFF)

The Financial Freedom Fund is AOF's affordable lending program that provides low-interest (3%) loans to highly-motivated financial coaching clients who have low or non-existent credit and therefore do not qualify for a loan with a reputable financial institution.

These loans are provided to help our clients reach financial goals, pay off existing high interest debt, and/or to help relieve financial stress. Our FFF loans are reported to all three credit bureaus, helping our clients build their credit score for the future. We have provided over \$171k in FFF loans since 2019.

People-Centered Financial Coaching

Our People-Centered Financial Coaching program is the core of AOF's services. We provide 100% free, personalized one-on-one financial coaching to community residents in order to help manage income, reduce debts, build credit and establish savings.

Since 2019, we have coached more than 800 clients who have increased credit scores by 16,284 points, paid off over \$570k in predatory debt and over \$300k in delinquent debt, and established savings and investments of over \$700k.



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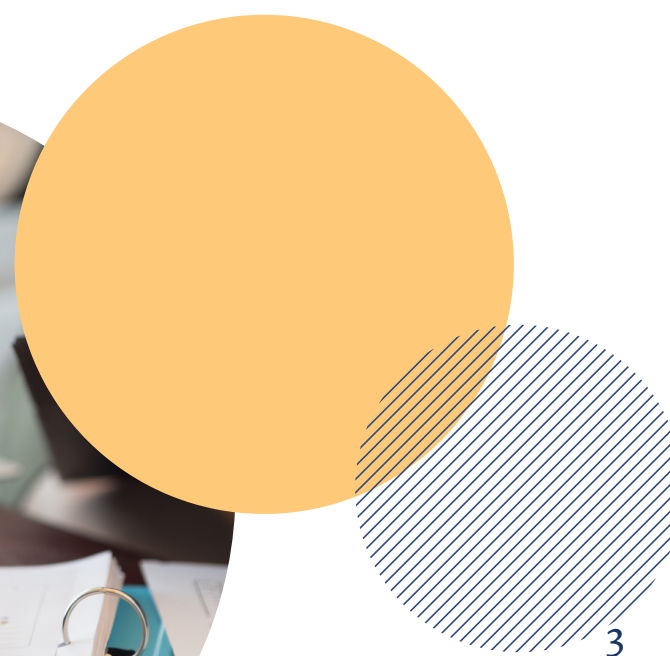
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How We Work



Businesses

AOF works with regional employers to provide our People-Centered Financial Coaching program as an employee benefit. Financial coaching as an employee benefit has been shown to reduce financial stress and improve mental health, productivity, engagement, and retention.



Nonprofits

AOF partners with nonprofit organizations to provide our financial coaching program to their staff and service populations alike, strengthening the fantastic community programs these partners already provide to our region.



Community

AOF works with United Way of East TN Highlands and other granting organizations to serve individuals and families in this region who do not already have access to financial coaching through our non-profit and business partners.



Highlights

351

Clients Coached

\$47K

FFF Loan Total

\$167K

Predatory Debt Paid

3.5K

Total Credit Score Increase

Impact by the Numbers

CLIENT IMPACT	2020	2021	2022	2023
Clients Coached	153	242	300	351
Total Credit Score Points Increased	3,240	5,012	4,514	3,518
Total Predatory Debt Paid Off	\$65,027.53	\$197,381	\$140,598	\$167,336
Total Delinquent Debt Paid Off	\$48,808.59	\$125,605	\$38,014	\$46,797
Total Debt Negotiated Down	\$29,648.47	\$66,130	\$9,577	\$10,701
“Financial Freedom Fund” Loan Guarantees Obtained	17	10	17	11
Total Amount of Financial Freedom Fund Loans	\$31,280	\$19,815	\$72,603	\$47,374
Total Dollars Clients Saved and Invested	Not tracked	\$400,448	\$188,934	\$171,903
Total Affordable Loans Clients Accessed	Not tracked	\$1,539,451	\$1,119,328	\$78,960

HELPING NORTHEAST TENNESSEE ACHIEVE
FINANCIAL FREEDOM SINCE 2019



CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

“ My financial situation changed when I lost my job in early 2023. I used all my savings to try to stay afloat but I felt myself sinking fast. The unemployment was not much to live on while searching for a new job. The stress level was over the top for me. I cut back on everything I could, including food. I was starting to miss payments and worried if I would have a home or vehicle before long.

After almost a year of looking for a job, I found employment in December 2023. The stress of still trying to catch up on everything and then receiving a garnishment was affecting me mentally and physically, and starting to affect me at my new job. It was then I contemplated bankruptcy. In September, I found an AOF coach that was available to me through my employer, free of charge. It was embarrassing, to say the least, to speak about my financial situation to the coach, but I was assured it would be confidential. We spoke about the steps I could take to achieve my goals to get to where I felt at ease again and not have to file for bankruptcy.

The steps were to stop making all payments to anything besides my home and car loan, gas and groceries. I reached out to school debt and was able to have a forbearance done for a few months. I stopped my federal income taxes on my check for a couple months. All to give me a few months to have some extra funds to catch up on my house and car loan. I was then offered, with the help of the coach, to get a low interest car loan to pay off the high interest one I was paying. I am working on saving cash to offer my other debtors to settle on my other open accounts.

In four short months, I am finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. With the help from my AOF coach, I am feeling positive about my financial situation that I can get this all turned around and not have to worry about any further garnishments, collection calls or losing my house or vehicle. My financial stress is very minimal if not gone all together now. I can see that 2024 will be a great year for me, thanks to my AOF coach.

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MEET OUR TEAM

AOF seeks to nurture individual financial health and stimulate community wealth in Central Appalachia.



Victoria Hewlett
Executive Director



Abigail Gaines
Administrative Assistant



Adam Taylor
Co-Founder and
Financial Coach



Oren Peterson
Financial Coach



Hannah Newberry
Financial Coach



CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

“ My financial history is a typical American story. I was raised by a single mother who ran a cleaning business to support herself, my brother, and me. We were lucky if we had delicacies like milk in the house and could eat out at a restaurant once a month. Our clothes and toys consisted of hand-me-downs. We always had a roof over our heads, even if that required help from others outside the home. I was able to go to college on scholarships and grants. Based on good academic standing, I was able to complete an MA by the time I was 33. Having money or the various lifestyles financial stability could afford was not at the top of my priority list until I had a child at 34. Once my son was born, I realized that my economic lifestyle needed to improve. Medical conditions prevented me from working throughout my pregnancy. I spent what little savings I had and was homeless with a baby for one day. I struggled to find a job. I had no money for childcare. It took me two years until I found a friend who could take care of him until I could earn an income. Once I got on my feet the balance of work and affordable daycare for my son leveled out. I was still struggling when I met Oren at AOF.

With help from AOF staff, I was able to map out my financial standing and future goals. They helped me develop projections to ensure my financial security for the present and future. We worked together on organizing and categorizing my income, bills, other spending, and needs for the future. My AOF coach went above and beyond by helping me find answers to questions I had trouble getting on my own. My coach introduced me to resources I did not know were out there and set me up with an entire team of social workers who work to help me better my life for my son and myself.

I continue to grow with my AOF coach by my side, but I now have the confidence and skills to manage much of my financial affairs independently. There is a sense of community with the service that AOF provides. Knowing that I am not alone in the struggle to become financially independent and self sufficient has granted me the courage to work harder than I ever have before. I can now take bigger leaps in my journey knowing that there is someone there to help me if I fall. I can not recommend AOF and their staff enough. This organization has changed my life for the better and I hope more people and families are able to access their services in the future.

“There is a sense of community with the service that AOF provides.”



CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

“ I always thought I was good with money. Building a 401K, acquiring two investment properties, having home ownership with a low interest rate, not buying a new cars, etc. I thought I was doing all the right things. Working with Adam at Appalachian Opportunity Fund has shown me I was wrong in such a beautiful way.

Before I discovered AOF I felt financially hopeless. I was prepared to refinance our house (yes even in this market) to just survive. In the span of three months, we had depleted all savings by consistently spending more than we make while simultaneously having unexpected emergencies that left us with no savings and more debt than we can handle. I work in education and love it. However, that leaves a little something to be desired when it comes to income. I had tried everything I knew to try to dig us out of the financial hole we were in but found no path forward. Nothing brings you to rock bottom like not knowing where to turn financially when all you want to do is provide for your family.

Then a few friends of mine connected me with Adam at Appalachian Opportunity Fund. In just a short 15-minute phone call Adam gave me hope and a plan forward in a unique, honest, and refreshing way. He spoke truth to my mistakes while giving me the world class coaching I needed to begin my climb out of financial illiteracy. He has continued to work with me every step of the way and it is such a blessing to know I have someone I can trust in my corner as I navigate financial decisions to better provide for my family now and in the future. I would not have been able to afford coaching like this and I know I would still be financially lost if it wasn't for the work of AOF. Building my confidence financially has effected far more than my bank account - it has changed my life.

“It is such a blessing to know I have someone I can trust in my corner as I navigate financial decisions to better provide for my family now and in the future. I would not have been able to afford coaching like this and I know I would still be financially lost if it wasn't for the work of AOF.”

YEAR IN REVIEW

- Hired new Executive Director
- Raised \$20,000 for Sponsor-a-Client campaign
- Won the United Way Social Innovation Grant to Implement New Software
- Launched our involvement in the STRONG Families Program
- Won a Washington County Community Foundation grant for "Building an Appalachian Financial Empowerment Center"
- Won the STRONG ACC Organizational Resiliency Award
- Hired New Financial Coach and Brought On Two New Board Members
- Launched new CRM software

STRONG Families Program

CLIENT IMPACT (STRONG FAMILIES ONLY)	2023
Clients Coached	80
Total Credit Score Points Increased	982
Total Predatory Debt Paid Off	\$12,592
Total Delinquent Debt Paid Off	\$3,477
Total Debt Negotiated Down	\$55
“Financial Freedom Fund” Loan Guarantees Obtained	3
Total Amount of Financial Freedom Fund Loans	\$9,270
Total Dollars Clients Saved and Invested	\$3,770



“

My coach introduced me to resources I did not know were out there and set me up with an entire team of social workers who work to help me better my life for my son and myself.



In June 2023, AOF started our partnership with STRONG ACC to provide financial coaching services to recipients of the STRONG Families program.

STRONG Families NETN is a part of a study funded by the Tennessee Department of Human Services which is being conducted to determine how these pilot programs help people improve their economic well-being. During the study, all new eligible applicants will be randomly selected into one of two groups that receive a different mix of program services.



CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

“ I became really depressed in 2023, so much so that I couldn't leave my house and work. I used credit cards to pay bills and wasn't making enough money to pay them back. My financial goal is to eventually be debt free. I am saving and paying off my debt a little at a time. Over time, this will build up and I will achieve my goal.

My AOF coach gave me hope. He is very positive and believes in me, which is important for me because I haven't believed in myself for a while. He checks in with me every Thursday via text or phone. Now, I have paid off some debt and continue to save. I will reach my goal of laying off credit card debt this year.

The importance of this work is to give people inspiration, support and motivation. It is important because the more people who are able to pay off their debt, the more empowered the community becomes. The more empowered we are, the more we are able to focus on improving the quality of life for the people in our community.

I am very grateful for Oren. He is my biggest supporter for getting out of debt, and I could not do it without him or this program.

“The more people who are able to pay off their debt, the more empowered the community becomes. The more empowered we are, the more we are able to focus on improving the quality of life for the people in our community.”



CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

“ My family had fallen on really hard times. We were roughly \$20,000 in credit card debt and a car repossession for a vehicle we hardly had for 3 months. It dropped our credit significantly. We didn't have job stability and couldn't seem to get our heads above water.

My AOF coach made me feel like I could actually manage my situation. There really was no judgement and only encouragement. They helped me stop using an institution that was taking a cut out of the money I gave them to pay off the repo, and instead start a savings that actually builds interest in my favor. We also refinanced the credit cards for an incredible decrease in interest.

It feels amazing. I worried day after day about how we could get out from all the debt and it seemed like it would never end. Anything I payed seemed to do nothing. It is freeing to no longer feel this way.

AOF is an amazing program. I wish I had learned about them sooner and I whole heartedly recommend it to everyone. It's life changing.

“I worried day after day about how we could get out from all the debt and it seemed like it would never end...

It is freeing to no longer feel this way.”



www.aofcoaching.net/donate

GIVE a monthly donation to increase our reach in this region.

HIRE US as an Employee Benefit to support and care for your team.

SHARE OUR IMPACT with your network of community resources.

Your support allows us to expand financial freedom in the Appalachian Highlands

Partnerships



MULLICAN[®]

HARDWOOD FLOORING



UPM Pharmaceuticals[®]
Formulating Your Future[™]

C4K
Coalition For Kids



United Way of East TN Highlands



Partnerships



THANK YOU!

Your support has been instrumental in our achievements.

Thank you for being an essential part of our success.



CONTACT US!



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www.aofcoaching.net



Appalachian Opportunity Fund



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