

NYC DSS-DHS's Financial Independence Now (FIN) Learning and Coaching Program Partnership Sees Early Impacts

Nearly 700 shelter staff now equipped to help New Yorkers experiencing homelessness develop financial literacy skills, and efficient savings and budgeting plans, to help them achieve long-term stability

NEW YORK - The Department of Social Services-Department of Homeless Services (DSS-DHS), CUNY School of Professional Studies (CUNY SPS) and Change Machine are proud to announce that the DSS-DHS Financial Independence Now (FIN) Learning and Coaching Program has trained nearly 700 DSS-DHS and not-for-profit provider-partner shelter case managers, housing specialists, directors, and program administrators and analysts, on how to assist clients with setting financial goals, develop spending and savings plans, and manage credit and debt.

This partnership was formed in January 2018 with the goal of equipping DSS-DHS professionals with the tools to lead conversations with clients about personal finances, including the assessment of credit scores and reports, as well as finding no-cost or low-cost banking services.

Since the training launched in September 2018, nearly 700 shelter and agency staff have been trained across approximately 120 shelters and low-barrier programs serving a range of clients, including single adults, young adults, adult families, and families with children. The program aims to ultimately reach all of the agency's shelters across all five boroughs.

"Financial literacy is a key tool to building a more stable life," said **New York City Mayor Eric Adams**. "We must remain laser-focused on supporting our most vulnerable New Yorkers, and partnerships like this one ensure New Yorkers experiencing homelessness have the resources and the support needed to become financially independent and secure."

"Ensuring that the New Yorkers we serve have access to every opportunity to succeed as they stabilize their lives is our top priority," said **Department of Social Services Commissioner Gary P. Jenkins**. "We are proud of our continued partnership with Change Machine and the CUNY School of Professional Studies which has helped train nearly 700 staff members to assist our clients with developing financial literacy skills and savings plans which are key to achieving long-term stability."

"Financial Independence Now exemplifies the kind of innovation that strengthens our commitment to offering New Yorkers experiencing homelessness the high-quality services and supports they need and deserve," said **Department of Homeless Services Administrator Joslyn Carter**. "We are grateful to Change Machine and the CUNY School of Professional Studies for their incredible partnership in helping build on our comprehensive efforts to equip our clients with vital tools for financial sustenance as they get back on their feet."

The lively in-person classes were initially held in a classroom at CUNY SPS over two days, and DSS-DHS and our not-for profit provider-partner staff had a chance to collaborate and

brainstorm different scenarios, as well as engage in financial coaching role-play exercises. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic we quickly adapted to virtual learning,

Virtual learning has not only improved access to classes conducted via Zoom but also enabled staff to have access to more learning modules and coaching tools online. The program also guides staff on making client referrals to NYC Financial Empowerment Centers for free, confidential, and more in-depth financial counseling services over the phone.

DSS-DHS and CUNY SPS surveyed the case manager and housing specialist course attendees a few months after the virtual training sessions to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. The feedback was very positive.

Survey respondents report having richer and more frequent conversations with clients about their finances, and they feel better informed and more confident about having those conversations

Overall, respondents found the training to be useful, with more than half reporting that various DSS-DHS FIN guides and worksheets were “very helpful.” Respondents attest to the importance and value of improving financial literacy among their clients and are committed to having these conversations.

“This is a truly wonderful collaboration between CUNY School of Professional Studies, DHS and Change Machine. We are so pleased that the Financial Independence Now financial literacy program has trained hundreds of DHS agency and shelter provider staff members who in turn help their clients figure out the best ways to set financial goals, manage money, build credit, and create a budget with the goal of obtaining stable housing,” said **Jorge Silva-Puras**, Interim Dean of the CUNY School of Professional Studies.

“Part of our school’s mission is to lift up and assist the most vulnerable city residents. The DHS FIN program is housed within the Office of Professional Education and Workplace Learning (PEWL), an integral unit of CUNY SPS, which partners with city and state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector to develop innovative learning programs. This is another outstanding example of the service we provide and the impact we have on our fellow New Yorkers.”

“Change Machine is a proud partner in this initiative to build financial security,” said Founder and CEO **Mae Watson Grote**. “An asset-orientation to poverty alleviation is immensely powerful. These assets are not just monetary, but inherent strengths relating to the customers’ strong relationships with their communities, their love and devotion to their family, and their dreams for the future. We are excited about the survey results and will continue to support embedding financial coaching in housing counseling to advance financial security and equity.”

About the Department of Social Services (DSS):

The Department of Social Services, comprised of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), serves more than three million New Yorkers annually through a broad range of services that aim to address poverty, income inequality, and prevent homelessness. HRA serves over 3 million New Yorkers through the administration of

more than 12 major public assistance programs. DHS oversees a broad network of shelters and services dedicated to helping New Yorkers experiencing homelessness get back on their feet. DSS is central to the City's mission to expand opportunity for more New Yorkers, address income inequality, help New Yorkers experiencing homelessness stabilize their lives, and ensure that vulnerable New Yorkers receive the benefits and assistance to which they are entitled.

About the CUNY School of Professional Studies

As New York's leader in online education since 2006, the CUNY School of Professional Studies (CUNY SPS) offers the most [online](#) bachelor's and master's degree options at the City University of New York, and serves as the University's only undergraduate all-transfer college. With 24 [degrees](#) and numerous other non-degree and grant-funded workplace learning programs, CUNY SPS meets the needs of adults who wish to finish a bachelor's degree, progress from an associate's degree, earn a master's degree or certificate in a specialized field, and advance in the workplace or change careers. Consistently ranked highly by [U.S. News & World Report](#) for its online offerings, and noted for its soaring growth and enrollment, CUNY SPS has emerged as a nationwide leader in online education. The School's renowned and affordable online programs—which offer in-state tuition to all students regardless of where they live—ensure that busy working adults may fulfill their educational goals on their own time and schedule.

About Change Machine

Founded in 2005, Change Machine builds financial security for low-income communities through people-powered technology. Our products champion the aspirations of those most economically disadvantaged, as well as the expertise of financial coaches and customers, to transform how social service organizations and public agencies work with people to achieve their goals. Over 6,000 practitioners have used our platform to amplify their impact, including putting \$45 million in the pockets of their customers. Together, we're creating an equitable economy in which we all thrive. Learn more at change-machine.org and follow along on Twitter @ChangeMachineUS.