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Guidewell Financial Solutions Marks 51st Anniversary by Focusing on Long-Term Client Outcomes

Program Participants Reduce Debt, Rebuild Credit, and Gain New Skills

(BALTIMORE, MD) - Like many of us, Martha Souder didn't learn much about money management growing up. At age 19, she had already maxed out her first credit card, and by 2002, she owed nearly \$60,000 in loans and credit card debt. For 10 years, Martha diligently worked to reduce her credit balances, but was only able to repay \$10,000. Meanwhile, the interest she owed continued to grow. She says, "That's when I realized I needed help. After doing some research, I chose Guidewell Financial Solutions. They're a nonprofit with years of experience helping people take control of their finances."

After receiving financial counseling, Martha enrolled in the agency's debt management program (DMP). During the next four years, she paid off nearly \$50,000 and saw her credit score rise. She says: "Living on cash during my DMP taught me discipline and how to budget and save. I've also gained a better understanding of how to avoid overspending. Learning to respect my money has given me confidence. My financial future is the brightest it's ever been!"

Martha's experience mirrors the [2016 findings](#) of an independent study by researchers at The Ohio State University. It examined how financial counseling impacts consumer behavior and financial well-being. The study found that clients who took part in certified financial counseling and debt management plans like Guidewell Financial's reduced their total debt by an average of \$17,000, while individuals who did not seek counseling saw a rise in the amount they owed. Counseled clients also recognized a substantial improvement in their credit scores. Like Martha, 67% said the program had helped them manage their money better, and 70% reported an overall improvement in their financial confidence.

▪ **How Counseling and DMPs Work**

Guidewell Financial offers free, confidential financial counseling. President and CEO Helene Raynaud says, "Every session begins with a holistic financial assessment that serves as a reality check. We then help clients set up a budget and brainstorm on ways to increase income and reduce expenses, so they have resources to repay what they owe and continue to cover their other bills."

Counselors help their clients review available debt repayment options and come up with an actionable plan. Some like Martha qualify for Guidewell Financial's debt management program. Under this option, they make a single payment each month to the agency, which is then distributed to

their unsecured creditors. After three months, creditors may reduce clients' interest or waive their late fees provided they continue to make payments on time and in full.

In celebration of its 51st anniversary, the agency contacted current DMP clients to get their perspective on the program benefits they've realized.

- **Discipline and Courage**

Client Gene Noble enrolled in a Guidewell Financial DMP early last year. He says, "For much of my life, I didn't have money problems; however, I was an impulsive spender. When I retired for good, I continued spending like I did when I had a full-time job. But on a limited income, I could only afford to make the minimum monthly payments on my credit cards, so the amount I owed spiraled out of control. When I found myself losing sleep over my finances, I decided to get help."

In the program, Gene has mastered his spending habits. He says, "I've become a much more sensible spender. Before making a purchase, I ask myself, 'Do you really need this?' I no longer treat all my friends at the baseball game or buy shoes I don't need. I've also developed cost-free hobbies, like taking regular walks and observing and photographing birds. It's great to feel healthier and be back on track."

When Client Sandra S. and her husband were unexpectedly furloughed from their State jobs, it significantly reduced their salaries for two years, and they had to use credit cards to meet financial obligations. Before they knew it, their debt and interest had skyrocketed. The couple enrolled in a DMP in November 2013, and have since repaid nearly \$48,000 in unsecured debt. This coming November, they will be debt free.

Sandra says, "Participating in the DMP has taught us that money can't buy happiness but it can provide peace of mind. Taking part has reduced our constant worry and eliminated the onslaught of creditor calls. We've also gained an understanding of how credit works. As we've paid off what we owe, it's been extremely gratifying to see our credit scores increase from 450 to 800. Best of all, I landed a wonderful new job that required a good credit score."

Raynaud concludes, "At Guidewell Financial we help clients build financial skills they can use for a lifetime. Watching them succeed keeps us passionate about what we do!"

Guidewell Financial Solutions' services are available in-person or by phone. To learn more, visit the agency website at www.guidewellfs.org or call 1-800-642-2227 for an appointment. [Click here](#) to view the agency's 51st Anniversary infographic.

About Guidewell Financial Solutions

Guidewell Financial Solutions (also known as Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Maryland and Delaware, Inc.) is an accredited 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency that helps stabilize communities by creating hope and promoting economic self-sufficiency to individuals and families through financial education and counseling. Maryland License #14-01 / Delaware License #07-01