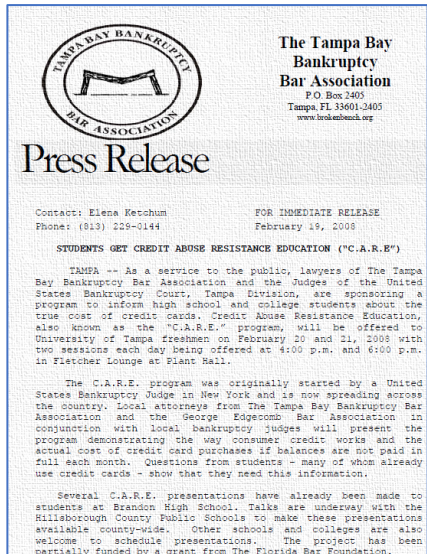




Who C.A.R.E.S.? We All Should! (And Here's How to Help)

By Hon. Catherine Peek McEwen



Ever heard of the “C.A.R.E.” program? Gee, I hope so, but I can’t blame you if you haven’t, given the stops and starts we’ve had with C.A.R.E. locally. And I hope you will stick with me to the end of this article because we need your help.

First some national and local backstory: The acronym stands for Credit Abuse Resistance Education. It is a national, nonprofit organization that started as a grassroots initiative by Bankruptcy Judge John C. Ninfo, II (W.D.N.Y., now retired) to teach high school and college kids about responsible use of credit and the dangers of using credit irresponsibly. Gradually, the program spread throughout the country as other bankruptcy courts and bankruptcy bars jumped on

Judge Ninfo’s bandwagon, creating local chapters that provide speakers to make presentations at schools. Since then, the program has been formally organized as an IRS 501(c)(3) entity and is now shepherded by the American Bankruptcy Institute, which provides some funding to support the administration and online infrastructure of C.A.R.E.

C.A.R.E.’s robust website starts here: www.care4yourfuture.org; program resources are here: [Volunteer Resources \(care4yourfuture.org\)](http://VolunteerResources(care4yourfuture.org)). Program resources include presentations using step-by-step outlines, videos, Q&As, and games that can be created to fit a particular audience. One thing we’ve learned from the pandemic is that, if need be, all the materials can be presented remotely.

Our Tampa division got interested in the program back in 2007 (almost 15 years ago!), after learning of the successful C.A.R.E. program offered in the Southern District of Florida. Tampa’s C.A.R.E. program was initiated with Judge Rodney May (now retired) as its judicial advisor and the Tampa Bay Bankruptcy Bar Association as its organizer. The original presentation materials were largely drawn from the Southern District’s. Some of the initial institutions that benefitted from Tampa’s early C.A.R.E. efforts included Brandon, Chamberlain, Tampa Prep, and Academy of the Holy Names high schools, as well as all the incoming freshmen at the University of Tampa.

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Over time, various bankruptcy lawyers have served as the contact point — Elena Ketchum, Barbara Hart, and Brad deBeaubien, to name some.

Fast forward to more recent times, when we saw the need to re-engage because our “chapter” had become essentially dormant. Bankruptcy lawyer Michael Hooi agreed to be our area’s C.A.R.E. coordinator, and in the fall of 2019, we invited some officials from the Hillsborough County School System and the Florida Council on Economic Education (“FCEE”) to attend a little show-and-tell meeting to inform them of our availability to visit schools. [See Michael’s recap here in the October 2019 issue of *Court Connection*: [Tampa CARE Chapter Holds Kickoff Orientation](#).] But then the pandemic hit, so there was no going into the schools. And once again, we find ourselves classified by the C.A.R.E. mothership as dormant.

Aside from the pandemic, another recurring complicating factor is the lack of class time available for extracurricular presentations such as C.A.R.E., meaning it’s hard to get into the schools. Although financial literacy advocates such as the FCEE have pushed the Florida Legislature to make financial literacy a required course, at this point it is but a half-credit elective. According to the Southern District’s Chief Bankruptcy Judge Laurel Isicoff, who is on the board of the FCEE, “the new BEST [Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking] standards have financial literacy folded in as part of the mandatory math curriculum, but that portion of the curriculum doesn’t go into effect for another two years.” So we are a bit away from when the schools must make time for financial literacy.

Yet every year that passes by without our reaching out to the youths in our community results in more of them facing an uncertain financial future, ill-equipped to handle their personal finances. Yes, that means one day they likely will have to make a pit stop in our court, which is good for bankruptcy lawyers, I suppose. But our court should be the fresh start repair shop for circumstances outside the control of the debtors (job loss, divorce, health issues), not because they are unknowledgeable about the proper use of credit.

This is where you can help with the financial literacy movement locally. Do you have a connection with a group of kids or young adults—maybe through scouting, a church or synagogue, a private school, a teacher, the University of Tampa, or with a community center, non-profit mentoring program, or an after-school program? If so, offer to arrange a presentation. And if the offer is accepted, email Michael at mhooi@srbp.com. You don’t even have to volunteer to be a presenter. Just get us in the door!

[Editor’s note: Judge McEwen is a member of C.A.R.E.’s national advisory board.]

CREDIT ABUSE RESISTANCE EDUCATION

The Truth About Credit

Why does your credit matter?

- A credit check may be required by your employer to get a job.
- Your credit impacts your ability to get an apartment or buy a home.
- Having a strong credit history can lead to lower interest rates on future credit.
- Financial freedom helps you meet your goals.

Think about your spending

- How much do you usually spend each day?
- Are you a price conscious shopper?
- What do you spend most of your money on?
- Paying late and carrying a balance near your credit limit can hurt your credit score.

Debt

Good	Bad
✓ Establish Credit	✗ Impulse Spending
✓ Consumer Protection	✗ Ruin Credit
✓ Rewards	✗ Spend More Money
✓ Make Important Purchases	✗ Late Fees and Interest

What Makes A Credit Score

65% of Total Score

- 35% Payment History
- 30% Amounts Owed
- 15% Length of History
- 10% Credit Mix
- 10% New Credit

Get a free credit report each year at annualcreditreport.com

Tips

- 📅 Pay in Full Every Month
- 🛑 Keep Balance Low
- 🕒 Pay on Time

Sources: Credit Abuse Resistance Education, "The Truth About Credit Presentation," from care4yourfuture.org; CreditCards.com, "The 4 Best and Worst Things About Credit Cards," from <https://www.creditcards.com/credit-cards-news/tandberg-4-best-worst-things-about-credit-cards-1377.php>

care4yourfuture.org

JUDGE NINFO'S TOP 10 PERSONAL FINANCE TIPS

