

2018
2019

COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT





RPD officers take some time to engage with kids at the West End Center located adjacent to our West End Branch.

Why would a bank build a branch in a struggling community?

What kind of bank invests money into Roanoke's first Financial Empowerment Center?

Simple. A bank wouldn't. Luckily, we aren't a bank. We're Freedom. And so much more.

Welcome to Freedom First. We're an innovative community credit union.

Why should you care? Because you have to bank somewhere. Why not bank with an institution that offers the same tools, service and convenience as the finest banks, but also does more? More — like not being obligated to make a profit for some board member in another state. Like focusing on creative community redevelopment. Like investing profits in the health and well-being of our community. Like working toward financial freedom and literacy for members of our community in need, helping them become independent and able to give back.

You've got to bank somewhere. Why not bank somewhere for good?



Why Community Capital Matters



“When we keep our members’ money local while also bringing in outside investment to our region, we can anticipate even more economic opportunity to grow around us.”

Paul Phillips
President & CEO
Freedom First Credit Union

Freedom First has done the hard work to make sure our products and services are on par with the finest institutions. **But what does Freedom First offer that no one else does? We’ve been locally headquartered and operated since 1956 — we live here, we understand our community, and we have a vested interest in our region.** We’re not going anywhere; in fact, we’re continuing to grow, which in turn enables us to deploy capital back into our community.

That capital fuels local growth in the form of jobs, businesses, and commerce. We brought in more than \$6.7 million of outside funding into our community and issued more than \$87 million in commercial loans to area businesses, while funding an additional \$130 million in residential mortgages. We also gave back more than ever before in volunteer hours, employee donations, and free ice cream. We cemented lasting, meaningful partnerships with the City of Roanoke, Carilion Clinic, Delta Dental of Virginia, and many others.

BEYOND BANKING FOR GOOD

We work diligently to give back to our community not just through our extensive grants, scholarships, sponsorships, donations, and Impact Banking services,

but to all of our members in the form of cash back and dividends on their checking and rate discounts on loans. We give back to our local economy by financing rehabilitation and revitalization efforts in disinvested neighborhoods. Every local business that we help by providing necessary capital often means more local jobs. Every commercial loan funded in a target reinvestment area means more economic vitality, which will in turn encourage more businesses to follow. And the more people who bank with us, the more we’re able to expand our scope of services and continue that mutually beneficial cycle of returning investments to our members.

OUR PROMISE TO YOU

Every dollar you invest in Freedom First stays here in your backyard, with an institution that has grown to over \$650 million in assets over the past 64 years and will continue to grow in the years to come.

Because we are truly locally owned and operated, the very people we serve — of all walks of life — can directly benefit from the community capital that Freedom First is able to deploy. That’s something the Freedom First team and I take a great deal of pride in, and I hope you do too.

We thank our 2018–2019 volunteer Board of Directors for their leadership and support



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Retired, Council of
Community Services



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LEAP, Grandin Co-Lab,
Community Sourced Capital



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Neighborhood Preservation



MICHELLE DAVIS
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Roanoke City Council



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Retired, The Roanoke Times



ANDREA GARLAND
City of Roanoke



JOHN BUDD
Budd CPA



SHIRLEY HOLLAND
Carilion Clinic

Freedom First. Where people bank for good.®

MORE THAN
\$650M
IN TOTAL ASSETS

Since 1956, Freedom First has served the Roanoke and New River Valleys. In that time, the region has grown exponentially – here, we take a look back on the impact Freedom First has had in just the past two years.

Freedom First has grown to over 50,000 members, assets of over \$650 million, and 10 branch locations in the Roanoke and New River Valleys. Freedom First members benefit from competitive rates, secure and convenient technology, and the knowledge that their money is being reinvested in their community.

MORE THAN
52,000
MEMBERS

Freedom First is “Where People Bank for Good” – for good business, with commercial loans that help create jobs. For good service, with local branches, local management, local decisions, and personal connections. For good features that put you in control of your money. And for good community, with programs that benefit everyone in our region. This report details our wide-reaching impact in all of these areas over the span of 2018-2019.

MORE THAN
200
EMPLOYEES

MORE THAN SIX DECADES OF LOCAL SERVICE

It’s no secret that our people make us who we are. Over 200 employees work hard each day to ensure that our members receive the stellar, personalized service they have come to expect from us. And that’s not all – over the past two years, our team has helped Freedom First support 458 local causes with almost 8,000 volunteer hours and employees have given nearly \$50,000 of their own money.

BRANCHES
10
IN ROANOKE AND NRV

On top of that, Freedom First’s ice cream truck, Scoop, spends the summer months delivering free ice cream to schools, businesses, and charity events throughout our service area. It is staffed entirely by volunteer employees, who drove over 6,000 miles to hand out 51,708 servings of ice cream to our community.

2018–2019 | Impact Banking by the numbers

\$130
MILLION



HOME OWNERSHIP

\$130,471,352 in home loans originated
\$29.8 million in home loans to low- to moderate income members

\$2.1
MILLION



RESPONSIBLE RIDES®

\$2,052,746 in Responsible Rides® loans accessed
183 Responsible Rides® loans accessed

3,591
PARTICIPANTS



FINANCIAL EDUCATION

3,591 financial education participants
\$7,598 in average debt reduced by financial coaching participants

\$608
THOUSAND



PAYDAY RELIEF

\$608,171 in Flash Cash and Payday Relief Loans accessed
699 Flash Cash and Payday Relief Loans accessed

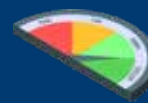
\$38
MILLION



COMMUNITY CAPITAL

\$37.9 million in economic impact lending to area businesses
\$6 million in community capital deployed

\$1.07
MILLION



IMPACT BANKING

\$301,324 in Workforce Development Loans accessed
\$778,010 in Second Chance Loans accessed

\$555
THOUSAND



ASSET BUILDING

\$554,900 held in Impact Banking member savings
35% year over year increase in Impact Banking member savings held

\$809
THOUSAND



COMMUNITY GIVE-BACK

7,787 employee volunteer hours given to the community
\$809,246 in overall community give back

\$5,853,194 in Impact Loans

DAVE PROSSER
Executive Director
Freedom First
Enterprises



“My biggest motivator is going beyond where others would typically go. It’s important for us to serve markets that are otherwise marginalized.”

A New Nonprofit Loan Fund: Freedom First Enterprises

Since its launch in 2017, Freedom First Enterprises has grown to become a source of capital to address the adverse effects of predatory lending, as well as a provider of comprehensive financial education.

Freedom First Enterprises is a separate 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit organization that operates alongside Freedom First Credit Union. Its purpose is to support community development efforts by assisting low- and very low-income consumers with safe alternative financial services when they lack the means to access traditional services due to poor credit, job instability, or other life factors. **Freedom First Enterprises operates as a loan fund, a financial provider, a capital provider, a fundraiser, and an economic development driver in the Appalachia region.**

EXPANDING FREEDOM FIRST’S IMPACT

As a nonprofit, Freedom First Enterprises complements Freedom First Credit Union to further its mission of **Helping People Prosper — Helping Communities Thrive** in expanded ways. For example, it currently operates as the fiscal agent for the cross-industry collaborative project called Local Impact For Tomorrow, which is highlighted later in this report.

Another substantial undertaking Freedom First Enterprises will tackle in 2020 will be to act as the financial counseling provider for the City of Roanoke’s Financial Empowerment Center. This initiative, launched by the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund, will allow the City of Roanoke to offer no-cost financial counseling services to its residents. Freedom First’s already robust financial counseling program was a natural fit for the program.

Dave Prosser, SVP of Community Development of Freedom First Credit Union and Executive Director of Freedom First Enterprises, says he is eager to see what the future holds for the nonprofit and its ability to positively impact our region.

Freedom First
Enterprises

Freedom First Enterprises Board of Directors

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President/Board Chairman

DAVE PROSSER
VP/Executive Director

DAN MERENDA
Board Secretary

WAYNE STRICKLAND
Board Treasurer

SHIRLEY HOLLAND
Board Director

Community Wellness: Local Impact for Tomorrow

Freedom First has partnered with Carilion Clinic, Delta Dental of Virginia, and Roanoke City Public Schools on this groundbreaking initiative that aims to work with a community to address holistic wellness needs.

A HEALTHIER FUTURE

MORE THAN
\$425,000
INITIAL CAPITAL INVESTMENT*

608
STUDENTS ENROLLED
(2019–2020)

MORE THAN
8,900
SOUTHEAST ROANOKE HOUSE-
HOLDS THAT COULD BENEFIT
FROM CLINIC SERVICES**

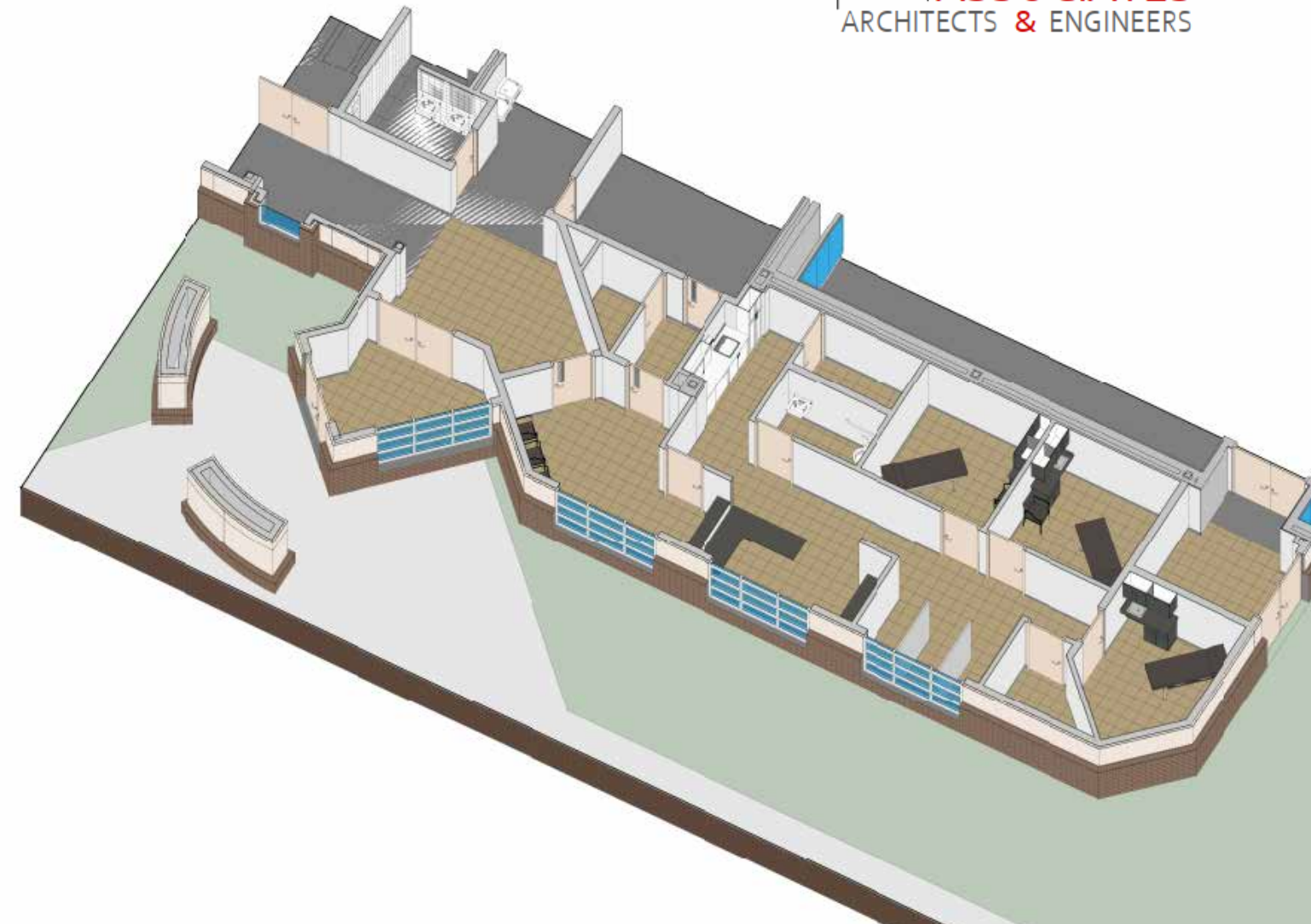
Local Impact for Tomorrow (LIFT) is a health and wellness initiative sponsored by a coalition of community partners. **We believe the key to strengthening a community starts with the family, and the easiest way to reach families is through their neighborhood school.** That's why we're partnering with Fallon Park Elementary School to bring life-changing services to the families who need them most.

A BRIGHT AND HEALTHY FUTURE IN YOUR BACKYARD

LIFT is focused on enabling a bright and healthy future for local families. The collaborative effort between Carilion Clinic, Delta Dental of Virginia, Freedom First, Roanoke City Public Schools, and numerous community partners will provide multiple services to students and local families. From physical health to oral health to financial wellness, as well as coordinating access to community services, LIFT will offer resources for the community in one convenient location.

A child's physical and mental health can impact their performance in school and their quality of life. Appropriate preventive medical, dental, and mental health care is essential. School nurses and a nurse practitioner will provide proactive clinical services, enabling students and their families to stay healthier. A community health worker, made possible by a United Way grant, will help students and families address other needs they may have, connecting them to community partners and services, including transportation, access to appointments, job training, housing needs, and more. Health and wellness have a large financial component as well, and Freedom First is supporting LIFT to help community members with their financial well-being, including offering services to help improve credit scores, reduce debt, establish savings, and more.

* Freedom First contributed \$125,000 of the initial capital investment.
** US Census 2019 estimates of households in Roanoke City Census Tracts surrounding the Fallon Park Elementary school district and broader Southeast neighborhood (tract numbers 5, 6.01, 6.02, 26, and 27).



Partnering with our communities to meet the health and wellness goals of local families, starting at Fallon Park Elementary School.

Economic Revitalization Through Commercial Banking

One way Freedom First gives back is by engaging in community redevelopment and rehabilitation projects, by providing capital to developers who invest in neighborhoods facing continued disinvestment.

INVESTING FOR GOOD

NEARLY
\$38 Million
IN ECONOMIC IMPACT LENDING

207
COMMERCIAL LOANS
ORIGINATED

MORE THAN
\$87 Million
IN COMMERCIAL INVESTMENTS

Freedom First's commercial and business banking teams are an integral part of the organization's mission to give back to the community. Every local business that we help by providing necessary capital often means more local jobs. Every commercial loan funded in a target reinvestment area means more economic vitality, which will in turn encourage more businesses to follow. It's a ripple effect.

A CONVERSATION WITH ED WALKER

Redeveloper, Roanoker, and community-minded entrepreneur Ed Walker banks with Freedom First because, "where your money is matters." He explains, "I can deposit my money with a regional, national, or multinational private bank and all the benefits of my deposits, fundamentally, will go to their shareholders. Or I can deposit all of my money with a community-oriented credit union like Freedom First and all the exponential impact of my deposits go to benefit my own community — where I live and work."

Freedom First financed several of Walker's rehabilitation projects, including the Salem Motor Lofts, which transformed a long-shuttered historic building into restaurant space and luxury lodgings in the heart of downtown Salem. And this is just one of 207 businesses that we supported in 2018 and 2019, indicating a much broader effect on the region simply through commercial investment and capital deployment.

"When you invest in a credit union like Freedom First, you're investing in your community," Walker continues. "And we all want exponential impact from the money that we earn. So what is the smartest way to put the money that we earn to work? It's to deposit it — which is an investment — in a credit union like Freedom First."

ED WALKER
Roanoke Based
Entrepreneur &
Redeveloper



"When you invest in Freedom First, you're investing in your community. For somebody like me, there is no other place to deposit money that makes the most sense."



Community Give-Back



51,708

SERVINGS OF ICE CREAM PROVIDED BY FFCU



7,787

EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEER HOURS



\$45,560

IN DONATIONS FROM EMPLOYEES



6,002

MILES DRIVEN IN SCOOP TO 245 EVENTS



\$51,232

GIVEN THROUGH SCOOP



\$561,442

IN SCHOLARSHIPS, GRANTS & EVENTS



We put the community first by serving people from all walks of life — even those by financing the local businesses you know and love.

who cannot access services at most banks — all while fostering economic growth

Affordable Housing Program

Freedom First's Affordable Housing Program is managed by a Virginia Housing Development Authority-certified Mortgage Loan Officer who works with members for months or years to achieve the goal of home ownership through smart finance management, down payment assistance, home ownership counseling, and non-conforming mortgage loan products. These home loans undergo custom underwriting, sometimes using alternative proof of credit, to ensure that the borrower can safely afford their home and have the opportunity to build wealth through home equity.

FINANCIALLY FIT IN ONLY FIVE MONTHS

When Daniel and Nicole B. decided they wanted to buy a home, they first tried inquiring at bigger banks. "They just showed us numbers, as opposed to having a conversation with us and asking who we are, what our goals are," Daniel recounts. But the couple felt an immediate difference when they came to Freedom First. "It was about the person over the credit score or amount of money, and the counselors shared their own home buying stories with us, which made us feel less alone."

Daniel and his wife Nicole sat down with one of Freedom First's financial coaches to figure out what they needed to do to buy a home. It was difficult to overcome the fear of sharing their finances with one another, but they were determined to do whatever it took to reach their goal. "There was no judgment through the whole process," Nicole says. "They stayed right with us the whole time. And now we're comfortable enough to coach each other, to talk to each other about financial decisions we used to make on our own."

The coaching sessions established an action plan to keep the couple focused on their goal. Originally, the plan was meant to take about a year to accomplish — but Daniel and Nicole far surpassed their own expectations by becoming homebuyer ready in only five months. The coaches had never seen anything like it before!

"We worked really hard on building our credit and getting everything in order," says Nicole. "But in the back of your mind you still have that fear and doubt about whether or not it's really going to happen. But Allison, our Mortgage Loan Officer, reassured us that she would take care of the financial side and told us to have fun picking out a home we really love."

"From the start, it always felt like Freedom First was working just for us," Daniel adds, referencing the financial coaching team and Community Development Mortgage Loan Representative Allison Wolf. "They were solely invested in our journey and genuinely excited for us. They even came to our housewarming party to celebrate! It made us feel like we made the right decision to work with Freedom First."

When asked about advice for others in similar situations, he has this to say. "No matter how bleak your situation may seem, it's not impossible to overcome it. If you put the work in, ask for help, and be patient, you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish."



"Going to a place like Freedom First that really cares and wants to see you buy a home — that's a big difference from other banks. They're in our corner and want to help us grow."

— Nicole B.
Homebuyer

2018–2019 AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM OUTCOMES

\$130M

There were a total of 783 home loans made in 2018–2019 for a total of \$130,471,352.

\$29,836,045

in home loans went to low- and moderate-income members in 2018-2019.

\$250K

in down payment assistance was accessed by homeowners in 2018-2019.

Financial Education

With National Credit Union Administration (NCUA)-certified financial coaches on staff, Freedom First helps members receive financial education tailored to their individual situations. We also partner with numerous local nonprofits to host specialized classroom-style sessions tailored to their clients' needs, including, but not limited to, community members served by Blue Ridge Literacy; Total Action for Progress; STEP, Inc.; Family Service of Roanoke Valley; and Transitional Options for Women.

PATHWAYS TO FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Freedom First's financial coaching program has grown drastically since its humble beginnings. It is an unlimited, no-cost service for Freedom First members with the ultimate goal of long-term financial stability and success for participants. The sessions, both one-on-one and group workshops, focus on goal setting, asset building, debt management, credit repair/establishment, spending plans, and banking best practices.

Each of Freedom First's financial coaches is certified through NCUA's Financial Counseling Certification Program, a training that ensures counselors understand remedial, preventive, and productive counseling; myths and truths about money; how to provide effective analysis of a member's financial condition; how to develop personalized and systematic action plans for members; and how to build strong counseling relationships. Counselors must renew their certification by exam every three years.

Freedom First's financial coaching team utilizes the Pathways to Financial Empowerment model. This program was first implemented in 2015 with a \$20,000 grant through Inclusiv and Neighborhood Trust Financial Partners as part of a new initiative to support financial counseling in Low Income Credit Unions. This initiative, recognized in 2017 by the Wall Street Journal for its impact, incorporates one-on-one financial counseling that is integrated with product delivery and supported by an outcome-tracking platform.

Using this platform, the financial coaching team has seen amazing results. An assessment by Pathways shows that on average, participants of Freedom First's financial coaching reduced their debt by \$7,598. For the 70% of participants making \$30,000 per year or less, this equals nearly a quarter of their annual income.



“It's incredible to see the huge difference just a little bit of education can make. We aim to be as non-judgmental as possible so people aren't afraid to ask us questions and learn.”

– Kathryn Knotts
Financial Education Coordinator

2018–2019 FINANCIAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES

3,591

3,591 people participated in Financial Coaching classes and sessions in 2018–2019.

\$7,598

Financial Coaching participants reduced their debt by an average of \$7,598 in 2018–2019.

74%

74% of Financial Coaching participants established credit in 2018–2019, with a median credit score of 568.

Responsible Rides®

Responsible Rides is an award-winning auto buying program for low- to moderate-income earners that also includes educational classes on finances and budgeting, as well as car maintenance and care. This program works closely with a network of local nonprofit partners to reach community members: **Total Action for Progress (TAP), New River Community Action, Support to Eliminate Poverty (STEP, Inc.), and local area car dealers and mechanics.**

Our full-time, in-house coordinator streamlines the lending process for borrowers, coordinates vehicle maintenance classes, and travels regularly to meet with residents across our region.

THE VALUE OF PEACE OF MIND

Deanna G. was always wary of accumulating any debt in her name, so she had never really considered getting a loan to buy a car. But when her family's old car broke down while she was pregnant and needed to get around Franklin County, she and her husband took a closer look at the Responsible Rides program she learned about through an information session at STEP, Inc.

"Freedom First taught us about what it means to get an auto loan," she recalls. "Getting that education on what to expect, what healthy debt is, what a good car payment is, what a good APR is — it really helped us realize that it was a good option for us."

Deanna also learned how to keep her car in great condition through the vehicle maintenance classes. "We learned different things about how to maintain a car so it lasts as long as possible," she says. "In fact, we bought that car several years ago and it's still in great shape. We didn't realize how important safety and reliability were to us until we got a Responsible Rides loan. **And even though we were cautious about getting a loan at first, it actually saved us money in the long run because we're not having to repair it every few weeks like with our old car.**"

Freedom First's personal touch with this program and others is what keeps Deanna a member. "Responsible Rides has a connection with local dealerships that makes the car buying process more personal, less intimidating, and much more affordable than going it alone. I've referred at least five different people to Freedom First because what they do is tailored to you."



"I can't imagine where I'd be without the car I bought through Responsible Rides because it's so reliable."

– Deanna G.
Responsible Rides Participant



"The partnerships we've made with local dealers and mechanics go a long way in building trust with our members."

– Kim English
Responsible Rides® Coordinator

2018–2019 RESPONSIBLE RIDES® OUTCOMES

182

182 children and 49 single parents directly benefited from Responsible Rides® loans in 2018–2019.

\$2.1M

183 Responsible Rides® auto loans were accessed for a total of \$2,052,746 in 2018–2019.

\$31K

Responsible Rides® loan holders accumulated \$31,617 in savings balances in 2018–2019.

Debt Consolidation & Relief

Installment or payday loans can be deceptively expensive. Customers are pushed by predatory lenders to renew their loans over and over again, which causes mountains of interest debt to accrue. **According to Pew Research and The Economist, every 90 seconds, \$67,000 in new payday loan debt is issued in the U.S. and roughly 2.5 million American households use payday loans each year, making it a \$40 billion industry.**

That's why Freedom First offers payday loan alternatives and debt consolidation options to our members.

For example, Freedom First's Payday Relief and Flash Cash loans act as a tool for people who have already fallen into a cycle of mounting high-interest debt to pay off their loans at a more manageable interest rate, which in turn can give them the room they need to break out of the predatory lending cycle.

A FRESH START THROUGH DEBT RELIEF

Gloria M. describes her financial situation prior to coming to Freedom First as "not a good one." She was emotionally stressed from judgments, bankruptcy, and dealing with collection agencies. She didn't even know where to begin to get back to a position of stability.

West End branch staff who got to know Gloria recognized that she needed some guidance, so they referred her to Community Development for a consultation. There, Gloria was able to outline her goals and current situation, which she was then able to transform into an action plan for the next six months.

"Banking with Freedom First has changed my life in so many ways," she says. "It has really made a difference in everything that I do, how I live now. I was able to get a loan to consolidate my debt and pay off everyone that I owed. I was also able to start re-establishing my credit with small purchases on my Freedom First credit card that I paid off each month to show that I am creditworthy."

She admits that the process was not easy and took a great deal of patience, diligence, and follow-through to build her credit back up and pay off her outstanding debts. But in committing to her action plan, she was able to demonstrate to her teenage son how to manage his finances.

"I'm showing my son that you can start making smart financial decisions when you're still young, and that can set you up for a more successful future so you don't have to go through what I did," Gloria explains. "But he also sees that if you do end up in a tough spot, it's not impossible to overcome it and turn things around. If I can do it, so can you."



"I now feel confident that I'll be able to own my own home one day."

– Gloria M.
Freedom First Member

2018–2019 PAYDAY RELIEF OUTCOMES



699 Payday Relief and Flash Cash small-dollar loans were accessed in 2018–2019.



\$608,171 in Payday Relief and Flash Cash small-dollar loans were accessed in 2018–2019.



An estimated \$241,159 in interest payments was saved by Payday Relief and Flash Cash borrowers in 2018–2019.*

*Based on calculations of a 6-month loan of \$300 using the typical average Annual Percentage Rate advertised by the largest payday lending chains, or as determined by a state regulator, in 2018 and 2019 in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Source: Center for Responsible Lending.

Commercial Redevelopment

Freedom First's robust Business Banking and Commercial Lending departments worked hard with local developers, business owners, and entrepreneurs to breathe new life into our region through commercial redevelopment of existing properties, often preserving and honoring the buildings' historical significance to the surrounding community.

REINVESTING IN A THRIVING COMMUNITY

In 2018 and 2019, Freedom First financed a number of significant redevelopment projects. For example, the Salem Motor Lofts, pictured to the right, transformed a long-abandoned storefront in downtown Salem into a mixed-use site of restaurant space and luxury lodgings. The project took care to preserve much of the original building facade, original brick, and exposed beams.

Other projects include the Lancerlot Sports Complex in Vinton, which was a popular ice skating spot until a snowstorm damaged the ice rink in the 1990s. The newly renovated rink serves as the practice facility for the Rail Yard Dawgs and Virginia Tech ice hockey teams, as well as being open to the community for recreation throughout the year.

Roanoke area redeveloper Ed Walker offered his perspective on the importance of community reinvestment through commercial redevelopment. **"Someone like me is interested in how we can recycle this building, how we can find new vitality for it," he says.** He explained that each project he undertakes bears the potential for a wide variety of uses depending on the circumstances and needs of the community. He and his team weigh the possibilities of creating an entrepreneurial co-lab, housing, food and beverage, a gym, or a nonprofit community center. Sometimes, the vision includes a mix of two or more of these facility types.

Walker continues, "Those are all the ideas we deal with every day. **And that's all terrific, but it's meaningless until you find a financial institution like Freedom First that wants to get behind those ideas, that shares those ideas, and is willing to lend its members money in order to facilitate the achievement of that transformation.**"



"The importance of shopping, investing, and banking local is because when you spend a dollar at a local business, the vast majority of that dollar stays within the community."

– Brent Cochran
Roanoke-Based Entrepreneur

2018–2019 COMMERCIAL REDEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

207

207 commercial loans issued in 2018–2019.

\$37.9M

\$37,900,000 in commercial loans to targeted investment areas in 2018–2019.

\$87.1M

\$87,108,680 in commercial loans in 2018–2019.

Broader Impact With Outside Investment

As a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), Freedom First is positioned to funnel secondary capital and other funding sources back into our community for even greater impact.

IMPACT MULTIPLIED

MORE THAN
\$6.7 Million
IN OUTSIDE FUNDING SECURED

MORE THAN
458
LOCAL CAUSES SUPPORTED

Freedom First acquires outside funding, often from the national level, that is then brought into our region through initiatives that meet our community's needs. This means that we are not only keeping our members' money local, but we are also bringing new capital into our region for local benefit.

INVESTING IN OUR REGION THROUGH HOUSING ACCESS

In 2018 and 2019, Freedom First was able to secure over \$6.7 million in funding from the CDFI Fund and the Southern Equity Fund, most of which will expand home ownership opportunities in our community through our Affordable Housing Program and a partnership with Habitat for Humanity in the Roanoke Valley.

The Inclusiv Southern Equity Fund in particular offers secondary capital investments to credit unions serving communities of color across 17 southern states. "Financial exclusion has been a persistent problem in the South, particularly for communities of color," said Director of Inclusiv/Capital Cathi Kim. "The Inclusiv Southern Equity Fund is designed to promote economic mobility among low-wealth and underserved communities, preserve and build diversity in community-owned and controlled financial services, and increase the impact of scalable institutions throughout the American South."

The CDFI Fund, a source of secondary capital for financial institutions certified by the U.S. Treasury Department, also plays an important role in generating economic growth and opportunity in some of our nation's most distressed communities. **Freedom First succeeded in securing this extremely competitive funding source two years in a row in order to augment our Affordable Housing Program and to deploy financial services in our region's Persistent Poverty Counties.**

ALLISON WOLF
Community
Development
Mortgage Loan
Representative



"With the capital investment from the CDFI Fund, we're able to partner with Habitat for Humanity in the Roanoke Valley to make the dream of home ownership come true for even more Roanoke families."



KERI GARNETT
Financial
Empowerment
Center Manager

“Opening access to financial education can be a truly impactful benefit to the Roanoke community. The more financially empowered people are, the more they, too, can give back and lead fulfilling lives.”

Looking Forward: Financial Empowerment Center

Freedom First is partnering with the City of Roanoke and the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund to make financial coaching a no-cost public service for our community through a Financial Empowerment Center.

The City of Roanoke has contracted Freedom First to act as the financial counseling provider of Roanoke’s Financial Empowerment Center, the first of its kind in Virginia. Financial Empowerment Centers **offer professional, one-on-one financial counseling as a no-cost public service to enable residents to address their financial challenges and needs and plan for their futures.**

BUILDING STRONGER FINANCIAL FUTURES

Freedom First’s counselors will work with a wide range of local nonprofit partners and government agencies to ensure that Roanoke’s residents have access to holistic support that will ultimately enable them to achieve financial stability.

“Financial stability is just one piece of the puzzle, but it’s a crucial one,” says Financial Empowerment Center Manager Keri Garnett. “When someone is able to break out of a cycle of high-interest debt, build up their credit, and stick to a budget, they can turn their whole life around.”

The Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund defines the keys to financial empowerment as **asset building, banking access, consumer financial protection, and financial education and counseling**, so the FEC model is designed with these pillars as the organizational focus. In 2017, the Fund conducted a five-city pilot study that showed how FEC clients achieved three times as many savings outcomes as would have been seen before.

With such encouraging results, we are optimistic about the outcomes of our own community in the movement toward greater financial wellness and success. The Center will open officially in mid-2020 and operate throughout the City, including out of the Freedom First Crossroads branch.

THE PUBLIC GOOD

3,591
FINANCIAL COACHING
PARTICIPANTS

AVERAGE DEBT REDUCTION OF
\$7,598
FOR COACHING PARTICIPANTS

Awards & Accolades

“Freedom First has been a great partner in the many initiatives and events they sponsor with us. They truly understand community involvement as business and also as a vital part of their mission. Their support has allowed us to engage in some projects that would have probably been unfeasible without their help.”

– Jaime Clark
Marketing & Communications
Downtown Roanoke, Inc.



- Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Fund Recipient (2018, 2019)
- Centers for Financial Empowerment Fund Planning Grant Recipient (2018)
- Credit Unions Care Foundation Grant Recipient (2018)
- National Credit Union Administration Underserved Outreach Grant Recipient (2018)
- Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year, Large Not-for-Profit Category (2018)
- Credit Union National Association Dora Maxwell Award (2018)
- Roanoke Valley Association of REALTORS® Affiliate of the Year — Paula Brown, SVP Mortgage (2018)
- Downtown Roanoke, Inc. St. Patrick's Day Parade & Shamrock Festival, Best in Show (2018)
- Forbes® Magazine Top 5 Credit Unions in Virginia (2019)
- Inclusiv Southern Equity Fund Secondary Capital Recipient (2019)
- Roanoke Valley Association of REALTORS® Good Neighbor of the Year Affiliate Award — Allison Wolf, Community Development Mortgage Loan Representative (2019)

FREEDOM FIRST HAS A MISSION OF
**Helping People Prosper —
Helping Communities Thrive.**





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