

Microcredit helps turn lives around

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Andy used to run a kiddie ride at an amusement park. Now he owns his own cleaning business and is earning more than \$700 per month, thanks to a microcredit cooperation in Colorado called Credit for All.

Andy got a \$500 loan from Credit for All, and with it bought business cards and a vacuum cleaner. Andy is planning to buy a car with his next \$1,000 loan, so he won't have to carry his vacuum cleaner on the bus to get to work.

"I have really benefitted by the support that Credit for All gave me. And I am working hard to be a success," Andy said.

Jacque is a single mother who used to work two waitress jobs and live off welfare. She said that fate stepped in, and she discovered microcredit. Now she and her sister own a business that sells herbal oils and salves for babies and pregnant women. Their initial product, "Mountain Momma's Baby Butt Balm," has been a great success. Jacque can now spend more time at home with her son, and plans to be off welfare in less than a year.

"(Microcredit) has helped us realize our dream to have our own business, producing a product that not only helps others, but also enables us to stay at home with our children," Jacque said.

Andy and Jacque are just a few of the millions of people who have benefitted from microcredit programs, said Bob Sample, president of Credit for All.

Microcredit is an effective way to alleviate poverty around the world, said Ned C. Hill, dean of the Marriott School. This is why the Marriott School decided to sponsor its second annual MicroEnterprise Conference, Hill said.

Leaders in the Microcredit movement from around the world came to BYU Friday and Saturday to share their experiences with microcredit and teach others how to contribute in the 'war' against poverty.

The MicroEnterprise movement has its roots in the work of Muhammad Yunus, the father of microcredit and founder of Grameen Bank, headquartered in Bangladesh. The bank is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing small loans to individuals who cannot otherwise obtain credit.

More than 2 million people have borrowed money from Grameen Bank. The average loan received is \$140.

"We have started believing the unbelievable namely, that the elimination of poverty is feasible, and that there is no reason whatsoever why anyone should be poor on this planet," said Yunus, That statement has become the battle cry of the microcredit movement.

Yunus believes that the poor know their problems, and therefore, they are the only ones who know how to solve them, said Blaine Johnson, a BYU student who attended the conference.

"They know what to do with their money and we can't really train them because we don't know their situation," said Johnson, a junior from Monett Mo., majoring in International Development.

Peter Rose, the Founder and Executive Director of the Washington based microcredit organization CASH, said at the conference that it is important to believe in and trust the people who are receiving the loans.

His agency, like Grameen Bank, is based on the notion that low-income borrowers will become self-reliant if they are provided with money, knowledge and responsibility.

Rose said the phrase, "give me a fish and I eat today, teach me to fish and I eat forever," can be applied, with modifications to the concept of microcredit.

"We don't need to teach them to fish necessarily, we need to give them a loan so they can buy a net or go buy the reel or the bait or whatever. And every once in a while we will give them some better ideas about how deep the lures should be," he said.

BYU students said they agreed with the concept behind microcredit.

"The people are the ones who have to make the decisions, and microcredit has that potential because the people are the ones that get the money and decide how they want to spend the money, and they pay the money back, so essentially, they become very independent and they're not turning to somebody saying 'what next' they're the ones who are saying we will decide what to do," said Tiffany Ivins, a junior from Bountiful majoring in humanities.

Sample said that to get involved in microcredit, you have to be a little crazy.

"I frequently look at this and say, I don't know whether I can do this, I don't know if this is working. But I really do believe that microcredit is making a contribution to getting a lot of people out of poverty in the United States as well as abroad."

Janice Peacock just got back from a humanitarian mission in the Phillippines where she taught people how to plant gardens and raise rabbits. She said she attended the conference to find out ways she could keep on serving.

"Your life is just never the same after serving the poor people," Peacock said.

Ann Richards and her husband pioneered the Indonesian humanitarian mission. She is now serving as the humanitarian representative for her ward.

"We come home and we want to feel like we are still doing something to help other people. And in a conference like this, you can get some concrete ideas that can help you so you can still make a difference. There's nothing like that feeling of giving," Richards said.

Ivins said she was glad BYU could host the MicroEnterprise conference. "Students are idealist, so I think its really fitting that they hold this kind of conference on a college campus. It brings all these experts on the field -- people who have been involved for like 20 years and they start filtering the minds of the youth with their experience. So, essentially we are building on their shoulders. And we end up with a whole lot more because they have done a lot of groundwork for us."

Getting involved with microcredit is something all BYU students should consider, said Emily Christenson, a senior from Washington D.C., majoring in civil engineering.