



This month we sat down with Noelle Carter, Chief Operating Officer at Consumer Credit Counseling Services of Buffalo, Inc. to brainstorm tips that you can use to build your financial health...one paycheck at a time!

### 1. Pull your credit reports once a year (for free!) at [annualcreditreport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com).

Pull your report every 4 months to keep any eye on changes as they happen. The three major credit reporting bureaus are Experian, Equifax and TransUnion.

**Pro Tip:** "Free credit monitoring sites can be helpful, but make sure never to enter your credit card information—to avoid any charges—and make sure you are on a secured, trusted site."

### 2. Track your expenses.

Start tracking your expenses to expose areas you are overspending in so that you can make necessary budget adjustments.

**Pro Tip:** "You can utilize a paper or pen, or use a free smartphone app, like *Spending Tracker* or *Mint*."



### 3. Address credit card debt sooner rather than later.

Devise a plan to pay any credit card debt off in the quickest and most cost effective way.

**Pro Tip:** "If you carry balances on your credit cards, start a spreadsheet listing the account name, balance, interest rate, annual fees etc. It may be an eye opening experience to get everything in black and white in front of you."

### 4. Save for your periodic expenses.

We are all aware of our monthly bills—but what about gifts, car and home maintenance, sports, or music lessons? If you don't plan for these costs, you might need to turn to credit cards to cover your costs.

**Pro Tip:** "Determine what you need for the year to cover these periodic expenses, divide by the number of pay periods you have, then have that amount directly deposited in to a separate savings account from your paycheck."

## Are You Ready to Improve Your Financial Future?

If you feel overwhelmed with your finances, whether it be with **budgeting**, **credit card debt**, **student loan debt**, or **bad credit**, don't be tempted to bury your head in the sand! There is free, local help available through your EAP. As part of your benefits, you may receive services with a financial counselor over multiple sessions to tackle financial issues and brainstorm better fiscal strategies for the future.