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## From the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

Where can consumers go for help and advice? I'm proud to say that, for 40-plus years, they can come to Consumer Action. In the fiscal year ending in March 2015, Consumer Action responded to 6,354 complaints on a veritable smorgasbord of subjects from consumers in virtually every state. But that's hardly the end of our reach.

On all fronts, our dedicated staff has done an incredible job at expanding our outreach while strengthening our programs and services.

Our outreach and training work among community-based organizations (CBOs) nationwide creates a ripple effect that carries the consumer literacy message far and wide in underserved communities. During the last fiscal year, Consumer Action's outreach team traveled to 15 cities to train more than 760 CBO staff members and consumers. These organizations serve servicemembers and veterans, youth, low-to-moderate-income families, the disabled, seniors, new immigrants and the formerly incarcerated—just to name some of the populations we reach.

Consumer Action created three new training modules, six new stand-alone educational publications, four new webinars and three short educational videos. We also updated six of our existing consumer resources to make sure the information we provide is timely and accurate. Our free multilingual publications reached hundreds of thousands of consumers via our websites and through the 1,917 requests we filled for 507,141 printed copies.

Our new Class Action Database logged 84 cases and settlements that were open to claims, garnering 153,037 total page views by consumers who otherwise might not have known they were eligible to join a settlement.

During the last fiscal year, our email list grew by leaps and bounds, to more than 50,000 consumers who regularly take action on our legislative alerts. Consumer Action's reach on social media grew, ending the year with close to 1,850 followers on Twitter and more than 2,000 Facebook fans thanks to the informative posts and tweets by our staff.

And, our 2014 Consumer Excellence Awards, held at Google's new offices in Washington, DC, raised a record-setting \$240,000 in support of our free, multilingual consumer assistance and referral hotline and our *Consumer Action News* and *INSIDER* newsletters.

How about joining us? Visit our website, sign up for our email newsletters, "like" us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter. We'd love to hear from you, no matter how you reach us!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katherine Sawyer".

## The year in review

### Advocacy

In the nation's capital and in Sacramento, California, Consumer Action's staff advocated for consumer-friendly legislation, regulatory reforms and increased corporate responsibility.

### The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB)

Consumer Action has worked tirelessly to establish and protect the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Since the CFPB's founding in 2011, we've used our voice to inform and engage the agency on numerous consumer issues.

A key area of focus throughout the 2014-2015 fiscal year (FY 2015) was to ensure that complaint narratives were included in the CFPB consumer complaint database. Consumer Action led a joint effort by consumer, civil rights, community, privacy and fair lending organizations to encourage the CFPB to allow consumers to make public the details of their complaints rather than limit them to sterile facts (name of company, category of complaint, etc.). We argued—successfully—that complaint narratives would help inform consumers' financial decision-making process, prevent further financial harm and allow regulators and advocates to identify unfair, deceptive or discriminatory patterns in the marketplace. Finally, in June of 2015, 7,700 detailed accounts of consumers' financial complaints were, for the first time, made available for public review at the [CFPB complaint database webpage](#). Ruth Susswein of Consumer Action spoke at the El Paso field hearing where the Bureau announced its plans for the more complete and open database.

Throughout the year, our staff met regularly with the CFPB regarding such critical consumer issues as debt collection, mortgage servicing, foreclosure prevention, credit reporting, data collection, financial literacy/consumer education, credit cards, student loans, bank services, arbitration, payday lending, lending to the military, language access and more.

In the "Some things never change" department, FY 2015 required Consumer Action and its allies to fend off attacks by Republicans in Congress who remained intent on weakening and diminishing the CFPB's authority, cutting its budget and creating excess layers of oversight for the consumer financial regulator. In response to 11 proposals and bills designed to harass and undermine the authority of the Bureau, Consumer Action and its allies in the Americans for Financial Reform coalition urged Congress to stop obstructing reasonable regulation that serves to protect consumers and the financial industry from another financial meltdown.

We continued to report on the CFPB's latest actions to protect consumers in the "CFPB Watch" feature of our monthly *INSIDER* e-newsletter.

### Mandatory binding arbitration

Banishing mandatory binding arbitration was a major focus of Consumer Action's work for the year. Forced arbitration clauses, buried in the fine print of service agreements, prevent consumers who have been harmed from taking the offending company to court, alone or in a class action, and force them to abide by the decision of a private arbitration provider, typically chosen and paid for by the company.

➤ In June 2014, advocates, including Consumer Action, wrote to the CFPB urging it to conduct a survey of credit card holders to learn what consumers know about arbitration and how they feel about signing away their legal right to go to court in order to be a company's customer.

The following month, as part of the Fair Arbitration Now (FAN) coalition, we met to strategize about mobilizing and informing the public and legislators about the perils of forced, pre-dispute arbitration requirements. Looking forward to the results of the CFPB research, the coalition explored ways of making the public aware of the anticipated study and pushing Congress to enact the Arbitration Fairness Act, which would prohibit pre-dispute binding arbitration clauses.

In November 2014, Consumer Action took the fight to the big screen by co-hosting the San Francisco premiere of "Lost in the Fine Print," Alliance for Justice's short documentary about the consequences for consumers of forced arbitration. The following week, we delivered a petition signed by more than 67,000 consumers and activists to the Wells Fargo & Co. headquarters in San Francisco—Public Citizen delivered the petition to the PNC Financial Services Group Inc. headquarters in Pittsburgh—calling on banks to remove terms in their contracts that deny customers their right to a day in court. The petition was organized by national consumer and citizen groups Public Citizen, Consumer Action, The Other 98%, Alliance for Justice, American Association for Justice, Americans for Financial Reform and National Association of Consumer Advocates, and targeted the five biggest banks that use forced arbitration clauses: PNC, Wells Fargo, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup and U.S. Bancorp.

At the start of 2015, Consumer Action joined over 100 organizations in asking the CFPB to ban mandatory arbitration clauses from consumer credit card, cell phone, car loan, student loan and other financial contracts. The CFPB released its [arbitration study](#) in March 2015. In October 2015, it announced that mandatory arbitration reform is on the Bureau's docket.

## Banking access

Millions of U.S. unbanked and underbanked consumers rely on non-traditional financial services to cash checks, access and transfer funds, spend and borrow. Consumer Action weighed in on the status quo, made recommendations and scrutinized proposals to improve banking options for underserved households.

With the CFPB planning to propose new rules that would expand consumer protections on prepaid cards, Consumer Action joined the National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) and other advocacy organizations in calling for a number of specific changes, including a mandatory \$50 limit on consumer liability for transactions made with a lost or stolen prepaid card (to match the protection available to credit card users).

Early in 2015, Consumer Action submitted comments to the CFPB in support of its proposed prepaid card rules, including considering any form of overdraft on a prepaid card as a line of credit subject to ability-to-pay evaluation.

We also encouraged industry to adopt greater consumer protections on prepaid payroll cards. Linda Sherry of Consumer Action joined a panel at the Network Branded Prepaid Card Association (NBPCA) Power of Prepaid conference, the prepaid/payroll card industry's major annual event. Sherry noted that there are many benefits for unbanked consumers who receive their wages on a payroll card, but that employers should work hard to keep costs to payees low. Consumer Action had, a few months earlier, created a four-page guide designed to help employees who work for companies that offer a payroll card determine

whether that is their best option, understand how the cards work and how to avoid fees, and know their rights. *An Employee's Guide to Payroll Cards* was produced in partnership with Visa Inc. and NB-PCA. A guide for employers was also part of the project.

Responding to a white paper by the Office of the Inspector General of the United States Postal Service (USPS) that laid out options for having the USPS provide non-bank financial services for the underserved, Consumer Action became a supporter of the idea. Not only would the income generated from these services help support the financially struggling agency, postal banking could promote financial inclusion and save families billions of dollars in fees—a win-win proposition. Shortly thereafter, Consumer Action joined Americans for Financial Reform (AFR) for a daylong conference in Washington, DC on a related topic. The “Banking Without Wall Street” event explored a range of options that could better provide fair and accessible products for all consumers and better support local community development.

In mid-2014, the CFPB began investigating the benefits and challenges of mobile banking services, including how mobile technologies affect unbanked and underserved consumers who have limited access to traditional banks. In response to the Bureau's request for input, Consumer Action joined other advocates in signing the National Consumer Law Center's comments highlighting issues of concern. The comments called for protections around the safety of funds, data security, dispute procedures and measures to control deceptive marketing strategies, among other ideas about how regulators can help consumers and the industry by leveling the playing field and establishing strong minimum standards.

As part of our ongoing advocacy work for veterans and servicemembers, we developed the *Economic Survival Guide for Servicemembers and Veterans*, which, among other things, informs current and former military about the high costs of payday loans and fringe banking services and guides them toward mainstream financial services. We applauded the Department of Defense's September 2014 proposal for regulations to reduce predatory lending practices, significantly expand the consumer protections provided to servicemembers and close loopholes in current lending rules. These new rules, advocated for by the anti-payday loan coalition of which Consumer Action is a part, updated the Military Lending Act (MLA) to close loopholes and provide greater protections. The proposal became part of the final rule issued in July 2015.

## Language access

One of the things that differentiates Consumer Action from other consumer advocacy organizations is our active outreach to limited-English-speaking consumers through multilingual educational materials, community education and in-language media.

During the fall of 2014, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) proposed a “language access” plan to help it serve disparate U.S. populations. With input from our network of community-based organizations nationwide that cater to multilingual communities, Consumer Action submitted comments to guide the CFPB on some of the most pressing language access issues. First, we encouraged the Bureau to ensure it hires people with fluency in non-English languages as well as expertise in industry language for financial products or service areas such as mortgage servicing. While commending the Bureau for taking complaints in 180 languages via a translation provider, we suggested that the responses also be routinely provided in the language used by the complainant. We further recommended that complaints be analyzed to detect trends in financial problems or scams that target particular in-language communities.

## Housing

Consumer Action continued its push for mortgage principal reduction as the primary remedy for those still in need of loan modification, greater outreach efforts to find borrowers who are eligible for compensatory mortgage funds, and the use of leftover settlement funds to support HUD-approved housing counseling efforts. We also continued to monitor big-bank settlements and their fulfillment of requirements to assist homeowners who were unfairly foreclosed on.

In cooperation with other housing and consumer advocates, Consumer Action urged regulators and legislators to take steps to establish protections for surviving spouses who are at risk of losing their homes to foreclosure, improve access to mortgage modifications and improve mortgage servicing. We also pressed Congress to enact legislation to extend the Mortgage Forgiveness Debt Relief Act, which forgives any tax liability on forgiven mortgage debt for former homeowners who were forced to enter into short sales.

Consumer Action joined others in a letter supporting the CFPB's efforts to improve Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) data collection and suggested additional data sets, including whether racial/ethnic data is self-reported or based on the lender's observation, if applicants are first-time homebuyers and whether the applicant speaks English as a second language. We also spread the word about the CFPB's new resources, introduced in January, to educate the public about the new protections provided by the Bureau's mortgage rules, and its new mortgage rate checker tool, which enables consumers to learn the range of mortgage rates in their state before applying for a home loan.

During the year, we joined a host of advocacy and civil rights organizations in letters and other actions against bad bills that would undermine many mortgage reforms aimed at helping consumers recover from the recession and foreclosure crisis of 2008-2009.

## **Student loans**

In response to a draft rule released by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to regulate for-profit institutions, Consumer Action joined a broad coalition of more than 50 organizations representing students, veterans, consumers and civil rights groups in filing public comments calling on the Administration to strengthen the rule in five specific ways: 1) Provide financial relief for students in programs that lose eligibility for public funding; 2) Limit enrollment in poorly performing programs until they improve; 3) Close loopholes and raise standards for the programs; 4) Preserve and protect low-cost programs where most graduates don't need to borrow; and 5) Prohibit problem schools from offering new programs for at least three years. To drum up grassroots support, we emailed a Take Action! alert to our supporters, urging them to join the coalition in submitting their own comments for a stronger final rule. Consumer Action received 217 letters and submitted them to the Education Department.

Facing increased scrutiny from lawmakers, regulators and advocates, several of the biggest for-profit college players were investigated, faced lawsuits, filed for bankruptcy and collapsed altogether (including Corinthian Colleges, parent of Everest College, WyoTech and Heald College). But they didn't roll over: The for-profit college industry's powerful lobbying group challenged the Department of Education on revising student loan regulations. Consumer Action joined an amicus brief countering the lobby's lawsuit, and the case ultimately was thrown out in both DC and New York's federal district courts—a win for students, veterans, consumers and their advocates.



Under the new “gainful employment” standard, which took effect July 1, 2015, for-profit colleges will be at risk of losing their federal aid should a typical graduate’s annual loan repayments exceed 20 percent of their discretionary income or 8 percent of their total earnings. A coalition letter to the Department outlined recommended steps the agency could take to improve the performance standards for tax-funded institutions.

In a March 2015 speech, President Obama called for a Student Aid Bill of Rights, highlighting, among other things, the need for an improved student complaint system to ensure quality and accountability for all players. Consumer Action and coalition advocates had already been working to identify ways the CFPB and the Department of Education could better serve students and their families who have complaints regarding their education and their private and federal student loans. Months before, Consumer Action joined student loan advocates in a letter to the CFPB asking for the publication of more detail about complaints submitted to the Bureau.

Consumer Action and its coalition partners met with the Senate HELP committee and provided feedback on the proposed Higher Education Reauthorization bill. Committee chairman Senator Harkin (D-IA) later introduced the Higher Education Affordability Act (HEAA), his bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act of 1965. The bill incorporates several coalition recommendations, and focuses on four main goals: increasing college affordability, helping struggling borrowers, strengthening accountability and improving transparency of college costs and quality.

In January, Consumer Action published its new five-page [Student Loan and Education Resource List](#), a survey of some of the best student borrower resources available, including ones from the Department of Education, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and many other reputable sources that help explain students’ options. The guide also links to resources that help borrowers communicate their needs to the companies managing their loans and get advice about their options, including easy-to-follow instructions.

## Privacy

In the core area of privacy protection, Consumer Action joined others to advocate for individual privacy as a civil right, fend off unwanted phone calls and prying eyes, protect families from intrusion from marketers and encourage consumer protections that keep pace with technology.

In response to a request for public comment from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) on proposed policy changes from the Administration to better protect the privacy of Americans, Consumer Action submitted written comments on behalf of a coalition of organizations including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Consumer Federation of America, Privacy Rights Clearinghouse and Common Sense Media. The comments asked the White House to immediately implement a strong and resolute Consumer Privacy Bill of Rights that includes limitations on how consumer data can be used and collected, with carve-outs for sensitive categories of information such as financial, health, race, ethnicity, location, age, and data collected in an education context.

In an effort to keep cell phones off limits to intrusive marketers, Consumer Action joined Americans for Financial Reform, the Consumer Federation of America, the National Association of Consumer Advocates, the National Consumer Law Center, the National Consumers League, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG in the campaign against any action by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to allow robocalls to cell phones without consumers’ express consent. Powerful industry groups, including the Chamber of Commerce, the American Bankers Association, the American Collectors Association and the Consumer Bankers Association, were behind the proposal, which would have gutted a key consumer and

➤ privacy law, the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA). On June 18, 2015, the FCC voted to approve expanded restrictions on robocalling.

Also in the area of telecommunications privacy, Consumer Action joined in efforts to ensure that the FCC designate all data collected by commercial entities using E911 technologies—the technology for pinpointing a cell phone caller’s exact location when a request for emergency services is made—as “customer proprietary network information,” or CPNI, a designation with strong privacy and security parameters. Earlier in the year, Consumer Action joined privacy and civil liberties advocates in a letter to the White House asking the administration not to renew the National Security Administration’s bulk telephone records collection program.

The Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) makes it a violation of law for websites to collect personal information from children under 13 years of age without verifiable consent from a parent or guardian. Consumer Action joined privacy colleagues in urging the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate the Topps candy and trading card company for violating COPPA by encouraging children to post on its Candy Mania website. Advocates charged that Topps collected personal information, including photos and online contact information, from users who were under 13 years old without providing notice to parents or obtaining consent.

Consumer privacy is not a static issue. Changes in technology often create new threats to personal information. Consumer Action’s Linda Sherry joined a panel, “The ‘people’ side of the Internet of Things,” at the 2nd Annual Internet of Things Global Summit in late October in Washington, DC. A focus of the discussion was how the huge amounts of personal data generated by connected devices could potentially be used, and the potential consequences for consumers. In her presentation, Sherry suggested consumer protections are crucial because, in their eagerness adopt “convenient” technologies, users may overlook the ramifications.

Sherry also sat on a panel at the Common Cents Conference in Bethesda, MD, held by the Maryland CASH Campaign to address financial websites and apps. Participants highlighted some online personal financial management tools and discussed how to determine which tool may be most useful and safe. While acknowledging their usefulness in managing your spending, Sherry advised users to read the privacy policies carefully and to learn in advance how information entered into the applications will be used.

Consumer Action has been a member of the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD), a consortium of consumer groups from the EU and the United States, for more than a decade. Members meet annually in person, and regularly by phone, to monitor global policy affecting consumers, and Consumer Action has actively participated in drafting resolutions on consumer financial and privacy matters. At the 2014 meeting in Washington, DC, coalition members from the EU and U.S. attended internal TACD meetings hosted by the U.S. Department of State and gathered for a public discussion of the pending Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and its potential impact on consumer protection. Consumer advocates, EU and U.S. government officials and business people attended. Throughout the day, consumer advocates voiced opposition to efforts by global companies to trade consumer data without restriction.

## California

During FY 2015, Consumer Action collaborated with its home state allies, including the California Reinvestment Coalition, the Consumer Federation of California and the East Bay Community Law Center, to support legislation that we believed would benefit consumers and oppose that which we viewed as harmful to consumer interests.



➤ Consumer Action's supported bills included ones that would protect consumers from warrantless searches of their digital devices (SB 178), create new protections for purchasers of home warranties (AB 493), establish a state Earned Income Tax Credit (AB 43) and protect the private data of consumers who use ride-hailing apps (AB 886).

The California Electronic Communications Privacy Act (CalECPA) (SB 178), which requires police to get a warrant before they can get access to electronic information about who we are, where we go, who we know and what we do, was signed into law by Governor Brown in October.

Our California legislative coordinator, Joe Ridout, was in Sacramento on June 17 to attend a committee hearing on two key bills supported by Consumer Action. SB 962, which would require a "kill switch" to be built into smartphones or tablets sold in the state after July 1, 2015 in order to stop the epidemic of cell phone thefts, made it through committee that day and was ultimately signed into law on Sept. 30. Also on Sept. 30, the Governor signed another bill supported by Consumer Action: AB 2056 will provide basic consumer protections and disclosures for buyers of pet insurance policies.

At the same June 17 Assembly business committee hearing, lawmakers addressed SB 686, introduced by Assemblymember Hannah-Beth Jackson (D-Santa Barbara), to ban auto dealerships from selling used vehicles subject to safety recalls without having repaired the defect. Despite vocal opposition from Consumer Action and its allies, the bill was defeated after lobbying by used car giant CarMax and its allies.

On Oct. 6, an op-ed co-written by Consumer Action's Ridout and Consumer Federation of America's (CFA) Mark Cooper appeared in the Sacramento Bee. The [opinion piece](#) analyzed just-vetoed AB 2581, legislation that would have weakened the California Energy Commission (CEC) and limited its ability to promote energy efficiency for plugged-in digital devices. The letter was part of our alliance with the CFA to push for energy efficiency standards in California and call on the Consumer Electronics Association membership to stop supporting an industry group that is undermining the state's efforts to become more energy efficient.

Early in 2015, Ridout traveled to Los Angeles to testify at the Federal Reserve against the proposed bank merger between CIT Group and OneWest. The hearing aired the banks' performance under the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) of 1977, which requires banks with government-insured deposits to serve the needs of low- and moderate-income customers. Ridout, who also submitted written comment to the Federal Reserve on the merger, outlined some of Consumer Action's concerns, which included dismal rankings by housing counselors of OneWest's record of responding to mortgage modification requests and CIT's bankruptcy filing after receiving \$2.3 billion in TARP bailout funds. Unfortunately, on July 21, the OCC and Federal Reserve gave their conditional approval to the merger. The approval is contingent on the bank submitting a revised Community Reinvestment Act plan as well as a business plan.

## Coalitions

During the 2014-2015 fiscal year, Consumer Action was a member of more than 50 national and state coalitions (see full list at end of report). These alliances, while diverse in composition and purpose, all enabled participants to achieve far more than they could have individually.

Here are just a few highlights of our coalition efforts that don't appear in other sections of this report:

■ Coalition advocates wrote a letter in late April to oppose language in the EXPIRE Act of 2014 that would have required the use of private collection companies to collect back taxes on a commission basis.





The plan would have opened up consumers to potential harassment and abuse and lined the pockets of private companies at taxpayer expense.

- In June, we joined allies in urging the Senate to support the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Operation Choke Point initiative, which would protect consumers and taxpayers from fraud by targeting banks and payment processing companies when they allow wrongdoers to use the legitimate banking system in perpetrating their scams and schemes.
- Consumer Action joined 10 organizations in asking the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate auto retail giant CarMax over claims that its advertisements are deceptive because CarMax does not fix used vehicles under recall before it sells them. CarMax, the nation's largest used-car retailer, runs ads promising that the vehicles it sells have undergone rigorous quality inspections.
- Along with more than 30 organizations from around the country, Consumer Action urged the U.S. Treasury Department's Federal Insurance Office (FIO) to collect data from insurance companies in order to assess the affordability of auto insurance for low- and moderate-income Americans and those living in historically underserved communities. Advocates want to know what discounts, if any, are extended to these customers and who qualifies for the programs.
- In August, federal banking regulatory agencies repealed Regulation AA, which banned banks from unfair and deceptive acts covered by the FTC Credit Practices Rule (such as piling on late fees, retaining security interests in household goods, etc.). In its stead, the agencies jointly issued the Interagency Guidance Regarding Unfair or Deceptive Credit Practices (the Guidance), which clarifies to banks and financial services providers that the credit practices described in Reg. AA are still not permissible. Consumer Action joined coalition advocates in seeking a stronger rule that mirrors and improves upon the protections originally included in Regulation AA.
- Advocates from over 200 farm, faith, environmental, labor, rural and consumer organizations delivered a letter to the Senate urging legislators to reject any effort to repeal, rescind or weaken Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) in any federal spending legislation.
- In December, Consumer Action joined a diverse coalition of private companies, public interest groups, labor unions and industry associations to block Comcast's attempt to acquire Time Warner Cable. Coalition members, while having different individual concerns, agreed that the proposed merger threatened competition, could raise consumer prices, would stifle innovation in programming and technology and ran counter to U.S. antitrust and communications laws. Consumer Action's DC office met with FCC commissioners and Hill staffers to discuss the ramifications of the merger. In April 2015, after facing consistently stringent opposition from all corners, Comcast announced that it would drop its merger plans.
- In early 2015, Consumer Action joined the Save Our Retirement coalition to require Wall Street brokers, bankers and insurance agents to put their clients' best interests ahead of their own. In a joint letter to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), advocates asked the department to finish updating the 40-year-old fiduciary duty rule regulating professionals that offer investment strategies for retirement plan participants—in other words, make it a requirement for financial advisers to put their clients' best interests before their own.



## ➤ Consumer training and outreach

Consumer Action provides publications, educational tools, in-person training and technical support to enable its network of nearly 7,000 community-based organizations (CBOs) to deliver in-language consumer and personal finance education to low-income and underserved households across the country. In addition to training CBO staff and volunteers to use our materials to inform and empower their clients and communities, our trainers give presentations directly to consumers; participate in coalitions, conferences and resource fairs; grant interviews in English, Chinese and Spanish; and work closely with community groups, government agencies and advocates to ensure that critical consumer information reaches those who need it.

During the last fiscal year, Consumer Action's outreach team traveled to 15 cities to train more than 760 CBO staff members and consumers. The CBOs that attended the events serve servicemembers and veterans, youth, low-to-moderate-income families, the disabled, seniors, new immigrants, re-entry and workforce development clients and others.

In September 2014, the Outreach team conducted trainings in San Diego, CA and Hampton Roads, VA on our new Economic Survival Guide for Servicemembers and Veterans module, which we produced with funding from Visa as part of its Veterans Financial Coalition project, of which Consumer Action is a member. The San Diego training attracted advocates with the Department of Defense, the California Attorney General's Office, the Fleet & Family Support Center, Courage to Call and other local veteran support agencies. In addition to being active in several coalitions in Southern California's Inland Empire, community outreach and training manager Linda Williams also regularly attended San Diego Veterans Coalition meetings and trained National Guard Reservists at the Army Support Headquarters in Los Alamitos.

In the course of the year, our trainers expanded the Consumer Action [YouTube channel](#), adding four new webinars. Two of these we co-hosted with the National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE) to help community partners learn about evaluation tools that help to demonstrate impact. Seventy-five CBO representatives tuned in. The Outreach team conducted the other two webinars in August and September as part of the Capital One-sponsored MoneyWi\$e program.

In November, Consumer Action returned to Chicago for its fifth annual National Consumer Empowerment Conference. The invitation-only two-day event brings together dozens of consumer educators, counselors and advocates from around the country to address critical consumer issues, learn from subject matter experts and agency representatives, and share best practices in consumer and financial education. The conference is free to attendees thanks to the generous support of sponsors such as American Express, AT&T, Bank of America, Capital One, Chase, Citi, Comcast, Enterprise, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, MyWireless.org, TracFone, Verizon, Visa and Walmart. The 2014 conference included presentations on the transition to "chip" cards, Big Data, the student loan crisis, credit reporting, consumer protections for prepaid card users, foreclosure prevention, discriminatory auto loans and CFPB activities. Representatives of many of the sponsors also attended the conference and shared important information with attendees.

In addition to planning train-the-trainer events and managing the evaluation program, Consumer Action's associate director of outreach and training, Audrey Perrott, conducted several trainings locally for groups of consumers and community agency staff. In July, she traveled to Reno, NV to attend the Bridges Out of Poverty training—a community development model for reducing generational poverty rates, ending pover-

ty and transitioning people out of poverty. Perrott also obtained various housing certifications through the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, and received training through Meeting Planners International (MPI).

## Publications and websites

Over the course of the year, Consumer Action filled 1,917 requests for 507,141 free, printed copies of our multilingual publications. Of these, 307,777 publications were part of the [12-module MoneyWi\\$e library](#), created and distributed through our partnership with Capital One. CBOs nationwide rely on these materials to educate their clients and community members on a wide range of consumer and personal finance topics.

Another 61,000 copies mailed, at no charge to recipients, were for [Checking and Savings Accounts: A wise choice](#). This new banking inclusion module, created with funding from the Rose Foundation, encourages unbanked and underbanked consumers to get checking and savings accounts and guides them through selecting, opening, using and managing the accounts. The module was launched near the beginning of the fiscal year and was supplemented at the end of the year to include a second brochure, this one focusing on overdrafts.

We wrote a number of other new modules or stand-alone publications completed during FY 2015. Unless otherwise noted, we created these materials with cy pres funds (class-action residuals) received from an insurance lawsuit.

- The [Economic Survival Guide for Servicemembers and Veterans](#) module was developed with support from Visa Inc. to help servicemembers, veterans and their families recognize and avoid scams and costly financial products and services (payday loans, check cashers, Buy Here, Pay Here auto dealers, etc.); identify better banking and borrowing options; and understand and exercise the rights afforded them under laws such as the FCRA and SCRA.

- A new module on the [basics of auto insurance](#) explains the importance of having adequate coverage and prepares drivers to determine what types and amount of auto insurance they need, shop for a policy, manage their auto insurance costs, and obtain help if they have trouble getting coverage or are dissatisfied with how their claim is handled.

- A pair of new guides work together to inform consumers of their rights when they owe a past-due debt. The 16-page [Debtors' Rights: Protecting yourself from debt collection lawsuits](#) helps consumers who owe money understand how to avoid a debt collection lawsuit, what the legal process is if they can't avoid being sued, their rights if they lose the suit and how to file a complaint against a debt collector. The much shorter [Fair Debt Collection Practices Act: How it restricts collectors and protects consumers](#) brochure makes consumers aware of what collectors must do under the law, what they are allowed to do and what they are prohibited from doing. It also provides information about getting a collector to stop contacting you, what your options are if a collector violates the FDCPA and where to get more information or personal assistance.

- A new, stand-alone fact sheet, [Privacy and Control for Social Media Users](#), presents the potential privacy risks in social networking and prepares social media users to make wise choices about what they share and who they share it with. It includes information about how to use the privacy controls on social networking websites and apps and offers tips for enjoying social media while still protecting your personal privacy.



■ As a companion resource to our [Spring 2014 home-based business insurance issue](#) of *Consumer Action News*, we debuted three short videos to help home-based entrepreneurs understand their business insurance needs and options. Knowlera Media produced the videos, which star Ruth Susswein, Consumer Action's deputy director for national priorities, as spokesperson. The videos can be found on Consumer Action's [YouTube](#) page.

■ Two new publications explain the IP transition—the move away from copper-based landline telephone service to Internet-based service or cell phones—in easy-to-understand, non-technical language. The first publication, [Making the Switch: The next communication evolution](#), is a brochure (available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese) providing an overview of the transition, including why it is happening, what advantages it offers consumers, key points about switching phone service, and what to know if your service area is part of a transition “trial” (test) being conducted. The second publication, [Questions & Answers about the IP Transition](#), is a backgrounder that answers many of the specific questions that community-based organizations, their clients and their communities may have about the change. The creation of these resources was sponsored by AT&T.

■ With seven in 10 college students needing help paying for their education, Consumer Action developed the [Student Loan and Education Resource List](#) to provide useful resources to help students meet their financial obligations and get out of debt sooner. The publication offers something for students and families looking for education funding, student borrowers currently in repayment and student borrowers struggling to make monthly loan payments.

Consumer Action actively promotes and distributes new publications to our network of community-based organizations as soon as they become available.

In addition to expanding our library of publications, we updated existing publications, including two popular auto-related brochures: [Get a Car Loan That's in Your Best Interest](#) and [California's Lemon Law: Protection for new and used car buyers](#); our [Understanding Debit Cards: Plastic with a difference](#) fact sheet; [Connect to California LifeLine and Save!](#), our popular guide to the discounted phone service program for low-income households; our online [directory of credit-building loan programs](#); and, as we do every year, our publication on the earned income tax credit, [Get Credit for Your Hard Work](#).

For the fifth consecutive year, Consumer Action hosted “virtual” interns from Columbia University. The fiscal year was bookended by Dat Dang, who completed his internship at the end of April 2014, and Cindy Xiao, who worked on her project through the first quarter of 2015. Dang's research into consumer specialty reports and the companies that produce them resulted in two publications: the 24-page [Insider's Guide to Specialty Consumer Reports](#) and the 17-page [Directory of Specialty Consumer Reporting Agencies](#). These were the focus of the [Fall 2014 issue](#) of *Consumer Action News*. Xiao delved into the (for many) unfamiliar world of mobile payments. Xiao's research was conducted with the goal of helping both early adopters and holdouts identify their ever-evolving choices, assess the advantages and disadvantages of each, and understand the consumer protections that do—or don't—exist for mobile payments.

Other issues of *Consumer Action News* for the 2014-2015 period focused on medical credit cards (survey, [Summer 2014](#)) and automotive recalls ([Winter 2014-2015](#)).

Our monthly [INSIDER](#) newsletter, in its fifth year, continued to chronicle Consumer Action's activities.



➤ For FY 2015, Consumer Action's family of websites drew 1,362,922 page views, an increase of more than 75 percent over the previous fiscal year. Our main website, [Consumer-Action.org](http://Consumer-Action.org), claimed the greatest portion of the increase, with 1,171,065 page views by 532,315 visitors. Popular sections of the site included the [Class Action Database](#), with 153,037 page views (99,440 unique), and our [Helpdesk](#), with 71,205 page views (64,922 unique). Of our subsites, the [MoneyWi\\$e](#) financial literacy site accounted for 57,914 page views.

In partnership with AT&T, we launched another website this fiscal year. [NewPhoneNetwork.org](#) addresses the same topic as our new IP transition publications (see bulleted list above), but provides the opportunity to share updates on the transition, including the "IP trials" in selected communities, and news on related topics. The specialized site is being used by our Outreach department in its FY 2016 training line-up.

We ended the fiscal year with close to 1,850 followers on [Twitter](#). Combined with our more than 2,000 [Facebook](#) fans, Consumer Action's significant and growing audience has made social media an important component of our [Take Action Center](#) success and an opportunity to get real-time information to consumers. News and action items we posted and tweeted about during the 2014-2015 fiscal year include class action settlements and the due dates for claims applications, efforts to give consumers more control over their monthly cable bills, regulations proposed by the CFPB to protect prepaid card users and rules that would ensure that vocational school students can find "gainful employment."

## Administration

The San Francisco-based Administration team handles many crucial behind-the-scenes activities that keep Consumer Action's programs and services functioning.

Over the course of the fiscal year, the team managed the printing, promotion and distribution of hundreds of thousands of copies of our free multilingual educational materials and quarterly consumer newsletter. It also ensured that dozens of new and updated publications were translated and made available in Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese to the members of our network of community-based organizations and individual consumers. In addition to managing the translation of Consumer Action's own publications, the staff continued to provide translation services to corporate, non-profit and government clients that serve diverse populations. Clients have included the Federal Reserve Board (FRB), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Treasury, Bank of America, Capital One, the Consumer Federation of America and the Securities Investor Protection Corporation (SIPC).

The Administration team was also responsible for maintaining multiple databases to keep track of nearly 7,000 community-based network members, hundreds of donors and training participants, and 1,917 requests for over half a million publications during the fiscal year. These databases maintain information that is crucial to our outreach, advocacy and fundraising efforts.

In support of the outreach and training component of our work, the department made thousands of calls and sent dozens of mailings to recruit attendees for more than a dozen community train-the-trainer events and conferences, and compiled the hundreds of packets of training materials for these events. It provided similar support for our fundraising efforts, including our annual Consumer Excellence Awards and anniversary event in Washington, DC.

In addition, this team is charged with our technology needs for 11 websites, several dozen employee/office computers and company servers, and multiple network, backup and email systems.



➤ Toward the end of the fiscal year, the Administration team started the search for new, lower-cost San Francisco office space and began preparing for the inevitable move, which took place in July 2015. In addition to making dozens of trips to prospective new spaces, preparations included planning for a new layout, reducing mailroom inventory and archiving 40-plus years worth of Consumer Action history. Earlier in the year, our Los Angeles-based staff closed our office there and became telecommuters.

## Hotline

The Hotline team, working out of our San Francisco and Los Angeles offices, responds to consumer questions and complaints with referrals, non-legal advice and, when appropriate, educational materials. Last year we received 6,354 complaints and communications, with 59 percent arriving via our website and the rest coming in by phone. Complaints came in from virtually every state; the top five were, again, California, Florida, New York, Texas and New Jersey. The types of complaints varied widely, with the top five categories being defective goods, customer service, refunds/overcharges, wireless phones and tenant/landlord issues. Our multilingual hotline counselors served mostly English-speaking consumers, followed by Chinese- and Spanish-speaking consumers.

The Hotline team is also responsible for the ongoing maintenance of our [Class Action Database](#), which helps consumers learn about class actions they might be eligible to join and settlements for which they can submit claims. As a [June 2014 Nonprofit Quarterly article](#) observed about Consumer Action's recently launched online tool: "In the big scheme of things, maybe these consumer actions are tiny and inconsequential. However, for consumers, particularly the Latino and Asian American consumers frequently assisted by a nonprofit advocate like Consumer Action, reliable, easily accessible information is important. Don't write off the importance of consumer advocacy that leads to settlements...they remain important reminders to companies that they cannot and should not run roughshod over the needs and interests of consumers."

During the 2014-2015 fiscal year, 84 cases were open to claims, and the Class Action Database webpage logged 153,037 total views.



2014 awardee Michelle Singletary

## 2014 Consumer Excellence Awards

Consumer Action's 2014 Consumer Excellence Awards, held at Google's new offices in Washington, DC in late October, raised a record-setting \$240,000 in support of our free, multilingual consumer assistance and referral hotline and our *Consumer Action News* and *INSIDER* newsletters.

The cocktail reception, attended by our staff, government officials, community partners, fellow advocates and industry representatives, celebrated Consumer Action's four decades of innovative multilingual consumer education and outreach. We also honored the recipients of our Consumer Excellence Awards. The annual awards, which recognize individuals and

groups for their outstanding contributions to the education and welfare of consumers nationwide, went to:

- Michelle Singletary, *Washington Post* "Color of Money" columnist, whose writings empower consumers to make wise money management choices;
- The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Consumer Education and Engagement Division, which creates opportunities for consumers to make better choices about money so that they can reach their life goals; and
- The National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE), which provides financial education and practical information to people at all financial stages.

The anniversary theme was "Training the Trainer," to commemorate the outreach and training work Consumer Action does among community-based organizations and to honor the organizations who, in turn, carry the consumer literacy message far and wide in their own communities. In this way, Consumer Action "teaches one to reach thousands"—the slogan for the year's event and our guide to selecting the 2014 honorees.

To learn more, download a PDF version of the [2014 Annual Fundraising Event program booklet](#).



Ted Beck of NEFE (L) with Dirck Hargraves

## Did you know?

### *That the year ending March 31, 2015, Consumer Action...*

- Maintained a diverse staff of 24 in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington, DC that collectively speaks 15 languages and/or dialects
- Traveled to 15 cities and trained more than 760 community group representatives and consumers
- Responded to 6,354 complaints and communications (59 percent arriving via our website and the remainder by phone) on a variety of issues, with the top five areas of complaint being defective goods, customer service, refunds/overcharges, wireless phones and tenant/landlord issues
- Ended the fiscal year with close to 1,850 followers on Twitter and more than 2,000 Facebook fans
- Gave dozens of in-language interviews to Chinese and Spanish television, radio and print news outlets
- Participated as a member of more than 50 national and state coalitions that amplified the voice of consumers on issues ranging from regulating career education lending and expanding affordable mortgages for underserved communities to protecting consumers' retirement funds and banning remotely created checks
- Had a total of 1,362,922 page views across 10 of the 11 websites we have developed and maintain (Our newest website, [NewPhoneNetwork.org](http://NewPhoneNetwork.org), was launched at the end of FY 2015, and its numbers are not included here.)
- Posted 84 cases open to claims in our Class Action Database, which drew 153,037 total page views
- Filled 1,917 orders from across the country for over half a million copies of our free, multilingual publications
- Created three new training modules, six new stand-alone educational publications, four new webinars, three short educational videos, and updated six existing consumer resources in our library
- Updated all 12 Moneywise modules in all five languages
- Enabled 1,298 subscribers to compose their own email messages to their elected officials on topics of their own choosing
- Generated 5,476 emails to policymakers on a variety of topics, from defending the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to protecting the Lifeline low-income phone subsidy program, from our subscriber list of 35,110 people (as of March 31, 2015)

## Thanks to our volunteers

Since its founding, Consumer Action has benefited from the generosity of volunteers who contribute their time and effort to supporting our daily operations, assisting consumers and advancing our mission. Their contribution to our success is immeasurable.

### Hotline volunteer *Ralph Stone*

Though Ralph Stone moved to San Francisco from Massachusetts the same year that Consumer Action was established (1971), he didn't join the organization until he retired as a Federal Trade Commission attorney in 1997. "I decided to volunteer with Consumer Action, where I could use my knowledge and experience gained at the FTC to help people with their consumer issues," recalls Stone.

And help he has, with more than 11,000 hotline cases under his belt since his first day on the desk. Stone staffs Consumer Action's busy hotline for around 10 hours per week. He provides information and resources to consumers on a wide range of issues, from deceptive advertising and bad customer service to Internet/wireless billing problems and scams.

Stone says he is "continually saddened by consumers who fail to read the fine print or check on unfamiliar companies before spending their hard-earned money and are too often unfamiliar with their rights or where to seek help." He believes that consumer education is an important tool against scammers, unscrupulous businesses and consumer-unfriendly policies.

Stone is a graduate of Middlebury College and Suffolk Law School, and a U.S. Army Vietnam War veteran.



## Staff profile

### Rose Chan

**Rose Chan** joined Consumer Action's San Francisco office in June 2011 as a consumer advice counselor. She handles complaints by phone and email and drafts consumer rights FAQs and consumer alerts. In 2014, Chan was promoted to consumer advice coordinator. In addition to her duties of providing consumers with advice and referrals and engaging in consumer advocacy efforts, she supervises the operations of the Chinese-language hotline and the complaint-handling volunteers. Chan is also responsible for researching and updating Consumer Action's Class Action Database, where interested consumers can learn more about a case, join a pending action or make a claim. She contributes a Class Action Roundup article to Consumer Action's monthly *INSIDER* newsletter.

Chan holds a B.A. in history from UC Berkeley.

#### In her own words:

I have always been interested in education and research, and Consumer Action is the perfect fit. Knowing your consumer rights is very important, since it allows us to be full participants in the marketplace and make wise financial decisions.

One consumer right that stands out are the rules that protect people who hire household movers. In my first year as a consumer advice counselor, one of the most frequent complaints I received involved moving companies. People move for all sorts of reasons, and if you pick the wrong mover, your belongings may be held hostage and you cannot focus fully on starting the new phase of your life. This experience prompted me to write an FAQ sheet on moving that consolidated many excellent consumer resources. A few quick tips are: Check the movers' license, get the movers to examine your belongings before giving you an estimate and never sign a blank agreement. In recent months, we have received fewer complaints regarding moving companies, hopefully due to people being more aware of their rights.

Working at Consumer Action also allows me to witness the direct impact we have in our community. We received complaints from the Chinese-speaking community regarding travel agencies in San Francisco's Chinatown. The travel agencies had sold plane tickets and vacation packages, but when the consumers went to the airport, their

reservations were invalid. When the Chinese consumers then returned to the travel agencies, they found the travel agencies had closed. California requires travel agencies to register as a Seller of Travel with the state attorney general's office. We were able to help these Chinese-speaking consumers file for refunds with the state's Travel Consumer Restitution Corporation.

Consumer Action is a great place to work. I am constantly learning and, in turn, passing on that knowledge to consumers.



## Staff profile

### Linda Sherry

**Linda Sherry** joined Consumer Action in 1994 as a writer and editor from a background as a community newspaper reporter. Living in San Francisco at the time, Sherry had for three years previously held the post of managing editor at *AsianWeek*, an English-language weekly covering issues of interest to the Bay Area's diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander population. When she discovered the Consumer Action job posting, she said it stood out for the opportunity to write about personal finance, banking and money management, "all longtime interests of mine."

From writer/editor, Sherry in short order was promoted to Consumer Action's editorial director, coordinating the organization's written communications and content. She held that title until 2004, when she moved to Washington, DC to establish Consumer Action's office in the nation's capital. Since the move, her title has been director of national priorities, with responsibilities that include the organization's national advocacy work and coalition participation as well as overseeing the research and writing of Consumer Action's free, multilingual educational publications, newsletters and website content. Sherry also fields media inquiries and oversees the organization's social media activities.



Sherry grew up on the East End of Long Island, NY, where she lived until moving to California in 1990. She has worked as a reporter at *The Almanac* newspapers in Menlo Park, California; *The New York Times* Long Island Section; and *The East Hampton Star* in East Hampton, NY. She was a founding editor of the *Sag Harbor Herald*, a weekly newspaper. She says she thanks the influence of her late father, a novelist and playwright, for the writing and editing skills that have served her so well in her career.

#### In her own words:

Had you asked me pre-1994 if I would remain at one place of employment for more than 20 years, I would have said "No way!" But that was before I found Consumer Action. I had worked as a journalist, and while the power of the press is formidable, the power of the consumer movement is more personal and tangible. Consumer advocates motivate change, from the poorest communities to the most elevated boardrooms to the halls of Congress and state legislatures. I marvel at our work to educate individual consumers and help them prosper financially and fight inequity. I'm proud of our successes in changing the marketplace for all consumers. One example of this is the Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility, and Disclosure (CARD) Act of 2009, a law we fought for and helped craft that has sharply curtailed "any time, any reason" interest rate hikes, limited fees and allowed cardholders to pay off balances more quickly at a lower cost.





In Washington, I've been fortunate to work alongside the country's foremost consumer advocates and to work on issues that have had a direct impact on people's lives, such as the Affordable Care Act and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Internally, at Consumer Action, I've been given the opportunity to help lead the organization in new directions and have had unparalleled support from the executive director in all my activities.

The advocacy issues we tackle from the DC office often seem overwhelming—student loan debt, data breaches, the foreclosure epidemic, predatory lending—but as they say, Rome wasn't built in a day. So we just march on, trying to have some fun as we do. I often wish that we weren't in this era of a sharply divided electorate and intense political polarization on the need for consumer protection regulation, but perhaps this too will change. I'm heartened to see young people joining Consumer Action and the other national advocacy organizations we work with, because it's only through the infusion of new thinking and strategies that the consumer movement will have future impact.

There's been another, more personal, benefit of working at Consumer Action: I've "internalized" wise financial choices and feel I'm in a reasonably good place for my retirement years when they arrive. No joke, the advice we offer really does work! Try it yourself.

## Feedback from CBOs

I want to thank you for all that you did for us. The information and the networking was priceless. The accommodation was superb. The whole [2014 National Consumer Empowerment] conference and materials were top class and extremely informative. Again thank you!

—Luisa Delgado Clark, GoldenRule Housing & Community Development Corporation

I feel empowered after attending Consumer Action's conference. I learned a great deal, and met amazing people from all over the country. I also learned that the collaborative work that I'm doing is recognized nationwide.

—Erika Toriz, Haven Neighborhood Services

What a wonderful training... The trainers just have so much energy. [The MoneyWi\$e roundtable] was very engaging and well organized... Hats off to Consumer Action.

—Stephanie Baccus, Capital Area Partnership Uplifting People

Our girls enjoyed the information on money management. I look forward to working with you again in helping to develop smart, strong young ladies.

—Yvonne Nunn, Girl Scouts, Troop 33184

Great info. Great [servicemember/veteran economic survival] training materials that we will use. We will use this in our train-the-trainer course.

—Beth Middleton, Marine and Family Programs, Marine Corps Community Services

I find the materials provided in the [MoneyWi\$e Building and Keeping Good Credit] webinar to be invaluable when educating the community on financial literacy. I greatly enjoyed the webinar.

—Heather Hicks, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Southern Oregon

This [financial literacy] training was very well done. There was a wealth of information presented. Thank you!

—Anne Teal, Jackie Robinson Center

Keep up the good work! It is refreshing to know that your class is dedicated to educating the public (underserved) about financial matters.

—Peter Emelue, Inland Counties Legal Services

## Spotlight on...

Our community-based partners

### Empowering Students and Parents, Inc.: Reentry Consortium

Each year, an estimated 10,000 inmates are released from prison and return home to Baltimore, MD. Unfortunately, approximately 40 percent of them will be back in prison within three years. This daunting statistic has only strengthened the resolve of the Reentry Consortium (The Consortium) to turn the tide against recidivism

and offer help and hope for those leaving prison.

Since 2011, The Consortium, a program of Empowering Students and Parents, Inc., has provided both direct and referral services to formerly incarcerated men and women returning to the Baltimore metropolitan area with the goal of enabling them to become self-sufficient, contributing members of their community. Because the organization understands that economic stability is a crucial component of individual success, The Consortium's services include job fairs to increase employment, and financial education to instill responsible money management practices, improve credit and promote savings. The group has used Consumer Action's MoneyWi\$e



*A MoneyWi\$e class at the Reentry Consortium*

curriculum and materials to provide group and one-on-one financial literacy education to more than 350 returning-home citizens. MoneyWi\$e is a consumer education partnership between Consumer Action and Capital One.

In 2011, Consumer Action awarded The Consortium a MoneyWi\$e mini-grant of \$7,500, which it used to partner with another local non-profit to launch a project to serve 13 formerly incarcerated men and women and their families. Biweekly classes were offered to assist these clients in establishing and maintaining a budget, opening a savings account, ordering and reading their credit reports and disputing any inaccuracies. One-on-one assistance was available for any who needed it.

Today, The Consortium's financial literacy offerings include formal two- or four-hour biweekly group workshops. Individual sessions lasting between 60 and 90 minutes are also available. To date, more than 90 percent of the agency's clients have reported that they have found the MoneyWi\$e materials easy to understand and use in their daily lives—the key to maintaining forward momentum.



## Chinese Newcomers Service Center (CNSC)

San Francisco has been an immigrant destination for more than a century. In 2010, 35 percent of the city's population was made up of immigrants, the largest group being from China. Since 1969, the Chinese Newcomers Service Center (CNSC) has provided essential services to the recently arrived to help them adapt to their new U.S. home and become self-sufficient, contributing members of the community. Through multilingual services, CNSC serves as a bridge between the two cultures.

Included among the many programs and services provided by CNSC is financial literacy education and assistance with obtaining telephone service. For more than 10 years, the organization has turned to Consumer

Action for materials and training in these areas. As part of this long-term partnership, Consumer Action has provided multilingual educational publications for the CNSC staff to use in one-on-one counseling and group workshops; on-site trainers to facilitate workshops for CNSC staff and clients; and presenters for on-site, in-language California LifeLine presentations. (California LifeLine provides discounts on basic residential or wireless telephone service to eligible low-income households.)



Using Consumer Action's educational materials at the Chinese Newcomers Service Center.

In 2013, CNSC partnered with Consumer Action to host a six-month workshop series that featured Consumer Action educational modules on banking, identity theft and fraud, wireless services and establishing and using credit.

As part of the organization's Telecommunication Education & Assistance in Multiple-Languages (T.E.A.M.) program, CNSC staff regularly contact Consumer Action to ask questions about telephone bill disputes and consumer rights and to help bring issues of suspected fraud against limited-English-speaking consumers to the attention of the utility companies and regulators.

"I am extremely grateful to Consumer Action for providing Chinese publications that are easy to understand and help me to serve my clients," said Eva Chong, CNSC's program coordinator.

Learn more about CNSC on its website ([www.chinesenewcomers.org](http://www.chinesenewcomers.org)).

## Donors and supporters

### 43rd anniversary sponsors

#### *Underwriter*

Capital One | Credit.com | Google | TracFone

#### *Donor*

Amazon | AT&T | Consumer Relations Consortium | Microsoft | Time Warner Cable

#### *Leadership Circle*

Facebook | Philip and Janice Levin Foundation | Visa

#### *Benefactor*

Ally Financial | American Express | Bank of America | Chase | Citi | Comcast | DirecTV | Fan Freedom | Global Cash Card | MyWireless.org | VantageScore Solutions | Verizon

#### *Sponsor*

Community Merchants USA | IDT911 | Neil Gendel | Walmart

#### *Patron*

Certified Automotive Parts Association (CAPA) | DCI Group, LLC | Future of Privacy Forum | VOX Global

#### *Special Friend*

Amplify | Anonymous | Consumer Attorneys Public Interest Foundation | CUNA Mutual Group | Cuneo Gilbert & LaDuca, LLP | James S. Beck | Mortgage Bankers Association | Norman Bock | Pastor Herrera, Jr. | Western Union

#### *Supporter*

arnie berghoff & associates | Consumers First, Inc. | Debbie Berlyn | Irene Leech | Martin Mattes (Nossaman LLP) | Patricia Sturdevant | Paul Bland | Pew Trusts

### Educational partners

Amplify Public Affairs/TracFone Wireless | AT&T | Bank of America Charitable Foundation | California Department of Insurance | Capital One | Consumer Federation of America | DCI Group | Facebook | Google | National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) | Network Branded Prepaid Card Association | Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment | The Hastings Group | The Nakadegawa Fund | Visa Inc.

### Cy pres awards

Consumer Action's work is supported in part with cy pres awards from these lawsuits:

California Insurance Education Project v. Lockyer | Chase Check Loan Cy Pres | Gateway Cy Pres Fund | Griego v. Rent-A-Center | Insurance Brokerage Global Settlement Fund | Marengo v. Visa | Reed v. 1-800 Contacts | Smith v. National Corrective Group | The AT&T Lawsuits | Title and Escrow Consumer Education and Outreach Corporation | Trombley v. Bank of America



## Coalitions

Consumer Action works with diverse allies on a host of important issues. For more about our collaborations, visit the [Coalition Efforts](#) section of our website.

Here are the coalitions we work with:

Alliance for Justice (AFJ) | Americans for Financial Reform (AFR) | Auto Insurance LMI Working Group (CFA) | California Consumer Affairs Association (CCAA) | California Latinos for Economic Justice | California Reinvestment Coalition (CRC) | CFPB Consumer Complaint Process Committee (AFR) | CFPB Language Access Issues Committee | CFPB Mortgage Complaints Committee | Coalition for Patient Privacy | Coalition for Quality Credit Counseling (CQCC) | Consumer Federation of America (CFA) | Consumer Federation of California (CFC) | Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Task Force (AFR) | Consumer Labor Coalition (National Consumers League) | Consumer Policy Solutions Roundtable | Consumer Relations Consortium | Digital Due Process Coalition | Digital Privacy and Security Working Group | EPIC Privacy Coalition | Fair Arbitration Now (FAN) Coalition | Fan Freedom Project | For-profit College Loans Reform Working Group | Foreclosure Prevention Task Force (AFR) | Fraud Alliance | Get Older Adults onLine (GOAL) | Grand Alliance to Save Our Public Postal Service | High Cost Credit/Payday Loan Coalition | Identity Theft Prevention Coalition | Independent Foreclosure Review Committee (AFR) | Inland Empire Disabilities Collaborative | Internet Privacy Working Group | Lifeline Coalition | Mortgage Reform Task Force (AFR) | National CAPACD | National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC) | National Consumer Protection Week Partners | National Cyber Security Alliance | National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) | National Partnership for Women and Families Consumer Privacy eHealth Working Group | Postal Consumer Council | Privacy Group (Center for Digital Democracy) | Protect Your Identity Week | Safe Checking Working Group (Pew) | Safe Rental Car Coalition | San Diego Veterans Coalition | San Francisco Smart Money Network | Save Our Retirement Campaign | Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) | Student Loan Reform Coalition | Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD) | Univision Consumer Protection Committee | Veterans Financial Coalition | We Need to Know

## Statement of activities

### Year ended March 31, 2015

	<u>Unrestricted</u>	<u>Temporarily Restricted</u>	<u>Total</u>
<i>Support and revenue</i>			
Grants, contributions, cy pres awards	\$ 46,412	\$ 5,192,132	\$ 5,238,544
Fundraising event income*	250,075	-	250,075
Interest and other income	49,293	-	49,293
Net assets released from restriction:			
Purpose or time restrictions met	<u>2,589,615</u>	<u>(2,589,615)</u>	<u>-</u>
Total support and revenue	<u>2,935,395</u>	<u>2,602,517</u>	<u>5,537,912</u>
<i>Expenses</i>			
Program services	2,255,179	-	2,255,179
Supporting services:			
Administration	620,797	-	620,797
Fundraising	<u>157,687</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>157,687</u>
Total expenses	<u>3,033,663</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3,033,663</u>
Change in net assets	(98,268)	2,602,517	2,504,249
Net assets at beginning of year	<u>835,257</u>	<u>6,550,092</u>	<u>7,385,349</u>
Net assets at end of year	<u>\$ 736,989</u>	<u>\$ 9,152,609</u>	<u>\$ 9,889,598</u>

\*During the year ended March 31, 2015, Consumer Action held an annual fundraising event. Direct benefits to the attendees consisted of donated venue and food. The fair value of such donations is not reflected on the financial statements in accordance with Consumer Action policy.

## Board of directors and staff

### San Francisco

Ken McEldowney  
*Executive Director*

Michael Heffer  
*Business Manager*

Kathy Li  
*Director, San Francisco Office*

Nani Susanti Hansen  
*Associate Director, San Francisco Office*

Audrey Perrott  
*Associate Director, Training/Outreach*

Monica Steinisch  
*Senior Associate, Editorial*

Jamie Woo  
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Joseph Ridout  
*Consumer Services Manager*

Angela Kwan  
*Web Manager*

Hazel Kong  
*Office Manager*

Cui Yan Xie, Kinny Li  
*Project Associates*

Vickie Tse  
*Development Coordinator*

Ricardo Perez  
*Mail Room Operations*

Rose Chan  
*Consumer Advice Coordinator*

Schelly Gartner, Tasneem Pitalwala, Ralph Stone  
*Consumer Advice Counselors*

Alden Chan, Robert La  
*Support*

Rain Lee  
*Administrative Assistant*

### Los Angeles

Nelson Santiago, Linda Williams  
*Community Outreach Managers*

### Washington

Linda Sherry  
*Director, National Priorities (DC Office Director)*

Ruth Susswein  
*Deputy Director, National Priorities*

Lauren Hall  
*Associate, National Priorities*

Alegra Howard  
*Associate, National Priorities*

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Anna Flores

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Dr. Irene Leech

Sue Rogan

Kay Pachtner, Consumer Action founder *Emeritus member*

*Consumer Action* has been a champion of underrepresented consumers nationwide since 1971. A non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, Consumer Action focuses on consumer education that empowers low- and moderate-income and limited-English-speaking consumers to financially prosper. It also advocates for consumers in the media and before lawmakers to advance consumer rights and promote industry-wide change.

By providing consumer education materials in multiple languages, a free national hotline, a comprehensive website ([www.consumer-action.org](http://www.consumer-action.org)) and annual surveys of financial and consumer services, Consumer Action helps consumers assert their rights in the marketplace and make financially savvy choices. Nearly 7,000 community and grassroots organizations benefit annually from its extensive outreach programs, training materials and support.

## Headquarters

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