



## Rochelle Johnson

Rochelle Johnson is a fine artist, so she's familiar with how a painting can progress from a blank canvas to a glorious masterpiece. She's also keenly aware that a masterpiece requires a lot of time, energy, and effort to make it perfect. The same holds true for her personal finances – they haven't always been perfect and she's worked hard to get them where they are.

Rochelle's financial issues started after a couple visits to the hospital left her living from check to check and caught in a vicious cycle of debt and past due bills. After her second trip to the hospital, she found herself unable to work, and barely making it using her social security disability benefits and "just trying to live". Overall, she was grappling with debt of over \$7000 from credit cards and her hospital visits. She was behind on her mortgage and contemplating bankruptcy. Looking for another way to earn income using her art skills, she started her own business in 2009, Rochelle Johnson Studio.

In 2014, Rochelle found Rocky Mountain MicroFinance Institute's (RMMFI) business development programs and was referred to the Denver Financial Empowerment Center. She eventually enrolled in RMMFI's Business Launch Boot Camp, looking to gain the knowledge and tools necessary to effectively run her business. She also began working with a financial coach to get her finances together. Through a simple tracking sheet, Rochelle figured out that by quitting smoking, she could save money not only on the cigarettes, but also on the chips and soda that she purchased when she was at the corner store.

She also eliminated paying almost \$400 in overdraft fees to her bank every month. The way Rochelle puts it "Even though I didn't have any money, there was always something to buy." Rochelle's credit raised from 490 to 600 through these changes and an RMMFI microloan.

Over the past two years in working with a financial coach, Rochelle has been able to catch up on her mortgage, get a better hold on her credit card debt and "enter back into the real world." She has ended her pattern of spending money frivolously and is focused on growing her business so that it becomes her sole source of income. "It hasn't been easy, but it feels good to be in a place where I am comfortable, even if I'm not making a lot of money yet. I never believed I could be a business owner and actually make money. Now I can dream again and that makes me feel happy and confident." While Rochelle admits that she has yet to create her artistic masterpiece, her personal finance journey itself definitely has the makings of an inspirational work of art.

