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CHA program helps cancer survivor achieve life goals *Nursing candidate will be among 39 graduates to receive their portion of \$350,000 in Escrow at Fall Family Self Sufficiency graduation*

WHAT: CHA Family Self Sufficiency Fall Graduation
WHERE: Charles Hayes Center, 4859 S. Wabash
WHEN: 6 p.m., TODAY, Oct. 18, 2011

CHICAGO – Donlashoni Cowley defines determination.

The student at Indiana Wesleyan is five classes away from completing nursing school. Since joining the Chicago Housing Authority’s Family Self Sufficiency program, she has earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Health Administration and has battled dyslexia, while raising a son who also suffers from dyslexia.

As though all of that weren’t enough, she fought – and beat – thyroid cancer.

“In 2005, I was studying for finals and it just popped up,” she said. “One percent of people with cancer have this type of cancer. I was that one percent. But I couldn’t take time off. I had to finish.”

She finished.

Cowley earned her Bachelor’s degree, and had surgery to remove the tumor. Today, after another cancer scare, she is healthy, happy and not far from achieving her goal of a career in nursing.

She is one of 39 graduates who will be honored at **6 p.m. today at the CHA Family Self Sufficiency graduation ceremony at the Charles Hayes Center, 4859 S. Wabash.**

Cowley credits FSS for giving her a blueprint toward a life of success.

“FSS was the push on the back that I needed,” said Cowley, who also teaches and tutors in medical assistance and physical therapy. “It provided the

encouragement, the counseling, the educational classes, the financial classes that helped me get through the journey,” she said. “The program gives you great focus. I sure wouldn’t have made it without the program.”

Recognized as one of CHA’s most successful “Plan for Transformation” initiatives, the FSS program is a five-year commitment designed to help participants achieve financial independence. Upon joining the program, participants enter into contract with CHA that identifies educational, career, financial and life goals. A service representative then helps the client develop a plan of action that outlines specific activities and services needed to achieve those goals.

Throughout the five-year period, the client service representative serves as coach and advisor, monitoring the participant’s progress and assisting their work toward their goals. As participants reach their goals, their income increases - resulting in an increase in rent as well. When this occurs, an amount equal to the increase is set aside in an escrow account for the participant to be accessed only upon completion of the goals and their contract of participation.

Cowley thinks FSS is a much-needed program during tough times.

“With everything that is going on with our economy, everybody needs a little love once in a while,” she said.

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