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CHA honors 13 residents who realize financial stability at Family Self Sufficiency graduation ceremony

*Graduate of FSS program purchases home, will receive Master's Degree
in March: "Don't Be Afraid, they'll help you every step of the way."*

CHICAGO (Jan. 22, 2010) – When Ilene Roper used a Housing Choice Voucher several years ago to move out of her soon-to-be demolished public housing building, she was sure of one thing: she was never going back.

Since then, Roper has been a model of determination.

She has earned an Associate's Degree and a Bachelor's Degree and is two months from obtaining her Master's Degree in psychology. She also achieved the ultimate goal by purchasing her own home.

Roper was one of 13 participants of the Chicago Housing Authority's Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program to be recognized this week for completing the five-year asset-building process and obtaining financial stability.

"I moved into a beautiful new home, but then I thought, 'That's not enough for me,'" Roper, who currently works as a resource specialist, told her fellow graduates Thursday. "I wanted to repair my credit and strive for other goals. It was hard work; it was trying. But every second was worth it. And if I was to give a bit of advice, I would say, 'Don't be afraid. The FSS team will help you every step of the way.'"

Recognized as one of the most successful programs available through the CHA's "Plan for Transformation," FSS was created in 1997 for families renting with a Housing Choice Voucher. It is designed to help those voucher participants obtain good jobs and build assets - not only to purchase a home, but to eliminate the need for public assistance and achieve personal goals.

The participant's savings are placed into an account which, at the end of the program, is used for down payments on homes and similar ventures.

The 13 graduates will share \$121,661 worth of escrow. An average of \$8,690 worth of escrow will be dispersed per graduate.

Meanwhile, when the graduates started the program five years ago, their average income was \$11,747.

Now, it is \$24,686.

Besides Roper, two other Thursday graduates are homeowners.

Overall, the program has produced 638 graduates, with 116 of those becoming homeowners.

FSS has dispersed approximately \$5.8 million worth of escrow since its inception 13 years ago.

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