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Graduates of Family Self-Sufficiency Program Learn To Earn

Participants see 300 percent spike in average yearly income

CHICAGO – The average yearly income of graduates of the Chicago Housing Authority-sponsored Family Self Sufficiency program has increased 300 percent - from \$7,786 to \$23,463 – since its inception in 1996. The program has dispersed \$4.6 million to 500 total graduates (an average of \$9,313 per graduate) in that time. The FSS program has also produced 70 new homeowners.

FSS is a five-year program for families who receive a federal Housing Choice Voucher. It had its first 2008 graduation ceremony Wednesday, Jan. 30, 2008, at the Charles Hayes Center, 4859 S. Wabash, as 17 graduates received \$109,315 worth of escrow. The graduates were presented with a check representing money they have saved throughout the program.

The average income of Wednesday's class increased from \$12,516 upon initiation to \$29,289 today. Seven of the 16 graduates became homeowners by way of the program. Four graduates are no longer participating in FSS because of over-income.

The FSS program is designed to help those voucher participants obtain good jobs and build assets in order to purchase a home or eliminate the need for public assistance. With the help of FSS mentors, advisors and advocates, program participants aim for economic self-sufficiency, and their savings are placed into an account that is used for down payments on homes and similar ventures upon the program's conclusion.

FSS graduate Loretta White hasn't done that yet, but she is on the road to homeownership.

A single mother of nine children who enrolled in the FSS program in February 2003, Loretta's goals were to counsel battered women and obtain an Associates Degree. Nearly six years later, Loretta is an advocate for the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women Network and has earned her Associates Degree in Applied Science. Next up: She will begin working toward her Bachelor's Degree in Behavioral Science on Feb. 20. She credits the FSS program with turning her life around.

“English was my hardest subject,” White said. “I had to take that class four or five times, and sometimes, I just felt like giving up. But I didn’t, and I’m glad I didn’t. You can make it if you just keep going. That’s part of life.”

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Note for Editors: Please use these photos for your story. Photos are courtesy of the Chicago Housing Authority.

Photo #1 Suggested Caption: “Family Self Sufficiency graduate Marvin Heard, who earned his GED, completed several job training courses and is now a driver for a dairy company.”

Photo #2 Suggested Caption: “Marie Townsend, who is now employed as a Patient Care Technician for Medstaff and is attending Malcolm X College, was one of 17 Family Self-Sufficiency January 2008 graduates.”

Photo #3 Suggested Caption: “Family Self Sufficiency graduates April Bunn (left) and Karol Burns enjoy the ceremony on Wednesday, Jan. 30. Bunn works for the Chicago Public School system and Burns is employed by Marshall’s.”

Photo #4 Suggested Caption: “Family Self Sufficiency graduates (from left to right) include Karla Wells, Leticia Rios, Adelina Lopez and Virginia Tetter. They were four of 17 graduates on Wednesday, Jan. 30, 2008.”

Photo #5:

Suggested Caption: “Family Self Sufficiency graduates Josephine Baker (left) and Maria Mojica enjoy the Jan. 30, 2008 festivities. Baker works for the Chicago Public School system and Mojica has achieved complete self sufficiency and is employed by Marriott Hotel.”

About the Chicago Housing Authority

The CHA was created by state legislation in 1937 to create and expand affordable housing opportunities for low income families and seniors. Today, through federal and other resources, the CHA assists approximately 35,000 families who participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program in private units owned by private landlords. In addition, the CHA owns an additional 15,000 units for families in scattered site, traditional public housing or mixed income developments and 9,500 units of housing for senior citizens in 56 senior developments across the city.

About the Plan for Transformation

In 1999, the City of Chicago began a multi-billion dollar, 15-year initiative to renovate or replace the CHA’s entire portfolio of 25,000 public housing units throughout the city. Currently, 61percent of the units have been completed, including the comprehensive renovation of all the senior developments and all the scattered site units. Eighty percent of the portfolio is scheduled to be complete by 2009. The Plan is a collaboration between the CHA, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the City of Chicago and its many agencies, area businesses and non-profit organizations.