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CHA Families Achieve Goals, Find Pathways to Success *Eighteen Individuals Graduate from Award-Winning FSS Program*

CHICAGO (Apr. 20, 2011) – When Charlotte Thomas first heard about the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, she didn't really think she needed the guidance offered.

But when she lost her job shortly thereafter, she quickly changed her mind.

Five years later, Ms. Thomas was able to earn both a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Illinois while working part-time. In May, she's looking forward to taking the exam to become a licensed clinical social worker and find full-time employment in her new career.

She credits CHA's Family Self-Sufficiency Program, also known as the FSS Program, for advising and motivating her toward a path to financial, academic and professional success.

"Without the assistance of this program, I don't think I would have been able to achieve what I have achieved," Thomas told the audience at her graduation ceremony. "I'm glad I enrolled and I'm looking forward to what comes next."

Ms. Thomas's story is just one of the 18 tales of success lauded at the FSS graduation ceremony at Bronzeville's Charles Hayes Family Investment Center this week. The event featured congratulations from CHA executives and staff, well wishes from loved ones and spirited, grateful reflections from graduates.

The FSS Program has received national recognition for supporting public housing and Housing Choice Voucher residents in getting jobs and saving money. The program typically lasts five years and features long-term goal setting, mentoring and financial incentives to empower families to make positive life changes.

Collectively, April's FSS graduating class secured or maintained part- or full-time employment, earned eight degrees (including three bachelor's degrees and one master's), bought three cars and created one homeowner with two others planning on buying homes this summer.

Additionally, over their five-year participation in the program, the most recent graduates have cleared their debt, improved their credit and saved more than \$270,300 in escrow accounts – an average of \$15,000 per graduate. As CHA continues its Plan for Transformation, its focus remains on the advancement of CHA residents and voucher holders.

“The Plan’s success relies on low-income families reaching self-sufficiency – whether that means homeownership, career advancement or saving money to decrease their reliance on housing subsidies,” said Lewis Jordan, CEO of the Chicago Housing Authority. “The FSS Program is designed to encourage residents to chart their own path to self-sufficiency – no matter what that path looks like.”

The spring graduates join 699 other Chicagoans who have already completed the five-year program. Since its inception in 1996, FSS has seen 137 graduates become homeowners and helped participants almost triple their income – from an average of about \$8,600 to \$22,800.

“These individuals are a testament to what is possible with hard work, determination and a little assistance,” said Jordan. “We are honored to play a part in their individual success, as well as the success of CHA’s Plan for Transformation.”

Note to Editors: Photos available upon request.

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