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Family Self-Sufficiency Grads Receive Diplomas, Share \$205,117 Worth of Escrow

Annual income of April 2008 class almost doubles in five years

CHICAGO – When Doretha Harding started Family Self Sufficiency, the five-year program for families renting with a federal Housing Choice Voucher, one of her goals was to become proficient in computer networking.

Five years later, she is not only an IT technician – she is an IT instructor who also coordinates a program educating others about computer usage and repair.

Harding was one of 26 people who completed the class and received their FSS diploma on Thursday, April 25, 2008, at the Charles Hayes Center. The graduates split \$205,117 worth of escrow.

The class' annual combined income has nearly doubled over the past five years - from \$15,573 upon initiation to \$29,838 upon graduation. Thirteen of the graduates are new homeowners.

“FSS makes you focus on what you want, and gives you the time it takes to achieve it,” said Harding, known for her inspiration and encouragement.

With team mentors, advisors and advocates at its disposal, the FSS program is designed to help voucher participants gain economic self sufficiency – to obtain good jobs and build assets so that they can purchase a home and eliminate the need for public assistance. Their savings are placed into an account that is used for down payments on homes and similar ventures upon the program's conclusion.

The end goal is to do like Doretha - who no longer needs voucher assistance.

“I have a happy and sad feeling,” she said after the graduation ceremony. “I'm happy that I've achieved my goals; I'm sad that I won't have FSS anymore.”

Since it began in 1996, FSS has dispersed \$4,861,525 to 526 voucher participants (an average of \$9,242 per graduate) – helping to produce 83 new homeowners. The average income for participants entering the program is

\$8,171; the average income for participants upon their exit from the program is \$23,776.

Lewis A. Jordan, CEO of the CHA, said the FSS program is another fine example of residents taking advantage of the tools available to them courtesy of the Plan for Transformation.

“I applaud the April 2008 FSS class for its determination,” Jordan said. “These dedicated, focused residents have taken action to improve their lives, and they have not only succeeded – they are on the brink of extraordinary accomplishments. They are role models for their families, their friends, and their neighbors. And they serve as an inspiration to us all.”

During the graduation ceremonies, residents were presented with a certificate commemorating their achievements.

“All of the April graduates are to be commended for their achievements,” says William T. Riley, Executive Director of CHAC. “They worked hard and obtained some very impressive goals. Thirteen of the graduates purchased homes and three of the graduates are over income—that is, their income has increased so much that they no longer need voucher program assistance. They have truly reached financial self-sufficiency.”

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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, 64.7 percent 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.