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**Family Self-Sufficiency Graduation Marks Completion of
Five-Year Goals, Boosts Income**

Program has 556 Graduates, 93 Homeowners

CHICAGO – When Shante Chatman entered the Family Self-Sufficiency program, she was struggling to repair her credit and stuck in a job where she was only working part-time. Five years, a new full-time job at Jane Adams Hull House and a car purchase later, Chatman has not only met all her goals to graduate from FSS, but she has also increased her income so much that she no longer needs voucher assistance to pay her rent.

“I did it,” Chatman proudly told the audience at her graduation ceremony. “I’m glad to be here, and I’m excited about my future.”

Highlighting one of the most successful programs associated with the CHA’s Plan for Transformation, 30 current or former Housing Choice Voucher holders, like Chatman, celebrated their economic independence and financial stability as they graduated from the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program on Thursday, September 18. The ceremony was held at the Charles A. Hayes Family Investment Center.

As the Chicago Housing Authority continues its landscape-shaping Plan, its focus remains on the advancement of CHA leaseholders. Although public-housing units are being provided for all qualifying households, proof of the Plan’s success relies on low-income families reaching self-sufficiency by entering the private market with a Housing Choice Voucher, through homeownership and eventually no longer needing voucher assistance.

Of the FSS September graduates, all are employed at companies such as Heartland Alliance, Illinois Masonic Medical Center and Chicago Public Schools; 10 are new homeowners and others have set their sights at also purchasing a home.

The fall graduates joined 526 other Chicagoans who have already completed the five-year program that provides educational support, job training and placement services. The graduates were presented a check for escrow savings earned during the tenure in the program, totaling almost \$220,000 collectively.

Andy Teitelman, vice president of CHA resident services, opened the ceremony by congratulating the graduates on their dedication to reaching their goals and encouraging graduates to continue their path to self-sufficiency.

“These graduates have reached a milestone by completing this program,” Teitelman said to the audience. “With the knowledge they have taken from FSS, they know what it takes to not only reach their goals, but also how to maintain and build upon their accomplishments.”

Cathy Pennington, executive program director of the Housing Choice Voucher Program, and Kris Warren, CHA executive vice president of asset management, were also on hand to congratulate the graduates.

Since its inception in 1996, FSS has seen 93 graduates become homeowners and helped participants almost triple their income – from an average of about \$7,700 to \$22,500.

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

The Chicago Housing Choice Voucher program has enabled more than 4,200 families formerly living in public housing developments to live in the broader rental market on a permanent or temporary basis in 70 of the city’s 77 neighborhoods.

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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.