

~~~~ Welcome To The Family Self Sufficiency Program ~~~~

DEAR FSS PARTICIPANT:

Welcome to the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program! We hope that you will use all of the available resources that we have to offer through this program. The Handbook is a guide to help you through the program, and to let you know the resources we have to assist you in your goal to become self-sufficient. If you have any questions or concerns at any time, please let us know. We will be happy to assist you in any way that we can.

THE FSS PROGRAM STAFF & YOU

Your contact will be with the FSS Coordinators. The staff is available to assist you during office hours. You will be assigned an FSS staff member to work with when you start the program and will meet with your FSS worker on a regular basis.

OFFICE LOCATION AND HOURS

The FSS office is located at 143 Reservoir St. The staff is available from 9a.m.-5p.m. Monday through Friday with an appointment. Also located at the Simms School Building is a computer that FSS participants may use to type resumes, fill out job applications online, or do online job searches. The FSS staff can assist residents with basic computer skills.

THE FSS CONTRACT

It is essential that you understand the terms of the FSS contract. You will have a contract and a list of goals that you will work on during your enrollment in the FSS Program. You will be in the FSS program for a period of up to 5 years. It is important that you commit to following the steps of the program from the very beginning so that you can make the most of the opportunity that you have through FSS. You will sign the FSS contract at your move in appointment. Failure to comply with your FSS contract can cause you to lose your housing assistance.

INDIVIDUAL TRAINING AND SERVICE PLAN

The FSS participant meets with the FSS staff to set goals and work on meeting those goals to become self-sufficient. Program participants will complete a needs assessment with the FSS staff to determine what types of goals the family will work on. For example, participants can work on areas such as: education and training, job placement, job retention, transportation issues, healthcare, mentoring, home ownership classes and child care assistance. FSS staff will be in contact with clients a minimum of four times per year to review the family's goals and update information. Your Individual Training and Service Plan (ITSP) will be updated by you and your FSS worker at least annually. You will sign off on your goals on an annual basis.

REQUIRED EMPLOYMENT

Employment is an essential part of becoming self-sufficient. FSS participants are required to work a minimum of 20 hours per week upon entering the program and are expected to achieve full time employment status (40 hours per week) during their participation in the program. Employment will be verified on a regular basis by a member of the Housing Authority staff.

ALWAYS keep the Housing Authority staff updated on your income and family composition by filling out a Change Form at the main office of the Housing Authority. **You must report changes in income within 10 business days of the change.** Examples include: getting a job, losing a job, getting child support, getting a monetary gift from a friend or family member, losing your TANF benefits, receiving unemployment benefits, having a baby, having a spouse or significant other move out, etc. This is not a complete list of examples, so if you have a question about income and family composition, **please ASK your Section 8 worker.** You can contact your Section 8 worker by calling (540) 434-7386.

IF YOU BEGIN THE FSS PROGRAM AND ARE NOT WORKING

- You will attend 2 pre-employment classes per week for 5 weeks. Pre-employment classes are designed to help you learn how to fill out job applications, sharpen your interview skills and do job searches. You also have the opportunity to meet other FSS participants and network to learn about what others in the program are doing. You will receive the pre-employment class schedule from your FSS worker during your first appointment.
- Everyone must apply for 10 jobs per week. You will be given a job search form and are expected to fill it out and turn it in by noon on Friday each week.
- If you have not found employment of at least 20 hours per week by the end of the pre-employment class, you will begin volunteer work. You must volunteer at least 20 hours per week and continue to look for employment (you must continue to fill out your job search form each week).
- You may participate in volunteer work for four (4) weeks. If at the end of the four (4) weeks, you have not found employment of at least 20 hours per week, you will be considered out of compliance with the FSS program. Please see the section below entitled "If You Choose Not to Participate in the Program".
- When you begin working, you have 10 business days from your first day of work to report to the Housing Authority staff that you have a change in income. Changes to income and family composition are reported at the Housing Authority's main office **ONLY**. When you fill out your change form, request a copy that has been date stamped and keep it for your files.

IF YOU BEGIN THE FSS PROGRAM AND YOU ARE WORKING

- Please continue to work at least 20 hours per week. Take advantage of any additional opportunities for extra hours or a move from part-time to full-time employment which will help you start to earn escrow!
- If your hours increase or decrease, you have 10 business days from the date of the change to report the change to the Housing Authority staff. Changes are reported at the Housing Authority's main office **ONLY**. When you fill out your change form, request a copy that has been date stamped and keep it for your files.

IF YOU ARE WORKING AND LOSE YOUR JOB

- **Inform your FSS worker and Section 8 worker immediately by filling out a change form at the main office of the Housing Authority.** This can help reduce the amount of rent that you owe while you are unemployed.
- You should begin job searches and volunteer work immediately. You must participate in 20 hours of volunteer work while also job searching. Your FSS worker will provide you with a form to document your job search and community service. If you have not previously completed the Pre-Employment class, you may choose to come to the class for 2 hours per week (will replace 2 hours of volunteer work)
- You will have four (4) weeks to find new employment. If after four (4) weeks, you have still not found employment of at least 20 hours per week, you will be considered out of compliance with the FSS program. Please see the section below entitled “If You Choose Not to Participate in the Program.”

IF YOU ARE IN SCHOOL

- You will need to be participating in school on a full time basis if you are not working. The term “full time” will be defined by the school that you are attending.
- If you are attending school on a part-time basis, you will need to be working at least 20 hours per week as well.
- Attendance at school will be verified by the Housing Authority after the “add/drop” period each semester.
- If you are not attending classes during “summer break” you are expected to be working at least 20 hours per week or participating in community service.

REQUIRED GOALS IN THE PROGRAM

The following goals are required as part of your participation in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program.

- Paying rent on time each month.
- Turning in the Monthly Goal Sheet on or before the 10th of each month.
- Keeping unit clean (inside and out)
- Reporting changes in income or family composition to Housing Authority staff within 10 business days of the change (this **MUST** be done at the main HRHA office.)
- Working at least 20 hours per week **OR** attending school **FULL TIME**.

All other goals are based on your family’s needs. We are happy to help you find resources for childcare, transportation, medical care, or anything else you can think of. This is your opportunity to access resources for your family to be successful.

BENEFITS OF THE FFS PROGRAM

Residents who are actively participating in the FSS program have several benefits available to them:

- Assistance with transportation. Referrals can be made by the FSS staff to clients that are experiencing transportation issues. Assistance can be in the form of gas

- vouchers, help with paying a repair bill, or getting a new car, or accessing bus passes.
- Support from the FSS staff with resume writing, job searches, and interview skills.
 - Credit counseling and repair. Help establishing a monthly budget.
 - Referrals to resources available in the community.
 - Ability to earn escrow (explained in detail in the next section).
 - Option to use earned escrow to pay for emergency situations or to help attain self-sufficiency. (Request for funds is subject to approval by FSS Coordinator and the Executive Director.)

ESCROW ACCOUNT

The FSS program allows you to earn money! FSS accounts are established based on rent. FSS accounts are maintained by HRHA and distributed after successful completion of the program. You may use escrow funds while you are participating in the program for activities that will help you achieve and/or maintain self-sufficiency provided that you are actively earning escrow and working to meet your established goals.

The general concept of the escrow account is that FSS families continue to pay rent in accordance with their incomes, even if their incomes increase due to wage increase. As a rule, the amount of the increase in family rent resulting from an increase in earned income (pay increase) is escrowed. Because there are other factors that affect the family rent, the escrowed amount will not necessarily be dollar-for-dollar. If during the contract term the family rent becomes less than the original rent on the effective date of the contract, there is no escrow credit.

COMPLETION OF THE FSS PROGRAM AND GRADUATION

The FSS program lasts for five years. You will complete the program at the end of your five year contract with FSS. If you have met all of the goals that you established for yourself, you are eligible to graduate from the program and receive any escrow that you have earned during your time with the program. This money can be used as a down payment on a home, to purchase a new car, to continue your education or to clean up any remaining credit issues.

It is possible to complete the program and graduate early if you have met all of your goals and are no longer eligible to receive a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). This is done by increasing your income to the point where you are able to pay full market rent for your home.

NON COMPLIANCE AND TERMINATION FROM THE PROGRAM

Participation in the FSS program is mandatory for all residents living in Project Based Section 8 Housing. This program is your opportunity to complete any goals that you may have for yourself or your family. If you choose not to participate in this program, the following steps will occur:

- **STEP 1:** FSS staff will attempt to contact you via telephone to discuss your non-compliance with the program. We will help you identify strategies to correct any problems and provide you with a deadline (not to exceed 10 business days) to

remedy any non-compliance issues. A follow up letter will be sent to you explaining the strategies that we discussed and providing you with a written reminder of the deadline that you were given to correct any issues. Should you fail to provide the FSS staff with up to date telephone contact information, a letter will be sent identifying the non-compliance issues and requesting that you call the FSS staff to discuss the problems. A deadline for you to call back will be provided.

- **STEP 2:** If you fail to follow through with the strategies identified by the FSS staff and yourself, you will receive an “out of compliance with FSS” letter. This letter will identify the steps that you agreed to take and provide documentation of any deadlines that you were given. This letter will provide you with 10 business days to complete any corrective actions. You will be informed that if the corrective actions are not completed, that you will be terminated from the FSS program.
- **STEP 3:** You will be terminated from the Family Self-Sufficiency Program. A letter will be sent to you terminating you from the program. A detailed listing will be provided to you of the opportunities that you were given to correct any issues. This termination letter will also be given to the Franklin Heights Manager and to the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. Failure to comply with the FSS program can result in your termination from Franklin Heights and from the HCV program.

If you are out of compliance with the FSS program, staff will be happy to assist you in correcting any compliance issues; however, you will be unable to use any escrow that you may have earned and the FSS staff will be unable to refer you to any other service agencies during this time.

If you are terminated from the FSS program, any escrow that you have earned will be forfeited and all supportive services provided by the FSS will be withheld.

The following choices are examples of (but not an all inclusive list) actions that will indicate to the FSS staff that you have chosen not to participate in the FSS program:

- Failure of adults in the household to seek and maintain employment of at least 20 hours per week or be participating in a full time educational program.
- Failure to participate in FSS sponsored activities such as pre-employment class, job searches or completing volunteer work (and turn in required documentation by due dates provided).
- Failure to complete goals that you have set for yourself and your family.
- Recurring late rent payments (2 consecutive months)
- Recurring inability to turn monthly goal sheet in on time (2 consecutive months)

GRADUATION FROM THE PROGRAM

When you graduate from the program, you have completed all of your goals or moved into a home where you are able to pay Fair Market Rent with no assistance. You are eligible to receive any escrow that you earned less any deductions for money owed to HRHA or the Franklin Heights program.

COMPLETION OF PROGRAM

When you complete the FSS program, you have accomplished all of the action items on your Individual Training and Service Plan. Participants may complete all of the items on the ITSP without earning escrow while participating in the program.

EXIT FROM PROGRAM

If you are terminated from the program based on your non-compliance with the contract that you sign for the FSS program, if your Housing Choice Voucher is terminated, or if your lease is terminated through the Franklin Heights program, you are withdrawn from the program. If you withdraw from the program without graduating, your entire escrow amount will be forfeited.

THE FSS PARTICIPANT AGREES THAT ALL OF THE PROVISIONS OF THIS HANDBOOK HAVE BEEN READ AND ARE UNDERSTOOD. THE FSS PARTICIPANT FURTHER AGREES TO BE BOUND BY ITS PROVISIONS AND CONDITIONS AS WRITTEN.

CLIENT SIGNATURE

DATE

FSS STAFF

DATE

Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority or Franklin Heights, LLC, reserves the right to amend this Family Self-Sufficiency Participants Handbook at any time with or without notice, as applicable, unless otherwise provided by law.