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HOUSING AUTHORITY OF COOK COUNTY AWARDS GRADUATES FOR COMPLETING THE FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM

Graduates Celebrate Path to Homeownership & Entrepreneurship

CHICAGO, IL – The Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) held its Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Graduation ceremony today at the HACC's Central Office located at 175 W. Jackson. HACC staff and family members attended the memorable event.

“Today underscores the importance of hard work, dedication and the personal sacrifice that these individuals possess to achieve their ultimate goals towards home ownership and owning their own small business,” said HACC Executive Director Richard Monocchio. “This program does not simply attack the symptoms of poverty, it tackles dependency on all fronts and replaces powerlessness with empowerment and the opportunity for a better future. We are proud to know that our staff and agency resources have provided endless opportunities for these outstanding individuals to succeed,” he added.

The tenets of the program include goal setting, mentoring and obtaining financial literacy to empower families in making positive life changes. Financial incentives are offered to successful graduates who demonstrate that they are financially responsible and committed to a path of self sufficiency. Participants maintain a savings account and the HACC matches the savings funds at the end of the program to incentivize their accomplishment. The funds accumulate in an escrow account over time and after completing set goals the funds become available to graduates to spend on numerous necessities like rent, purchasing a house, starting a business, etc.

The purpose of the FSS Program is to empower people to take control of their lives by providing the necessary tools and resources to assist participants in becoming independent and self-sufficient. Essentially, the FSS program is designed to assist housing choice voucher participants to achieve goals such as education, employment, and purchasing a home under the Home Ownership program.

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FSS & Home Ownership Graduation

Today's graduates completed the FSS Program despite their adversities. Nenaia Turner, 49, joined the FSS program in 2010 with the goal of obtaining full-time employment. She started her journey struggling with two children – both now college graduates. Her daughter is a graduate of the University of Phoenix, and her son is working for the Department of State in Africa. As she wiped her tears during the ceremony, Ms. Turner said that her main goal was to ensure that she could provide for her children. Part time jobs helped her throughout her journey, but steady, full-time employment is her greatest accomplishment. Ms. Turner resides in Schaumburg.

Juan Trujillo, 37, joined the FSS program in March 2015, with the goal of increasing earned income to better care for his wife and three children. Juan completed the program and was able to start his own small business - J.T. Communications, located in Schaumburg, IL. The Trujillo family is truly grateful for the resources obtained from the HACC and are focused on establishing a college savings account for their children. The Trujillo's reside in Schaumburg, IL.

Gloria Cutts, 58, is currently employed. Ms. Cutts obtained technology training through National Able Network, Inc., a partner of the HACC. She is a certified entry networking technician. The FSS program has enabled Ms. Cutts to access professional resources that have helped her to develop a business plan to start a technology training center.

The Home Ownership Program is intended for all eligible Housing Choice Voucher Program participants interested in purchasing a dwelling unit to be occupied by the tenant family. Participant must work a minimum of 2 years concurrently, acquire an annual earned income of at least \$17,160 per year, maintain a credit score of 640 or better, and have a minimum of \$3,000 in a savings account for closing costs.

Public Housing residents and HCV participants who are interested in participating in the FSS program may contact a PHA in their area that administers an FSS program. The only requirements are that the participant must be in good standing with the Housing Authority of Cook County. To be in good standing, the individual doesn't owe any debts to HACC including their current Landlord and is not subject to any repayment agreement with HACC. As well as be a housing choice voucher participant residing in HACC's jurisdiction for a period of one year if coming off of the waitlist.

The FSS program is administered by Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) with the help of Program Coordinating Committees (PCCs). The PCC usually consists of representatives of local government, employment and job training agencies, welfare agencies, nonprofit providers, local businesses, and assisted families.

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