

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **I'm not on Section 8 yet; can I join FSS?**

No, you must have a Section 8 voucher and be leased up before you can join FSS.

### **Is the FSS program required?**

No, it is a voluntary program.

### **Will I lose my housing assistance if I don't graduate from FSS?**

No. You will not lose your housing, and may leave voluntarily at any time. However, if there has been money set aside in your escrow account for you, you will forfeit that money. You will also have to wait at least a year to re-enroll.

### **Will I lose my housing assistance if I do graduate from FSS?**

No. The goal of the FSS program is to help you reach self-sufficiency in the long term, but for the purposes of this program, graduation requires only that you complete your own goals, be suitably employed, and be off of welfare for a year. If you are far enough along the path to self-sufficiency, then by the time you graduate from FSS you may be earning enough money that you will no longer be eligible for Section 8 – and that's a great thing for you! If you graduate from FSS but still meet the income guidelines, you will continue to receive your housing assistance as before.

### **What do I have to do to join FSS?**

You have to be receiving Section 8 rental assistance, have indicated your interest to the FSS Coordinator (there is an Interest Form to fill out) attended an orientation, filled out an application form, and been invited off the waiting list. You will be required to sign a contract of participation, and to create a five year plan (Individual Training and Services Plan).

### **What do I need to do to stay on FSS?**

You must seek and maintain employment during the duration of your five years on FSS (seeking employment may include job training and education). You must maintain contact with your FSS case manager, respond to requests for progress reports, attend at least two workshop a year, and remain in good standing with the Housing Authority.

**How often will I meet with my FSS case manager?**

You must meet with your FSS case manager a minimum of twelve (monthly) times per year. You may need to meet with more often when you are starting, or if you are going through difficult times and need more support.

**What if my goals change?**

You can make changes to your ITSP at any time. However, the changes must be agreed upon by both you and your case manager, and if you remove any goals, they must be replaced by a reasonable alternative that will equally further your progress toward self-sufficiency.

**Will my FSS escrow account count against me for Housing, Welfare, SSI, etc?**

No, the escrow account is not your money, and is not held in your name. The money belongs to the Housing Authority until you have completed all of the goals necessary for you to graduate.

**Can anyone else in my family join FSS?**

Any other adult in your household may create an ITSP and access FSS resources. However, there will be only one escrow account, and only the Head of Household must be employed. What if my family member who lives with me is receiving cash aid for her child? Everyone in the household must be off of cash aid in order for the Head of Household to graduate.

**What if my family member who lives with me is receiving cash aid for his/her child?**

Everyone in the household must be off cash aid in order for the family to graduate.

**I have a disability and cannot work full time; can I join FSS?**

As with all our programs, we will make reasonable accommodation for your disability, keeping in mind that this is an employment program. In some cases that accommodation may mean working less hours, or working from home. The accommodation must match your needs as verified by your physician. Typically we refer FSS participants to the Department of Rehabilitation, who can help with retraining.

**I already have a case manager at another agency; will you coordinate?**

You may sign a release of information form allowing your FSS case manager to talk to your other case manager(s). Your FSS case manager will do their best to coordinate with your other case managers to ensure that your various service plans are realistic and in line with one another and there is no duplication of services.

## **What is the Family Self-Sufficiency Program?**

The Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program works with support and Housing agencies throughout Michigan to help families develop the strengths, skills and experience necessary to achieve economic independence. The FSS program is a team effort involving your family, the FSS Case Manager, and the job training, educational and social service agencies that will lend you a hand along your journey toward a productive and fulfilling life. You may want to think of the FSS program as a bridge that will help your family overcome the obstacles you encounter in your journey toward self-sufficiency. First, your family will develop a blueprint for its bridge with the help of the FSS Case Manager. This blueprint is called an Individual Training and Service Plan (ITSP) and outlines your personal goals and the steps your family will take to achieve the earning power needed to be self-supporting. Other agencies who work with FSS families, such as schools, social service agencies, and job training programs, act as the supports that will make your bridge strong enough to stand against the challenges you will face. The FSS Case Manager solidly bolts your supports together by helping you find and connect all the many parts of your family's bridge to self-sufficiency. The final and most important part of the Family Self-Sufficiency program is YOU! You and your family must have the desire and determination to attack obstacles in your path and cross your bridge to the brighter future that is waiting on the road to self-sufficiency.

## **Your Responsibilities**

### Employment and Training

To remain on the FSS Program you must be working, actively seeking employment, or attending school to increase your skills and abilities.

### Activities

When you sign your ITSP, you are agreeing to complete the tasks you have identified that will help you reach your goals. You have also given due dates by which you believe it is reasonable for you to complete those tasks. Please report your completed tasks to the FSS Coordinator by the date you have agreed to complete them, and soon afterward provide documentation that you have completed them. Examples of documentation include: • Referral form filled out by staff at a community service agency • Copy of a budget you have created • Bank statements showing you have made deposits to a savings account • Receipt from a job you have applied to through a web site • Printout of your registration, class schedule or report card The FSS Coordinator is here to help you reach your goals. If you are having a hard time finishing one of your upcoming tasks, call before the deadline so that we can help you figure out how to complete it.

### Changes

If there are any changes to your situation, including a change in income, contact information or household composition, you must continue to report that change in writing to your Housing Technician. If the change affects your FSS plan, also contact the FSS Coordinator.

## Contact

If you have not checked in recently with the FSS Coordinator, you may receive requests for a progress report. As with all communication from the Housing Authority, you are required to respond.

## Other Adult Household Members

The Head of Household (HOH) is the only family member required to create and complete an ITSP. However, any household member over the age of 18 is eligible to create an ITSP and receive FSS support. Their participation will have no impact on the amount of escrow received; all income earned by household members over the age of 18 (with certain exceptions) will be included in rent and escrow calculations. However, if a family member other than the HOH creates an ITSP, they will be required to complete it in order for the family to graduate by completing all goals.

## Program Completion

Participants will graduate and receive escrow at any point, even if the contract term has not expired, if the following conditions are met: 1. The head of household is suitably employed; and 2. No member of the household has received cash aid (such as TANF or General Assistance) during the last twelve months of the FSS contract; and 3. Either The participant provides evidence that they have completed all goals set in the ITSP or 30% of the family's monthly adjusted income equals or is greater than the Fair Market Rent amount for the unit size for which the family qualifies Note: If 30% of a participant's monthly adjusted income equals or is greater than Fair Market Rent but the head of household is not employed or any member of the household is receiving cash aid, then the family will automatically graduate, but will not be eligible to receive escrow.

## Escrow Account

When your rent increases from the amount you paid at the beginning of your FSS contract as a result of an increase in earned income (i.e. income you earn by working), the Housing Authority will begin setting aside money in an escrow account. The amount will be calculated according to the worksheet on the following page. The escrow account is not your account, but holds funds on your behalf. Once your obligations have been fulfilled according to your contract, you will be eligible to receive this money. If you do not fulfill your FSS contract, then any money the Housing Authority has deposited in that account will be forfeited back to the Housing Authority. Successful FSS graduates have used their escrow funds to purchase a home, a new car, or to continue their education.