



**HOUSTON**  
HOUSING AUTHORITY

**Transforming Lives & Communities**

2640 Fountain View Drive ■ Houston, Texas 77057 ■ 713.260.0500 P ■ 713.260.0547 TTY ■ [www.housingforhouston.com](http://www.housingforhouston.com)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**July 30, 2014**

**Contact:**  
Claudia Nwaogu  
Communications Coordinator  
713-260-0774 (office)

## **HOUSTON HOUSING AUTHORITY FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM CELEBRATES THE GRADUATION OF 19 CLIENTS, LARGEST GRADUATION CLASS**

**HOUSTON**— The Houston Housing Authority graduated 19 clients from its Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program, its largest graduation class to date. The FSS program promotes and encourages participants to develop strategies towards financial independence. Participants sign a five-year contract agreeing to work towards accomplishing individual goals that they set for themselves. This year's graduates are all employed, have increased their combined income by 314 percent, and two graduates Bernadette Smith and Veronica Bass are now proud homeowners.

Former public housing resident Bernadette Smith served as Vice President of Resident Council at Irvinton Village apartments and worked extensively with the youth in the community. As much as she enjoyed her responsibilities and her involvement in the neighborhood, the time came for her to move on. In April 2014, Smith and her family moved into their new home in Spring, Texas. When she joined the FSS program five years ago, Smith's goals were to become a certified medical assistant, repair her credit, maintain a savings and own a home. Working closely with her FSS Coordinator, Smith was able to meet all her goals. Smith is currently employed as a medical assistant providing home healthcare to quadriplegics and paraplegics.

"The motivating factor to completing my goals were my children and my desire to provide them a better life," Smith said. "The FSS program is great because it allowed me the opportunity to move at my own pace and gave me the resources and support to accomplish each goal."

Veronica Bass, a former voucher participant moved into her new home in Missouri City on December 31, 2013. She told her two daughters that she wanted to welcome the New Year in a new home, and that is exactly what happened. Bass has worked for Houston Independent School District for ten years in various positions including a Special Ed teacher and now as a General Clerk. When she joined the FSS program, her main goal was to become a homeowner. Before her oldest daughter left for college, Bass wanted her to experience having her own

room, and a backyard to enjoy. Not only was Bass able to give her daughter that experience but her daughter is also excited about coming back to their home for the holidays.

“It is a wonderful feeling to be a homeowner,” Bass said. “I walk differently, I talk differently, I even dress differently. I used to be afraid of being a homeowner because I thought it would be too much of a responsibility but I realized that I can handle it. I’m now fearless and looking for the next thing in my life to conquer.”

Each person in the FSS program is assigned a caseworker who assists in providing the participant with referrals for social services and follows up with clients to make sure they stay on track. Participants have the opportunity to attend various life skills classes through FSS, including budgeting, home ownership and college. As part of the FSS program, any extra income that the participant earns while on the program is placed into their escrow account to gain interest until graduation. Upon successful completion of the program, graduates receive the funds from their earned escrow account. Many graduates use the funds to furnish their new home or as a down payment.

“The FSS program is a great resource that helps our clients overcome barriers that have limited them from reaching their full potential,” said Houston Housing Authority President & CEO Tory Gunsolley. “We are proud of the accomplishments of each graduate. I’m sure that this is the first of many more achievements to come in their lives.”

#### **ABOUT HHA:**

The Houston Housing Authority provides affordable homes and services to more than 58,000 low-income Houstonians, including over 17,000 families housed through the Housing Choice Voucher Program and another 13,000 living in 25 public housing and tax credit developments around the city. HHA also administers the nation’s third largest voucher program exclusively serving homeless veterans. More information about the Houston Housing Authority can be found at [www.housingforhouston.com](http://www.housingforhouston.com).



**Bernadette Smith and her family.**



Veronica Bass and her family.

###