

Houston Housing Authority

HCVP and PHO

Family Self-Sufficiency

Action Plan

July 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Section	Page #
I. Introduction	2
I Mission & Philosophy	2
III. Participant Profile	3
A. Demographic Profile of FSS-Eligible Families	4
B. Target Number of FSS Participants and Implementation Timetable	6
IV. Organization and Staffing	6
Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing FSS	6
HCV and PH FSS Program Coordinating Council	7
V. Outreach and Recruitment	7
Recruitment Tools	8
Assurances of non-interference with rights of non-participating families	8
VI. Participant Rights, Responsibilities and Incentives	9
FSS Individual Training and Service Plan	9
Meeting ITSP Responsibilities	9
Termination and Grievance Procedures	9
Incentives Plan	10
<i>Role Models</i>	
<i>Rewards</i>	
<i>Establishment of FSS Escrow Accounts</i>	
<i>Educational Workshops</i>	
<i>Bi-annual Job Fairs and College Fair/Financial Aid Seminars</i>	
<i>Graduation Celebrations</i>	
VII. Assessment and Referral	11
VIII. Services and Family Advocacy	12
Service Referrals	13
In-House Services	13
Coordination of Programs	14
X. Monitoring Program Performance	14
XI. FSS Flow Chart	16

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1996, the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) launched its administration of the Section 8 Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program. In 2003, the Houston Housing Authority submitted a combined FSS Action Plan which governed the existing Section 8 Housing Voucher program and any future funding received for its Public Housing Program. In May 2006, the Houston Housing Authority was awarded its first Public Housing Self-Sufficiency program grant. In April 2016 HHA combined its HCV and PHO FSS programs. The program is now managed by the HCVP Director. In recent years HHA's FSS Program has evolved to the point where parts of the original action plan had become outdated. The HHA FSS Action Plan has been revised to more closely reflect the program's current status, future plans, goals and objectives.

II. MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

The primary goal of the FSS Program for participants in either the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program or Public Housing Operations (PHO) is to empower families to reach long-term financial independence through stable employment. For these families the best first step towards long-term self-sufficiency is a job that provides a living wage, preferably one that holds the promise of advancement. For others who may need to overcome serious barriers to employment, short-term goals involve family stabilization, vocational training and basic education. The basic philosophy of the FSS program is to view each client and family holistically, conducting a full assessment of needs and then empowering the family to reach the goals they have set for themselves. Only after a family's basic needs have been addressed is it productive to talk about work, but it is understood that only families who are motivated to progress quickly in areas of education, training and mental health are appropriate for the FSS program. Consequently, the FSS Program's abiding philosophy is that meaningful employment is the "action step" that leads families out of poverty and all its challenges.

In keeping with this philosophy, and based on the assessed skills, needs, and current employment situation of FSS participants, the program emphasizes:

- Short-term paths to employment;
- Job retention
- Job mobility; and
- Financial self-sufficiency within five years

The core services of the FSS program include the following case management activities: outreach, assessment, counseling, referral to other services, and follow-up. At each stage of the program, the FSS participant has a single program staff member as their point of contact. This relationship will be supplemented by regular contact with vocational training and educational service providers from the surrounding area. Initially, the participant meets with an FSS Coordinator who assesses family needs and resources and helps the participant establish self-sufficiency goals. For an unemployed participant, the Coordinator determines the education, training, job placement, and supportive services needed for the participant to obtain employment. The Coordinator refers a participant to those services and follows-up to ensure that the participant is making progress toward the established goals. Once employed,

the client receives on-going services from the Coordinator, depending on need, with a primary focus on job retention and career advancement goals, as well as necessary referrals to services as barriers to employment arise.

The FSS community is characterized by three informal and interrelated partnerships:

1. The partnership of mutual obligation between participants and the program;
2. The partnership of shared goals and resources between the FSS program and other agencies serving FSS clients; and
3. The partnership of mutual benefit between the FSS program and Houston businesses.

The partnership of mutual obligation between FSS participants and the program is formalized in a contractual agreement that specifies the expected participant activities and behavior as well as the FSS services and support needed to move participants to self-sufficiency. FSS offers continuing services to participants, even after they obtain stable employment, while FSS “graduates” contribute to the program through mentoring, peer counseling, and other services to FSS job seekers.

The partnership of shared goals and resources between FSS and other agencies and programs serving FSS clients is joined together through close collaboration and coordination. Since there is no special funding attached to FSS clients for case management, coordination of services must originate through a network of informal relationships between staff serving mutual clients. To facilitate this effort, HHA senior management cultivates contacts with providers serving the FSS client in the interest of providing continuity of care and coherent direction and support. FSS program staff identifies community resources that will provide services to clients, while the FSS program offers case management and coordination services to supplement the capacities of other agencies and help them achieve shared institutional and community goals.

The partnership of mutual benefit between FSS and Houston area businesses rests on the program developing a reputation for preparing and supporting responsible and skilled employees in their jobs. As the FSS program develops and maintains credibility, the business community will be increasingly more willing to recruit FSS participants, participate in job fairs, and keep the FSS staff informed of job openings.

These partnerships help to advance the FSS philosophy and broader aims of the HCV Programs which affirm the belief that the multiple goals of family empowerment, quality affordable housing, and positive community involvement both depend on, and are supportive of, stable and decent employment.

III. PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Families must be a Houston Housing Authority Housing Choice Voucher Participant or a Public Housing Resident in order to participate in the FSS Program. As of July 2017, the HHA has over 17,000 families participating in the HCV program, with 548 families participating in the FSS program. Of the 548 HCV families currently enrolled in the FSS program 16 are receiving

TANF. The HHA is obligated to maintain a program enrollment size of 426 for its FSS Program.

As of July 2017, the HHA has 61 residents participating in the Public Housing FSS program. Of the 61 residents, 19 receive TANF or Child Support, 8 receive Social Security benefits, and 32 are employed.

The Housing Authority has 3,351 public housing units available for occupancy.

Demographic Profile of FSS Families

In many respects the FSS population mirrors the HHA assisted population as a whole. FSS participants are overwhelmingly non-elderly, African-American and single mothers. However, as one would hope, the economic circumstances of the FSS families are significantly better than those of the general population with an average household income of \$21,073 for FSS households compared to \$13,847 for the HCV program and \$11,623 for the PHO program.

Currently, FSS recruitment efforts focus primarily on HCV and PHO clientele and those Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing Operations families receiving TANF and/or Social Security Income (SSI). Exhibit 2.1 shows the demographic characteristics of those currently participating in the HCV and PHO programs, separately for cases receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Social Security Income (SSI) and cases not receiving TANF.

See Exhibit 1.0 Table, top of next page.

Exhibit 1.0

Family Status:	# HCV	% HCV	# PHO	% PHO
Head of Household – Age 62 and over	3,121	17%	903	26%
Head of Household – Under Age 62	14,813	83%	2,565	74%
Handicapped/Disabled	6,772	38%	1,315	38%
Gender				
Male	2,685	15%	683	20%
Female	15,249	85%	2,785	80%
Race/Ethnicity				
African –American	16,096	90%	2,761	80%
Asian	277	2%	229	7%
Native American/Pacific Islander	72	0.4%	52	1%
White	1,494	8%	412	12%
Hispanic	1,024	6%	459	13%
Non-Hispanic	16,910	94%	3,009	87%

B. Target Number of FSS Participants

HHA’s FSS program current program enrollment of 597 exceeds the mandatory minimum program size of 426. HHA’s current philosophy is to continue recruitment efforts to increase the program size. HHA believes that with 7 full time FSS coordinators, the program has the capacity to effectively support a program size of 700 families. There has also been a targeted effort

to increase VASH participation in the FSS program.

FSS HCVP MDRC Study

The Houston Housing Authority has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with MDRC, a non-profit national research organization hired by HUD, to conduct a national study of the HCV Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program. The goal of the study is to understand whether the services that FSS provides—such as escrow accounts, referrals for education, job training, employment and social services, and job search assistance—have a significant impact on participants.

During the study enrollment period (November 2013 – October 2014) all tenants who wished to participate in the FSS program were given the choice to be a part of the study or wait to join the FSS program at the expiration of the enrollment period when the application process will go back to our prior method.

During the study period, selection into FSS was done by a computerized random assignment method. The computer randomly assigned applicants to one of two groups: **The FSS Group** – clients assigned to this group were enrolled in the FSS program and receive all of the services offered by the FSS program, or **The Control Group** – clients assigned to this group were not able to enroll in FSS or receive its services, but were given a list of other available education and employment programs in the community. Applicants assigned to either group are a part of the study. Group assignment was strictly random and is not based on personal characteristics, background or any other criteria—much like a lottery.

Participants in either group may withdraw at any time; however, members of **"The Control Group"** will have to wait three (3) years after the date of enrollment into the study to apply for enrollment into the housing authority's FSS program.

The initial study will sunset in the 4th Quarter of 2017.

IV. ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

The FSS Team Leader schedules the FSS intake briefing by November for the following year. FSS coordinators performs intake and case management functions for the Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing Operations FSS participants. The FSS staff takes a holistic approach to assessing needs and coordinating services for HHA clients that provides a continuum of care across various government entities and also within the FSS program itself. FSS program staff currently includes: one (1) FSS Team Leader and seven (7) FSS Coordinators, with two coordinators also having responsibility for HHA's homeownership program (HOV).

As "point of entry" into the program, the FSS Coordinators address both in-house

and external inquiries, conduct orientations and initial interviews with applicants, and schedule formal intake appointments. FSS Coordinators assist clients in goal formation, provide counseling and service referral, and address program retention issues. Caseloads average 90 for FSS HCV clients per FSS/HOV Coordinator, 134 FSS HCV clients per FSS Coordinator and 60 FSS clients per FSS PHO Coordinator. They are responsible for monitoring and maintaining the clients' escrow accounts and conducting interim and annual reexaminations.

The FSS HCVP Housing Specialist performs all ongoing occupancy functions for clients. FSS Coordinators will author quarterly newsletters with job information, local service agencies listings, and upcoming event announcements. This staff partnering is also in place to assure that all the client's dealings with the HCV program are coherent and coordinated. Assigning a single supervisor whose sole responsibility is to concentrate on FSS, rather than other special programs (i.e. VASH, Mainstream, et al) represents HHA's increased commitment to the FSS program.

FSS Program Coordinating Committee

Since launching the FSS Program in 1996, the Program Coordinating Committee was developed as recommended by HUD with members representing various city agencies, non-profit community-based organizations dealing with work-readiness services, and non-profit service providers. Recently, the HHA is in the process of reshaping the Committee with a greater emphasis on Houston business, banking, community, and policymaker representation. The Program Coordinating Committee includes representatives of organizations that are important to the welfare-to-work community in all its facets: educational, policy development, vocational training and direct service delivery.

Housing Choice Voucher FSS Program Coordinating Committee Membership

- Designate Member, Wells Fargo Bank
- Designate Member, St. Michaels School
- Designate Member, Easter Sills
- Designate Member, The City of Houston
- Designate Member, Avance
- Designate Member, Bank of America
- Designate Member, HAUL
- Designate Member, United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast - 211
- Designate Member, Houston Community College (HCC) - GED Program
- Designate Member, SER
- Designate Member, Neighborhood Centers

V. OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

FSS recruitment efforts focus on Housing Choice Voucher recipients and Public Housing residents, especially those receiving welfare (TANF) benefits. Participation in the FSS program is not mandatory for HCV or PHO recipients. However, HHA actively implements outreach activities to enroll clients in the FSS program on a volunteer basis. HHA seeks highly motivated clients without regard to race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin who choose to become self-sufficient.

Notices are posted in all public housing development management offices and community buildings, and supportive service provider offices. In addition, continuous outreach is conducted at initial admission into public housing, annual re-certifications and interim re-determination of income for public housing residents. Bi-lingual notices are posted in all HHA waiting rooms, and supportive service provider offices. Weekly briefings are conducted commensurate with the HCVP Voucher Briefing schedule. In addition, continuous outreach is conducted at initial certification, annual re-certifications and interim redetermination of income for HCV participants. Also, random bi-lingual mailings are sent to the Housing Voucher participants throughout the year offering the program and explaining its services.

A second group targeted for recruitment into the FSS program is Homeownership participants. The HCVP Homeownership program is being marketed first to HCVP FSS program participants. Through researching clients for the Homeownership Program, we found that over 90% could benefit from the services offered by this program. The FSS program will work with these participants to address issues that could hinder homeownership through credit counseling, money management and support during the stressful home buying process.

The FSS program will be able to help the clients get better education, training and possibly secure a job. The Homeownership Program will also attract these participants who desire to buy a home. A letter of introduction regarding the FSS program will be sent out to prospective FSS clients inviting them to a special briefing to explain how the FSS program can help them.

Recruitment Tools

The richest source of FSS referrals are HHA staff, who in the course of a year make contact with the over 21,000 families that participate in the HCV or PHO programs, to perform the annual re-certification that determines household eligibility for continued program participation. In-house training and information sessions on the FSS program have resulted in a staff that is educated as to the benefits of FSS, supportive of its aims and objectives, and eager to link its clients to the services provided. Also, FSS information is enclosed in each mail out HCVP recertification package.

A second opportunity to educate clients on the benefits of FSS are orientation briefings conducted at various times throughout the year. These are informal presentations in which the FSS program is fully described and voucher holders are encouraged to complete a pre- application package.

A third opportunity to educate clients on the benefits of FSS is at the monthly PHO resident council meetings at each development. These are informal presentations in which the FSS program is fully described and residents are encouraged to complete a pre-application package.

FSS PHO Coordinator conducts orientations at least once a month to introduce the program to residents. The orientations are scheduled in the afternoon and on Saturdays as well as during the week to accommodate schedules.

Brochures describing the FSS program are distributed at briefings and in response to written and phone inquiries about the program.

At least monthly, FSS Coordinators present program information to community coalition and town meetings as well as government organizations and agencies. Additional briefings occur through active involvement in the Homeless Coalition and United Way monthly meetings, which are geographically grouped associations of various social service organizations such as non-profit providers of services to people with mental illnesses and developmental disabilities, area colleges and universities, child care agencies, and other social service agencies. FSS program information is provided to local churches in minority communities, as a method to both recruit FSS members and keep the public informed on program efforts to improve the lives of clients and hence the communities in which they live.

Assurances of non-interference with rights of non-participating families

During recruitment efforts, the HHA provides assurances to families that their election not to participate in the FSS will in no way affect their admission, continued assistance, and right to occupancy in accordance with the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

VI. PARTICIPANT RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND INCENTIVES

While conduct enabling participants to get and keep a job is strongly encouraged, for many FSS clients “work readiness” traits need to be learned through services that help develop appropriate behaviors and attitudes. FSS program efforts will direct services to clients who want to work but have not yet internalized the skills that would make this possible. Thus the FSS environment is more an educational setting where clients are informed and supported while pursuing vocational endeavors and high value is placed on self-discipline, emotional control, punctuality, and good grooming.

FSS Individual Training and Service Plan

Individual rights and responsibilities and FSS program commitments to the participant are outlined in the FSS Individual Training and Service Plan (ITSP), a contractual agreement that specifies the services, achievements, and interim goals expected to lead the client ultimately to self-sufficiency. Where appropriate, the ITSP will take into account similar plans that may have been developed by other employment-related programs and agencies. The ITSP also includes the FSS obligation to facilitate access to or directly provide services and support for the participant to achieve interim and final self-sufficiency goals.

The FSS ITSP will include interim achievements so that progress may be monitored toward the ultimate goal of financial independence. If a participant fails to achieve an interim goal or maintain attendance and/or performance standards in any particular service or services, the FSS Coordinator will first determine if the FSS program or any service provider failed to fulfill their obligations. If the responsibility is with the program itself or a service provider, the Coordinator will investigate the reasons for the failure and take steps to correct it. The Coordinator and the participant may also, if mutually agreeable, change the ITSP to substitute a different service or provider.

Meeting ITSP Responsibilities

Should a participant fail to maintain their ITSP obligations, the Coordinator will investigate the specific causes for the failure. If external barriers are preventing participation, the Coordinator will take steps to help remove them. If the failure is due to the participant's dissatisfaction with the ITSP or any part of the ITSP, the Coordinator will attempt to determine the reasons for the dissatisfaction and try to reach an agreement with the participant. The client will be allowed to modify their ITSP within the first (4) years of the contract of participation.

If the Coordinator determines that a participant has failed to fulfill the specific terms of the ITSP without good cause or has behaved in an inappropriate manner either at HHA, on the job, or at a job interview, the participant may be terminated from the program at the discretion of the Special Programs Manager. Termination from the FSS program will not affect eligibility for the Housing Choice Voucher program rental assistance, as long as the participant continues to comply with the requirements of the HCV Program. Extensions may be granted for extenuating circumstances only. Coordinators may request additional supporting documentation.

Termination and Grievance Procedures

The process leading to FSS termination must begin with a formal notice to the participant specifying the violation(s) of the ITSP and/or acceptable standards of behavior. The Coordinator will meet with the participant to discuss the violations at the participant's request. The Coordinator may also outline a program of reconciliation by which the participant may remediate the violation(s). Moreover, the participant may appeal the pending termination to HHA's Hearing Officer. FSS participants who withdraw, or are removed, from the Housing Choice Voucher Program or Public Housing Operations for any other reason will also be terminated from FSS.

Upon mutual consent, changes to the terms of the ITSP may be initiated by the FSS participant or Coordinator within the first (4) years of the contract of participation. An FSS participant may also request in writing to the FSS Team Leader for a change in FSS Coordinator. Reasons for any assigned staff changes will be documented in the case file.

Notwithstanding any difficulties concerning compliance with the ITSP or any other FSS requirement, the participant may choose to withdraw voluntarily from FSS at any time. A participant withdrawing from FSS will not lose any rights as a Housing Choice Voucher or Public Housing Operations client, as long as other requirements of the HCV or PHO Program are met.

Incentives Plan

Role Models

An important aspect of the values that govern the FSS program is that successful program participants and graduates serve the program through mentoring, peer counseling and other activities. Recognition as role models bestows tribute to the achievements of each client while the role model provides invaluable services at graduation, promotional events and recruitment sessions.

Rewards

One motivational tool in development during the coming fiscal year involves recognizing significant interim achievements at FSS graduations. Participants who have reached major goals such as obtaining a GED, getting a job or a promotion or completing a training program will be invited to attend graduation ceremonies for recognition with award of a certificate.

Establishment of FSS Escrow Accounts

FSS escrow accounts are an effective incentive tool that motivates clients to

participate in the FSS program. In accordance with HUD regulations, HHA opens and maintains interest-bearing escrow accounts on behalf of each client during their participation in the FSS program. An escrow credit, based on increases in earned income of the family, is credited to this account. Each month FSS staff prepares a monthly schedule of FSS escrow to be deposited into a separate Money Market bank account specifically designated for FSS escrow. Upon completion of their identified goals, or other event as allowed by HUD regulation, FSS recipients receive their escrow balance. Several clients have put their escrow balances towards purchasing a home.

Educational Workshops

FSS participants will be connected to community and HHA sponsored educational workshops and seminars to learn about employment and educational opportunities, parenting skills, health career planning and financial and homeownership counseling.

Graduation Celebrations

Graduation celebrations occur annually where graduates are encouraged to invite their families and refreshments are served. The HHA senior management will preside over the ceremonies where each graduate is presented with a certificate of completion from the FSS program. Each graduate is invited to speak and without fail these impromptu words resonate with gratitude, courage and hope. This is where the “service delivery system” of the FSS program comes full circle and the staff truly benefits from the generosity of spirit of the FSS graduate.

VII. ASSESSMENT AND REFERRAL

Most inquiries from potential participants and referrals to the FSS program go through FSS Coordinators. Preliminary conversations convey program details and explain that the program is designed to serve people who want to maximize their earnings through meaningful, full-time employment. Individuals who feel they need more education and/or training before returning to work are not discouraged; however, FSS Coordinators emphasize the belief that frequently the best training for returning to the workforce involves work itself. Workplace learning enables the client to internalize the skills necessary to hold down a job: showing up on time, showing up every day, learning to interact with co-workers, learning to follow instructions, and so forth.

Once the FSS program employment goals are understood, the client is invited into the office for a program orientation. The client has the opportunity to ask questions and determine whether the goals and objectives of the program meet their needs. If the client is still interested, the Coordinator sets an

individual assessment interview appointment. The ITSP is developed and executed at the time of this interview.

For clients who are not working when they join the FSS program, the assessment will focus on the immediate barriers to employment and longer-range career goals. For those with jobs, the assessment will address needs and resources related to job stability, retention and career advancement. The assessment will identify the family's resources and needs in such areas as work experience, job search and retention skills, education, training, childcare and transportation. The assessment will also address such issues as physical and mental health, parenting, budgeting and household management, English language skills, coping skills and other skills necessary to gain and sustain employment. Several key objectives will guide the assessment process covering the many issues faced during a participant's preparation for and entry into employment:

- Determine whether the participant is ready to look for work, including whether the participant has the skills needed for the type of employment sought and whether additional training would enhance the participant's long-term employability.
- Determine which service needs the family can meet themselves and which will require outside assistance.
- Encourage participants to identify and build on the positive life skills, strengths and capabilities they already possess.
- Establish priorities among identified needs.

The assessment will provide the basis for developing the family's FSS ITSP. The FSS ITSP will outline steps towards long-term independence from public assistance, establish interim goal timeframes, identify potential barriers, and anticipate strategies for overcoming barriers. The FSS ITSP also outlines FSS program commitments to support the participant efforts, and the roles and responsibilities of program staff in helping participants reach their goals. The FSS ITSP, like the assessment, will be reviewed periodically; staff and participants may choose to revise ITSPs as appropriate.

VIII. SERVICES AND FAMILY ADVOCACY

The primary goal of the HHA approach to the FSS program is to help clients clarify their vocational goals, link and refer them to necessary services, and provide the ongoing support they need to maintain their focus and motivation.

The intake interview is the foundation of a client's participation in FSS. It is during this interview that the Coordinator lays the groundwork for developing a successful long-term relationship with the client. The objective is to build a relationship based upon respect for the client, an assessment of the client's needs and appreciation for their strengths, and an understanding of any

barriers to employment and services necessary to overcome them.

Following the initial assessment, the frequency and type of regular follow-up FSS participants receive will depend on the participant activities and needs. FSS Coordinators will be available to clients for phone consultations and in-person visits on a scheduled basis.

Individual client contact will also occur through frequent calls to monitor individual progress. FSS participants who are unemployed are required to have a quarterly meeting with their FSS Coordinator. In general, Coordinators will contact those families who do not report in to get an update on the participant's current activities, discuss progress toward interim goals, and identify any areas where the participant may need assistance. The Coordinators will have more frequent contact with participants who request additional assistance and/or who are known to be having difficulties. When the monthly reports indicate a job loss, the FSS Coordinator will make every effort to contact the client immediately either by phone or letter to schedule an in-person visits.

Although staff will be supportive and share some responsibility for coordinating and arranging services, ultimately the participant will be encouraged to assume responsibility for obtaining the services needed to implement their strategy for self-sufficiency. Staff will convey a consistent message that participants need to take control of, and assume responsibility for their working lives. This acceptance of responsibility will be critical to participant success in the workplace.

The FSS program staff work as a team to assist participants as they work toward employment and self-sufficiency. FSS staff provides individuals and families in-house services as well as referrals to additional services in the community as appropriate...

Service Referrals

Following the development of the FSS ITSP, the coordinators begin assisting participants to identify the resources needed to begin implementing their plans for reaching self-sufficiency. Participants seeking further education are referred for additional academic assessment if needed; those who are still identifying their employment goals may be referred for more in-depth testing and career counseling. Depending on the participant's interests and prior education, referrals may be made to local providers of basic education (GED), vocational or technical education, English as a Second Language course, and/or academic training. Participants who are already looking for work or who are planning to begin a job search may be referred to programs sponsored by the Texas Workforce Commission. The United Way's Thrive program also serves as a valuable resource for FSS referrals, since the United Way serves as a clearing house for other social service providers. Participants may also receive referrals

for supportive services, such as childcare and transportation assistance, personal or family counseling, or medical services.

To make effective use of the education, training, and support services available to FSS-eligible families, FSS staff compiles, maintains and updates a directory of local service providers. Coordinators will make every effort to follow up with participants and service providers regarding the outcomes of referrals. Staff will make sure the participants were able to contact the provider, that the needed services were available, and that the participant is satisfied with the quality of service. Heavy reliance is placed on clients reporting if they are unable to access the referred services so that, if needed, intervention can take place on their behalf.

In-House Services

The comprehensive assessment focuses on the skills and resources necessary to help participants obtain and keep employment. FSS Coordinators play a primary role in facilitating referrals to outside services, monitoring progress on short and long term goals, and providing support and encouragement.

In addition to the one-on-one contacts between staff and participants, the program offers opportunities for participants to meet each other, share experiences, and gain additional skills. There will be periodic workshops held for FSS Participants throughout the year. Speakers are engaged to provide presentations where attendees can discuss topics of mutual interest and concern. Each of these sessions focuses on some aspect of work readiness and/or life skills (i.e., resume writing and interviewing, “dress for success,” building self-esteem, balancing work and family obligations, childcare, money management and stress management etc.)

When an FSS participant begins looking for work, staff provides assistance in job search and job listings. Staff also provides the important support and encouragement that job seekers need to stay motivated during a job search

The transition from welfare to work usually includes spells of employment and unemployment; FSS participants are no exception, especially those who have limited skills and little or no work history. These participants may face greater barriers to retaining employment (e.g. limited workplace skills) and jobs with low skill requirements may be less stable (e.g. subject to seasonal or repeated layoffs). Staff attempts to minimize the spells of unemployment by encouraging participants to begin searching for work immediately and by continually working with potential employers to develop new opportunities for FSS participants. They will also help participants target employment opportunities with the potential for long-term stability.

Coordination of Programs

In an environment like Houston where there is fierce competition for limited vocational training and job placement resources; tremendous challenges exist for ensuring successful service referrals for FSS program clients. Insufficient resources and staffing for overburdened providers severely limits the services available for clients. Although FSS client's needs and goals are widely diverse, formal arrangements with employers to hire FSS clients in blocks are further stymied by a lack of similar tax incentives available to providers who work strictly with TANF recipients. While conflicting program regulations and procedures have hindered full partnerships with other government entities, HHA has successfully developed channels for coordinating services when we "share" a client with another entity.

Informal relationships with a broad array of providers and employers, particularly those where mutual clients are shared with other providers, helps identify valuable resources for services such as childcare, financial counseling, vocational training, GED preparation, and so forth. Such informal relationships have fostered effective collaborations with city and state government agencies, including the Texas Workforce Commission and Texas Department of Human Services. As an illustration, Houston Community College provides free GED classes, computer training, job readiness and several training programs with job placement to FSS clients. In addition, we have developed a strong network of associations with various vocational training programs, social service agencies, and childcare resources.

IX. MONITORING PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

HHA staff and management are responsible for monitoring and assessing FSS program performance on a regular basis. We have developed a number of key indicators and track this data on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis.

- Total enrollment
- Number of clients enrolled in any given month
- Amount of escrow deposits in a current month
- Number of escrow deposits in a current month
- % of employed heads of household
- % of clients who obtain employment in a current month
- % of clients who are working on GED or in College
- Number of outside referrals made to service providers to support families' interim goals (training, education, credit counseling, job referrals, etc.)
- Number of in-house counseling sessions (e.g. club meetings, one-on-one sessions with Coordinators)
- Number of clients who meet an interim goal in a given month and the kind of goal they reached

In addition to quantitative reports collected monthly, the HHA program management staff prepares Narrative Reports that highlight special events and strategic developments.

Flow Chart of FSS Program Steps

Orientation

▫

Initial Contact with FSS Staff

▫

One on One appointment between FSS Staff and prospective client

▫

Needs Assessment

▫

Individual Training and Services Plan

▫

Contract of Participation (5 year Program Plan begins)

▫

Coordination of Services

▫

**Goals are Achieved
(Educational, Training, Income, Verifiable Non-Receipt of Government Assistance)**

▫

Graduation from FSS Program