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**Family Self-Sufficiency Graduation Marks Beginning of Financial Independence,  
Stability for CHA Voucher Holders**

*Chicago Housing Choice Voucher Program Staff  
Help Residents Set and Achieve Short and Long Term Goals*

CHICAGO (April 27, 2006) – 30 families Thursday celebrated their journey from financial hardship to financial independence as Mayor Richard M. Daley and CHA CEO Terry Peterson handed them checks and certificates to mark their successful graduation from the CHA-sponsored Family Self-Sufficiency program (FSS).

Thursday's graduates join over 325 other families who have taken part in the award-winning initiative that has enabled these families, many of them former public aid recipients and CHA residents, to obtain good jobs and build assets through goal setting, education, job attainment, individual counseling, and financial incentives.

The FSS program is open to all families who receive rental assistance through CHAC, Inc., the private company that administers Chicago's Housing Choice Voucher Program for the CHA. Upon joining the FSS program, former CHA residents and current voucher holders create five-year goals for themselves and their family such as finding a first or new career, obtaining job training or further education as needed, purchasing a new home, boosting a credit score or learning about time management skills and creating a family budget. Throughout the five-year program CHAC provides access to skills assessment testing, child care, GED test preparation, career counseling, credit counseling, and other educational programs. FSS client service representatives serve as mentors, supporters and friends to program participants.

As FSS participants reach their goals and their earned income increases, their income-based rent increases as well. CHAC places the difference between the amount of their current rent and what CHA would have paid on their behalf into a savings account. Once participants achieve all of their established goals, including obtaining full-time employment, they receive all of the money in their account, plus interest.

"You ladies and gentlemen are living proof that the American Dream is still alive and well," Daley told the graduates. "You have set goals, and you have met them. You have shown that, through hard work and determination, it is possible to achieve financial independence."

At the graduation ceremony, held at the Chicago Public Library Harold Washington Library Center, Mayor Richard M. Daley honored these families for their success in achieving their short- and long-term goals, and presented each with a check representing money they had

saved throughout the five year program. Since the program's inception in 1996, over 325 FSS graduates have earned more than \$3.2 million in savings. While the average return to each family is \$9,000, some graduates have received nearly \$20,000 in savings, all of which is tax free.

When Alberta Lawson, who graduated Thursday, joined FSS she was unemployed and receiving TANF. Thanks to the program "I went from being on welfare to working full time in a rewarding career," explained Ms. Lawson. After completing the FSS training, Ms. Lawson no longer needs the rental assistance provided by the voucher program.

"The program allowed me to go to college and to become a registered nurse. I am currently in the process of purchasing my own home. FSS is a true example of how the system is supposed to work," continued Ms. Lawson, a former CHA resident, former voucher holder and full time nurse working at Stroger Hospital.

"Like the Service Connector Program and other resident services, FSS is an essential part of the CHA's Plan for Transformation," explains Terry Peterson. "It speaks to the equally important part of the Plan – our intention to help transform lives as well as buildings and neighborhoods. Today's graduation is another indication that we are on the right path."

"FSS is a model program that provides motivation and supportive services to enable families to accomplish their financial, educational and personal goals," says William T. Riley, CHAC's Executive Director. "It is a privilege to play a part in the success of these families."

For more information on Family Self-Sufficiency training, please contact the Chicago Housing Choice Voucher Program at (312) 986-9400 or visit [www.chacinc.com](http://www.chacinc.com).

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**Note for Editors: Photos of the event are available at the following web addresses.**

**Photo #1: <http://www.mkcpr.com/filebin/FSSGraduates.jpg>**

**Suggested Caption: "Graduates from the Family Self-Sufficiency training program await their certificates of achievement and money earned through the program at the Chicago Public Library Harold Washington Library Center April 27<sup>th</sup>."**

**Photo #2: <http://www.mkcpr.com/filebin/MayorTerry.jpg>**

**Suggested Caption: "Mayor Richard M. Daley and CEO of the CHA Terry Peterson discuss the importance of programs for low-income residents after providing uplifting remarks and honoring graduates at the Family Self-Sufficiency ceremony, held Thursday, April 27<sup>th</sup>."**

**Photo #3: <http://www.mkcpr.com/filebin/MayorTerryDebra.jpg>**

**Suggested Caption: "Mayor Richard M. Daley and Terry Peterson, CEO of the CHA, present Debra Forrest-Thomeson, a full-time nurse, with her certificate for completion of the Family Self-Sufficiency training program."**