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**100th FAMILY GETS KEYS TO NEW HOME THROUGH “CHOOSE TO OWN”
Program helps voucher holders fulfill dream of owning a home**

At 9 a.m., LaShonda Johnson was a renter. By noon on the same day, she was a homeowner – and had made history in the process.

“Overwhelming,” was how Johnson described the complex set of emotions that came along with receiving the keys to her new home.

Johnson’s family was the 100th family to achieve homeownership through Choose to Own, an innovative program designed to help low income families with vouchers become homeowners. CHAC, Inc., the private firm that administers the Housing Choice Voucher program for the Chicago Housing Authority, has run Choose to Own since its inception in January 2002. The program offers eligible voucher families the assistance needed to successfully navigate the homeownership process.

“I wanted to own a home,” LaShonda said. “That was one of my goals when I got into the program.”

Employed as a Teachers’ Assistant, she spent a year-and-a-half seeking out the right place for herself and her three children. Searching for more bedroom and bathroom space, finally she stepped through the door of one particular house and felt it saying her name. Now, she has an upstairs and a downstairs; three bedrooms, a basement. Her mortgage is less than what she was paying in rent – and she owns the satisfaction of knowing that her home purchase is a major accomplishment.

“I’m proud. It’s a big step I made,” LaShonda said.

That step would not have been possible without financing from Harris Bank, one of several significant program partners. CHAC, Inc. maintains partnerships with several financial institutions, four home-buyer counseling agencies, the City of Chicago, and the Community Economic Development Law Project. Assistance from those entities combine with CHAC’s Family Self Sufficiency and Choose To Own staff to provide education, counseling, services and ongoing support. Peter Stojic, Vice President of Regional Sales for Harris Bank, remembers when Choose to Own was just a concept. Now, with more than 100 families closed and a pipeline of about 200 hundred more pursuing the dream, it is the most successful program of its type in the country.

“I don’t think there’s anything more one could ask for in a vocation than to help people achieve their dreams,” Stojic said. “We’re pleased and honored to be part of an initiative that truly brings affordable housing to families who probably would not have been able to realize that dream in the past.”

“I’m so proud of all the participants. Their dreams of being homeowners take goal setting, discipline and a strong belief that they can achieve their own personal wealth,” said Rose Ann Zona, Homeownership Program Coordinator for CHAC, Inc.

(more)

LaShonda is already thinking about ways to redecorate -- and she is thinking about her next house. She's worked hard to provide her children with this opportunity and says she is going to go through it all again in a few years. She encourages others still waiting for their first home to not give up. Why?

"Because in the end," Lashonda counsels, "it all pays off.

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