



Family Self-Sufficiency Program

What is the family self-sufficiency (FSS) Program?

HUD's family self-sufficiency (FSS) program helps eligible individuals acquire the skills and experience they need to obtain work that pays a living wage, then offers them a unique savings opportunity as their earnings increase called an escrow account. Public housing agencies (PHAs) work with welfare agencies, schools, businesses, and other local partners to help FSS participants access services including but not limited to:

- child care
- transportation
- education and training
- home-ownership counseling

How do families apply to the FSS program?

Families selected to receive a voucher or who currently receive assistance through HUD's housing choice voucher (Section 8) or public housing programs should discuss participation in the FSS program with the local PHA. Families who receive assistance under the housing choice voucher program or who live in public housing are eligible to participate in the FSS program, but some agencies place limits on the number of households that may participate or only offer it to families in one type of assisted housing.

What is the FSS escrow account?

Each participating family has the opportunity to develop FSS escrowed savings through an account established and controlled by the PHA. As a participant's earned income increases, so does the percentage they must pay for rent. For FSS participants, however, an amount generally equal to their increased rent because of increased earnings is placed in the FSS escrow account. The more money an individual earns, the more money HUD deposits into the escrow account. The escrow is not counted as an individual asset until the contract is completed and only when the money is paid directly to the individual.

At the PHA's discretion, the PHA may make a portion of this escrow account available to the family during the term of the contract to enable the family to complete an interim goal such as education or other employment related needs.

What requirements must a family meet to participate in the FSS program?

The PHA and the head of each participating family complete a FSS contract of participation that specifies the rights and responsibilities of both parties. The 5-year FSS contract specifies goals and services for each family. Family members must fulfill all requirements in order to obtain full benefits, including that the family comply with the lease, that all family members become independent of welfare assistance, and that the head of the family seek and maintain suitable employment (see definitions below).

Who is the Head of the FSS Family?

The head means the adult member of the FSS family who is the head of the household for purposes of determining income eligibility and rent. While other members of the family are encouraged to seek employment, only the head is required to seek and maintain suitable employment during the term of the contract. The PHA has discretion to determine who is considered the head of the household.

What does FSS considered welfare?

Welfare assistance means (for purposes of the FSS program only) income assistance from Federal or State welfare programs. Welfare assistance does NOT include: Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Food Stamps and emergency rental and utilities assistance, or other payments from Social Security (24 CFR Ch.IX §984.105).

What is suitable employment?

Each PHA is allowed to determine what is considered suitable employment based on the skills, education, and job training of the individual that has been designated the head of the FSS household. For example, if the PHA determines that an individual working part-time is suitable for an individual with a disability, the PHA can certify completion of the contract (24 CFR Ch. IX §984.303).

What happens if the FSS contract is not followed?

Failing to follow rules of the FSS contract can result in termination from the FSS program, forfeiture of the FSS escrow account, or withholding or termination of supportive services. Housing agencies also have the right to terminate housing choice voucher (but not public housing) assistance, but many housing agencies have waived this option, as they have found it makes it harder to recruit participants. If the PHA terminates the FSS contract, or if the family fails to complete the contract before its expiration, the family's FSS escrow funds are forfeited.

What can the escrow account funds pay for upon completion of the FSS contract?

There are no limits on usage of funds once the contract is complete. However, many FSS programs work with families to identify the most appropriate uses for escrow consistent with the families' long-term objectives, such as homeownership, advanced education, etc.

For more information:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Family Self-Sufficiency Program Summary

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/fss.cfm>

FSS Partnerships

<http://www.fsspartnerships.org/>

Also see The Family Self-Sufficiency regulations (24 CFR Part 984)

http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_00/24cfr984_00.html

Have Questions about the FSS Program?

Rental Assistance FSS Program contact Sara Johnson at 781-581-8712 or the Public Housing FSS Program contact Damaris Rivera 781-595-5091.