

BHA Family Self Sufficiency Program

2018 Program Report

2018 Year in Review

This year, BHA's Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS) Coordinators worked with 144 families with the objective of moving forward towards their personal, employment, and/or financial goals. The support provided through this program helped clients improve their credit, create resumes, get connected with education/training programs, and in many cases find and retain steady jobs. In addition to case management services, over the course of the 2018, FSS issued \$128,000 in escrow funds to 19 program graduates. The average graduate received \$6,776 dollars while the largest escrow check issued was for a little over \$16,000!

Although it didn't slow our work, 2018 brought a lot of transition and reorganization to the FSS program, both in terms of our day to day operations and our reporting requirements. On the staff side, after many years as an FSS Coordinator, Rhonda Freed left BHA and Helen Oetjen was hired to fill the position. On the reporting side, HUD's oversight and reporting requirements changed, with all reporting now automated based on the data entered through Section 8's systems. Moving forward, HUD will score each Housing Authority's FSS program management based solely on the following metrics:

- 1) Number of clients enrolled
- 2) Percentage of clients graduating
- 3) Average amount of income increases for non-disabled program participants

HUD's new performance metrics haven't changed the way BHA approaches our FSS work. Rather, we believe that a holistic approach to case management services will still result in the best outcomes for clients. So far, metrics have backed up our belief in the impact of this approach. HUD's preliminary review rated BHA's FSS program as "excellent." Out of the 723 programs HUD reviewed, only 145 (20%) received this rating.

In order to best serve our clients, BHA's FSS Coordinators have continued our pilot program of tracking client needs and accomplishments beyond aspects reflected in HUD's evaluation, for a portion of our program participants. In 2019 we plan to expand this data tracking to our entire caseload.

Finally, this year has also seen BHA's FSS program expand its partnerships with both BHA's Housing Retention Services department as well as Vermont State's Reach Up program. This has resulted in an increase in referrals as well as collaborative case management with both groups. The goal of these partnerships is to streamline services so that once a family's housing is stable, clients can pass smoothly from Reach Up/Retention transitional case management services into FSS to begin working towards higher levels of self-sufficiency for their households. Preliminary results from these partnerships is very promising.

FSS Program Description

The Family Self Sufficiency Program is a voluntary opportunity available to all Section 8 Voucher holders. Participants enroll by creating and signing a 5-year Contract of Participation (COP) with their case manager, known as an FSS Coordinator, based on their individual goals. This COP is used to guide service over the course of their participation in the program. As an incentive, participants are eligible to build the balance in an escrow account, which is automatically funded by HUD based on changes in household income and the related portion of rent paid by the tenant. Upon successful completion of the COP, clients are eligible to receive all escrow monies built up over the COP term. If clients do not successfully complete their COP for any reason, all monies in the account revert into BHA's Housing Assistance Payment reserves with HUD.

Contract of Participation (COP)

The Contract of Participation is centered around a mandatory employment goal, which, once achieved, must be maintained for the 6 months prior to graduation. This is referred to as a client's "Final Goal." According to HUD, this goal must provide for "suitable" and "sustainable" employment. This definition allows FSS Coordinators to work with clients to determine goals that are appropriate for each individual. For some, this goal may involve supplementing their disability income by \$800 a month. For others, this goal could involve finding full time work with benefits that pays \$40,000 a year.

Clients also establish "Interim Goals" around five main subjects: Education, Financial Literacy, Transportation, Childcare, and Health and Wellness. Ideally, interim goals not only help clients move toward their final goal, but also toward stability for themselves and their family. There is no required number of interim goals, which vary widely (in both frequency and nature) from client to client based on individual need.

With approval from the Director of Rental Assistance, clients are permitted to make reasonable changes to both final and interim goals based due to the inevitable changes that happen over a five-year period. If needed, clients may also apply for an extension of up to two years. Extensions are typically requested due to health issues or other extenuating circumstances that are out of a client's control, and for the most part are approved.

To graduate, clients must complete all of their interim and final goals. In addition, HUD mandates that all FSS graduates (and their household members) must remain off of welfare assistance for the 12 months prior to graduation. Clients are not required to be off of Section 8 assistance before graduating from FSS. Program completion or failure does *not* affect a person's rental assistance in any way.

Although all household members are entitled to the supportive services provided by FSS Coordinators, COPs *must* be created for and fulfilled by the Head of Household listed on the family's Section 8 voucher.

A sample COP can be found at the end of this report.

Escrow Account

When a client enters the FSS program, his/her Coordinator documents the household's current Total Tenant Payment (TTP) to establish a baseline for future escrow funding. At any subsequent point during the term of the COP, if a change in household earned income causes the TTP to rise above this baseline, a payment equal to this change is deposited into the client's escrow account. Tenants continue to pay their portion of rent as they would if they were not enrolled in FSS, with the escrow payment being separately provided from HUD funds. Participants continue to receive an escrow credit into their account each month the increased TTP is in effect. Monthly escrow deposits are calculated (and recalculated) any time a participant reports a change in income. If income subsequently decreases back to or below the baseline TTP, future monthly escrow payments cease. Monies previously deposited in the escrow account are not impacted. Those funds are only removed by either BHA or the participant when the Contract of Participation is completed or the client's participation in the FSS program is terminated.

The client's escrow account represents an external incentive for participants in the FSS program to work towards and achieve their goals. Upon successful completion of the Contract of Participation, FSS clients receive any money accrued in their escrow account as an unrestricted, tax free payment from the Housing Authority. Clients work with their FSS Coordinator to determine the best use for this money. For some clients, these funds provide them the ability to purchase a car, establish emergency savings, or even use the money for a down payment on a home.

Integration of Programmatic Services

Referral and Enrollment Programs

Over the course of 2018, the FSS team worked closely with Reach Up to integrate these two programs in order to better serve mutual clients. As part of this collaboration, Reach Up now offers a \$50 incentive for clients to conduct an initial meeting with an FSS coordinator to determine if they are a good fit with the FSS program. If the client enrolls in FSS they receive another \$50 payment. Initial and subsequent meetings have been held at the Reach Up offices when that is best for the client. During its first year, this partnership saw ten clients receive an incentive payment for attending a preliminary meeting; five clients sign up for FSS; with two more expected to sign up early in 2019. Of the 33 total new enrollments in 2018, the five referred from Reach Up represent 15% of BHA's new FSS clients.

FSS has also seen an increase in referrals this year from BHA's Housing Retention team. Mike Fife and Jennie Davis have been working together to transition potential clients from Retention directly into FSS, once their housing is stabilized. Clients can also potentially receive job training and placement services through Vermont Works for Women. It is our hope that this type of referral system can begin to provide continuity in case management for clients who are looking to move forward with personal goals once their housing is stabilized. This partnership has already led to six clients (18% of new participants) enrolling in FSS who were referred by a member of the Retention team.

Team Meetings

For many clients, the need to check in with multiple case managers and organizations can be a barrier that keeps them from signing up for programs like FSS. It is not rare to see a client working with CVOEO, Vocational Rehabilitation, Reach Up, the Howard Center, and FSS all at the same time. That list of course, doesn't include meetings for school, medical appointments for themselves and/or children, or required meetings for clients in the criminal justice system. Although these meetings are meant to support clients, the sheer amount of time spent with service providers can actually become a barrier to finding work.

Due to the holistic nature of its work, BHA's FSS Coordinators are in an ideal position to help clients coordinate and streamline their support services. This can range from getting updates from other service providers about their work with shared clients to organizing meetings with some or all of a client's case management team. This year FSS Coordinators, held team meetings with case managers from the Howard Center, Spectrum, Reach Up, CVOEO, Champlain Housing Trust, Vermont Adult Learning, Opportunities Credit Union and VocRehab. Of the 80 of clients tracked, 21 (27%) had a team meeting with at least one of the organizations listed.

Client Demographics and Characteristics (Current Participants)

As with the Section 8 program as a whole, FSS clients have a wide variety of backgrounds and demographic characteristics. The data in this section is pulled both from the Section 8 database (HAB) as well as the database (TAAG) that FSS Coordinators use to track client notes, accomplishments and progress in the program. Some of the data in this section does not reflect the full FSS program, given changes to data tracking systems have only been instituted for roughly half (75) of all participants to date.

Age, Sex and Family Composition

The FSS program represents a portion of Section 8 participants that is more predominately female and younger than the average Section 8 Head of Household (HoH). Of the 106 FSS clients currently enrolled in the program, 90 are female (85%) and 16 are male (15%). This represents a much larger percentage of women enrolled in FSS than would be expected when looking at the Section 8 population as a whole, which is made up of 66% female-headed households. FSS clients range in age from 20 to 63 years old with an average age of 36. Thirteen years younger than the average Section 8 HoH age of 49.

Household size and family composition of FSS participants varies greatly. Among FSS clients, most participants (84%) have at least one child in the home which is again and as expected, much higher than the Section 8 average of 36 percent. Of households with at least one child, FSS families averaged a slightly higher number of children (2.25 vs. 2.00) per household than the Section 8 program as a whole.

Number of Children in Household	Number of Households
0	17
1	36
2	25
3	15
4	8
5	2
6	1
7	2
Grand Total	106

Mental and Physical Health

For many FSS clients, mental and/or physical health issues can be a barrier to work. These include long-term physical issues, such as severe arthritis or auto immune diseases, and shorter-term physical issues such as knee or back injuries. In regard to mental health, many clients report severe anxiety and/or depression as well as trauma and/or abuse. As may be expected, any one of these hardships serve as a barrier to accomplishing the goals clients set either on their own or through FSS.

Of those FSS clients who were tracked, 55% reported that they are working to address either a mental and/or physical health issue. It should be noted that clients were not prompted directly to report on mental or physical health issues. Instead, this data was tracked indirectly over the course of case management sessions and was only recorded when clients voluntarily discussed it with their FSS Coordinator. Due to this, these numbers most likely under report the rate of mental and/or physical health issues among FSS households.

Total Clients Tracked	Reports taking steps to work on a Mental or Physical Health Issue	Reports taking steps to work on Mental Health Issues	Reports taking steps to work on a Physical Health Issue	Reports taking steps to work on Mental <u>AND</u> Physical Health
80	44 (55%)	37 (46%)	27 (34%)	20 (25%)

Household Income

Although some clients enter FSS while unemployed and therefore are focused on training or simply finding employment, other participants enter the program already working full time and as a result set goals of moving forward in their careers. The tables that follow provide a rough overview of both income levels and sources for households currently participating in FSS as compared to the Section 8 Program as a whole.

	FSS Households with Earned Income	FSS Households w/o Earned Income	All FSS Households	All Section 8 Households
Number	74	32	106	2197
Average Annual Income	\$26,620	\$9,815	\$21,546	\$16,527
Median Annual Income	\$26,402	\$7,950	\$20,295	\$13,272
Maximum Annual Income	\$57,652	\$25,152	\$57,652	\$78,963

Income Source	Number	Percentage of FSS Households w/ income source
Wage	70	66%
Supplemental Security Income	29	27%
Child Support	30	28%
Asset Income	20	19%
Social Security Income	16	15%
TANF (Reach Up)	17	16%
Other Nonwage Sources	19	18%
Unemployment Benefit	16	18%
Own Business	4	4%

Current Enrollees Only (106 Families) – Data is point in time. Retrieved 12/31/2018
Many families have multiple income sources.

In regard to FSS and employment outcomes in general, it is important to note that asset and income limits for unearned income sources like SSI, as well as for benefits like Medicaid and Food Stamps create a benefits cliff, which is an added barrier to employment/earned income. For some families, earning more money may mean they actually realize very small real increases to household income - or even a reduction in total income after the loss of benefits like Medicaid have been factored in. FSS can help mitigate this issue through the escrow account, which can be seen as a potential replacement for losses to unearned income as well as a way to build assets without losing benefits.

Program Outcomes for 2018

Outreach, Enrollment and Graduation

Although the number of participants at the end of 2018 decreased by seven from the prior year, we do not believe this represents a downward trend for enrollment. This decrease instead is likely related to the turnover of one of BHA's FSS Coordinators, which resulted in a few months pause in enrollment. After taking this transition pause into account, BHA FSS enrollments were actually at a very similar rate to last year. Through our new partnerships with both BHA's Retention Team as well as Reach Up, we expect enrollment to hold steady at roughly 110 at any given point during the year.

Total Enrollments and Exits	
FSS Self-Termination (Client Initiated)	10
FSS Termination (BHA Initiated)	10
Graduated from Program	19
New Enrollments	33
Total Enrolled at Year End	106

In 2018 FSS saw 20 terminations of clients from the program. Of these, four were related to clients who transferred their vouchers to another housing authority (counted as self-terminations). Two of these clients asked to transfer their program and escrow monies to the receiving housing authority and were able to do so. Other reasons for terminations were varied and include contracts expiring but not being completed, clients going back to school full time, long term health issues, and clients who were exited from the Section 8 Program.

On the more positive side, this year also saw 19 program graduates. Escrows received upon graduation ranged from \$144 to \$16,656, with an average escrow amount of \$6,667! Graduates reported plans to use their escrows in many ways including taking a trip, paying for education, purchasing a car and in some cases even a down payment on a home. In almost every case however clients also talked about using at least some (if not all) of their escrow funds as a safety net to provide stability and security for themselves and their families in case they are unable to pay bills in the future.

Education and Employment

Of the 80 tracked, FSS had three clients working towards their GED/High School Diploma in 2018. In addition, three received a certification from a technical school, and six others participated in postsecondary classes. These clients represent 15% of FSS participants who are involved with training and education programs.

Upon entry into the program, some clients are more prepared to begin employment than others. This can be due to multiple variables including, technical skills, soft skills, education level, transportation

issues, childcare issues, and mental/physical health issues. FSS Coordinators work with clients to first determine their individuals needs and then create a relationship that will help support them in moving towards breaking down these barriers.

Barriers to Employment	Number	Tracked	Percentage
Mental OR Physical Health Issue Being Addressed	44	80	55%
Barrier to work – Transportation	19	80	24%
Barrier to Work – Child Care	13	80	16%
Any Barrier	55	80	69%
Multiple Barriers	37	80	46%

As discussed above, these barriers mean that clients may be working with a team of case managers, parole officers, and/or counselors. This in turn can mean that they have up to four-five hours of meetings per week at various agencies, which can be an additional barrier to employment in itself.

Even with all of these barriers to employment, 68 (47%) of the 144 households that worked with an FSS Coordinator at some point in 2018 saw an increase in their earned income, which resulted in an increase in their monthly escrow deposits.

FSS case managers provide both coordination and direct services to help clients identify and move forward with educational and employment opportunities, which will fit into their lifestyle, economic, and personal goals. For some clients, these services consist of referring them to local agencies and/or going with them to meetings. For other clients, support can simply be encouraging clients to self-advocate, identify personal and community resources and providing a system of accountability and follow up.

Once clients find work, support is often still needed to maintain employment. This can involve helping with “soft skills” such as discussing strategies for dealing with coworkers/supervisors or more concrete outcomes such as keeping resumes up to date as well as continuing to manage the barriers to employment listed above that inevitably come up throughout the year.

Financial Literacy and Escrow Accounts

Like many of us, FSS clients struggle with budgeting, credit, and debt. Over the course of the year, 34 FSS clients participated in one on one financial counseling with an FSS Coordinator. Activities included negotiating settlements for collections debts, reviewing credit reports, creating a budget, making savings plans, and navigating ABLE accounts. In addition to these activities, seven clients participated in home ownership counseling through the Champlain Housing Trust and/or with an FSS Coordinator. Two of those participants have since purchased a home using BHA’s Mortgage Assistance Program.

For almost all Housing Authority Clients it can be hard to generate and maintain savings accounts for personal goals or even emergencies. The FSS escrow provides families with a real opportunity to build savings for the long term. Of the 106 program participants currently enrolled, 68 (64%) have a balance

in their escrow account. As seen below, there are a wide range of total escrow balances as well as monthly deposit amounts.

The charts below represent the escrow accounts and deposits as of 12/31/2018 of the 106 clients currently enrolled in FSS.

Total Escrow Balance	
Average	\$4,461
Median	\$2,842
Minimum	\$10
Maximum	\$25,368
Total Number	68

Monthly Escrow Deposits	
Average	\$318
Median	\$322
Minimum	\$1
Maximum	\$886
Total Number	53

Client Testimonials

Letter #1:

Dear Mike;

Thank you very much for your all of your help and support. I really appreciate your guidance. I will be grateful forever.

The check for \$11,932 was deposited in my bank account on Thursday. Knowing that this money was coming over the past month has pushed me into paying closer attention to my finances. I finally signed up with mint.com and am making more detailed charts of my spending and incoming money - I am doing this by hand. I can see a possibility of taking honest control of my own finances. I met with Carmen Tall, from the financial empowerment class on Thursday. She is supporting me in doing the financial work I need to do and to make it a fun game.

The FSS program through BHA has been a huge part of my getting back on my feet. When I began I was in deep stress from a horrible divorce and had very little money. My gauge for money at that time was toilet paper. I needed to save up coins to buy a roll of toilet paper. Putting money in a meter downtown could tip my finances off balance. Then I graduated to being able to buy a roll of paper towels - richness! Next was a whole package of toilet paper and then a whole package of paper towels. Now I am in a different gauging system and planning to buy a home. We don't have a lot but we have enough.

Both you and Rhonda helped me in many ways over the past four and a half years. Talking things through with you made a tremendous difference in reframing how I was approaching my life and money. We found goals that were real and important to me. And I met them! Rhonda helped me write a new resume and do job and school exploration. All this supported me taking one step at a time toward a happier and healthier life.

Again, thank you, thank you. I appreciate all you've done. Thank you for your kindness and support.

Many blessings to you and all of you at BHA,

Letter #2:

Hi name is ***** I had FSS program with Burlington housing and saved for me money. I felt so happy when I got the money now I'm feeling I can rich self-sufficient because I have support if I don't have this money I wouldn't get what I want to ever and I wouldn't save money as the easiest Burlington housing saved it for me now I will like to tell the other people who are connecting with Burlington housing if they want to save money for the future they can start this program it would help and their dream will become true. Now thanking Mike Fife, Emily Cameron and all other people who participated my help thanks again

Sample Contract of Participation

Final Goals:

1. To earn \$2775 per month by 8/25/2023 and maintain that level of income for six months.
2. For all family members to be independent of welfare by 02/25/2023 and maintain independence from welfare for twelve consecutive months.

INTERIM GOAL	GOAL TYPE/ OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES/ SERVICES	COMMENTS
Conduct a job search	Employment	Est. Start: 02/26/2019 Est. Completion: 09/01/2019	
Begin working.	Employment	Est. Start: 09/01/2019 Est. Completion: 12/31/2019	
Explore childcare/progra mming options for the summer for son.	General	Est. Start: 02/26/2019 Est. Completion: 05/31/2019	1. Do online search of local summer programs/camps for children. 2. Talk with Reach-up worker to find out if they have resources.
Get a better car.	Transportation	Est. Start: 02/26/2018 Est. Completion: 02/26/2019	Work with Good News Garage to buy a car with lower mileage that will be dependable. Current car has almost 300,000 miles on odometer.
Participate in Parenting Skills Training	General	Est. Start: 06/01/2019 Est. Completion: 06/01/2022	Identify a parenting class or counselor that can assist with acquiring new parenting skills.
Make regular deposits into a savings account.	Financial	Est. Start: 03/01/2020	

		Est. Completion: 01/01/2024	
Participate in credit counseling.	Financial	Est. Start: 03/15/2019 Est. Completion: 03/15/2020	
Establish a credit score of 660 or higher	Financial	Est. Start: 10/01/2023 Est. Completion: 02/01/2024	
Have no outstanding collections debts	Financial	Est. Start: 10/01/2023 Est. Completion: 01/01/2024	
Complete CHT's Home Ownership Education Course	Financial	Est. Start: 10/01/2023 Est. Completion: 12/31/2023	
Complete one-on-one counseling with CHT to determine feasibility and price ranges for home ownership.	Financial	Est. Start: 01/01/2024 Est. Completion: 02/15/2024	