

**Fact Sheet for HASA’s Family Self-Sufficiency Program**

**02/01/2022**

**General Information About the Program:**

**Purpose**:

FSS is a program funded from HUD that allows assisted families to work closely with an FSS Coordinator in establishing short-term and long-term goals for the family. This program encourages participants to increase their working income and reduce dependency on welfare assistance and rental subsidies.

The FSS Program with the Housing Authority works in conjunction with a Program Coordinating Committee (PCC) that acts as an advisory board for the program itself. The PCC is established by securing commitments of public and private resources for the operation of the program, aides in developing an FSS Action Plan, and influences the implementation of the program.

**Information on the Administration of the FSS Program:**

**What is the Action Plan?**

The FSS Action Plan is the governing policy for the program. It acts as an extension of the HCV Administrative Plan or the Public Housing ACOP but specifically defines functioning of the HASA’s FSSP.

**Eligible participants**

HASA’s FSS program is available to Public Housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program participants. To participate in FSS, the family must be currently assisted by one of these programs. Applicants on the waiting list are not eligible to participate in FSS.

**Participant’s Responsibilities**

The family must comply with the terms of the lease, comply with the rules and procedures and obligations of the family for the respective program they receive assistance with, all FSS family members must be welfare-free for the 12 consecutive months before the contract expires, and the HOH must seek and maintain suitable employment. These requirements are also  clearly defined in the COP itself.

Any noncompliance with the contract without good cause could result in termination of the COP. If the COP is terminated, this does not necessarily mean that the household is terminated from housing assistance. The family may be able to transfer over to the traditional Section 8 or Public Housing program respectively as long as they are still in good standing accordingly.

**Contract of Participation:**

**What is the Contract of Participation (COP) and what services are available?**

Within the policy framework, or Action Plan, the FSSP has selection criteria that is reviewed for each interested family. Once selected, each head of household for a participating family will execute a Contract of Participation (COP) with the HASA which specifies the rights and responsibilities of all parties, identifies services to be provided to the family, and activities that the family must complete.

The term of the COP is 5 years with the potential for extension for up to 2 additional years depending on HASA’s determination of “good cause”. Typically, “good cause” includes serious illness or involuntary loss of employment. Participants can also graduate in less than 5 years if the ITSP is completed sooner.

Within the COP is the Individualized Training and Services Plan (ITSP) which details the goal plan for the family. Goals are determined as specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. The FSS Coordinator works with the participant family in establishing Final Goals and then interim that are achieved along the way. The ITSP also details any services and resources the family may need to achieve the goals they have outlined.

Services that are commonly associated with the plan include: child care, transportation, education, job training, employment counseling, financial literacy and training, homeownership, etc. The majority of services are coordinated with other agencies but some may be provided by the HASA specifically.

Finally, an incentive to the program is the escrow account. This account is established by the HASA for each participating family to where any increases in the family’s rent that results from earned income increase would result in a credit to the family’s escrow account. The overall account is also interest bearing which is applied monthly by the HASA. The HASA also allows for some interim disbursement of escrow funds (see section on Escrow) and once a family graduates the FSSP, they may access the escrow completely without restriction.

**Program Coordinating Committee (PCC):**

**Who participates in the FSS PCC?**

The PCC is made up of multiple local agencies who offer an array of services and resources in the community. Current agencies represented on the PCC are as follows:

* Texas Workforce
* Disability Connections
* SAISD Federal Programs and Homeless Liaison
* High Sky
* Galilee CDC
* Howard College
* Participant representative - a required position on the PCC per HUD regulation to ensure accurate representation and input.

The PCC meets quarterly, or four times per year, and as stated previously helps in the implementation of the program, establishing a governing policy (the FSS Action Plan), coordinating services for program participants, identifying gaps in services, etc.

**The Escrow Account:**

**What is the escrow account?**

As stated above, the escrow account is an interest-bearing account established by the HASA on behalf of the participating families. Deposits are made to the account as long as the family is actively participating in the program and when a family’s rent increases as a result of increased earned income for the FSS family.

**How do you get access to the FSS escrow funds?**

The HASA does allow for interim disbursement as long as the request for monies is to be used toward a specific  goal within the ITSP. IF the interim disbursement will assist in achieving a goal, the HASA may approve said disbursement of funds. The HASA does reserve the right to deny a request as an interim disbursement and defines within the FSS Action Plan what would be permissible.

Once the family has satisfied the COP by means of completing all of the goals listed in the ITSP prior to or by the expiration date of the COP, the family will have full unrestricted access to their escrow monies. That is, the HASA will issue a check in the amount that has accrued.

**What would cause the escrow funds to be forfeited?**

The FSS family will forfeit the escrow account in its entirety if the family fails to complete the COP and ITSP or is terminated in accordance with HUD and program regulations, or if the family is still receiving welfare at the expiration of the contract term.

**Additional information and Common Misconceptions:**

**Can families be required to participate in the FSS Program?**

No, the program is strictly voluntary but is available to all housing participants currently receiving HCV/Section 8 or Public Housing assistance.

**Can a family continue to receive housing assistance if the COP is terminated under mutual agreement or once the COP is completed?**

Yes, the family can transition back to the respective assistance program without interruption. Although, one of the main goals for HASA FSSP is to reduce overall dependency of low-income families on federal, state, and local housing assistance programs.

**What HUD regulations apply to the FSSP?**

For more information on the program and governing policies per HUD, see 24 CFR 984.

For general information regarding the HCV/Section 8 program, see 24 CFR 982.