

MENARD COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY

Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Action Plan

I. Introduction

Menard County Housing Authority Mission Statement:

“To promote and provide quality housing while encouraging upward mobility and a better quality of life.”

Menard County Housing Authority Vision Statement:

“Creating housing that families and communities can be proud of.”

All families have the right to expect a barrier-free community environment that is supportive of self-sufficiency and independence. All families have a responsibility to their children to ensure their health, safety, and well-being and to help create and maintain environments that promote their healthy growth and development.

The Menard County Housing Authority, as part of that community, has a role in creating and maintaining a neighborhood and community that promotes the health, safety, well-being and prosperity of its members. In so doing, the Menard County Housing Authority will move towards the development of a community-based human service component, the purposes of which will be to:

- 1) Participate with and/or facilitate a community effort to identify community barriers to health, safety, well-being and self-sufficiency and to participate in strategies to reduce/eliminate such barriers; and
- 2) Enable families and individuals to overcome those barriers that continue to exist. Family Self-Sufficiency will be a pivotal component.

II. Barriers

A common issue for families who live in publicly subsidized housing is poverty; families who are chronically and persistently poor as well as those who are temporarily poor due to circumstances that are likely to pass. These families also tend to live in impoverished neighborhoods and communities in which adverse environmental conditions tend to cluster together and persist over time. Some of the adverse conditions that tend to cluster around poverty lead to poor development and ultimate life outcomes such as, functional dependency and economic dependency are:

- School dropout or poor achievement
- Lack of adequate, affordable housing
- Lack of child and/or elder care

- Social isolation and/or dislocation
- Unemployment or underemployment
- Mental health issues
- Crime and violence
- Single parent families
- Teenage parents

All of the barriers that tend to cluster together in communities and persist over time tend to produce families who are “barrier bound” and unable to break the cycle of disadvantage to achieve economic and functional self-sufficiency.

The Menard County Housing Authority, through the development of a Family Self-Sufficiency Program, intends to enable families to overcome existing barriers to self-sufficiency by providing opportunities for FSS participants. The Menard County Housing Authority will provide a strong case management component, which will link participants with needed resources throughout their involvement with the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (i.e. education, job skills training, life-skills, counseling, entrepreneur programs, homeownership programs, etc.).

III. Contents of the Plan

The Menard County Housing Authority proposes a five-phase program to achieve the primary goal of self-sufficiency for program participants.

This program assumes the active and continued participation of agencies and personnel providing services required for each phase, as well as their assistance in evaluating participants going through the program.

A. Recruitment/Selection

The Menard County Housing Authority proposes to recruit residents receiving Section 8 assistance and must be head of household.

In order to assist as many interested residents as possible, the Menard County Housing Authority will operate an FSS Program that will serve Section 8 program residents even if they are participants in other local self-sufficiency programs.

Participants must agree to design and pursue Individual Treatment and Service Plans.

Elderly persons and individuals with disabilities are eligible for the program but do not have to be head of household or be required to get a job.

The Menard County Housing Authority will not utilize local selection preferences. Applicants will be accepted on a first come-first serve basis. The Menard County Housing Authority is also committed to enforcing a non-discrimination policy in the FSS

Program without regard to race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, age or national origin. The Menard County Housing Authority will provide reasonable accommodations to those persons with disabilities wishing to participate in the FSS Program.

B. Orientation

All interested residents will go through an orientation introducing them to services and expectations involved in the FSS Program. Section 8 participants will be given information during their briefing to the program.

An internal referral process is set up to refer interested Section 8 participants to the FSS Program.

Once interest is expressed, the FSS Coordinator will meet individually with the potential participant to explain the program, processes, and expectations in detail.

C. Five Phase Program

1. Phase 1 – Personal Development and Assessment

During this phase, issues of personal development including self-esteem building will be conducted. This phase will also focus on basic skill building. Initial assessments of participants will be conducted. The assessments will include, but are not limited to: educational background, current reading levels, budgeting skills, job skills, family management, health care needs, drug and alcohol dependency, etc.

2. Phase 2 – Development of Individual Training and Services Plan

Based upon the assessments completed in Phase 1 and the supportive service needs of the participant, an Individual Training and Services Plan will be developed. It will be a plan mutually designed by the participant and the FSS Coordinator. The plan will outline the goals, activities and milestones.

3. Phase 3 – Maintenance of Effort

This phase will build upon the contract of participation by continuing to monitor milestones and activities and making appropriate adjustments. It is anticipated that Phase 3 will be the longest phase and will serve as a stabilization time for families. It is a time when the participants will be employed, working toward job advancement or job stability, or enrolled in a long-term educational program. Participants will also receive on-going support for self-assessment and re-evaluation of goals.

4. Phase 4 – Transition

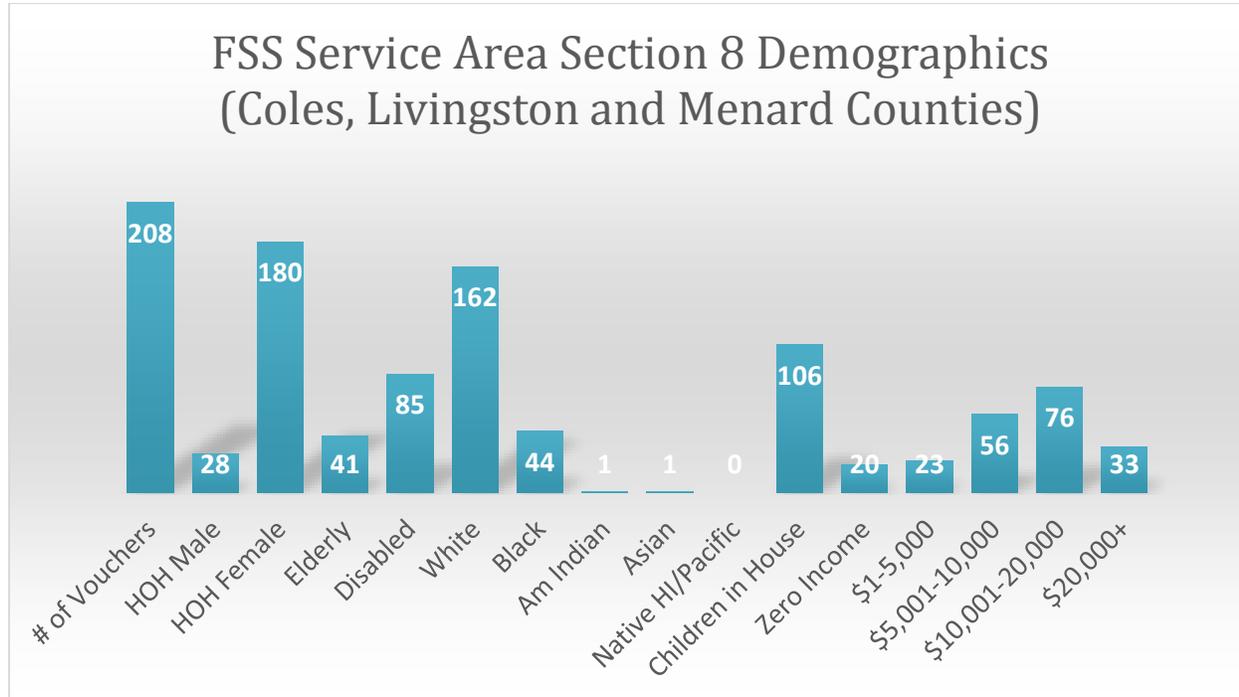
The fourth phase of the FSS Program will focus on how participants can move from subsidized housing and welfare assistance to housing in the private market and “self-sufficiency.”

5. Phase 5 – Follow up

This final phase includes tracking participants for at least six (6) months after they have completed the FSS Program.

D. Demographics

The Menard County Housing Authority’s FSS Program currently serves three counties in the service area which hold Section 8 vouchers, including Coles County, Livingston County and Menard County. Below is a chart outlining the demographics in those three counties. As indicated in the chart, the majority of these voucher holders are white females with children in the household.



The Menard County Housing Authority currently has 593 Section 8 housing choice/project based vouchers in 24 counties in Illinois. Although, the FSS Program is serving only three of these counties, expansion efforts into additional counties will be made in 2018. There will be an annual review of demographics to ensure that the Family Self-Sufficiency Program meets the needs of the residents.

E. Number of Eligible Participating Families

The Menard County Housing Authority anticipates serving 25 current Section 8 voucher holders.

F. Outreach Efforts

The outreach efforts for the FSS Program are as follows:

- When MCHA's Section 8 caseworkers schedule new participants' briefings, the FSS Coordinator is given an opportunity to introduce the FSS Program and present information regarding the program. Each participant is encouraged to consider the program and schedule an appointment with the FSS Coordinator.
- MCHA's intake workers recommend the FSS Program to new and present participants of MCHA's assistance.
- An introductory letter, a brochure, a letter of invitation, a list of benefits for participating in the FSS Program will be mailed to all potential eligible residents.
- FSS advertisements will be placed in agency newsletters.
- Program announcements will be mailed to community agencies with whom we coordinate services. Posters and fliers will be displayed in public and private service offices.

G. Assurance of Non-Interference

The Menard County Housing Authority assures that a family's decision not to participate in the FSS Program will not affect the family's admission to the Section 8 Program or the family's right to occupancy in accordance with its lease.

H. Program Incentives to Encourage Participation

As residents participating in the FSS Program income increases, they may incur rent levels higher than private market rents, creating a dis-incentive for some residents to seek employment and preventing significant economic changes for those who do work.

The Authority plans to provide incentives to FSS participants by:

1. Development of an escrow savings account. The establishment of this escrow will be done using the guidelines set forth as in *24 CFR Section 984.305*
2. Free ongoing individualized support services in collaboration with community resources
3. Home ownership opportunities

4. Food pantry use every 30 days instead of 60 days for non-participants
5. Free copies and faxes
6. Free workshop and training opportunities
7. Monthly newsletter with resources and information pertaining to the FSS Program

I. Description of Public and Private Resources

Menard County – Office of the Board Chair – Actively supports the Authority’s FSS Action Plan and the Authority’s Section 8 Program.

CAPCIL – One of the Authority’s key partners for providing services to FSS participants. Services provided include: Head Start, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and outreach and referral services. CAPCIL also serves as the County’s Community Action Agency.

Lincoln Land Community College – Provides career planning and job training.

Memorial Behavioral Health – Provides a wide range of behavioral and mental health services to children, adolescents and adults.

Illinois Department of Human Services – Coordinates family needs with available state and local services.

Menard County Community Services – Provides job training, emergency relief, senior citizen transportation, and general assistance to families.

J. Activities and Support Services

The Program Coordinating Committee (PCC) includes:

- Representatives of MCHA (Section 8 Manager, Financial Manager, Executive Director, Housing Manager)
- Section 8 Program Participant
- County Government Representative
- Community Service Representative
- Community Action Representative

The PCC secured letters of commitment from a variety of public and private resources and will be clustered as follows:

| | | | |
|------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Assessment | Social Services | Education/Training | Financial |
|------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------|

The Menard County Housing Authority has established Memorandums of Agreement with the following agencies: Menard County – Office of the Board Chair, CAPCIL (Community

Action), Area Agency on Aging for Lincolnland, Inc., Illinois WorkNet Center, Community Connection Point and Menard County Community Services.

The FSS Program will provide 10 annual opportunities for trainings/workshops in coordination with local service providers and community partners. These opportunities will be available to all Section 8 residents with a requirement of 3 annual workshops for those participating in the FSS Program. Failure to participate in required workshops could result in termination from the program, with allowances for those with conflicting work schedules.

K. Timetable for the Implementation of FSS Program

The Menard County Housing Authority will fill twenty-five (25) FSS slots. This number will continue to grow as MCHA receives funds for Section 8 vouchers to participate in the FSS Program.

In 2018, the MCHA plans to:

- Work with public and private agencies to serve on the Program Coordinating Committee and provide the support services network for participation
- Secure linkage or memorandums of agreement with service providers
- Continue mailing to Section 8 residents regarding the FSS Program
- Continue informational meetings with interested applicants at which time they can complete a preliminary FSS intake packet
- Select, hold orientation, coordinate and write individual training and services plans, sign contracts of participation with participants interested in the FSS Program
- Expand recruitment efforts into three or more additional counties within the Section 8 service area

L. Certificate of Coordination

The FSS Program certifies the development of its services and activities under the FSS Program has been coordinated with the Menard County Office of IETC – Illinois Employment Training Center and other programs funded by the Job Training Partnership Act. In addition, coordination of services and activities is implemented with other employment and job training, social services, child care, transportation, and educational agencies in the service area.

The FSS Program will continue to coordinate these support services and activities throughout the implementation of its program with a goal of achieving maximum support for the FSS participants that are avoiding duplication of services and activities.

MENARD COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY
Family Self-Sufficiency Policies & Procedures
Section 8

I. Eligibility Requirements

- A. Must be a current Section 8 family with a voucher including participants in other local self-sufficiency programs and head of household **and**;
- B. Must agree to seek and maintain suitable employment
- C. Participation in the FSS Program will be determined on a first come-first serve basis
- D. The Menard County Housing Authority will make reasonable accommodations for participants with disabilities
- E. A family *may* not be chosen to participate in the program if they previously participated in the Menard County Housing Authority's FSS Program and was terminated because he/she did not meet the contract obligations; **or**
- F. If the family owes the Menard County Housing Authority or any other Housing Agency money and does not have a current repayment agreement.

II. Participant Responsibilities

- A. Meet with the FSS Coordinator to complete an assessment in order to enter the program.
- B. Upon completion of the initial assessment, determine and outline goals in the Individual Training and Services Plan, which will be completed with the FSS Coordinator.
- C. The head of household must sign the Contract of Participation.
- D. Participate in any recommended assessments, interviews, tests, evaluations and workshops.
- E. Work toward goals with the support and referral assistance from the FSS Coordinator.
- F. Meet with the FSS Coordinator at least one time per month. If unable to meet in person due to employment, must be in contact via phone, text or email monthly.
- G. Seek and maintain suitable employment upon completion of a job-training program or an educational program.
- H. Complete activities within the dates listed in the Individual Training and Services Plan.
- I. Provide information to the Menard County Housing Authority concerning changes in employment, training, etc.
- J. Become independent of welfare assistance for at least 12 consecutive months before the contract expires.
- K. Comply with the terms of the lease.

III. Contract of Participation & Individual Training and Services Plan Guidelines

- A. The Contract of Participation **must** include an Individual Training and Services Plan.

- B. The final goal for the Individual Training and Services Plan **must** be to obtain and maintain suitable employment.
- C. A mandatory interim goal is that all members of the family **must** be welfare-free for at least 12 consecutive months at the end of the Contract term in order to receive the escrow funds. Welfare assistance refers only to cash maintenance payments for ongoing basic needs (i.e. TANF, etc.).
- D. Modifications may be made to the Individual Training and Services Plan during the course of the Contract term. All changes must be dated and signed by the FSS Coordinator and the FSS participant.
- E. Other members of the family may devise an Individual Training and Services Plan, but are **not required**, under the Contract, to complete all obligations.

IV. Change in Head of Household

- A. The Section 8 head of household may change with the approval of the Menard County Housing Authority for the following reasons:
 - 1. If the original head of household leaves the family **or**
 - 2. If the original head of household dies
- B. If the head of household changes with the approval of the Menard County Housing Authority, the following process will be undertaken within the FSS Program:
 - 1. The FSS Coordinator and new head of household will revise the original contract to delete the Individual Training and Services Plan
 - 2. A new Contract of Participation will be signed with a new contract date and existing expiration date.
 - 3. The FSS Coordinator and new head of household will develop a new Individual Training and Services Plan tailored to the needs of that person within 30 days of the new contract date.

V. Contract Extension Guidelines

- A. At the end of the five-year contract term, an FSS participant may request an extension for up to two years, in order to fulfill contract obligations and receive the escrow money.
- B. The participant will complete a Contract Extension Request form and the FSS Coordinator will review and make a decision to approve or deny the request.
- C. The Menard County Housing Authority will only grant extensions in rare circumstances which are beyond the control of the participant and which prevent completion of the Individual Training and Services Plan.

VI. Escrow Account Information

- A. The family's Annual Income, Earned Income and Family Rent is inserted into the Contract of Participation and is used as baseline figures for future escrow calculations.

- B. The figures will be taken from the last re-examination or interim, but **must not be more than 120 days old**. If the figures are more than 120 days old, the Menard County Housing Authority will conduct a new re-examination.
- C. FSS participants continue to pay rent in accordance with income levels.
- D. The differences in the rent paid by the FSS family due to an increase in earned income is escrowed;
- E. The Menard County Housing Authority is required to deposit the escrow funds into a depository account to be held for the family;
- F. The Menard County Housing Authority will provide an escrow report to the family at least once annually including the following information: the beginning balance, the amount of the family's rent payment that was credited during the reporting period, and any deductions made from the account for amounts due the Menard County Housing Authority before interest is distributed, the amount of interest earned on the account during the year and the final balance at the end of the reporting period.
- G. The monthly amount escrowed is determined by the family rent paid to the Menard County Housing Authority or to the landlord. If rent falls behind, the escrow account will not be credited with late rent payments.
- H. Escrow funds will be disbursed as follows:
 - 1. When the Contract of Participation has been completed and the head of household certifies that all members of the family have been free from welfare assistance for the last 12 consecutive months, **or**
 - 2. When 30% of the family's monthly adjusted income equals or exceeds the existing FMR for the certificate or voucher size issued in the Section 8 program and no family member is currently receiving welfare assistance.
- I. Interim disbursements of escrow funds will only be provided if the following requirements are met, and *at the sole discretion of the Menard County Housing Authority*:
 - 1. The participant has fulfilled certain interim Contract goals, **and**
 - 2. Needs a portion of the FSS account funds in order to meet other goals outlined in the Contract (i.e. school tuition, job-training expenses, business start-up expenses, etc.)
- J. Escrow funds will be forfeited:
 - 1. If the Contract of Participation is terminated, **or**
 - 2. If the Contract of Participation is completed but the family is still receiving welfare assistance, **or**
 - 3. If the head of household dies and the remaining family members choose not to participate in the program, **or**
 - 4. If the head of household leaves the family unit and the remaining family members choose not to participate in the program, **or**
 - 5. If the family does not comply with the terms of the lease agreement

VII. Termination Guidelines

- A. Termination from the FSS Program may occur as a result of the following:
 - 1. Mutual consent of both parties;
 - 2. Failure of the family, or members of the family, to honor the terms of the contract and the family withdraws from the program;
 - 3. Failure of the family to remain in good standing by way of lease violation, option of law, etc.
 - 4. Expiration of the term of the contract and any extension; family achieves self-sufficiency
- B. If the family fails to meet the goals outlined in their Individual Training and Services Plan, they can be terminated from the FSS Program.
- C. The existing Menard County Housing Authority grievance procedures will be used for participants grieving the termination from the FSS Program.

VIII. Transitional Services

- A. Former FSS families who have completed their Contracts, still receiving housing assistance and whole head is employed, may be offered FSS support services to help continue toward self-sufficiency for up to one year.
- B. Former FSS families who have completed their Contracts, and are no longer receiving housing assistance, may also be provided support services to assist them in maintaining self-sufficiency for up to six months.

IX. FSS Portability

- A. An FSS Family participating in Section 8 must lease an assisted unit within the Menard County Housing Authority's jurisdiction for 12 months after the effective date of the Contract of Participation.
- B. After the initial 12-month period, the FSS family can exercise portability.
- C. The following actions may be taken if the family chooses to exercise portability:
 - 1. The family may continue to participate in Menard County Housing Authority's FSS Program if it is a short-distance move, he/she was hired to work in the new location or if he/she will be attending school in the new location, and if the receiving housing agency chooses to administer/bill for the family **or**
 - 2. The receiving housing agency may allow the family to participate in its FSS Program if the agency chooses to absorb the family (if available), **or**
 - 3. The Menard County Housing Authority will terminate the Contract when the family cannot fulfill its obligations in the new location.
- D. The escrow account will be turned over to the receiving housing agency if it absorbs the FSS family and they continue to participate in its FSS Program.
- E. If the FSS family is terminated from the receiving housing agency's FSS Program, and they have absorbed the family, the receiving agency will keep the forfeited escrow funds.

MENARD COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY

Family Self- Sufficiency Program

Internal Procedures

I. Internal Referral Process

- A. Client name is referred to FSS Coordinator from Section 8 Case Managers or other MCHA staff members.
- B. FSS Coordinator will provide first contact by phone to potential participant within 30 days from referral date to schedule an appointment to discuss the program.
- C. If a phone number is not available, a letter will be sent to schedule an office visit to discuss the program.
- D. If unsuccessful, a letter will be sent to schedule a home visit (*this is the final attempt to contact if the client does not respond*).

II. Process When Client Chooses to Participate in the FSS Program

- A. An initial Intake appointment will be scheduled with the FSS Coordinator.
- B. The FSS Coordinator will complete orientation to the program, the application packet and goals are established.
- C. Contract of Participation.
- D. Ongoing follow-up and referrals are made to and for the participant.
- E. The FSS Coordinator will meet, email, call or text with participants a minimum of one (1) time per month to evaluate progress made towards goals, re-evaluate goals and needs, etc. A face-to-face meeting is preferred, however if participant is unable to meet due to work schedule the alternative methods may be utilized.

III. Inability to Meet Individual Training and Services Plan Goals

- A. Families who are not meeting their goals or milestones will receive a written notice for a home/office visit to discuss the barriers of achieving the goal or milestone.
- B. If adequate progress has not been made within three (3) months, the participant has the option to revise his/her goals or milestones.
- C. If the progress has not been made toward the new goal or milestone in six months, the participant can be terminated from the program by voluntarily leaving or by recommendation of the FSS Coordinator.

IV. Objectives During the Five Phases

- A. Orientation/Completion of Intake Packet
- B. Education/Job skills assessment
- C. Individual Training and Services Plan for goal setting

- D. Contract of Participation signed
- E. Monitor progress made toward goals
- F. Assist participant in becoming welfare-free
- G. Provide follow-up

V. Internal Guide for Participant Completion of the FSS Program

- A. By the end of the first two years, the participant will have completed the education and/or job training goals.
- B. By the end of the third year, the participant will have obtained employment.
- C. By the end of the fourth year, the participant will be stabilized in housing and employment, possibly even receiving promotions.
- D. The final year, the participant will be welfare assistance-free, with completion of the FSS Program and presentation of escrow funds.

VI. Family Self-Sufficiency Forms

- A. Addendum Information
- B. Assessment
- C. Client Orientation handbook
- D. Contract of Participation
- E. Contract extension request
- F. Current concerns
- G. Family Self-Sufficiency brochure
- H. Historical reports
- I. Individual Training and Services Plan
- J. Intake Packet
- K. Inter-Agency Referral form
- L. Participant Commitment Agreement
- M. Participant Referral form
- N. Release of information
- O. Request for Interim Disbursement of Escrow
- P. Self-Evaluation
- Q. Visit Detail Record

VI. Standard Participant Correspondence

- A. Annual escrow letter
- B. Certificate of Mailing
- C. Office visit scheduled
- D. Home visit scheduled
- E. Referral letter
- F. Section 8 briefing letter

G. Urgent notice

VIII. FSS File Set-Up

- A. HUD Forms (50058 and 52652)
- B. Individual Training and Services Plan and individual goals and milestones
- C. Intake Packet, Participant Commitment Agreement, Authorization for Release of Information
- D. Contract of Participation
- E. Related forms, Copy of most recent budget from Housing Counselor
- F. Participant letters, Newsletters, Escrow requests, Close out notes, miscellaneous