



FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM ACTION PLAN

Menard County Housing Authority



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MENARD COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY

Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Action Plan

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.”

Menard County Housing Authority (MCHA) has been serving Menard County, Illinois since 1947. MCHA’s Section 8 voucher jurisdiction now consists of a number of counties in Illinois. In 2020, MCHA was awarded a joint FSS grant with Housing Authority of Christian County. MCHA’s current FSS Coordinator will provide services to both Public Housing Authorities.

This Action Plan describes the policies and procedures of Menard County Housing Authority for operation of its FSS Program, and contains the following information:

1. Family Demographics

MCHA currently has Section 8 Housing Choice/Project Based Vouchers in 24 counties in Illinois. The FSS Program provides services to eligible households who are currently receiving housing assistance through MCHA’s HCV/PBV program, as per HUD’s guidelines in communities within the jurisdiction which have the largest number of voucher holders, greatest need and most resources. According to our database system, Yardi’s Demographic Report of January 2020, Menard County Housing Authority has 330 active Housing Choice vouchers and 126 Project Based vouchers. 72% of our current heads of household are female and 28% are male. Reported race of head of household totals 303 as white, 142 as black and 9 as other race. Communities within the jurisdiction with the largest number of vouchers include: Athens, Greenview, and Petersburg (Menard County); Charleston and Mattoon (Coles County); Carbondale (Jackson County); Macomb (PBV only, McDonough County); and Pontiac (Livingston County). These communities provide the most resources and job opportunities within 25 miles, including community colleges and universities.

2. Estimate of Participating Families

MCHA intends to provide the FSS Program to up to 50 families of HCV/PBV vouchers in Coles, Jackson, Livingston and Menard Counties as well as those with PBV vouchers at an active development in Macomb, Illinois. Enrollment in the program will be ongoing, pending capacity and will maintain an active waitlist upon capacity.

3. Eligible Families from other Self-Sufficiency Programs

The number of families who are participating in other local self-sufficiency programs is not applicable to MCHA's FSS Program.

4. FSS Family Selection Procedures

The FSS Program is a voluntary program available to eligible families who are able and willing to work and motivated to achieve their financial goals. Residents who do not wish to participate in the FSS Program will not lose their housing assistance because of this decision.

Participation in the FSS Program shall be open to all eligible residents, as defined below, subject to availability of FSS slots. Determination of eligibility shall be on a uniform, nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin.

5. Incentives to Encourage Participation

Menard County Housing Authority will provide the following incentives to FSS participants:

- Development of an escrow account; the establishment of this escrow will be in accordance with the guidelines set forth in HUD's *24 CFR Part 984*
- Ongoing individualized support services in collaboration with community resources
- Homeownership counseling
- Free copies and faxes
- Free workshop and training opportunities
- Monthly newsletter with resources and information pertaining to the FSS Program

6. Outreach Efforts

Menard County Housing Authority's outreach efforts for the FSS Program are as follows:

- MCHA's intake workers recommend the FSS Program to new and present voucher holders
- An introductory letter of invitation and flyer with list of benefits of the FSS Program is mailed to all new voucher holders, assuring that both minority and non-minority groups will be informed about the program
- FSS advertisement is placed in agency newsletters and main lobby of MCHA

- Recruitment activities will be held annually with postcards being distributed to eligible families

7. FSS Activities and Supportive Services

Menard County Housing Authority has established partnerships with organizations that provide services to FSS participants. Examples of existing MCHA partnerships include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Community Action – provides Head Start, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and outreach and referral services
- Community Colleges – provide career planning and job training
- Behavioral Health – provide 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
- Illinois WorkNet – provides assistance with job search, resume writing and interview skills

MCHA 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 regular opportunities for trainings/ workshops in coordination with local service providers and community partners. These opportunities will be available to all Section 8 residents in the community with a requirement for those participating in the FSS Program that are not currently working or in school to attend workshops provided by Menard County Housing Authority.

The Program Coordinating Committee (PCC) includes:

- Representatives of MCHA (Section 8 Manager/Executive Director)
- Financial Consultant for MCHA
- CEO of local Rural Housing Development
- County Government Representative
- Community Service Representative
- Community Action Representative
- Section 8 Program Participant/Former FSS Participant

8. Method of Identification of Family Support Needs

The FSS Coordinator completes a Client Interview Questionnaire at Orientation. The questionnaire is administered at baseline to track clients' needs, successes, barriers and practices in regards to education, employment, finances, health and transportation. This

information helps to frame successes and challenges and to identify areas of family support needs.

9. Program Termination; Withholding of Services; and Available Grievance Procedures

Termination, which results in the loss of accumulated escrow funds, is a decision made by Menard County Housing Authority for a defined set of reasons. Termination from the FSS Program may occur as a result of the following:

- Mutual consent of both parties
- Failure of the family, or members of the family, to honor the terms of the contract and the family withdraws from the program
- Failure of the family to remain in good standing by way of lease violation, option of law, etc.
- Failure to meet requirements as set forth by the Participant Commitment Agreement
- Client forfeits Section 8 voucher
- Expiration of the term of the contract and any extension without meeting goals set forth by Individual Training and Services Plan

Withholding of supportive services or Section 8 assistance will not be implemented by Menard County Housing Authority on the basis of a family's failure to comply with the requirements of the Contract of Participation.

Menard County Housing Authority's existing grievance procedures will be used for FSS participants' grievances.

10. Assurances of Non-Interference with Rights of Non-Participating Families

Families' election not to participate in the FSS Program will not affect their admission into the Section 8 Program or their right to occupancy in accordance with its lease.

11. Timetable for Program Implementation

Menard County Housing Authority will maintain 25-50 FSS slots. MCHA was awarded a full-time joint grant with Housing Authority of Christian County for 2020 and will implement up to 25 additional slots in HACC's Section 8 jurisdiction.

MCHA will continue in recruitment efforts with Spring Recruitment in both jurisdictions. The recruitment effort will include a mailing to new Section 8 voucher holders, information in the MCHA agency newsletter and posted in the main lobby. A scheduled Orientation will take place for those interested in the FSS Program based on the Spring Recruitment. Continued recruitment will take place until the combined number of participants for both jurisdictions reaches 75, at which time a waitlist will be implemented and maintained.

Upon enrollment in the FSS Program, MCHA will conduct annual reviews of participants' ITSP goals and Contract of Participation with each participant. These reviews will take place more frequently as needed or as individually requested.

12. Certification of Coordination

Menard County Housing Authority certifies that its FSS Program has developed its services and activities in coordination with the Workforce Investment Act, Welfare to Work, and other relevant employment, child care, transportation, training and education programs in the applicable 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 to avoid duplication of activities and services.

13. Internal Policies and Procedures

a) Eligibility Requirements

1. Must be a current Section 8 voucher holder and head of household **and**;
2. Must seek and maintain suitable employment (unless elderly and/or disabled)
3. Participation in the FSS Program will be determined on a first come-first serve basis
4. Menard County Housing Authority will make reasonable accommodations for participants with disabilities
5. A family *may* not be chosen to participate in the FSS Program if they previously participated and were terminated because they did not meet the contract obligations **or**;
6. If the family owes Menard County Housing Authority or any other Housing Agency money and does not have a current repayment agreement at the sole discretion of Menard County Housing Authority and approved by the PCC

b) Participant Responsibilities

1. Meet with the FSS Coordinator to complete Orientation and Intake to enter the program
2. Upon completion of the Orientation and Intake, determine and outline goals in the Individual Training and Services Plan, which will be completed with the FSS Coordinator
3. The head of household must sign the Contract of Participation
4. Participate in any recommended assessments, interviews, tests, evaluations and workshops
5. Work toward goals with the support and referral assistance from the FSS Coordinator

6. Be in contact with the FSS Coordinator via phone, text or email monthly if not working or in school and meet quarterly. If unable to meet due to employment or school, must be in contact via phone, text or email quarterly
 7. Meet annually to review/update ITSP
 8. Seek and maintain suitable employment upon completion of a job-training program or an educational program unless elderly and/or disabled
 9. Complete activities within the dates listed in the ITSP
 10. Provide information to Menard County Housing Authority concerning changes in employment, education, training, etc.
 11. Become independent of welfare assistance for at least 12 consecutive months before the contract expires
 12. Comply with the terms of the lease
- c) Contract of Participation and Individual Training and Services Plan Guidelines
1. The Contract of Participation must include an Individual Training and Services Plan
 2. The final goal for the ITSP must be to maintain suitable employment, unless elderly and/or disabled. Menard County Housing Authority, along with the head of household, makes the determination of suitable employment based on the skills, education, and job training of the FSS head of household, and based on the available job opportunities within the jurisdiction
 3. A mandatory interim goal is that all members of the household 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 (TANF)
 4. Modifications may be made to the ITSP during the course of the Contract term. All changes must be dated and signed by the FSS participant and FSS Coordinator
 5. Other members of the household may devise an ITSP, but are not required, under the Contract, to complete all obligations
- d) Change in Head of Household
1. The Section 8 head of household may change with the approval of Menard County Housing Authority for the following reasons:
 - (i) If the original head of household leaves the family **or**
 - (ii) If the original head of household dies
 2. If the head of household changes with the approval of Menard County Housing Authority, the following process will be undertaken within the FSS Program:
 - (i) The FSS Coordinator and new head of household will revise the original contract to delete the ITSP
 - (ii) A new Contract of Participation will be signed with a new contract date and existing expiration date

- (iii) The FSS Coordinator and new head of household will develop a new ITSP tailored to the needs of that person within 30 days of the new contract date

e) Contract Extension Guidelines

1. 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
2. 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
3. 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 ITSP. These circumstances are at the discretion of the FSS Coordinator and the Program Coordinating Committee

f) Escrow Account Information

1. 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
2. The figures will be taken from the last annual or interim re-examination
3. FSS participants continue to pay rent in accordance with income levels
4. A portion of the increase in the family's rent because of an increase in earned income will be credited to the FSS escrow account
5. Menard County Housing Authority is required to deposit the escrow funds into a depository account to be held for the participant
6. MCHA will provide an escrow report to the participant at least once annually including the following information: the beginning balance, the monthly amount credited during the reporting period, and any deductions made to the account for interim disbursements, the amount of interest earned on the account during the year and the final balance at the end of the reporting period
7. Escrow funds will be disbursed as follows:
 - (i) 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 at least the last 12 consecutive months, **or**
 - (ii) When 30% of the family's monthly adjusted income equals or exceeds the existing Fair Market Rent (FMR) for the voucher size issued in the Section 8 Program and no family is currently receiving welfare assistance
8. Interim disbursements of escrow funds will only be provided if the following requirements are met, and *at the sole discretion of Menard County Housing Authority with approval from the Program Coordinating Committee:*
 - (i) The participant has fulfilled certain Interim Contract goals, **and**

- (ii) The participant needs a portion of the FSS escrow funds in order to meet goals outlined in the Contract (i.e. school tuition, job-training expenses, business start-up expenses, transportation needs, etc.)

9. Escrow funds will be forfeited for the following reasons:

- (i) Contract of Participation is terminated, **or**
- (ii) Contract of Participation is completed but the family is still receiving welfare assistance, **or**
- (iii) The head of household leaves the household or dies and the remaining family members choose not to participate in the program, **or**
- (iv) The family does not comply with the terms of the lease agreement

g) Transitional Services

1. Former FSS participants who have completed their contracts, still receiving housing assistance from Section 8 and whole head is employed, may be offered FSS support services to help continue towards self-sufficiency for up to one year
2. Former FSS participants who have completed their contracts, and are no longer receiving housing assistance from Section 8 may also be provided support services to assist them in maintaining self-sufficiency for up to six months

h) FSS Portability

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

i) Internal Referral Process

1. Client name is referred to FSS Coordinator from Section 8 or other Menard County Housing Authority staff

2. FSS Coordinator provides first contact by phone to potential participant within 30 days of referral date to schedule appointment for Orientation, if interested
 3. If a phone number is unavailable or contact is not made, a letter will be sent to invite family to Orientation
 4. 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*)
- j) Enrollment and Participation Process
1. Orientation and Intake will take place with the FSS Coordinator
 2. The FSS Coordinator will complete the application packet and establish goals with the FSS participant
 3. Contract of Participation is signed and executed
 4. Ongoing follow-up and referrals are made to and on behalf of the participant
 5. The FSS Coordinator will meet, email, call or text the participants a minimum of once per quarter to evaluate progress made towards goals, reevaluate goals and needs. Monthly contact is required if FSS participant is not working or in school. A face-to-face meeting is preferred, however if FSS participant is unable to meet due to work or school the alternative methods may be utilized.
 6. An annual meeting is required to review/update ITSP
- k) Inability to Meet ITSP Goals
1. FSS participants who are not meeting their goals, after review with FSS Coordinator, can be terminated from the program by voluntarily leaving or by determination of the FSS Coordinator
- l) Graduation and Final Withdrawals from FSS Escrow Account
1. In order to graduate from the FSS Program and receive a final disbursement of escrow funds, participants must meet the following requirements:
 - (i) All obligations under the Contract of Participation and goals outlined in the Individual Training and Services Plan are complete
 - (ii) Exit Interview is complete
 - (iii) Written statement from head of household verifying that no member of the family has received cash welfare assistance (TANF) for at least 12 consecutive months
 - (iv) Participant has maintained suitable employment (unless elderly and/or disabled and unable to work)

Menard County Housing Authority FSS Forms

- Authorization for Release of Information
- Client Interview Questionnaire
- Contract of Participation
- Contract Extension Request
- Escrow Statement
- Exit Interview
- Individual Training and Services Plan
- Inter-Agency Referral
- Memorandum of Agreement
- Participant Commitment Agreement
- Participant Handbook
- Request for Interim Disbursement

FSS File Set-Up

- HUD Forms (50058 and 52652)
- Individual Training and Services Plan
- Client Interview Questionnaire, Participant Commitment Agreement, Authorization for Release of Information
- Contract of Participation
- Contract of Participation Case Notes
- Related Forms (participant letters, annual escrow statements, requests for interim disbursement of escrow funds, miscellaneous)

Right to Include Addenda

Menard County Housing Authority's FSS Program reserves the right to include addenda to this Action Plan as situations, regulations, and funding sources change, but such changes will be made in compliance with HUD regulations