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Family Self-Sufficiency and Homeownership Programs Put OHA Tenants on the Homeownership Track

OAKLAND, Calif., March 13, 2007- Putting a roof over the heads of low-income Oakland residents is what the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) does every day, and it also puts eligible tenants on the path to homeownership through two “wealth-building” activities available through the Authority’s housing assistance programs.

The Section 8 Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) offers eligible participants the ability to build a savings account over a five-year period. Because rent in the Housing Choice Voucher (or Section 8) Program is income-based, as a tenant’s income increases, so does the rent. But participating in the FSS Program allows OHA to match a portion of that rent increase into an escrow account, building what can amount to a substantial amount of money. Participants must set and meet several interim goals during the 5-year contract (perhaps work to clean up a credit score), and complete one final work-related goal. Once they graduate, tenants decide how to use the money, often paying off debts, buying a car, or putting a down payment on a home. The program, started in 1994 by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), has seen 677 OHA tenants enroll with 111 successful graduates. One successful graduate accumulated more than \$37,000 in her account.

“Family Self-Sufficiency provides opportunity for OHA clients, and rewards them for taking initiative and staying employed,” said Linda Muller, FSS coordinator.

The Oakland Housing Authority also supports a Section 8 Homeownership Program which allows eligible tenants to use their Section 8 rental subsidy to cover homeownership expenses. The program began in 2003, and to date, 13 tenants have become homeowners through this program, with the first sale closing in 2004. Some of the eligibility requirements include being a first-time homebuyer, working full time and earning more than \$10,300 annually (this requirement does not apply to elderly or disabled tenants), and providing 3 percent of the down payment (1 percent must come from the tenants’ own funds). Four FSS graduates have used their accumulated savings toward the purchase of a new home.

“This program gives OHA clients a chance to fulfill the American dream,” said Stephanie Christmas, Section 8 homeownership coordinator. “It helps them to build wealth, own their very own house, and take pride in homeownership.”

The Authority’s Public Housing Program also offers a public housing homeownership program, which began in 2006. A closely-integrated Family Self-Sufficiency Program provides support and counseling to public housing tenants hoping to qualify for the purchase of their first home, guiding them through the credit reporting and loan processes.

“We hope to have our first public housing home buyer cross the threshold of their own house sometime this year,” said Nicole Thompson, OHA resident services coordinator II.

For more information about the FSS and Homeownership programs, please call Bronwyn Hogan at (510) 874-1563.

The Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) is the City of Oakland’s state-chartered and federally funded agency to promote the availability of quality housing for low-income persons. OHA works to promote the civic involvement and economic self-sufficiency of its residents and to further the expansion of affordable housing within Oakland. The Authority is currently helping to house 14,000 of the city’s lowest income families. (www.oakha.org)

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