Huntsville Housing Authority’s mission is to develop and preserve a high standard of safe, affordable housing for qualifying individuals and families, free from discrimination. HHA believes that housing is a basic need and the foundation for a successful life. HHA’s dedicated staff, along with community partners, promote revitalization, self-sufficiency, and assist our families in achieving long-term economic success and a sustained high quality of life. The following pages highlight the numerous struggles and obstacles that our residents face to move out of public housing and into the private sector. The two main ingredients to pull off this courageous feat are self-determination and access to resources. HHA’s services to our residents include public housing, housing choice vouchers, and self-sufficiency services. We also have partnerships with third parties to link our residents with GED certification/scholarships, pre-employment training, entry-level employment, contracting opportunities for resident owned businesses, and credit repair for home ownership. We also provide numerous services/referrals to meet the needs of our disabled, elderly and youth.
"The Huntsville Housing Authority is grateful to the clients, staff, and community partners that helped to make this publication possible. By working together, we enhance program effectiveness by providing our participants with unique opportunities to overcome barriers. Your collaboration has been essential in our pursuit to promote economic independence and self-sufficiency throughout the local community."

~Brittany Spencer
HCV Family Self-Sufficiency & Homeownership Coordinator

"Huntsville Housing Authority is a unique place to work. We have an unbeatable staff that truly cares about the well-being of our residents. This collaborative project is truly meant to highlight our residents' dreams, pursuits and the barriers that they have to overcome due to LIFE shifts. It is a constant reminder that compassion, resources and opportunity are the keys to overcoming obstacles. To all the departments that assisted with this huge undertaking, thank you."

~Lindsay Pollard
Public Relations/Section 3 Coordinator
Huntsville Housing Authority Publication
“Colin R. Davis once quoted, “The road to success and the road to failure are almost exactly the same.” If that is true, what makes the outcomes different? Jack Canfield said “Successful people maintain a positive focus in life no matter what is going on around them. They stay focused on their past successes, rather than their past failures, and on the next action steps they need to take to get them closer to the fulfillment of their goals rather than all the other distractions that life presents to them.” Most everyone realizes that change is a choice; however, that is easier said than done. Huntsville Housing Authority (HHA) has an excellent Resident Services Department and superb Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinators in both Public Housing and the Housing Choice Voucher Program. These dedicated individuals work one-on-one with residents who want to make that change. They encourage them along the way to maintain a positive focus and strive to complete the goals they establish to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. The case workers link the individuals to our partner agencies to provide the services they need along the journey. They meet with them regularly to encourage them and help them through the rough spots.

Our agency took an intimate look at the lives of our residents featured in this publication. We appreciate the willingness of these residents to be transparent and share their stories. In many cases they wanted to share their story to encourage others. Our residents also spoke about the various services provided to them in order to move towards their goal with a sense of empowerment. Not all the stories are about adult self-sufficiency. There are also stories of youth who have won scholarships and achieved things they might never have achieved if they were not an HHA resident. Finally, we spotlight a family that has numerous success stories.

As the Executive Director/CEO, I am proud of the successes outlined in this booklet and of the HHA support staff who helped along the way. There are many more lives to impact, and much more work to do; however, with each day, there lies the promise of self-sufficiency, homeownership, and financial freedom. This is where we ultimately want to see our residents. Read this booklet and enjoy their success stories.

Sandra Eddlemon, CEO/Executive Director of HHA
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INTERVIEW

[in(t)ərˌvYOo] VERB

-question (someone) to discover their opinions or experience.
Flossie V.

"This program is a struggle, because the stereotypes are looming. But I used the stereotypes to empower myself. I did not want to fall into a hopeless category because my children were watching me. One vital part for me was the support of my family. Also, the belief that it is NEVER too late to accomplish your goals. The Section 8 voucher program is not a waste of funding. It helped me stabilize my situation until I could do better. My caseworkers, Ms. Audrey Lewis and Ms. Brittany Spencer, were instrumental to my progress. Contrary to belief, there are many people that get on the program and become success stories. The hard work truly falls on the part of the participants, but it is up to you to have a blank canvas, and create your own picture."

Flossie is employed with the Department of Justice and obtained a new residence in the private sector.

Flossie is a 2017 HCV FSS Graduate.
Melony B.

"I worked with my caseworker to accomplish my goals and move forward to become self-sufficient. I did not want anyone to feel sorry for me and I wanted more than ever to better my situation. It feels good! I pay everything. After needing subsidized housing for three years, I was able to move forward, it was like getting a boost. The counseling, guidance, programs and support that I gained from the Housing Authority was immeasurably important. The programs are made for people who want to do better. It is not a crutch; it is a boost, if you want to do it. If you can afford to live without the assistance, then do so; someone else may need it. I see a lot of individuals that are homeless. It’s for people like them. We don’t always know everyone’s struggle, but at the end of it all, everybody needs somebody. Huntsville Housing Authority is a real good thing to have in this city. A real good thing."

Melony is employed and lives in the private sector.

Melony is a 2017 HCV FSS Graduate.

"HHA’s Programs are immeasurably important!"
"I was blessed to have the opportunity to be on Section 8 Housing and the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program. At the time, I was working a full-time job making $9.00 an hour and paying $400.00 a month in childcare. It was difficult, as that was the only income I had, and every expense my daughter had was strictly left up to me. But with the help of Section 8, I was able to manage my expenses. I had to teach myself how to budget every little thing. I had to keep widening the door for bigger and better ways to improve myself. I encourage anyone that they can achieve what they want through hard work and believing in themselves. That's what has made me successful."

Carrie is employed full-time and resides in the private sector and is a 2016 HCV FSS Graduate.
Marcia G.

Housing Choice Voucher FSS Graduate, 2017

READ MY STORY...
"In the fall of 2009, I decided that I needed to make a change in my life so that I could stop struggling so much while trying to support my daughter. I applied to Alabama A & M University and I was accepted. I was 38 years old, a non-traditional student, and terrified. I had only been there 3-4 months when I received a letter from the Huntsville Housing Authority telling me that I was approved for a Section 8 voucher. That was the beginning of a life-changing experience for me and my daughter.

I first started my journey with the Huntsville Housing Authority in the Section 8 Program in early 2010. I was on the waiting list for 3 years for a voucher; and during that time, I struggled as a single parent to care for my daughter. I worked a full-time job as a CNA at a local nursing home and I also worked at Walmart for a few years. I wasn't making much money and things were tough.

I never received any help from her father in taking care of our daughter. It dawned on me one day that I needed to use the Section 8 voucher to my advantage. I was tired of struggling and feeling disrespected by administration when I went to work, at the nursing home and customers at Walmart. I always felt that I had a certain level of intelligence, but I had this strong urge to want to put it to use. I took a philosophy class that first semester and I felt that I had awakened from a long, dark dream. I wanted to learn more and I put more focus on my studies. I often took my daughter to class with me and she sat in the back of the room because I had no one to watch her. The professors didn't seem to mind because she was always quiet. My first year in college was tough as well, and I almost dropped out because I didn't have much money or food in the home. I went to see my advisor and informed her that I needed to withdraw. I told her my situation and she took me to Kroger's and bought a basket of groceries for us and told me to pay it forward because she wasn't going to let me pay her back.
A couple of caring people at AAMU gave me the motivation that I desperately needed to keep pushing forward. I eventually used the voucher, food stamps, and my student refund checks to make it through school. In December 2013, I received my Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work. It was one of the greatest days of my life and I only had two family members to come to my graduation. My mother had passed away at that point and my father refused to attend because we never had much of a relationship while I was growing up. In 2014, I was accepted in the Master’s Program at AAMU in Social Work. I’ve completed the coursework, but I have one more test to take to have my Master’s-level conferred.

I’ve had a lot of sleepless nights and cried a lot because I didn’t think that I could make it. Writing papers, studying, taking tests, and being a single parent was taking a toll on me. I wanted a degree like I wanted air to breathe, so I didn’t give up. I did my Masters level internship with a state agency for 9 months and it was an unpaid internship.

The whole process took several years, but my FSS caseworker helped me to make a scary, but smooth transition. That voucher helped to change my life and I was afraid to let it go. I have prayed through it all and God helped me when I felt that I couldn’t go on. I’ve tried to be a role model for my daughter and others daily. I feel that the burden of struggle has been lifted off my shoulders and I have a new beginning. Don’t ever give up.”

Marcia is employed full-time as a social worker and resides in the private sector.
Y oulanda G.

Youlanda stated, "Go for your GOALS! The city of Huntsville is full of resources to help you move towards Self-Sufficiency and more! I have known about Huntsville Housing Authority since 2006. It has taken me some time get started and then graduate from the FSS Program through Section 8, due to some unforeseen setbacks, however, the help that was provided, blew my mind. As a participant, I was linked to the following services:
- Case Management
- Goal Assessment
- Employment Counseling/Training
- Credit Repair
- Resume Writing
- Community Resources
- Transportation Assistance

There are stigma's attached to being on Section 8, but people don't really understand how much this assists citizens across State lines. As a graduate of the HCV FSS Program, my ultimate goal is to be a homeowner! I want to cut my own grass, own my own property, and not live paycheck to paycheck. I want to live, and HHA has helped me move in the direction to reach my goals." Youlanda resides in the private sector, is employed and a 2017 HSV FSS Graduate.
Shaylynn is a chip off the old block. She comes from a family that has poured their lives into the medical profession through nursing. Shaylynn plans on becoming a Registered Nurse and is currently working towards that goal. Shaylynn is employed and lives in the private sector.

She is a 2018 FSS HCV graduate.
Dyonna was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and raised by her grandmother, while her mother lived in Huntsville, Alabama and was trying to stabilize her household. The family lived at the Downtown Rescue Mission until becoming eligible and receiving a long-anticipated Section 8 voucher. Dyonna's mother worked at a chicken factory to bring in income for the family, and Dyonna participated in the Boys and Girls Club. Upon graduating with a GPA of 3.7, Dyonna applied to college and began attending Calhoun College. She quit school to care for her mother. Fast forward, Dyonna became an HCV FSS Graduate in 2018. She is back in college and will graduate in May of 2019 with an Associate of Science Degree in Business Management. Her motto is, "Be your own support system and take advantage of the resources around you." Dyonna lives in the private sector and is employed. She is a 2018 HCV FSS Graduate.
**Tiffany O.**

Tiffany is a Public Housing FSS transfer to the HCV FSS Program. "I currently drive busses and am looking to move into the private sector in August of 2019. There were many times that I wanted to quit, but my FSS workers would not allow me to. They kept encouraging me to move forward and complete my goals. I thrive off of positive encouragement and that is what they gave me. Huntsville Housing Authority definitely helped me stay on track. Some people do not come from strong-income families and you have to utilize the resources that are given to you. I saw Public Housing as a stepping stone. I am really proud of myself and where I've come from. I can now see the improvement. I was given many resources to pursue my ultimate goal of becoming an entrepreneur in the bakery business."

Tiffany lives in the private sector and is still pursuing her dream of opening up her own bakery shop. She graduated from the HCV FSS Program in 2018.
Juel A.

Modeling success to two young girls is no easy task. After spending five years in the HCV Family Self-Sufficiency Program, Juel was able to work on and complete all of her current goals. Juel took advantage of the GED program. While in the HCV FSS program, her caseworker constantly encouraged her through the construction of a vision board, to stay focused on her dreams.

She completed an online course and is now a Paralegal. Juel stated that she would have been less focused without the HCV FSS Program, but would have found a way to accomplish her goals. "The program was very helpful. It worked like a stepping stone for me and there are so many people who need this type of assistance. People should not judge other people. I can sincerely say, that since being in Public Housing, I have met very nice, hardworking individuals who want a better life. Now that I have graduated, I plan on buying my home next year."

She is a 2018 HCV FSS Graduate.
Brittany is from West Virginia, a transplant like so many others who have come to reside in Huntsville, Alabama. She is married and has two children. She attended and graduated from Butler High School. She came into contact with HHA, because her mother made her aware of the resource. She was fortunate to get into housing within one week of signing up. She raised her children in Butler Terrace for eight years. She was unemployed for quite some time until she decided to attend school for Cosmetology. She finished in one year. During the year that she was in school, she was accepted into the Section 8 voucher program. She moved out of traditional public housing into the Section 8 voucher program in 2014.

Brittany is a recent graduate from the HCV FSS Program and is now gainfully employed at a local salon that she enjoys working at. She stated, "I am now able to financially support my family. People talk about public housing in a negative way; however, I stop people, because I was one of them. I worked my butt off. You don't know what people are going through. Am I not allowed to have nice things? I pay my rent, I pay my bills on time. I think there would be many more people on the streets if it were not for the Housing Authority. I needed a resource to help build me up, and they provided that for me. There are people out there that have to have these services in order to survive. Everybody deserves to live somewhere. It's not a bad thing." Brittany currently lives in the private sector.

She is a 2018 HCV FSS Graduate.
Amanda H. and her family are new homeowners!

All of their efforts paid off!

Housing Choice Voucher FSS Graduate Homeowners

Housing Choice Voucher Family Self-Sufficiency Graduate Homeowner!

Amanda H. and her family are new homeowners!

All of their efforts paid off!
Housing Choice Voucher Family Self-Sufficiency Graduate Homeowner!

Bobbie H. at her new home.

Congratulations on your new home!
Temecca in front of her new home. It's a beautiful sight. "I previously lived with my mother and my children. I needed my own space so I moved to L.R. Patton for three years. I was able to work and transition to the HCV FSS program. Ms. Spencer, my caseworker, worked with me. She is a stand-up type of woman. She works to see you reach your goals. Some of the goals she assisted me with were finding gainful employment, determining my options for furthering my degree in Speech Pathology, and owning my own home. I now own my own home. It is a wonderful feeling. I would advise anyone seeking assistance to use the resources. Sometimes life can get off balance. I am so glad to have regained my balance for my children."

She is a 2018 HCV FSS Graduate.
Gheymarne states, "I am a transplant from West Virginia and have been residing in Huntsville, Alabama since 2011. I wanted a place with more opportunity. One of my goals was to own my own home. Transferring my Section 8 voucher was critical and beneficial to my survival during that transitional period. Working with HHA and finding out about all of the resources allowed me to have a normal life. It felt good that I qualified for certain things. I took advantage of every training and workshop that was offered. I worked on my savings and cleaned up my credit.

I graduated from the Section 8 Program this year, bought myself a home, and have accomplished my goals. There are resources out there. People just need to take advantage of the assistance and they too, can reach their goals."

She is a 2018 HCV Homeownership Participant.
The only thing worse than being blind, is having sight, but no vision. Helen Keller
Derrick M.
Derrick worked tirelessly to climb the economic ladder of success. He joined the FSS Program and was given resources that would help him reach his goals. In the meantime, he commuted to different cities, working odd jobs; until he obtained his business license to become a clothing fashion entrepreneur. After spending five years participating in FSS, he was able to graduate and move his family out of public housing and into the private sector.

2018 PH FSS Graduate

Aja A.
Aja joined the FSS Program in hopes of obtaining the much-needed support to pursue her goals and gain economic freedom. One resource in particular, an Individual Training Service Plan, empowered her to identify targeted goals and gave her deadlines to accomplish each objective. Aja completed all of her goals in a little over five years. The job where she was working on a part-time basis offered her a full-time position and she was transferred to the state of Florida. Aja has also started a part-time business of her own, promoting weight-loss products.

2018 PH FSS Graduate
Whitney H.

Achieving homeownership was the primary goal of this single mother of two. Whitney joined the FSS Program because she wanted the American dream of financial stability and the traditional white picket fence. Within three years of networking with community providers, Whitney improved her credit history and financial budgeting. She maintained suitable employment as a phone operator and became a first-time homebuyer! Whitney is now enjoying her new home and playing in the backyard with her children. She attributes her advancement to the resources provided by HHA.

Bente B.

Bente was a great public housing tenant, paying her rent on time, great housekeeper, etc. But something was missing, owning her own home. She quickly accessed information through her property manager about the FSS Program. Since she was already employed, she combined her efforts with specific resources and was able to attend credit repair classes, increase her knowledge on financial literacy, and made this work for her when she received pay increases. She empowered herself by learning to take charge of her finances. The payoff? She is now a homeowner. Congratulations!

2018 PH FSS Graduate
Ashley M.
"Sometimes life is not what you thought it would be. I moved into public housing to care for my terminally ill parent. It was so hard, but I worked tirelessly to provide for my daughter. What made matters worse, was I did not have a driver's license and depended on public transportation. Then, I joined the FSS Program, followed through with my objectives, and was able to graduate from the program." Upon graduating from FSS, Ashley was transferred to Texas by her employer. She is currently enrolled in college, furthering her education.

2018 PH FSS Graduate

Carolyn K.
FSS participant, Carolyn was determined to provide for her two children. She volunteered at their schools, while actively completing her education. She obtained her GED and a Medical Assistant Diploma. She is currently seeking employment in the medical field.

2018 PH FSS Graduate

Sherry C.
"I had been dealing with several health and family issues that prevented me from actively pursuing my goals. I took full advantage of the resources provided by my FSS Coordinator. I was also able to repair my credit. I am so happy to be graduating from the FSS Program and moving into the private sector."

2018 PH FSS Graduate

HAPPY GRADUATES
"My name is Catessa. I'm a mother of four children, and a student. I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, and I lived there for the first 15 years of my life until Katrina, in 2005. I enjoy nearly every art form there is: dancing, painting, singing and modeling. As of late, I've been pursuing my Associates Degree in Salon Management. I plan to utilize my degree as a stepping stone to achieve another goal of mine, to become a midwife. After I receive my associates in salon management, I plan to move to Florida where I will work in my field while obtaining certification to become a midwife. I wish to help women. Utilizing my skills, I will uplift women by enhancing their natural beauty as well as assisting them in birthing life in a natural way. Enhancing the self-esteem, natural health, and beauty for women is my goal."

Catessa is the 2018 Alabama Housing Authorities Education and Enrichment Fund Scholarship Award winner.
Sherrod is a husband, a father to five children, an employee, and a student. He maintains a full-time job while currently pursuing his Associate Degree in Exercise Science full-time. He currently holds a 3.93 GPA. Once he completes his Associate, he will be continuing his matriculation through college to obtain his Bachelor’s Degree in Business Management with an emphasis in Entrepreneurship and having his own personal training/nutrition business.

His motivation is his family. He wants them to know that education is important and necessary to achieve dreams and goals in life. He was not able to complete his college degree earlier in life due to family responsibilities; however, it did not destroy his dream of becoming a college graduate even if it had to happen later in life. When he began college for the second time, his oldest son, Reshod, had just graduated from high school and was scheduled to start college himself. So, father and son are pursuing their college education at the same time. In addition to his daily commitments, he serves as the Sergeant-at-Arms for the Searcy Homes Resident Council in his community. He loves to travel, experiencing new things, helping people, and working on his car. Sherrod looks forward to a future of new opportunities. He resides in Huntsville, Alabama, with his family. He is one of seventeen recipients of the 2018 AHAEEF Scholarship Award and a PH FSS Participant.
(Washington, D.C.– October 25, 2018) – Xeniya C., a 12-year-old resident of the Huntsville Housing Authority in Alabama, has been selected as the grand prize winner of the annual “What Home Means to Me” poster contest. Her work graces the cover of the 2019 Annual “What Home Means to Me” calendar. The grand prize-winning poster was revealed on October 25 at NAHRO’s National Conference and Exhibition in Atlanta, Georgia.

The poster contest is part of the Housing America campaign, which was begun by the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) as a way to call attention to the national need for decent, safe, affordable housing in sustainable communities. In a statement accompanying her winning poster, Xeniya explained that “[h]ome means love to me because you have a roof over your head, clothes on your body, and food on the table every day.”

“It is always a pleasure to see the work of these talented artists,” said NAHRO CEO Adrianne Todman. “Their eloquent and heartfelt messages about their homes underscore the important work of the housing industry.”
For nearly 10 years, the poster contest has provided a platform for talented young artists who live in affordable housing. Hundreds of children, ages 5-18, submitted their posters to local competitions held by public housing authorities nationwide. Each piece of art visually shares the child's thoughts on what their home means to them. A panel of judges chose 13 national winners, which are featured in the 2019 “What Home Means to Me” Calendar.

The winning artworks are showcased online at the Housing America website and on NAHRO's Twitter account at @nahronational. The grand prize winner was given the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C. to tour the Capitol, meet their state representatives, and be an ambassador for affordable housing. This press release has circulated nationwide through NAHRO publications.

Written by Ashanti Wright

On April 7-10, 2019, Xeniya met with Congressman 'Mo' Brooks and Sr. U.S. Senator of Alabama, Richard Shelby.
Reshod considers himself a quiet, polite, and responsible young man who works hard in school, at work, and in his extracurricular activities. Education is a value that has been instilled in him since kindergarten. He is currently enrolled at J.F. Drake State Community and Technical College in Huntsville, Alabama, pursuing an Associate Degree in Culinary Arts. He currently holds a 4.0 GPA. Reshod earned his ServSafe Certificate, the Silver National Career Readiness Certificate, and has been inducted into the National Honor Society. He has worked successfully in various food industries. He looks forward to furthering his education by pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Culinary Arts or Food Science. In his spare time, Reshod likes to play the drums, watch television, and play his Play-Station 4. Reshod has high expectations for himself and hopes to fulfill his potential. Reshod is the oldest of five siblings.

Reshod applied for the 2018 AHAEEF scholarship even though he had already won the 2017 AHAEEF scholarship. He stated, “I didn’t realize that I would win again, but decided to do better than I did last year. I am not sure in which direction I will specialize in with Culinary school, but I am enjoying every minute of the craft.” Reshod is an amazing young man with a vision to be great in his future profession of Culinary Arts.
"Our family drove to New York City, and on July 4, 2018, I left with my group to fly to France for three weeks of cultural discovery. This was my first airplane flight, which took six hours for us to reach our destination. Although I was not afraid to fly, I was uncomfortable being wedged between people that I did not know. The seating for our group was scattered throughout the plane. Our first couple of days, we were able to settle in. We were able to tour many museums to learn the history of France, the French War, etc. The food was different. I had duck for the first time, it was okay.
We were given chocolate milk in a bowl, with a spoon. I was not used to using a spoon to drink chocolate milk, so I drank my milk right out of the bowl. We were able to sample many types of cheeses, some were good, some were disgusting. My favorite food was SPECULOOS-Cookie Butter. Oh that was so good! They spread it on bread and we ate it with our breakfast. As part of the group's routine, a few nights a week we gathered together to talk about our feelings, what we had learned, and the importance of our experiences. My most memorable moments of the trip included visiting the city's most iconic sites and museums, including the Eiffel Tower, Louvre, Arc de Triomphe, and Champs-Elysees. After a 10-day home stay with a French family, we crossed the French Border with our group to other parts, including Germany, to explore landscapes, cultures, and sites in a neighboring country. A French family, called a (Home Stay Family), chose me to stay with them based upon my application to the Experiment Project. The family spoke a good amount of English, so we were able to communicate effectively.

They were a very nice family. They had three children, two boys and one girl. We went kayaking, learned a new game that involved throwing a metal ball as close to another one to win against your opponent. We went sail-boating, paddleboating, took long naps, met new people and made new friends. One interesting thing was that the sun did not set until about 10:00 p.m., but it did not take me long to adjust. My advice to those interested in going on the Experiment Project is to have an open mind and try new things. I would love to do this again because of the independence."
"I began receiving e-mails from other students who would be going on the same trip. Meeting these people was amazing. They were from different parts of the U.S. I took classes to familiarize myself with the culture. The food was amazing! I stayed with a 'Host' family for two weeks in Tokyo, Japan.

The little boy from the host family could not speak much English at all, but he would tell me that he loved me. Although we are all from different parts of the world and have different cultures, we share the same language. We love each other and love is a universal thing."
Martha A.

Martha is a native of Atlanta, Georgia. She worked for over 20 years and owned her own home. After the passing of her husband, finances became overwhelming and she decided to apply for public housing. She has lived in public housing for 10+ years. As a retired senior citizen, Martha stays just as busy as when she was working full time. She works at a local Dollar General, and participates in many activities within Johnson Towers. She attends the Resident Council meetings, which occur monthly. For many years, she ran the Johnson Towers store inside the lobby for the residents so that they could buy basic need items. She started that store with $500.00. Martha enjoys planning parties, decorating for fall festivals, holidays, and scheduling wheelchair races. Believe it or not, the residents won 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place medals, which were donated by a local trophy company. One would never know that this lady is 60+ years, young. She also stays active with various church activities at Progressive Union Missionary Baptist Church. Martha stated, “I like seeing the smiles on the people’s faces and the thanks that I am doing a good job. I help them feel good about themselves. I bring in people who can share things to help them with whatever problems they have. My door is open to everyone who has a problem or to just listen.

I want people to remember me for the things I have brought to Johnson Towers. I want them to know that someone does care about them. Sometimes families do not visit, and so I assist with doctors' appointments and filing paperwork.”
"Ms. D"

Ms. D. is originally from Winchester, Tennessee. An accomplished entrepreneur, Donna ran a childcare business, but eventually had to close it down after an injury, which left her unable to manage it. She moved into Northwoods in 2001 and decided to redirect her passion for helping children and families by becoming involved in her community as an active advocate and activist. Donna stated, "Even though I have had the opportunity to move out with my Section 8 voucher, I chose to stay. This is more than being on PH assistance. This is my community, my home, and I feel like I have a purpose here. God led me here for a reason. It's rough to hear people talk down about PH. I have to set them straight. A 'project' is something that is being worked on. I have to explain to people that we live in affordable housing. This is a completed public housing development. There are many needs in my community and that is why I stay busy with the Resident Council meetings, hosting Bingo at two sites, helping out non-profits with back-to-school events for students, attending trainings, and so forth. All of the events we participate in, we take pictures of and keep on our board as a memory of how we have impacted our community. I am proud of what we do and honored to be a part of it."
HHA: How did you come to reside in traditional public housing (PH)?
Keith: I was renting from a relative and it became too much because I was working a job paying $10.00 an hour, and my utilities were as much as the rent because the insulation was faulty. I had a $500.00 utility bill. It was getting a little strenuous. I heard about public housing through Speakin Out News. I applied, and when I was notified that a housing unit was available, I jumped on it.

HHA: How long have you been in traditional PH?
Keith: Since 2011.

HHA: How do you find PH, compared to the private sector?
Keith: Big difference in living in PH than private sector. In the private sector they don't care if you've lost your job; they'll just kick you out. But with PH, they work with you with your income and adjust it accordingly. Sometimes you think living in PH is a step backwards. I had a negative view; but when I really looked at it, there are so many resources to help you improve yourself and move forward. If you walk into the rent office, the flyers are all around you. But because you may be kind of in your own feelings, you miss out on these opportunities.

HHA: Talk about some of the services that you are involved in now.
Keith: Family Self-Sufficiency, Troop 400 Cub Scouts, Girl's Night Program with the Delta sorority, President of Searcy Resident Council; we have participated in AAHRA Scholarships, The Experiment Project, STEM at Lowe Mill and Lego Robotics Class. Sherrod finished his Associates Degree with the scholarship he received from AHAEEF. He is now getting ready to begin his Bachelor's at Strayer. These are all as a result of the resources from the Housing Authority, if you avail yourself to them.
Keith: When our son went to France, I would have never been able to afford sending him somewhere like that. These are the types of programs that you really appreciate while being in PH.

HHA: If there was no PH, how different would your situation be?

Keith: It would be horrible. Of course, God is there to provide, but it would be a lot worse. A lot more Top Ramen, we would have to stay with relatives, hopefully not having to go to the homeless shelter, although when you don’t have family, there may be people who don’t have any other option.

HHA: What do you say to the naysayers who don’t understand or support PH?

Keith: It can happen to you. I had a house, I had family trying to help me, but when it came down to it, HHA was there when no one else could help. It has happened to a lot of us. Have you met the people? Do you know their situation? People talk about PH having rodents and pests; well, HHA does tell you to keep your residence clean. So if you have food and other debris on the floor, it is going to attract unwanted pests. So I feel like some of that stuff can be avoided if people are responsible for their own cleanliness. If you have bad habits, you will get pests.

HHA: What words of encouragement would you give to other public housing residents who are not utilizing all of the services available to them?

Keith: This is where mandatory speeches, boosts come in from HHA. Something might be blocking their road to success, they may need that extra encouragement. You may have to talk with them to find out what needs they have to get them out of their rut. A person has to want to change. I was not motivated when I first came to live in PH. I was angry that I was living here because I had lived here as a child and all the negative connotations that come from living in the "hood" came back to me. I then had to realize that I had to make my own way.

HHA: What are your goals for your future outside of PH?

Keith: To become homeowners, travel more, support our children going through college, own a business in Physical Fitness, become financially solvent, give back to the community, and develop a non-profit.
Many knew him by his street name, ‘Dizzy.’ But Bobby was a warm hearted, gentle man who just wanted a place he could settle in and call home. That dream became a reality in 2015 when his application for affordable housing was processed and an open apartment became available. Bobby had been homeless for many years. His youthful upbringing lacked the balanced healthy atmosphere of family and his wanderings and random jobs left him among the chronically homeless living in ‘Tent City.’ Bobby forged a strong relationship with the Family Self-Sufficiency Supervisor, Sakeenah Bowden. This relationship became instrumental in aiding him in his transition from the streets to the Salvation Army to Public Housing. His movement from place to place was not without cost. The Salvation Army has individuals offset their own expenses by paying $30.00 per week. This also included strict rules and regulations that prohibited drinking and fighting. Bobby was also taught how to budget and save his SSI check. He wanted the privilege of buying his own supplies and food that he would need to meet his personal and daily needs in affordable housing. Bobby stated at the time, “I knew God was still watching over me when I saw my address, Apt #316. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Bobby was especially fond of and thankful to Ms. Bowden and the Resident Services team who proved their kindness by encouraging him, showing tough love and most of all transitioning him to a place he could call home. This booklet is dedicated to his legacy, resilient spirit and humanity.

Written by: Lindsay Pollard Public Relations/Section 3 Coordinator
Want more information about FSS?

*If you are a Public Housing resident, please contact:

**Supervisor of Public Housing FSS** Sakeenah Bowden  
256-532-5657  
sbowden2hsvha.org

**FSS Coordinator** Kimberly Fearn  
256-532-5671  
kfearn@hsvha.org

*If you are a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV)/Section 8 participant, please contact:

**FSS & Homeownership Coordinator** Brittany Spencer  
256-532-5642  
bspencer@hsvha.org

**FSS Coordinator** Carmisia Woods-Danson  
256-532-5672  
cdanson@hsvha.org
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Contact info: lpollard@hsvha.org
(256) 532-5634 Public Relations Department