

# Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program Frequently Asked Questions



## **What is the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program?**

The FSS program can help you build a more stable financial future. Through this program, you are able to “save your raise.” As your income from work increases, your increase in rent is saved in a savings account that you’ll receive when you successfully complete the program.

## **How long does the FSS program last?**

You sign a five-year contract when you enroll in FSS.

## **How does the FSS savings account work?**

When you enroll in the program, RI Housing sets up a savings account for you. An increase in your rent as a result of an increase in earnings from work will result in a credit to your savings account.

## **Do I have access to the savings account anytime? Who manages this account?**

You do not have access to the account during the program. Your housing authority/owner manages the account on your behalf.

## **Does the savings account gain interest?**

Yes, your FSS savings account will gain a small amount of interest during your time in the program. This is also managed by RI Housing.

## **Can I add to the savings account?**

The only way to add to your FSS savings account is through an increase in income from work. When your rent increases, you will still pay your new, higher rent to your housing owner, but that increase in rent will also be credited to your savings account.

## **Can I use the savings account for emergencies?**

You cannot use the account for emergencies. You can, however, request an interim withdrawal during the program if you plan to use the money to make progress on one of the goals you’ve outlined in your contract.

## **Do I have to complete all five years of the program?**

You do not have to complete the full five years, but you do need to complete the program requirements to receive the money in your savings. If you’ve completed all program requirements before your contract term is up, you can request an early graduation.

## **What are the graduation requirements?**

There are three requirements you must meet in order to graduate from the program. First, you’ll need to be suitably employed at the time of graduation. Second, all household members will need to be free of cash welfare assistance for at least 12 months prior to graduation. Finally, you must have completed the goals you set during the program.

## **What if I need more time to successfully complete the program?**

If you need more time to complete the program, you can request an extension of up to two years depending on the circumstances. For example, if you have unexpected health issues, you can request an extension.

### **What if I don't complete my goals during my five year contract?**

In order to graduate and receive your savings funds from the program, you will need to complete your goals. That said, you will be working with your program coordinator throughout the program to create and modify goals as your interests and circumstances change.

### **Am I eligible to join the program if I'm not working?**

Yes, heads of household who are not currently employed are allowed – and encouraged – to join the program. In order to join the program you must be willing to seek suitable employment since a requirement to graduate successfully and receive your FSS account funds is that you are employed.

### **Will I lose my voucher by joining the FSS program?**

No, when you successfully complete the program, you may keep your rental assistance if you still need it. If you don't graduate from the program, you will not lose your voucher.

### **What happens if I lose my voucher while participating in the program?**

Unfortunately, if you lose your voucher while enrolled in FSS, you can no longer participate in the program.

### **I am worried about increasing my income. Every time I increase my income, my rent increases and I receive less benefits. How does this benefit me?**

If your earned income increases and you are not enrolled in FSS, your rent will increase. One great benefit of enrolling in FSS is that you'll get your increases in rent back at the end of the program through your FSS savings account. Also, from the moment you enroll in the FSS program you'll be working with your financial coach who will help you identify areas to save.

### **If I am not working, but have a household member who is working, does that income count toward my FSS account?**

Yes, any increase in earnings from work in your household while you are enrolled in the program contributes to your FSS savings account. That also means that any earned income in your household when you enroll in the program will be included in your contract.

### **What if my landlord increases my rent? Will my account grow because of this?**

No, your savings account will only be credited as a result of an increase in earned income.

### **What if I am unable to increase my income from work?**

If you don't increase your income from work, you can still benefit from the program. Your program coordinator will help you identify savings opportunities, build your credit, and take advantage of other community opportunities.

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