Promising Practices for Running an FSS Program

JEFF: So the recording is now started, so I'm going to go ahead and get started. Welcome to our second webinar on Promising Practices for Running a Multifamily FSS Program. Today's webinar will be different from the first one in that it will feature, primarily, experienced FSS practitioners.

So we are joined by Sherry Riva, the Founder and Executive Director of Compass Working Capital, along with Ann Lentell, who is the Director of Programs at Compass Working Capital. We're also joined by Nancy Scull, who's currently a consultant and formerly ran the FSS program at the Housing Opportunities Commission in Montgomery County, Maryland. We will be hearing quite a bit from them about how to run an excellent FSS program.

But we're going to start with an introduction from Danielle Garcia. Danielle is the Branch Chief of Subsidy Oversight in HUD's Office of Asset Management and Portfolio Oversight. We're also joined by Carissa Janis, who's a Program Analyst in that same office. Danielle, can you kick us off?

DANIELLE GARCIA: Sure, no problem, and thanks, Jeff. Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for joining our second of three webinar series regarding the Multifamily Program. We're very excited to kick off this webinar series, and in our first session we covered launching an FSS program. And as Jeff mentioned earlier, today we will discuss promising practices for running an FSS program, and best practices to think outside of the box of how to be successful in your program.

So I'm pleased to announce that, as of today, we have received two action plans from owners who would like to implement FSS program, and we are coordinating with the field staff and the owners to get those approved. Today, I'm joined with me, my head colleagues-- Carissa Janis, she has extensive experience regarding the support services programs-- Rahmaan Sharper, who is also very knowledgeable of multifamily programs-- and I believe we should have a few staff from Public and Indian Housing on the line as well. And with that, I will kick it off back over to Jeff.

JEFF: Thank you, we're going to start with an overview of the two established FSS programs. And I'm going to ask Ann and Sherry to kick it off first, and then Nancy. So I'm going to go to Ann and Sherry.

SHERRY RIVA: Great, thank you, Jeff and Danielle. This is Sherry Riva, I'm the Founder and Executive Director at Compass Working Capital. I want to thank both HUD and [INAUDIBLE] for the invitation to participate on today's call. My role in the next few minutes is just to give the attendees an overview of Compass, who we are, and how we came to the FSS program. And then throughout the webinar we'll be drilling down on aspects of our model that we're interested in lifting up and sharing with folks on the call who might be interested in launching FSS programs.

So let me just, at a high level, describe Compass, who we are as an organization. We are based in Boston and our mission is to empower low income families to build assets, and what we describe as financial capabilities as a pathway out of poverty. We are not a housing organization, we're a nonprofit organization with roots in the asset development field, which is a field really focused on looking at the role of wealth in lifting families out of poverty.

We actually began our work about 10 years ago in a program folks might have heard of called an Individual Development Account, which was a matched savings program model. And have more recently, over the last five years, focused on the Family Self-Sufficiency program as the market where we're really concentrating most of our efforts. For us, as practitioners in the asset building field, we really looked at the FSS program as a very powerful, very promising model and market to deliver the work we know how to do well, which is helping families build savings and financial capabilities as a path toward getting out of poverty.

Generally, our model is really typically bundling three primary things-- financial education, financial coaching, and some kind of savings incentive to help families make progress toward their goals. And, for us, the FSS model offered a very, very powerful model to do that work well and to do it in a market and at a scale that we thought could have real impact around the country.

So, as I mentioned, we're headquartered here in Boston. Over the last five years we've been focused on this FSS launch and expansion. We're serving about a thousand families in our direct service FSS programs currently with two public housing authorities, one nonprofit housing agency, and two multifamily owners, which has been a great opportunity for us to begin to work in that market as well across three states here in New England.

Really, one of the things we feel excited and proud about our work here at Compass is we were the first nonprofit organization in the country to launch what we described as an asset building model for the FSS program, which is really integrating financial coaching and asset building strategies into the core delivery of the program.

I want to mention briefly that last month we also launched a national network that will enable us to work with up to 10 implementing mission-aligned partners around the country to help them identify ways to integrate asset building and financial coaching into their FSS programs as well. We'll talk a little bit more later on in the call what an asset building model means for the FSS program and how that's different than a traditional model. But suffice it to say that we think that an asset building model has real potential for the FSS program.

What you're looking at now is a slide that describes a little bit of what we're learning and the impact that we're seeing on the ground when you integrate financial coaching into the core delivery of the FSS program. And the way we think about impact at Compass is looking at resident's progress towards a set of financial security goals around earnings, credit, debts, use of quality financial products, savings, and asset building.

And our work as coaches, the day-to-day work, is meeting one on one with clients and helping them reach and establish goals in each of those buckets, recognizing that progress toward financial security really requires progress in each of these areas. Having a credit score that allows you to borrow a lot of the capital you need to make the investment and, the sort of investments all of us need to move our families forwards-- education in homes, working on increasing earnings, and paying down debt.

Just a really quick look at what this looks like-- I think the best way to tell our story at Compass is looking at it through the life of a family who's been through the program. So introducing all 261 of you here to Rosa, another one of our recent program graduates. But what I love about Rosa is the fact is that Rosa had been in section 8 for almost 12 years before we met her-- 12 years living in subsidized housing, and hadn't been introduced to or had access to the opportunity to really think about how did she want to move her family forward. She had goals and dreams of what she wanted for herself and her family.

And she enrolled in the FSS program in 2013, and in two years-- we'll talk more about the program later, it's actually a five year program, but it took Rosa only about two years to make some real progress towards her goals. She increased her credit score, worked on paying off her debt, and ended up qualifying for an affordable first time mortgage on a two family home in Lynn. She's actually paying less now on our mortgage than she was for her rent, and has a chance now to really build wealth as a way to continue investing in her family and helping her family move forward.

Rosa's actually a graduate who's also working now with other people in the neighborhood, her own neighbors, her siblings, in fact, to help them achieve their dreams and, particularly, around home ownership as well. So I think if we, throughout the call, keep family, like Rosa's family, in mind as we think about why does it matter for us, as practitioners, to be thinking about how we expand the scope and impact of this very powerful program around the country? I'm going to pause there, we'll talk a little bit more about the program details later on in the call.

NANCY SCULL: And this is Nancy Scull, and you can see in the next slide is how we are a bit different from Compass. OK, so I began the program. I was the first coordinator at Housing Opportunity Commission, which is the public housing agency for Montgomery County, Maryland. And that was in 1993, so for 22 years I was the coordinator and was thoroughly excited about it the entire time. We were able to develop a new program and, really, to move families forward, we had almost 900 graduates.

But let me go back, now, to this slide. We enroll low income families, and it is a voluntary program. So those families who enroll are motivated. They want to do better, they want to try to change their lives, and that for their children as well. One third of our enrollees began the program unemployed or on welfare assistance, welfare cash assistance.

So we have quite a low income population at the beginning and that's why I've always been so excited and passionate about this program, because it really does bring those folks, no matter where they start-- whether they are employed when it began, or whether they're on welfare, or just simply unemployed, or very low employment-- we move them forward. And it makes a huge difference in their lives.

So they set personal goals, and then they are provided resources. And these resources are not just for the participant and the participant's goals, but also for family members. Because we have found that the head of the household who enrolls in the program-- and, also, any other adult who's also interested in the program can enroll.

But we found that if there are individuals in the family who have issues, who have needs, who need resources-- it's very important to meet those needs because, otherwise, it affects the success of the head of house who is the participant in the program. So we definitely provide resources for all of the family members as needed.

So as they move through the program they are improving their employment, they are improving their education and training, and they really do move out of poverty. And that is the key, I believe, in the Family Self-Sufficiency program.

Now, on the next slide, you'll see that not only do a third of our graduates are successful graduates, begin the program unemployed or receiving welfare, but then 82% are single parents when they enroll in the program. And that's a huge number of very isolated, often unsupported, less educated, single parents. It's often a single mom, but it could be a single dad from time to time. And then, also, we have 15% in our program who are foreign born, and they need to begin with improving their English skills, so it takes time for that.

And then the other thing is that, as you'll see in the next bullet, is that 15% of our graduates even lacked a high school degree or a GED when they began, and this is interesting because the average participant in our program was middle age-- about 37 was the average year when they enrolled. So it's very, very difficult for these folks to go back to school, and try to learn something that was difficult for them at the time when they were younger, and now they're middle age. So we do have tutors and other help like that.

But then we have 71% of our graduates who completed their degree. It will be a college degree, or certifications that read vocational training and so on. And then the other interesting fact is that a quarter of our graduates who purchased homes at the time of graduation, again, began unemployed or receiving welfare assistance. So that is a strong indication for you all to see how much difference we make in this program. Family self-sufficiency is very real, and it can be achieved.

And then our average escrow savings for our graduates is about almost $11,000 across the board as our average. OK, then we have a story about Yvette Hammond, she's one of our graduates. She graduated from high school, she was a mediocre student. She had lost her father while she was in high school. You can move on to the next slide. Good, thank you.

And that really, really upset her. She was so close to her dad, and she kind of gave up, and ended up feeling that it didn't matter-- her life didn't matter a whole lot. But then she got pregnant, she had a child, she worked very hard. She got jobs, but she was always living paycheck to paycheck. Went to college, used a Pell Grant, the scholarships-- we helped her with all of those things. She got an RN, the two year registered nurse training, and she got employed full time.

But then she realized that she needed more than that, she needed to move up. And so she got her bachelor's in nursing, and she is about to buy a home within a couple of years. She says to me, maybe in a year. And her son is doing very well, he's a junior in high school at age 16, so he's a little bit early.

I would like to add a few things. The folks that we work with in our program have, often, very low self-esteem. They may have suffered from substance abuse or from domestic abuse. They may have physical health issues, mental health issues. And they really need to struggle with and get our help to struggle with, as coaches and case managers, crises over and over in their homes and their families. So we work very hard with them, and as we're showing you, there really is tremendous success from this program.

PRESENTER: Great, thank you so much, Nancy. We're going to transition on back to Ann and Sherry over at Compass to talk about engaging residents.

ANN LENTELL: Great, thank you. So this is Ann Lentell with Compass Working Capital. So I'm going to spend some time talking to you a little bit about our philosophy on marketing the FSS program and engaging residents. Just some background-- our approach has been informed by behavioral science. We engaged in a research project with ideas42 earlier this year on marketing engagement, as well as our own research that focuses on what our families need and want. So our marketing is really based on data, science, and also some of our own learnings and experience.

So the very first pillar of our marketing approach is that it has to start and end with an aspirational focus. We know that they're motivated families who are raising their hands and saying, I want a better life for myself and my family. So our messaging focuses on the deeply held aspirations, and hopes, and dreams that our families already have for themselves. So these aspirations are around home ownership, being debt free, saving for college for their children, maybe having enough savings in retirement, or just feeling more financially secure. And I'll show some examples of that a little bit later.

The second pillar is to utilize a surround-sound strategy. So we don't think there is just one way to get your message across, but we utilize our website, postcards, recertification inserts, in-person touch points, phone calls, personalized letters, posters, you name it. The important thing is that seeing the message once sometimes isn't enough to get your message across. So, in other words, message sent doesn't necessarily mean message received. So when that aspirational message is surround-sound, then families really start to notice and absorb that.

So after we execute on a surround-sound marketing strategy, our next step is to invite interested participants to an orientation. That's a great opportunity for families to form a community with other participants. And we always like to start our orientation with families sharing why they came and what their dreams are.

Then we might show a video featuring a participant, so Sherry, earlier, shared Rosa's story, and we have a video of her on our website if you're interested in seeing that. So that's an example of a video we might show featuring our participants, or we'll have a participant speak and share their story. And that really sets the tone for what's possible and what's exciting about this program.

Only after that do we get into the program specifics. So we don't lead with here are the nuts and bolts of the FSS program, we lead with aspirations first, and then program specific second. After an orientation, participants will take three financial content workshops. The first focuses on budgeting and goal settings, the second on credit repair and debt management, and the third is on savings and asset building. And that really builds a solid foundation to begin the financial coaching work that we do. And after that point, we'll enroll someone in the FSS program.

Finally, an important pillar of marketing and engagement is utilizing a resident ambassador. So this could be someone in your property who is well connected with residents, it can be a representative of the program who can share his or her experience. Oftentimes, we find that that's much more powerful than hearing about the program from a staff person, or someone who isn't really participating in the program at a client level.

So if we move on to the next slide I'll show you some examples of what our marketing content might look like. So here is the classic postcard that we've used in almost every one of our programs. It shows a child's drawing of a house, on the left hand side, become a reality, on the right hand side, with the expression, "Every dream worth building takes effort." And a key focus of this postcard is really tapping into family's deeply held aspirations. So, again, we have that aspirational focus in our marketing messaging.

If you move on to the next slide we'll share an example of a postcard that was informed by our work with ideas42, which is the behavioral science research group that we work with. There's a slogan on the top that says, "A new group of savers is forming." So that's based on appealing to someone's positive identity notion.

So it doesn't say, "Are you in debt, and struggle to pay your bills, and worried about your finances?" Because someone receiving that might say, well, yes, but I don't want to be associated with that group. So we're refocusing it on a positive identity group, so we might use a slogan like, "A new group of savers is forming." That's me, I want to join that group.

So if we move on to the next slide we can talk about another tool we use, which is around recertification. So if the participant's rent is increasing at an upcoming recertification appointment, that's a great time to get their attention to enroll them in FSS-- before their rent goes up. So we have these small cards that you can place in a recertification appointment letter when you're letting a participant, or a resident, know that there is a certification coming up-- to focus on the urgency of signing up before your rent goes up. And so our data show that this strategy has been very effective.

So that's kind of a little bit of flavor of how we do marketing and engagement at Compass, and now I'll turn it over to Nancy.

NANCY SCULL: OK. Hi, this is Nancy Scull again from Montgomery County, Maryland's housing agency, Housing Opportunities Commission, from which I've retired. And we also use orientation flyers, and we do them in English and Spanish. And we put them in all of our office locations, too, so that they can be seen they're posted in various places. And we also give them to the housing specialist and also to the resident's services staff at our public housing agency. And we, also like Compass, we put flyers into the monthly recertification mailings.

And our flyers talk about resources, services for the family members, for the participant, education and training, some employment, and case management and coaching that is available, and then the escrow savings account. Our flyers usually mention those items. We put articles with photos in the client newsletters, and we send flyers to our partner agencies, especially the welfare agency, TANA agency, where they meet with clients.

So at the orientations we bring snacks and drinks, we think that's important, and we show a PowerPoint with lots of discussion as we go along about the program, and then we get into what brought you here, and what are you thinking that your goals might be. And then we send them home, asking them to start thinking about their goals, and jotting down some of the things that they wanted to do when they were younger that they gave up on, that they might reconsider now that they have five years in this new FSS program.

And, lastly, we not only do word of mouth, but we bring one of our participants and graduates to talk to them about his or her own direct experiences in the program, and how they struggled against challenges and moved forward.

PRESENTER: Thanks so much, Nancy. We're going to move on to our next section of this presentation and talk about case management and coaching techniques while working with residents. I'm going to hand it right back to Nancy.

NANCY SCULL: Yes, Hi, Nancy again from Housing Opportunities Commission, public housing agency in Montgomery County, Maryland. And we start with the participants who follow through with us after the orientation that they've been to. So we assign them to a case manager or coach and that begins with the contact meeting in person, and building a relationship of trust-- that's absolutely the key to this program, in our opinion. And, actually, when we've done some surveys with our graduates, they rate the importance of the support from the case manager and coach above the savings account that they get, the escrow savings account that they get when they graduate. So that tells you how important that relationship is.

So, as you can see from the slide, it's so important for the staff to provide the coaching and case management to be active listeners, not to be judgemental, talk about their history, where are they coming from, what are their goals at this time. And then they move on to setting those personal goals, short term and long term.

It's important for them to try to look at five years out in what they want, but then it's very important to break down the steps. Otherwise it's too overwhelming and it seems impossible. So they break down the steps, and the case manager or coach helps them to do that. Once they have chosen the goal that they want, that they have individualized for themselves, starting where they are and then moving forward.

So our goals include financial stability and planning, and looking at their credit, and looking at their budget from the very beginning of the program. And then the use of other families, and any other adults, 18 or older, can also create their own goals and becoming enrollees, as well-- participants, as well.

So the coaching and case management is really the source, the anchor, that helps them to gain the self-confidence, build their self-esteem, and to not give up. Giving up, facing new things all the time, and new goals that they never thought they could achieve is very, very challenging, and they need a lot of support, we have found, from their coach and case manager. And also helping them to problem solve, and not just make a quick decision about something. And to be accountable, but in a positive way.

So, again, there's always ongoing discussion, reassessment of progress. How are you doing? OK, it's OK you failed an exam in college, or whatever, or you didn't pass the GED. But let's figure out why, and what we can do about it, and pull back, and make another step. But put another step in there if you need a short term step.

So, again, we feel that the case manager, coach, needs to meet with the participant every month, because it's so important and, of course, especially in the beginning. At least every month. Sometimes you're in touch as well by phone, by email, by texting, and so on. But that support that builds and continues with the trusting relationship is very, very important and, really, the key to the success of our folks.

We also recruit volunteer tutors, and we use college interns in the program, and we also use federal work study students. And that has been very, very helpful because a lot of, again, our middle age folks don't want to go to a class with a lot of young people, or people who they feel are more capable than they are. So they work, sometimes privately, with a tutor, with a work study student, with an intern, and that helps them, again, to build their confidence.

PRESENTER: Right, so now we are trying to transition back to Ann and Sherry over at Compass.

ANN LENTELL: Great, thank you. So at Compass, our coaching model is very client driven. And we invest a lot in this area in professional development resources and with our own director of financial services on staff to continually train and update our coaching staff on refining our technique. But first and foremost, the core of our-- in the nomenclature, the core of our case management model-- we call coaching, which is participant led and driven.

So the coaching model is predicated on the belief that clients are experts in their own lives and goals. So we don't dictate or decide what's important to them, we focus on uncovering a client's own capabilities, understand what goals they have for themselves and their families, and we're really a partner in building an action plan to achieve those goals. And we coach our clients along that path towards their goals.

Of course, establishing trust is fundamental to success in this model. So we believe that clients are creative, resourceful, and whole, and it's important for coaches to honor and respect that. So we gain our clients' trust by listening and being respectful. We take extreme care in vetting our resources and our referral partners, and we're honest about what we don't know. So that's really important to having a successful relationship is establishing trust.

With any coaching relationship, motivating the client will oftentimes come into play. Sometimes clients need help uncovering their own capabilities. But our coaches have a lot of tools in their toolbelt to motivate clients. For example, one tool is reframing. So if the client is unable to accomplish a goal, or maybe they're resisting, or unsure about taking action on a particular step, you can reframe. So, for example, it's not about paying off this T-Mobile collection, it's about improving your credit so that you can work towards buying that home for you and your children. So that's an example of one of the tools that we might use to help motivate clients.

And, lastly, our goal setting framework is based on the acronym SMART-- Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-bound. So when we work with clients to set a goal, every single one has a SMART step next to it. That makes it easier to take smaller steps for clients toward a larger goal. So with that, I'll turn it back over to Nancy for the next section.

JEFF: Do you all know that one of the key goals of FSS is really to help families increase their earnings? So we're going to hear some of the best practices in this area first from Nancy, and then back from Compass.

NANCY SCULL: OK, this is Nancy. In our program at the Housing Opportunities Commission, we knew very well. We had evidence, we had research showing that higher education and training really is the key to moving low income families and individuals toward higher earnings and greater success towards self-sufficiency. So that is something that we encourage of all of our participants to work toward higher education or vocational training. They have to choose what it's going to be. It's important for, again, as with Compass and I think the vast majority of the FSS programs in the country, we have to start with where the client is and what the client wants. So this client centered approach is very important.

But if we have a participant who doesn't speak English, we would help them to get English language training. If the person has not finished high school or a GED, we would encourage them to go to GED classes, or, again, if they are embarrassed in a class, to work with one of our volunteer tutors. It could be an intern, federal work study student, or a volunteer tutor who is just simply a volunteer from the community whom we have recruited. And those are really nice relationships, too, by the way.

So the GED is very important. We do have people who do not have the mental ability to actually pass the GED but that's OK. We still help them to learn what they can, again, with the tutor or in a class. And we encourage them, again, not to give up, but keep going to the classes, or meeting with the tutor one on one, and learn what they can. The more they can learn, the better off they will be.

Again, our tutors are from the community. They might be federal work study students from the college nearby. We have several colleges, but they come, often, from our community college, Montgomery County Community College. And sometimes they're going into vocational training and they need some help. If it's in the nursing area, for example, we ask one of our graduates in nursing to help with that process of learning for the participant.

Now, the English skills, interestingly, are not just English language skills that are needed by foreigners who are foreign born, but it's also American born students who may not be very good in spelling or grammar with English, and so we work with them as well. We give them a little practice test to see what they need help with, and it could be the spelling or the grammar, or whatever else it might be. But having basic, good, strong English skills is important, of course, for good employment.

And then what we find is that as they go through the educational, vocational training-- whatever it is-- they are getting better and better employment during the program, so their rent increases, and they see that their escrow savings grow. And, of course, that's a huge motivation that makes them believe in themselves, but also helps them not to give up, not to just feel that they can't do it.

The money that we have gotten, that we've requested every year from the county government, has been very, very helpful. We just showed them the success in our early couple of years, and they gave us some money to help with tuition, and books, and uniforms, and child care, and transportation. And they have continued to do that because we continue to show them each year what our successes are, what our graduates have been able to do.

And I have to say that, to me, the FSS program's most important feature is that the parents are modeling for the children the importance of doing well in school, getting an education, becoming economically independent. And so the children, who are seeing their parents succeed, are then motivated and believe in themselves as well. So the adults and the children learn to believe in themselves, the families break out of poverty, and future generations become economically independent.

JEFF: Yeah, that's a really interesting point, Nancy, about the next generation. The program obviously deals primarily with the parents, and the theory of change is that we help families increase their earnings, but there's a lot of good evidence that some of the, really, most powerful impacts come from the next generation. So, thank you. We're going to turn now to Compass for some thoughts on how they help families increase their earnings.

ANN LENTELL: Great, thank you, Jeff. So first and foremost, just in our experience, even before we talk about career pathways, or coaching on career goals, our experience is that just removing the disincentive on rent will have an impact on earnings through participants seeking extra hours at work or accepting raises and promotions. So I think, for us, that really demonstrates the power of FSS.

There are many approaches to talking about increasing earnings. I think I'll spend my time talking about the career pathways approach and Compass' overall philosophy for how we work with clients on increasing earnings. So we really take a look at our local communities. What are the jobs in our communities? Where are the opportunities? What are the industries and areas that are growing? How do we develop and identify strong partnerships around career pathways, through skills training and education, to focus on that pathway?

So at Compass, in order to do that, we focus on a few key components around employment in our coaching session. The first is to take the time to understand a client's work history and just understand where they are. Are you working? How long have you been working? What are your skills? What field have you worked in? Do you have an updated resume?

There's a big difference between someone who is already working and already attached to the workforce, versus someone who isn't. Those are two very different conversations in a coaching appointment. About 80% of our clients are employed at enrollment in FSS, so that's one of the things we certainly take into consideration during those conversations.

Once we've gathered that information, we'll spend time understanding what the client's goals are for their careers. Some may enjoy the field that they're in, but find that they need a higher degree of education to advance. Nancy talked in detail about that just now. Others may just be looking for a raise, or how do I just increase my income? So we'll set and define a concrete goal for each individual around increasing earning.

Next, an important piece, as with all of our goal setting, is that the action items and next steps are very clearly defined. For example, the very first thing you might need to do is eliminate obstacles. So what prevents a client from increasing their income? Do they need to secure childcare? Do they lack access to transportation that's reliable? What other resources do we need to access in order to eliminate those obstacles?

We also utilize resource partners, so we have referral pipelines established at local job training programs, as well as scholarship programs, and access to other resources. So having that established partnership is really important in articulating those steps in a smaller way. And then, lastly, think outside the box. So what else can help increase income?

Some of our clients do babysitting outside of their normal job, or they work out of their homes. Some of our clients have launched catering businesses outside of their own homes. Some clients do Uber driving on the weekends. They may ask another household member to work and to contribute more to the household budget.

So there are many ways to increase income that don't look and feel like the traditional work environment we may have in our mind, so I would encourage you to think about those options with your participants as well. And that helps not just in FSS, but in the financial wellness of the participant overall.

JEFF: Ann, if you can hear me, can you say just a little bit about the role of motivation? I mean, to what extent is this about helping clients become motivated and less fearful about increasing their earnings, versus acquiring new skills or new services?

ANN LENTELL: Yeah, Jeff, that's a great question. I think, in our experience, clients want to have more skills, and a higher paying job, and a promotion. People aspire towards those things, but oftentimes there are obstacles getting in their way. And FSS is a great program that eliminates one of the biggest obstacles or disincentives, which is around rent.

So sometimes we have to retrain that muscle a little bit with our clients. If we say, oh, have you thought about increasing your hours, or asking for a raise? Someone's instinctive reaction might be, well, but my rent will go up. And so we have to have that moment where we say, oh, but, remember, you're in the FSS program, and part of that is you get to save that increase in your rent. So I think it's definitely one piece that we have a lot of conversations at the beginning because clients certainly have learned to think about their opportunities in a different way, and so we have to reframe that opportunity.

JEFF: Great, thank you. I want to note that we are on our fourth topic out of four, and we've structured this webinar so that we will leave lots of time for questions. We have 300 participants on. I would encourage you to be thinking about questions and putting them in the Q&A box so that we can be queuing them up, so we can have a really robust conversation.

Final topic before we turn to the Q&A is focusing FSS and helping participants build assets and financial capability. And we'll turn first to Compass for some thoughts.

ANN LENTELL: Great, thanks, Jeff. So you've recruited your participants, they're in the program, you're coaching them, they're increasing their income, what happens next? They build savings in the FSS . account. So why is that important? So we're going to talk about why the FSS account matters.

Just broadly, kind of from square one, savings and assets are critical towards reaching goals and accessing other walth building vehicles like buying a home, getting an education, starting a small business. So the savings in FSS can be very powerful launchpads towards accessing those vehicles. And for working, poor families, this is especially important to give the families the access and funds they need to get ahead.

So this savings in built in FSS while they are also increasing income at the same time, by definition. So that combination together can lead to some very exciting possibilities. More importantly, savings build hope. Research from Pew Charitable Trusts and others have documented that financial security, in the form of savings and assets, is one of the strongest predictors of a low income family's potential to move up and out of poverty.

So asset ownership increases the overall household savings and investing, it reduces the duration of unemployment, and lowers a family's subjective sense of economic hardship. Asset ownership is also, interestingly, associated with improved educational outcomes for children, for example, including higher high school and college graduation rates. So, for example, if a student knows that they have a college savings account, they're more likely to do better in school. And so that helps families just have a more hopeful and positive orientation towards the future.

The FSS account also has specific advantages for low income families. Because the account is technically held by the housing authority, it is not usually considered part of the household assets for the purpose of accessing other government benefits--for example, social security income or food stamps. So families are able to save in a way that they otherwise wouldn't outside of the FSS account.

And then, lastly, the restricted feature gives it more stickiness, so participants can't draw on the account for spending money for a short term need. Instead, it's restricted toward a long term goal. So, listen, you might have money in a retirement account or a college savings account, and you, really, mentally separate that account towards that long term goal, so does the FSS account really anchor a person's savings towards something bigger and longer term.

So I'll move on to the next slide. At the end of the program participants have access to their savings without restriction, so they can use their savings in whichever way they choose. However, even though it's unrestricted, it's important to know where those dollars are going. So in our process we have a final withdrawal form in which clients indicate where they intend to use their funds.

So it allows us to do several things. First, that allows us to assess impact. We know after all the hard work and coaching that our families have participated in, after all that they have saved, that it's important to understand what happened with all the hard work. So by asking for the intended use we can see where that's going.

And, lastly, if it's a direct expression and demonstration from our clients about what is important to them. So we may think savings for college is where they should be saving the money, but if clients say they're going to use the money towards retirement, then we need to take that into consideration, and understand how we can better tailor our services and resources to fit that need.

So this slide shows what our graduates spend their escrow dollars on. So you can see very clearly the first two categories, home purchase and savings towards a future home purchase, by far are the winners. So home ownership continues to be a very strong goal for our clients. And right behind that is credit improvement so that might mean paying down debt, eliminating some old debts. So that is something that's very important for our clients as well.

So on the next slide I'll talk about other things outside of the FSS account. That's not the only part of an individual's financial health. But at Compass, our coaches do a comprehensive review of a client's financial picture, and we set goals in that context. So one of the first places we focus is on the budget. We get a sense of the client's cash flow in the household. Coaches work with clients to identify ways to increase income, reduce expenses, and manage unexpected costs.

For example, we show how little changes can really add up over time, and we push our clients to think about whether spending in a particular area satisfy the want or a need. Then we focus on building credit and reducing debt. So we share a credit report with our participants at every appointment, and we also teach clients about what goes into a credit score and strategies to increase their score.

This area of our work has evolved quite a bit over the years. We've gone from the basics, like how to settle a collection or using the snowball technique to pay down debt, to now we're doing more advanced areas like understanding the different repayment options for student loans, or finding resources for a client who receives a court notice for a judgment on an old debt. And a lot of times we find that credit is often just as much of an asset as saving.

We also monitor, carefully, our client's access to mainstream financial products and encourage the utilization of regulated banking products. So, for example, we'll do a comprehensive assessment as to whether a client uses payday loans, pawn shops, rent-to-own furniture, check cashing, or other predatory services. And our goal is to help clients access products like checking and savings accounts, retirement accounts, 529 plans, and other similar products.

And then, lastly, we'll ingrain a more automatic savings habit with our families. So just like we do in budgeting, we'll show how little deposits can add up over time. And we'll educate our clients on products that they may not be familiar with, like a 401k, or a 529, or a Coverdell. So we're just trying to break down misunderstanding or perceived barriers around those types of products, and show clients just how easy it is to start saving and building a savings habit. And so with that, I'll turn it back.

JEFF: Thanks, Ann, appreciate the insight. Compass is really one of the leaders in focusing on financial capability as part of the FSS program. But other programs also focus, to some extent, on financial capability and building assets, and Nancy is going to tell us about what she did in Montgomery County.

NANCY SCULL: OK, this is Nancy. So from the beginning with the participants, we talked to them about their budget. We look at their budget with them, look at where the weak areas are, talk about debt and credit issues. And then the budgeting tools are provided. We have various tools that help people to break out their different expenses and so on.

We also have, at HOC, our housing agency, a financial counselor who worked full time. So he would meet with each participant, hopefully in the beginning. We are asking them to do that, encouraging them to start with the financial counselor from to beginning to look more in depth about these different budget and debt issues.

As they meet with the case manager, coach, every month, they would be reviewing budget issues and talking about how things are going, what the issues are still, or whatever. If there are continuing concerns, then we encourage them to go back and work on a monthly basis for like three, four, five months to be working with the financial counselor at the agency. And that has made a tremendous effect on improving their situations.

So then we also, of course, encourage the escrow account reviews, or the accruals, are reviewed by formal statement to the participants each year-- that's required by HUD, and I'm glad that it is because that's important. We do allow interim escrow withdrawals if the participant shows the case manager or coach that the money is needed for that person to achieve a specific goal. They've used all the other resources, and there's nothing else that will help them to pay for the full tuition or a couple of books that the Pell Grant or whatever doesn't cover.

So we do allow them to withdraw from the account while they're still in the program. But, again, we discourage that, but sometimes that happens. Of course, they have to document everything, and then they have to prove, through their receipt afterwards, that they've done that correctly.

We also talk about, and offer, the individual development account as that's how, apparently, Compass started-- that's good. It's also a very helpful way to encourage families and participants to move forward. And I have to say, some of our participants begin FSS with a very good understanding of budgeting, and good credit, and good money management, but many of them, certainly our vast majority from what we have seen, really do need guidance in long term asset building, and just, simply, budgeting and improving their decision making about their funds.

JEFF: Great, thank you, Nancy, and, Sherry. So we're turning now to the Q&A, hopefully you can still hear me. I would urge you, if you have questions to please go ahead and submit them through the Q&A feature.

I do want to just start with a question about the interim disbursements. Nancy talked a little bit about her attitude towards interim disbursements. These are disbursements before a family has graduated, right? So if a family fulfills all of the terms of their contract, they can get access to all of their funds on an unrestricted basis. But while they are in the program, they have the opportunity, as we talked about in the last webinar, to access funds on an interim basis if needed to achieve their goals.

So I'm curious-- starting with Compass-- what's your attitude towards interims? Do you think these are good things because they help people make progress towards their goals? Or is it a problem because they deplete your savings, and you don't have as much at the end to use towards long term goals?

SHERRY RIVA: Great, Jeff, that's a fantastic question. This is Sherry from Compass. So here we are big believers in the power of the interim disbursement opportunity. I mean, this is one of the reasons when you look at the FSS program, which is really the largest asset building program in the country for low income families, it provides a unique account, which really doesn't exist in any other anti-poverty program in the country, that allows families to take a withdrawal that can, in fact, then help their family make accelerated progress toward a goal.

So an interim disbursement could be-- we've had a family who needed $400 to take a teacher certification exam. An interim disbursement could be related to credit improvement to accelerate progress towards a home purchase. And I think, in the end, when the interim disbursements are paired with high quality financial coaching, or case management-- whatever term you use at your organization-- are experiences that interim disbursements are not moments where families take withdrawals, and then they end up at the end of the program with no money in the account. The families are protective of those powers and are only using them in really targeted ways. But I don't think the right goal is to get to the end of the road with the biggest amount in the account as possible. It's a strategic and nimble account that can help families move forward in very important ways, and I don't think there is an account or a program like that in the country.

JEFF: Yeah, that's very interesting. Nancy, do you agree or disagree, you have a different perspective?

NANCY SCULL: Well, it sounds like they do allow, sometimes, to allow that interim escrow to occur. I think, again, we definitely discourage it. And even when we give some of our county funds that we have for tuition, and books, and so on, we ask the participant to pay some portion of that. Together with the coach and case manager, they figure out, OK, well, your program's going to give me $500 for my last three books because the Pell Grant didn't cover that, I can pay $50. So we do have them be accountable and make a commitment, as well, to some sort of investment on their own.

So I think that it really is a question from the case manager, coach, to decide if this has been an active participant who is doing everything he or she can do, and doing well, and following through-- that's a great candidate. If they show us that they really do need to withdraw some money-- we don't allow them to take out a lot of money-- and we do talk about this is going to deplete your amount in the end, and we want you to be careful of that and protective, so I think it's a similar approach.

JEFF: Yeah, I actually hear some differences in nuance right around whether this is something to be discouraged or something to be supported. And I just want to emphasize for people out there that you all, in running your program, have discretion to decide what's the right way to approach this, and you want to make that a really informed decision.

But there are certainly strategic uses of escrow on an interim basis that can make a difference for people. But there are some programs that really want to discourage it so as to help people build up longer term savings. Sherry, did you want to add anything again on that, or should we move on to another topic?

SHERRY RIVA: Well, just one quick comment because I probably didn't mention this is that the disbursements, though, are paired with really clear guidelines around eligible uses for disbursement. You cannot do interim disbursements without that kind of clarity. So, for us, the allowable disbursements fall around education and training, credit improvement, small business development, home ownership.

And even on a credit improvement withdrawal, similar to Nancy, the client actually has to buy in and make progress first before they're eligible for disbursement to improve their credit. So I think that piece is very important. The guidelines for the family-- it's important to lay that out, so it's clear what they use of those funds-- you know, what they can be used for.

NANCY SCULL: I'd like to add something to that, this is Nancy.

JEFF: Please.

NANCY SCULL: OK, we do not allow interim withdrawals for credit improvement. I feel strongly that our folks need to be working on their credit issues, their budgeting issues, throughout the program, and they have to be responsible, in our opinion, to address those issues. And we do not want to bail them out so that is something we do not agree with.

JEFF: Well, see, there are different ways to do this. We have two really excellent programs here, and they have somewhat different perspectives. A couple of quick technical questions have come up about the escrow. So one person asked, "What happens if you pull interim funds, but then do not graduate from the FSS program? Do you have to pay that back?"

NANCY SCULL: No, you do not-- this is Nancy-- it does not require that that be paid back.

JEFF: OK, and what happens if somebody graduates from FSS-- well, let's put it this way. What happens if someone does not pay their rent on time? Are you allowed to take the money from their escrow or to withhold their escrow until they've paid their rent?

NANCY SCULL: You cannot withhold their escrow. Depending on how long the delay is-- different FSS programs have different approaches-- you cannot really be accruing escrow on an increased rent amount if you're not paying it. But then when you do pay it, then it's OK.

JEFF: But can someone graduate and get their funds if they're behind on their rent?

NANCY SCULL: Any debt that is owed to the agency, or to a landlord, must be subtracted from the total escrow accrued at time of graduation, so they do not get that. But, yes, they can graduate and get the balance.

JEFF: OK, Danielle or Carissa, do you have a different perspective? Or Sherry, or Ann?

DANIELLE GARCIA: Yeah, hi everyone, this is Danielle. I agree with the response in that regard. I do want to follow up, however, on the question regarding interim withdrawals and the tenant keeping that balance. So what we'll do is, only because multifamily structure and the way we're funding escrow is very differently from public housing. So we will put that in a Q&A toward the end of the webinar and get a firm answer for you.

JEFF: OK. So let's shift, if we could, back to earnings. I've had a couple of questions about residents who have physical disabilities. My understanding is you're obviously not allowed to discriminate against a resident based on their disability status, that would be unlawful. And so someone who has a disability, they might be getting social security benefits, disability benefits, but they enroll in FSS.

I mean, how do you deal with that? To what extent are asset and earnings cliffs a barrier to increased work debt? What about families who aren't actually able to physically work? What do you do? Maybe start with Compass, see if you have a perspective on this, and then go to Nancy.

SHERRY RIVA: Yeah, sure, so this is Sherry from Compass. So you know that to graduate from FSS, three things have to be true-- no one in the household can be receiving TANA benefits, the head of household has to be working, and the FSS participant has to have made progress toward goals as outlined in their individual training and services plan. So all the FSS program requires is suitable employment, and we take that very seriously. It's not full time employment, it's not even that you have to have been working for a certain amount of time, or be making a certain amount of money.

So for residents with disabilities, as long as that resident is interested in work, pursuing work, the FSS program is a good opportunity for someone with a disability. What we find in working with residents with disabilities is they are, understandably and very defensively, concerned about how increasing earnings will impact their receipt of other benefits that are an important input into their household economy. And so for the work we do it's the same financial coaching approach. We're looking at a family's income, and including cash benefits, not cash benefits, earnings to really paint a picture for what the household needs.

And in the conversation of a coaching interaction, that resident is deciding, I think I can work up to this limit in order to be able to both work, which is something I want to do, and maintain these benefits. Or make the calculation, whether work could reliably replace some kind of disability income, which is not traditionally what we see. It's more families balancing work with the receipt of benefits.

The other piece, for us, has been a financial coaching model, even if we have residents with disabilities who cannot work, who don't plan to work. The experience of taking financial aid education and even from financial coaching. So we'll have families who won't sign an FSS contract but are interested in learning more about how to manage their budgets, how to think about their credit, how to pursue some basic savings, and so we always welcome residents to participate in financial education in a one time financial coaching session, even if they choose not to sign a contract and enroll in the program.

JEFF: OK, great. Nancy, any thoughts about that?

NANCY SCULL: Oh, I think that covered it. But in the orientation time we let people know that if they are able to work, and that it would not harm them in any way to obtain and maintain any kind of employment-- part time or whatever-- then they should not enroll in the program because we do require employment. And we do require the last 12 months of their participation in the program that they be working during those last 12 months.

JEFF: So a kind of related question here-- it's expressed generally, so I assume it relates both to people with disabilities but also other people, how do you-- maybe start with Sherry-- how do you handle the fiscal cliff where people lose benefits as their earned income increases? To what extent do you see this as a problem, and how do you address it with residents?

SHERRY RIVA: Yes, so great question. I mean, I think this one is at the center of the FSS model. In fact, for folks on the call who are working with families, you know the experiences. You're working more, you pay more rent, you lose other benefits, and these unintended consequence of our housing and welfare systems where we really keep people trapped. It is so hard to keep making progress. The desire to get ahead is not matched with the opportunity to do so.

And so the cliff effect is real, and the way we manage that in the context of a coaching model for the FSS program, as I referred on an earlier question, is really helping a family understand how their household economy is put together. So what are they receiving in cash benefits, non-cash, and earnings? In our early data analysis here, our families, their earnings on average was about $22,000 to $23,000, and they were receiving a similar amount in cash and non-cash benefits. So $45,000-- half in earnings, half in benefits.

And it was really helpful for a family to understand what would have to be replaced in order to-- what would have to be replaced in income, in order to replace those benefits. But the power, though, of the FSS model and this account is that it is the only opportunity families have to save, as Ann referred in her remarks, in a way that doesn't jeopardize other benefits that have asset limits to them.

So the FSS program really is, in effect, a partial solution to the cliff effect. We've had families graduate in our FSS program with escrow accounts that can be five figure, $20,000 to $25,000. It looks like in Nancy's program they average at $11,000, ours are around $9,000. So that's a powerful account that can be used to mitigate the cliff effect when it comes.

At the end of the day, we can't solve all the macro pieces that, in the introspection of the program that create that cliff effect, but I think doing the coaching, and the planning, and budgeting in preparation for it, and then having capital that can allow you to mitigate its effect, are two pieces that are powerful in a financial coaching model paired with the FSS program.

PRESENTER: One question that came up that I think is a good, general question that maybe the folks at HUD can take on is, what is suitable employment?

DANIELLE GARCIA: Hi there, this is Danielle. So I just want to clarify, because I'm seeing some of the questions come in. So the Multifamily FSS notice was recently published, 2016-08, and so we're building off FSS, brand new in Multifamily, which have been existing for several years in Public and Indian Housing. So a lot of discussions that were here really apply to both programs.

In just in saying that, in our Multifamily FSS notice, we have defined suitable employment to mean it's the determination of suitable employment shall be made by the owner based on skills, education, job training of the individual, designed the head of household and based on available job opportunities. And, for us, that definition is on page seven of our housing notice, 16-08, and for Public Housing, y'all have, I believe, regulations that would define suitable employment, which is probably very similar to our definition.

PRESENTER: Great, thank you, Danielle. There's also a similar question that you may want to tackle is, what is the definition of family? And is a common law couple considered a family? Does a family need to include children?

DANIELLE GARCIA: Great question. So for a multifamily, the household head does not define the family make up of a particular unit. So whatever members are identified on the lease, and on the 559, what constitute as the family.

PRESENTER: Great, thank you.

JEFF: I should say that I probably introduced the term family, and it's really a mistake. It's really HUD speak for household, so any household who's participating is eligible in [INAUDIBLE].

PRESENTER: OK, we've got a few questions about graduating or completing the FSS program, and what it means to complete the FSS program. And one of the questions is, if an FSS participant has successfully transitioned to home ownership, even though they haven't completed all of their goals, are they still considered a successful graduate of the program? Sherry, maybe do you want to take that question first?

SHERRY RIVA: Sure, we were actually just looking at that question as well. So in the end, the definition of graduation is a pretty straightforward one, which are the three things I mentioned-- head of household employed, no one in the household on TANA, and progress toward goals. So if you have a graduate transition to ownership, but still have-- I mean, I think it's an unlikely scenario, but just to be technical about it, if someone transitions to home ownership but they still have a household member on welfare, or the head of household is not working-- technically that wouldn't meet the definition of graduation and being able to get the escrow account dollars.

There is another automatic grounds for graduation that applies on the public housing side that, I believe, does not-- Jeff, I've looked to you on this-- which is when 30% of your income exceeds your contract rent. That's another ground for automatic graduation but, again, I think the mechanics of that's a little different on the multifamily side.

DANIELLE GARCIA: This is Danielle. Yes, that's correct. For multifamily we want the household members to obviously fulfill their goals within their contract with the owner. If for some reason that does not happen and they move on to home ownership, for us, the main two requirements we're looking at is that the head of household has maintained suitable employment, and the family, the entire family, is off welfare assistance.

If one of those two are still happening, and it's going to prevent the family from graduating. In our notice, and we did follow public housing's-- I believe there's a notice out, and maybe someone else can chime in with that notice number. But in our FSS notice, there is a note where an owner can submit a waiver to the HUD office for a good cause. So if there's a scenario where the family is really trying to push forward in being self-sufficient, obviously they're going into home ownership, the owner does have an ability to submit that waiver.

NANCY SCULL: This is Nancy, could I add a comment? We have had some folks who are in there but doing quite well, and in their last year or two before they are purchasing a home, they expect to purchase within a year or two. And we talk to them about a goal that they might have had and that they may want to change, you can change your goals in this program.

And it's not just in order to make them eligible to graduate and get their money, it's really also because the goal needs to change. And so we have had a couple of situations like that where we have actually helped them to change a goal, and then be able to get those funds, and to be considered a graduate, which the last of which is more important, in a way.

PRESENTER: OK, Jeff, are you--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JEFF: Can you hear me?

PRESENTER: Yes.

JEFF: Yeah, well I just wanted to emphasize-- well, two things. One is the importance of this idea of being flexible and allowing our participants to make adjustments as they go. That was really a theme of what we learned in reaching out and talking with FSS coordinators.

But the other thing is the question really is, I'm interested in hearing more about what you do, how your work differs depending on whether somebody you're working with is employed versus whether someone is unemployed? What do you do with employed residents? What do you do with unemployed residents? Maybe start with Nancy.

NANCY SCULL: Well, if someone is employed, it depends on what the employment is. Is it what they chose for their goal? Are they already there working in their field? Or maybe they're in their field, and they would still want to move up and get more education or training? Maybe they're working in a job that is not a career based kind of field, maybe they're doing housecleaning or something like that. And we still would be helping them to achieve other goals and, perhaps, different employment, again, if it's not appropriate for their long term goal.

And then if they're unemployed, then we start with the basics. Help them to look into job opportunities and, again, realize whatever career goal they want long term. So help them to research various ways to find out what that long term goal is going to be. And that, of course, goes on the ITSP part of the contract.

But then we help with writing their resume, looking at their resume, doing a cover letter. Cover letters are terrible when we see them from our folks, generally, they just don't know how to do it, and how to write a cover letter speaking to the aspects of the job that they're applying for. So that's usually a big project to do with the participant.

And then practice interviewing skills. And, again, continue to search together to know what to be looking for and what's realistic. Maybe they'll be looking for a lesser job, a beginning kind of job in their field, but then we know that they'll be moving up. So it just depends on where they are in that process, I think.

SHERRY RIVA: And this is Sherry from Compass. A lot of what Nancy just shared resonates with our approach. I would just add one other piece here, which is I think there's a difference between folks who are suddenly unemployed, meaning they just got laid off or lost a job. Chronically unemployed, which is a different set of issues and understanding the barriers to employment.

Underemployed, which I wanted to clarify when we talked about our employment rates earlier, that about 80% of our residents at intake are attached to the labor market. That includes folks who are working only part time, and often very part time in lower wage jobs. So I think underemployment comes with its own set of questions and coaching. And then, of course, those who are in full time employment but looking more for career development. So I would slice the work based on those four categories, and it looks a little bit different depending on where people fall.

PRESENTER: Great, Sherry, thank you. So we've only got a few minutes left, and we want to make sure that HUD has a few minutes at the end to say what they want to say, but I just want to ask one more question, to both of you, and I think you talked about some of that already. But a question came in, and I think it's a good, final question, what are some of the top barriers to self-sufficiency that you see among your FSS families? And maybe, Nancy, do you want to start?

NANCY SCULL: Health, mental health, children's issues, and academically, or socially, or health wise, mental health wise, things like that. And, I mean, that's basically what I think of. I do want to just throw in something. I know it's not responsive to your question, but I want to assure the owners who are here listening that this does not take a lot of time.

When we recruit volunteer mentors who serve as case managers, which we have done in our program for many, many years, here in Montgomery County, Maryland, we ask them to give four hours a month. So don't think that this is-- that's basically to work with a particular family, and we often use college students who need some practicing with families, and you can use them as well.

There are lots of ways that you can get help from a nonprofit in your area. Perhaps some funding, again, from your county government, or other sources, grant proposals, and so on you can do. But don't feel that this is overwhelming, please, it really is doable. And four hours a month, generally, is what it takes.

PRESENTER: Great, Nancy, thank you. And, Sherry, do you have any final thoughts you would like to share with the group?

SHERRY RIVA: Just really briefly on the self-sufficiency question, I mean, I think our response to that question would really depend on how one defines self-sufficiency. And so, for example, if self-sufficiency means independence from housing assistance, or independence, more broadly, from benefit support-- about two thirds of our families come in saying they want to transition out of section 8.

If that's how we're defining self-sufficiency, then there are barriers, at least in New England, that has to do with the affordability issue around housing. Making an exit, even for families who are doing as well as they do in our program, is a very, very hard thing to do in most communities in New England. And I'm not saying that's the definition everyone's talking about, but if that's part of the definition, depending upon the region of the country you're in, affordability can be an issue.

Like Nancy, we definitely see other barriers that make it hard for people-- the cost of childcare. And I do think the career pathway piece is really trying to get folks the education and training they need to keep making progress, is an important piece as well.

PRESENTER: Great, thank you Sherry.

JEFF: Just to clarify-- yeah, just want to make sure it's really clear to everybody, you don't have to leave subsidized housing in order to graduate from the program. Sherry was talking about some individuals may want to do that, and if that's their goal, then helping them think about how to do that makes sense, but it's not a requirement of the program.

PRESENTER: Well, great. OK, we're just about to wrap up. Danielle, do you have any final words?

DANIELLE GARCIA: Yes, and I just want to say thank you to everyone that spoke today, Nancy Scull, and the folks over at Compass Working Capital, Ann Lentell, and Sherry Riva. I know it's a lot of information to try to cram in an hour and a half, but hopefully these webinars are helpful to the owners out there who are interested in participating. We are going to be having our third session of this training series on October 26th from 1:00 to 2:30 Eastern Standard Time.

That training session will be HUD staff doing it, and we'll be going over all of the technical aspects within the notice and program compliance. But we first wanted you to hear from an owner's perspective during webinar one and two, to get a feel of the struggles and the successes that they have making the programs work. So with that, I want to thank everyone for their time in spending with us, and we hope to see you, or electronically at least, on October 26th, thanks.

PRESENTER: All right, thank you, Danielle. Thank you, everyone.