

Supporting our families one step at a time

by Colleen Wolfe, BGCA FSS Project Coordinator

The Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program is an innovative three-year program for families residing in subsidized housing, who have incomes below the BC Core Need Income threshold.

Families have joined the program with a desire to learn how to make sustainable lifestyle choices. Phase two began in September 2005 and will continue until August 2008. The goal of the program is to work with 100 families towards increasing self-sufficiency. This is defined in three areas: employment, education and finances. Through the combined efforts of participants and staff, goals are identified and participants work to achieve these goals through a graduated action plan.

Currently, 80 percent of participants are single mothers, and roughly 50 percent are employed in some capacity or another.

Each year the program offers nine community building meetings, of which five are financial capacity building workshops. These workshops are designed to further the participant's financial literacy as well as connections to community resources both in and outside the program.

The FSS program is running at full capacity and is actively engaged in the community. At each step of the way, we are involved in seeking and developing community resources that will further the goals of the program. To date, many community organizations and individuals have offered their support to the families in this program.

Theresa, shown at right with her four-year-old son, is a member of the FSS program. The 32-year-old mother is on her way to a better life after starting her own welding business, and is now hoping to save enough money to purchase a home in the new Docksider development.



Photo: courtesy of the Times Colonist

Maureen is also a member in phase two of the program. "As soon as I heard about the second program a year and a half ago, I signed up immediately. I wasn't earning enough to support my three children and myself, never mind having to pay off student loans, lawyers and credit cards. I was feeling desperate.

"Then came FSS workers Linda and Trudy. There are no words to express my gratitude toward these two ladies. Linda always helps me formulate a plan. You don't feel so helpless when you have steps to take, one at a time, to get you out of the emotional abyss. And before I knew it, Trudy was telling me we had leftovers, and asking what I wanted to do with them. I still can't believe it. Trudy is also my official scary letter opener. I save all my scary letters for her to deal with.

"I feel like I am on my way now. There is hope for the future. I have a plan with clear step-by-step instructions. Thank you FSS."