

Self-sufficiency program expanding in Dot, Mattapan: \$500,000 grant from Boston Foundation

By **Staff**

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The state's largest regional provider of rental housing voucher assistance is receiving a \$500,000 grant from the Boston Foundation to expand an economic self-sufficiency program into three neighborhoods along the Fairmount commuter line, including Dorchester, Mattapan, and Roxbury.

The Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (MBHP) will join up with neighborhood organizations to get families in those areas who receive Section 8 rental assistance to participate in the program. The three areas were chosen because U.S. Census data show they are among the neighborhoods that need stabilization services the most. According to MBHP, 1,731 families in the three neighborhoods are likely eligible, but only five percent currently participate.

MBHP is seeking to enroll 100 new participants in the first year and another 50 participants in each following year for four years.

The program, dubbed the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program, is aimed at getting low-income families to increase assets and decrease need for them to participate in public assistance. Families work with an MBHP adviser, who helps them develop a five-year plan.

About 206 families are currently enrolled in the program, and between July 2009 and June 2010, the program had 15 graduates. During participation in the program, the average family's income increases by \$22,615, due to money being placed into an escrow account that becomes available once the family graduates from the program. According to MBHP, the escrow fund is usually used for college degrees or debt payments, as well as home purchases.

MBHP is also expected to open a satellite office in the neighborhoods.

"We are thrilled to be able to take the FSS program, which has changed the lives of so many families, to a whole new level," MBHP executive director Chris Norris said in a statement. "Collaborating with neighborhood-based organizations will provide an unparalleled network of support to the Fairmount Corridor's FSS program participants. We are grateful to the Boston Foundation for its generosity and for sharing our vision for this initiative."

— REPORTER STAFF

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