

# Family Supportive Housing Program

## Annual Report: State Fiscal Year 2018



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## Program Summary

The Family Supportive Housing (FSH) Program provides intensive case management and service coordination to homeless families with children. The program's goal is to reduce the incidence and duration of homelessness through supports for families as they transition to and sustain permanent housing over time. Service coordination and case management focus on the root causes of a family's homelessness; promote resiliency for parents and their children; and help households build financial capability. FSH staff take a holistic, two-generation approach using non-judgmental, positive, and trauma-informed communication and engagement in their support of families. The FSH program advances the key issues that have been identified in the Vermont Agency of Human Services strategic plan including strengthening and supporting families with complex needs, increasing housing stability and reinforcing accountability.

The Office of Economic Opportunity administers funding which supports Family Supportive Housing at seven community-based providers who employed 13 FSH Service Coordinators in SFY 2018. Service coordinators provided customized home-based case management; financial empowerment coaching; life skills support and referrals; tenant education; parent and child resiliency support; and support of addiction recovery. FSH Service Coordinators align and coordinate these services with existing Agency of Human Services programs and initiatives. FSH Service Coordinators support enrolled families for a duration of time that is appropriate for each family having the flexibility to exit families and/or continue necessary support as appropriate.

Safe, stable, affordable housing is key to family stability. Family Supportive Housing providers form partnerships with local affordable housing providers and private landlords to help participant families' access housing. Housing partners that work with the Family Supportive Housing program report increased confidence in renting to families that may not otherwise qualify for housing. Supportive services help families to be good tenants and neighbors, as well as build other life skills.

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*"Often, clients have had bad experiences with organizations such as banks and housing authorities and are fearful of those interactions. Working with FSH Service Coordinators, clients feel supported in approaching organizations that they have not had a great history with. FSH Service Coordinators work with clients and offer tools and support in beginning new relationships or repairing damaged relationships."*

*-FSH service coordinator in Barre*

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Families are eligible for Family Supportive Housing with the following criteria:

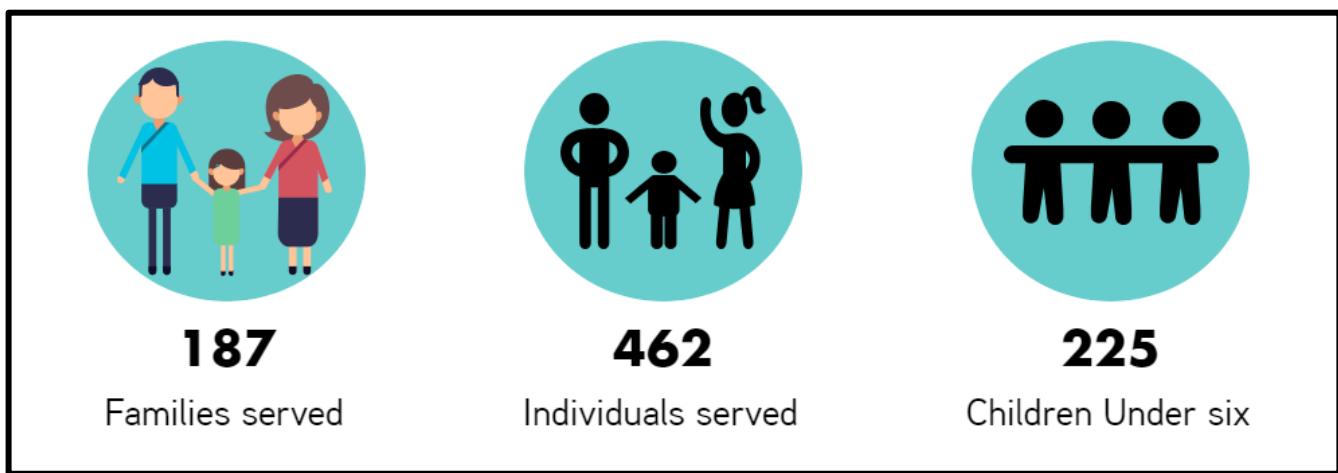
1. Families with minor children (under 18),
2. Families who are homeless according to the [AHS/HUD definition of homelessness](#), and
3. The parent(s) must want to participate in the program, agree to engage with services offered, set goals, and actively work towards them.

Prioritization is given to families meeting one or more of the following criteria:

1. Families that have had multiple episodes of homelessness.
2. Families that are open for services (or have an active case) with the Family Services Division of DCF.
3. Families with at least one child under the age of six.

Each criterion is weighted equally, and families meeting multiple criteria are prioritized above families meeting only one.

Each Service Coordinator maintains a caseload of 12 to 15 families. In SFY 2018, the Family Supportive Housing program served a total of 187 families which included 462 individuals, of which 225 were children under the age of 6; 30% (57) had an open case with DCF at enrollment.

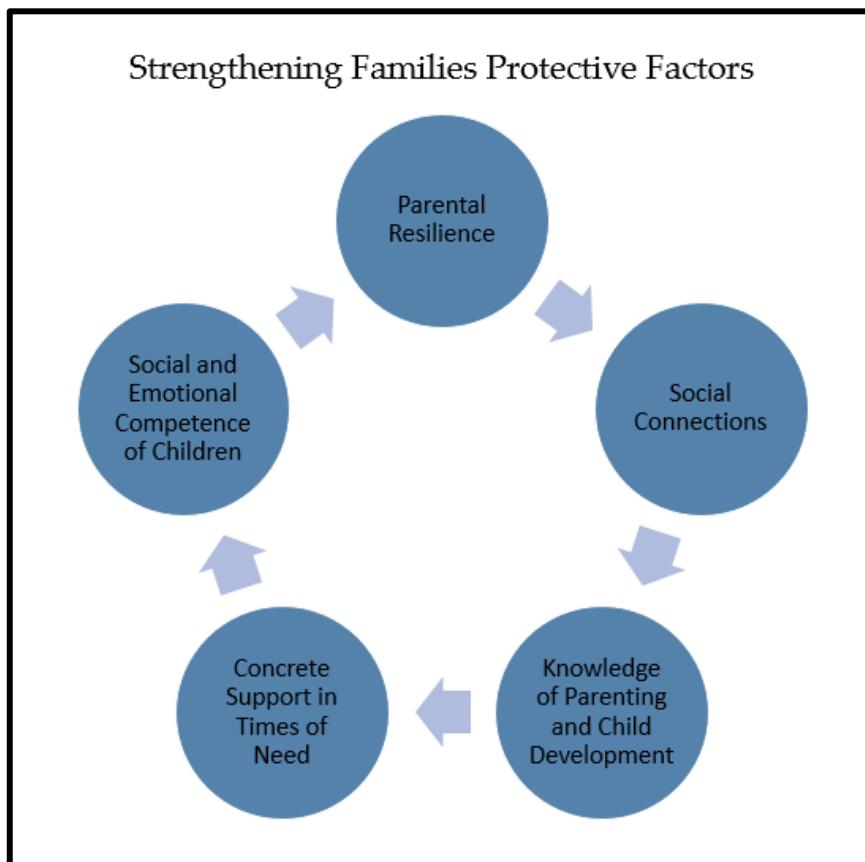


In SFY 2018, Family Supportive Housing served seven Agency of Human Services districts through the following providers:

- Winston Prouty Center in Brattleboro
- Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS) & Howard Center in Burlington
- Homeless Prevention Center in Rutland
- Upper Valley Haven in Hartford

- Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA) in St. Johnsbury
- Family Center of Washington County in Barre
- Sunrise Family Resource Center in Bennington

Since SFY 2017, OEO has utilized the Strengthening Families framework from the Center for the Study of Social Policy and the guidance from the Corporation for Supportive Housing to provide tools and resources to FSH Service Coordinators for their work with families. The Strengthening Families framework helps families and communities build protective factors that help mitigate or eliminate risk and promotive factors that enhance families' well-being.



## SFY 2018 Highlights

As of June 30, 2018, seven Family Supportive Housing programs served a total of 187 families, an increase of 27% compared to the same period last year. FSH Service Coordinators partnered with local housing providers, Family Services Division, Economic Services Division (Reach Up), Department of Mental Health and substance abuse treatment and recovery providers, and others to coordinate services to meet the families' needs. Each family worked with a single FSH Service Coordinator, whose role was to customize case management and coordinate services based on the family's individualized needs and goals.

In SFY 2018, families enrolled in the FSH program experienced homelessness for nearly 6.5 months (213 days) prior to being housed (in a leased unit) through the FSH program.

In SFY 2018, Family Supportive Housing served 187 families with 183 adults and 273 children. At the end of SFY 2018, 131 families were active and enrolled in FSH. Ninety-four of these families (72%) were stably housed. Twenty-one families exited the program in SFY 2018. Among families exiting, 90% (19) moved on successfully. Of families enrolled in FSH at the end of SFY 2018, 46% (60) were involved with the Family Services Division and only 7% (9) lost custody of a child during enrollment in FSH.

*Among Families exiting the program, 90% moved on successfully.*

In SFY 2018, OEO finalized a Family Supportive Housing provider manual and identified mandated training for all new service coordinators. Core training is consistent with the goal to provide non-judgmental, positive and trauma-informed support to families, and includes the following:

- Mandated Reporter
- Domestic Violence
- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Motivational Interviewing 101
- Culturally Responsive Practice
- Secondary Traumatic Stress

Since SFY 2014, the FSH program has utilized the Community of Practice model to support providers and improve practice. In SFY 2018, the FSH Community of Practice developed a Statement of Purpose to help keep program staff and providers accountable to the desired goals of the peer learning community. Goals include fostering collaboration, learning, and evidence-informed practice.

Over the course of SFY 2018, FSH Service Coordinators participated in an extensive multi-part Motivational Interviewing training series. The training helped service coordinators practice the use of Motivational Interviewing techniques that are applicable to their work. The 9-month training series provided an opportunity for FSH Service Coordinators to review challenging cases and develop new approaches to complex problems through the lens of Motivational Interviewing. Additional training topics provided at Community of Practice meetings included Help Me Grow, Coordinated Entry, Family Unification Program, and frequent review of the Strengthening Families framework.

FSH Service Coordinators continued to integrate financial capabilities into supportive services provided to families in SFY 2018. For the 3rd year, the Champlain Valley of Economic Opportunity's Financial Futures program (CVOEO) provided training and technical assistance to the Family Supportive Housing staff. This year's topics included earned income tax credit, tax return and filing resources, debt triage, VermontABLE accounts, and the Strengthening Working Families Initiative. Following a learning needs and resources assessment in SFY 2018, CVOEO helped FSH develop tools such as My Money Story, a tool to help FSH Service Coordinators discuss families' relationship with money, and a customized interactive FSH Monthly Budget tool that offers visuals to help families' set financial goals. These tools help support families' engagement in improving their personal financial management.

The FSH program expanded its focus on strengthening partnerships with Family Services, Child Development Division, Children's Integrated Services and Mental Health in SFY 2018. The FSH Advisory Group met to review FSH results, to help identify opportunities to deepen partnerships between Family Supportive Housing providers and other key sectors, and to collaborate on the expansion of the Family Supportive Housing Program to ensure that all regions have base level capacity to provide Supportive Housing for homeless families at greatest need. The Advisory Group consists of representatives from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont State Housing Authority, DCF-Family Services Division, DCF-Economic Services Division, DCF-Children's Integrated Services, Department of Mental Health and Department of Health.

In SFY 2018, OEO staff collaborated with Family Services Division, Economic Services Division and the Vermont State Housing Authority to implement a new Family Unification Program process to improve access of Family Unification Program vouchers to families enrolled in the FSH program. To date, 22 families have been referred for Family Unification Program vouchers by FSH Service Coordinators and four families were issued Family Unification Program vouchers.

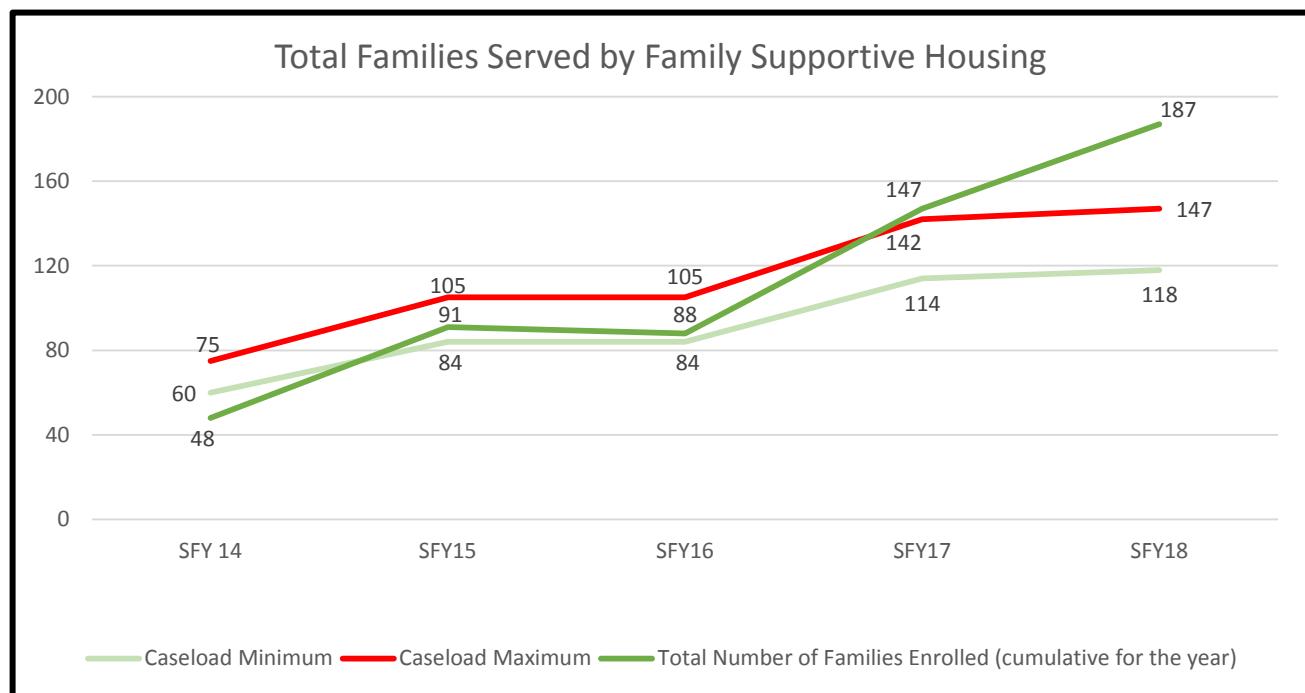
In SFY 2018, FSH implemented HMIS reporting statewide to streamline reporting and fully integrate FSH into the Coordinated Entry process. Using Coordinated Entry process will ensure that all families in a community who are experiencing homelessness are rapidly screened and prioritized for enrollment in FSH programs when there are openings.

## Results

In addition to family demographics and number of families served, the FSH program measures performance in several key areas including:

- Housing stability, including program exits
- Family engagement
- Community connections
- Reach Up status
- Employment, job training and education
- Financial empowerment
- Child safety
- Adult and child health and wellness

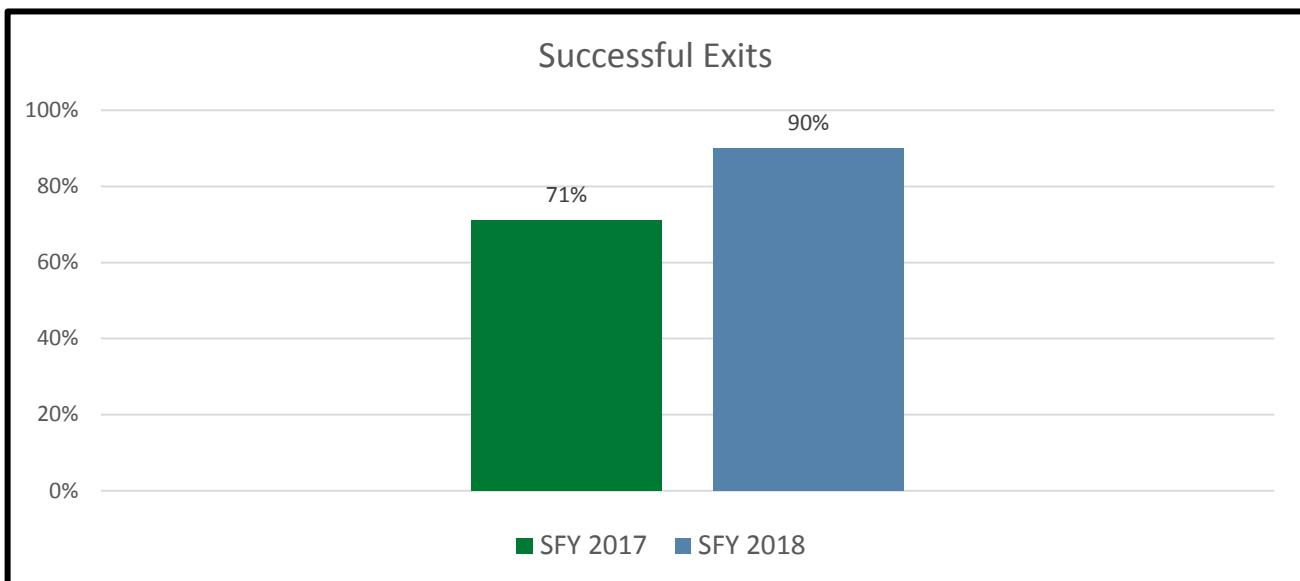
Since SFY 2014 (inception), the Family Supportive Housing program has nearly quadrupled in size - serving 187 families in SFY 2018. The FSH program operated in seven AHS districts serving 183 adults and 279 children. 225 children enrolled were under six at the time of enrollment with FSH.



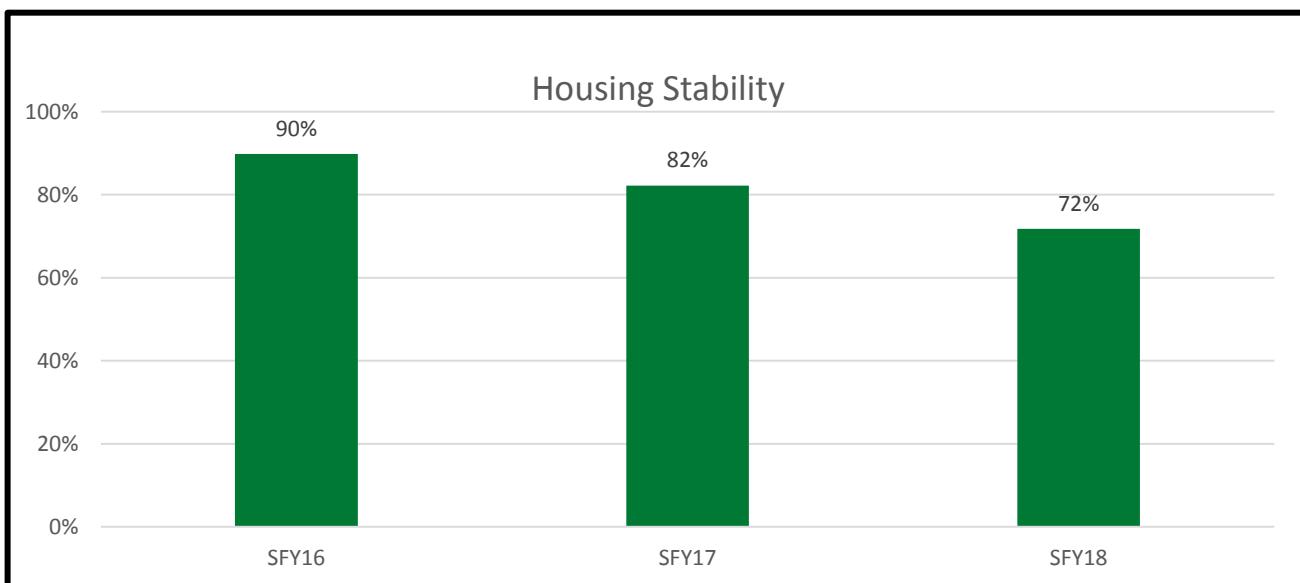
The caseload of a full-time Family Supportive Housing Service Coordinator is 12 – 15 families or 13.1 per full time equivalent service coordinator, on average. Families stay in the program long-term by design but do eventually exit when they are stably housed and connected with needed supports such as counseling, Head Start, home health visits, *etc.* The length of time a family is enrolled in the FSH program depends on their individual needs. Those with more complex needs participate longer and families whose needs are addressed in a shorter amount of time, exit the program sooner.

## Housing Stability

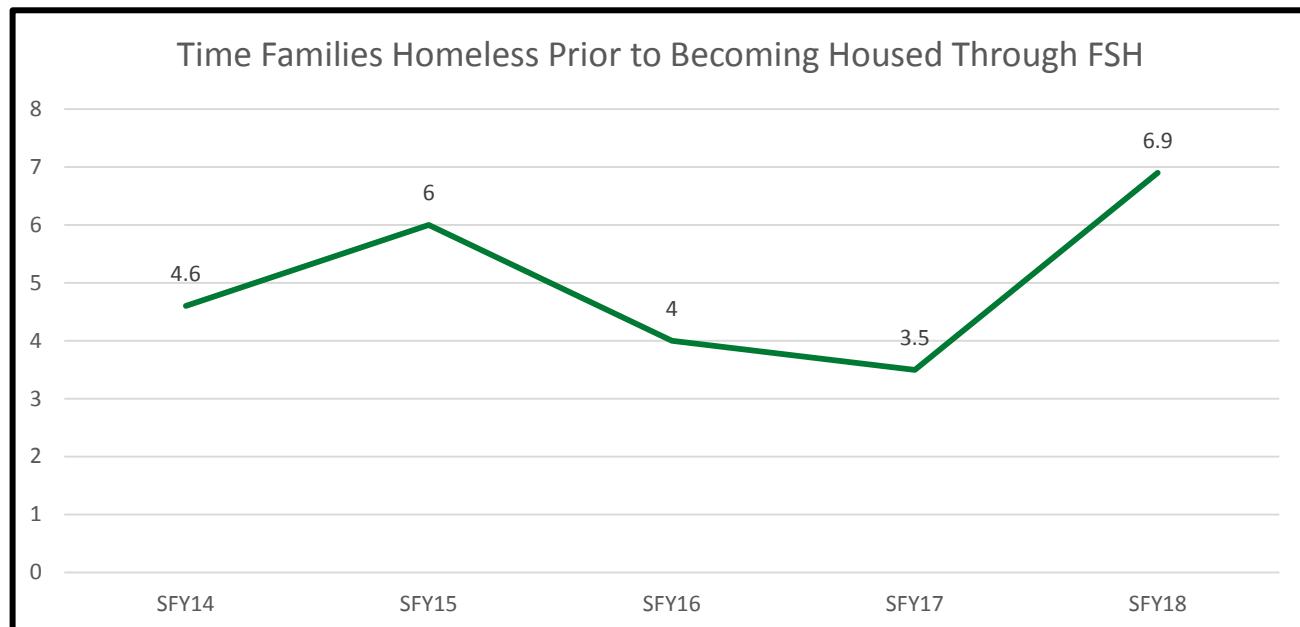
In SFY 2018, 11% (21) of families exited the program. Of those who left the program, 90% (19) moved on successfully and were stably housed, compared to 71% (12) in SFY 2017, an increase of nearly 27%.



At the end of SFY 2018, 72% (94) of active FSH families were stably housed (i.e., families who are in housing and not at risk of losing their housing). This represents a decrease compared to previous years. In SFY 2018, several FSH providers experienced changes in key staff positions. Families enrolled in the FSH program can often feel hesitant to engage in services; staffing turnover may impact family engagement, and within FSH family engagement is closely linked to housing stability.

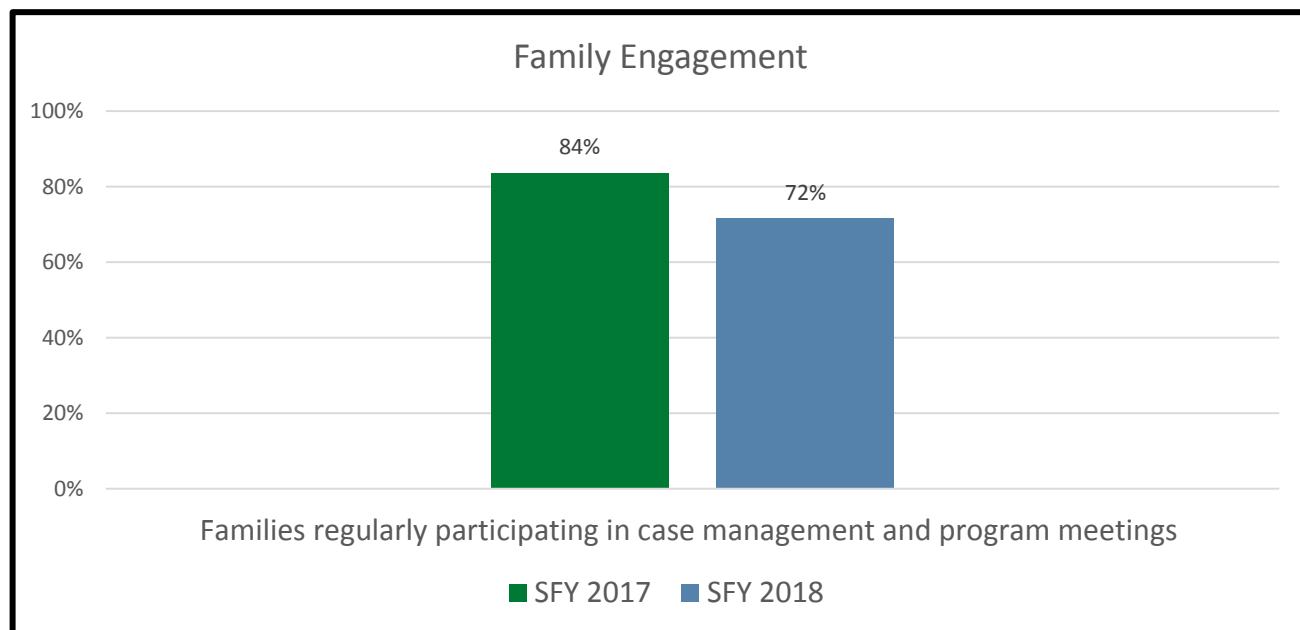


The median time families were homeless prior to being housed through the FSH program increased from 3.5 months in SFY 2017 to nearly 7 months in SFY 2018. FSH is both enrolling families with a longer history of homelessness and providers also remain challenged to quickly re-house families in affordable, safe housing.



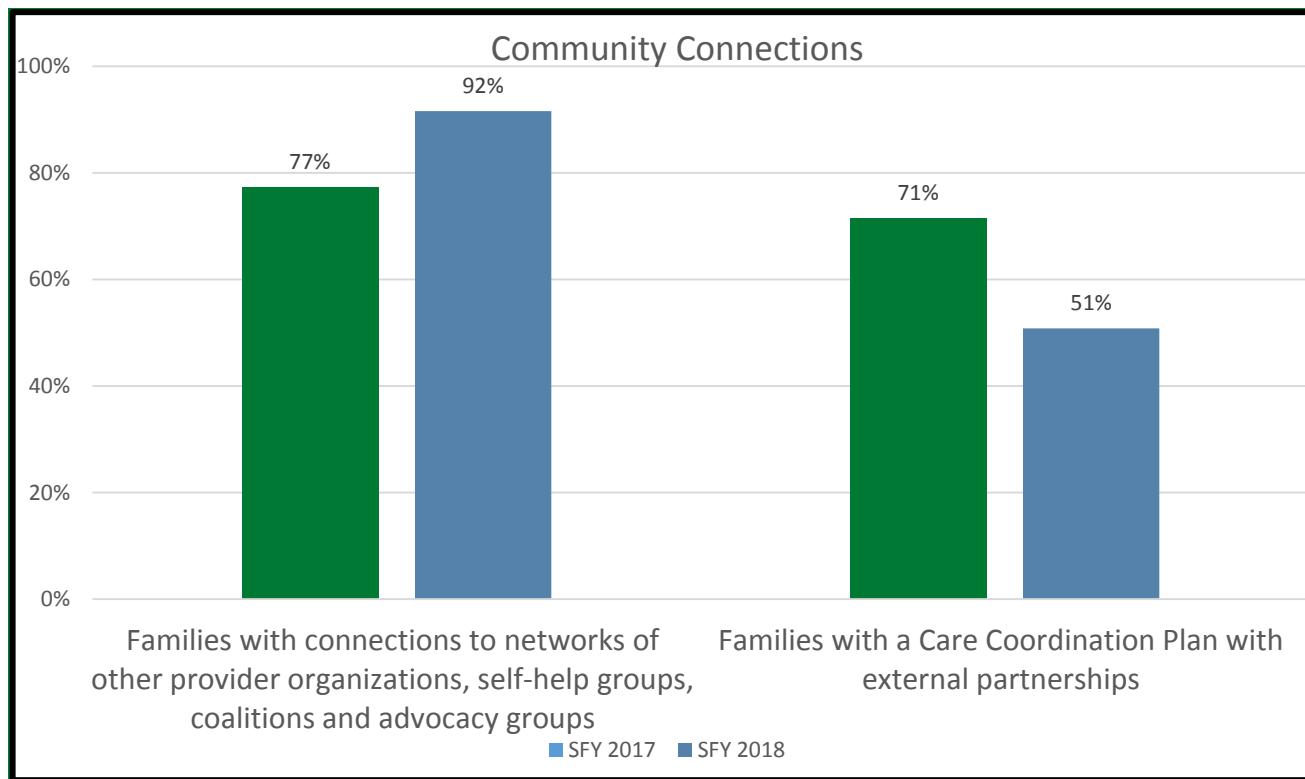
## Family Engagement

In SFY 2018, 72% (134) families maintained regular program participation and engagement with Service Coordinators. When reviewing results by site and over time, it is clear that family engagement and housing stability are interconnected in the FSH program.



## Community Connections

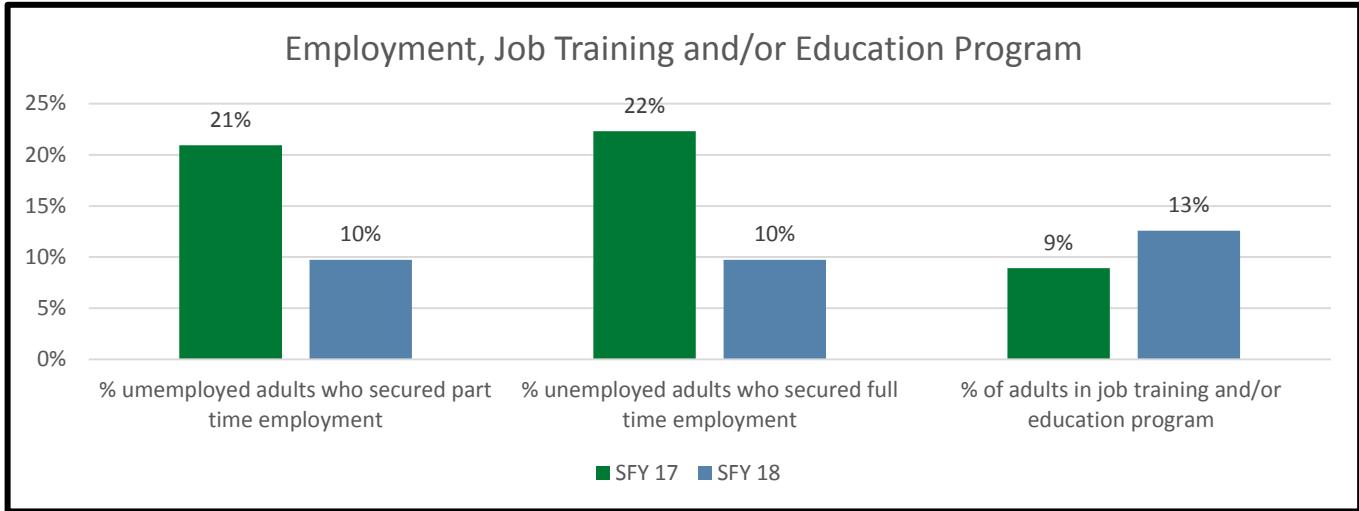
The Family Supportive Housing program is committed to helping families build and strengthen a natural network of support with family and community members to support family resilience long-term. In SFY 2018, 92% (120) families had connections to other provider organizations, self-help groups, coalitions, and advocacy groups, and 11% (15) families were involved in neighborhood community development efforts. OEO is working on increasing training and technical assistance for FSH Providers to better support the community connections of participating families.



## Reach Up, Employment, Job Training and Education

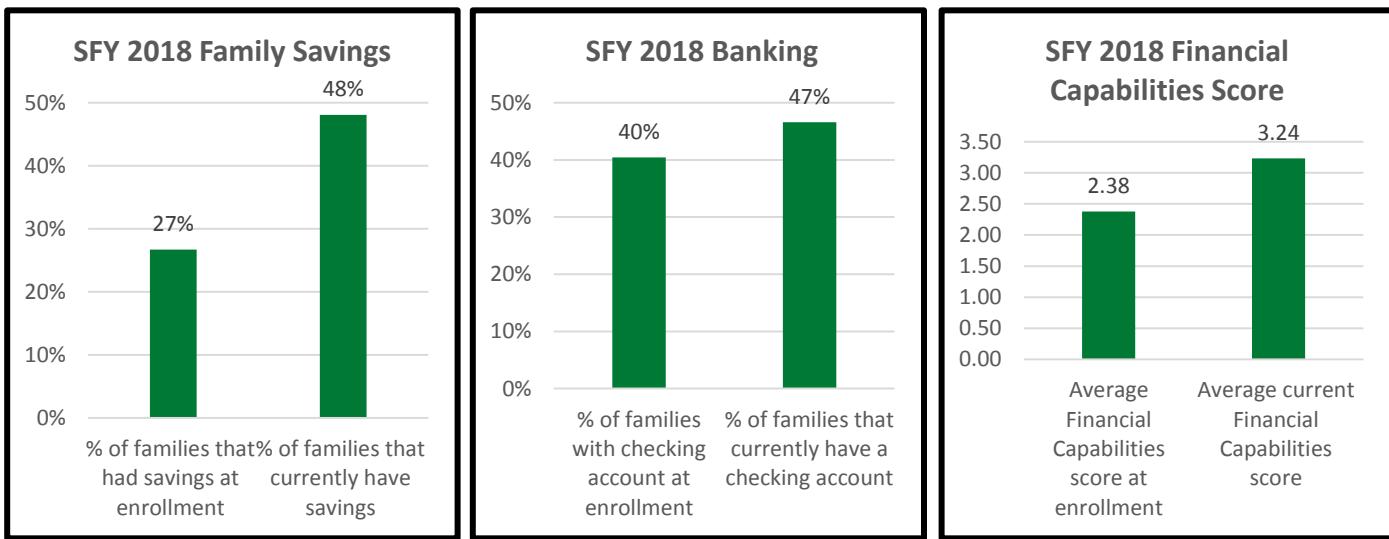
At enrollment with FSH in SFY 2018, 52% (97) families were enrolled in Reach Up. At the end of SFY 2018, 43% (56) families were enrolled in Reach Up and in good standing. FSH Service Coordinators continue to help families to connect to Reach Up, if needed, and engage successfully in the program. 30% (54) of adults who were enrolled in FSH, entered with other sources of income such as Social Security, Social Security Disability Benefits or Veterans Benefits.

In SFY 2018, 195 adults entered the program unemployed. At the end of SFY 2018, 10% (31) of these adults secured part-time employment and 10% (19) adults secured full-time employment. In addition, 13% (23) adults enrolled in FSH were engaged in job training and/or education program. OEO has identified employment as an area that needs additional support and focus in the coming fiscal program year.



## Financial Empowerment

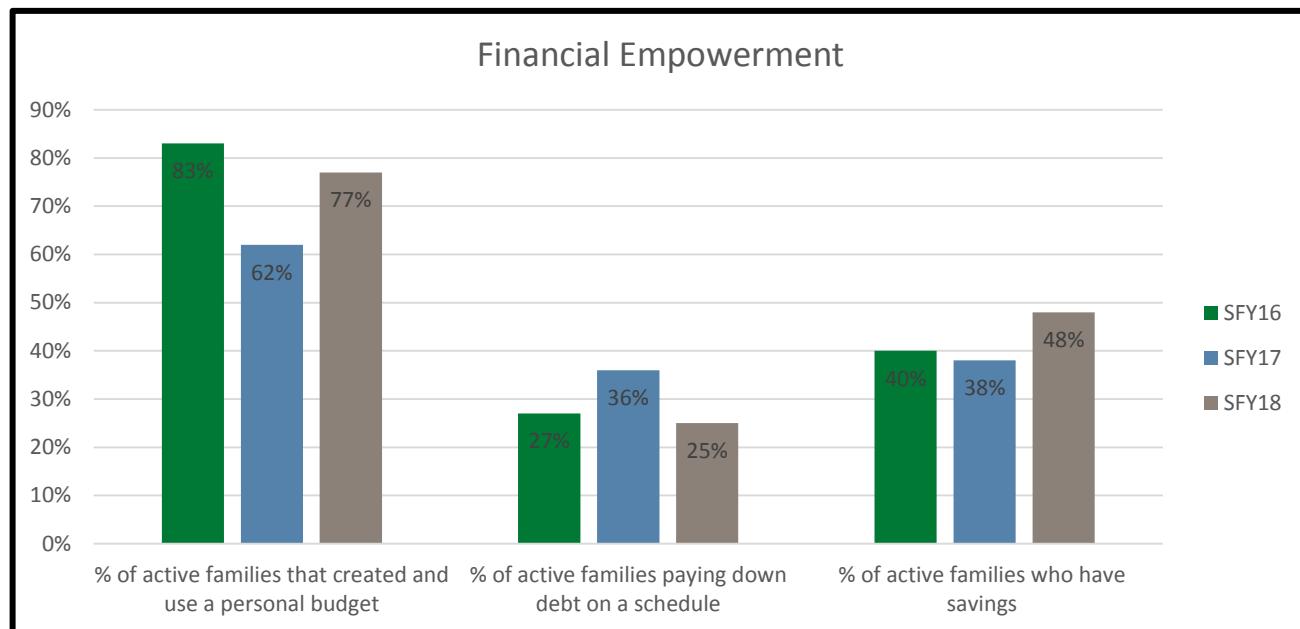
FSH Service Coordinators continued to work with clients on financial empowerment in SFY 2018. To ensure families maximize their employment earnings and sustain the progress they have made toward stability while in FSH, the service coordinators focus on building their capacity to budget, save and improve damaged credit.



*"I worked with a client who had bed bugs twice and incurred a big debt to the housing authority. This client had a significant distrust of banks. I encouraged her to enroll in the Family Savings Account (FSA) program and had to accompany her to the bank a few times. Once she enrolled, she began making regular contributions. I worked with her on a specific goal and she began paying off the debt to the housing authority which allowed her to get placed on the Section 8 waitlist.*

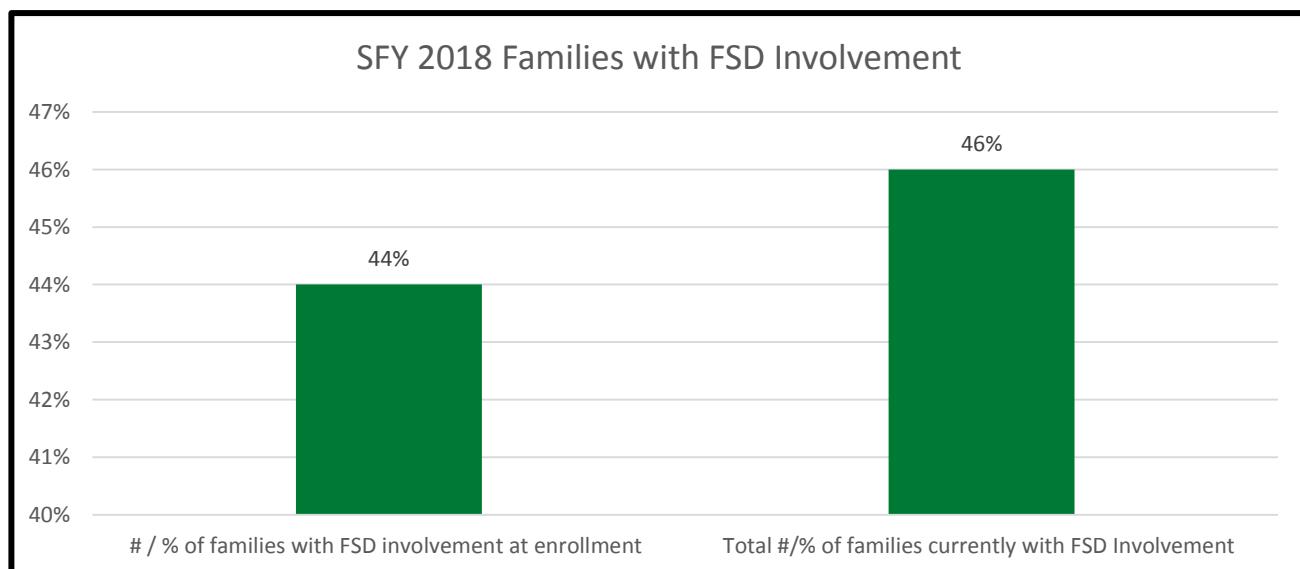
*-FSH Service Coordinator in Burlington*

In 2018, 77% (101) families created and used a personal budget, 25% (33) families began paying down debt on a schedule. At enrollment in SFY 2018, only 40% had a checking account and only 27% of families had savings. However, at the end of SFY 2018, 47% (61) of families had a checking account and 48% (63) managed to start saving a portion of their income.

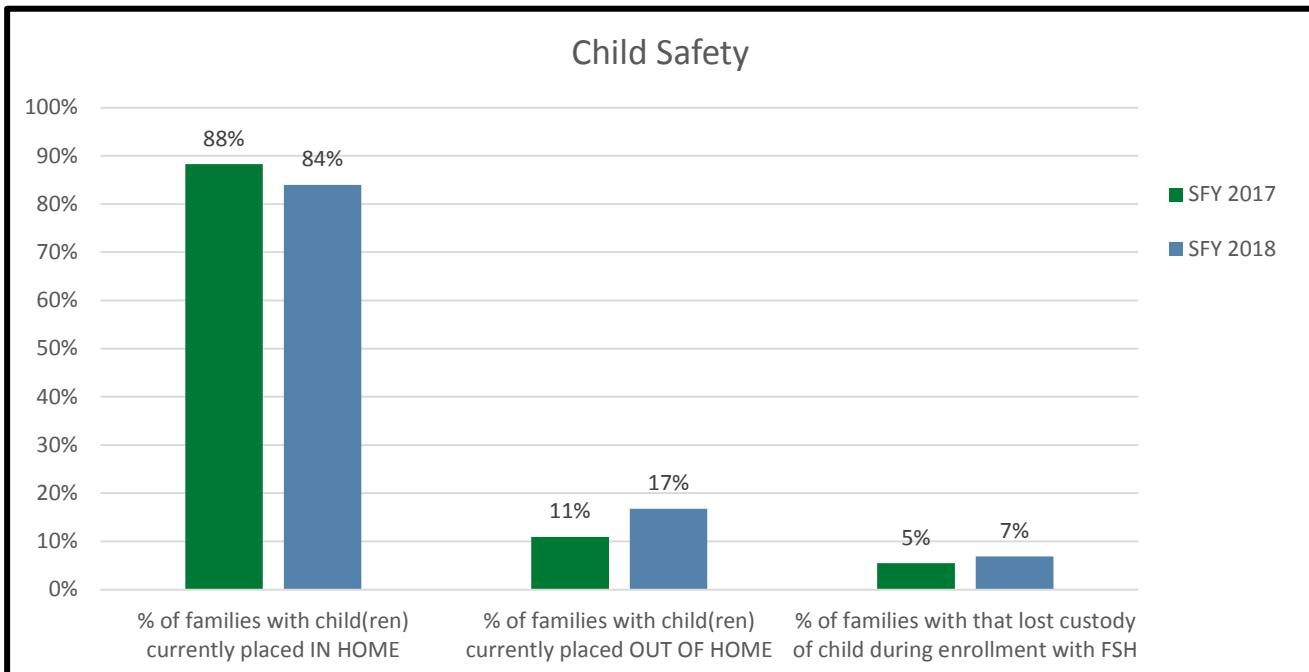


## Child Safety

Family Supportive Housing continues to intentionally focus on ways that supported housing can support family reunification and child safety. At the end of SFY 2018, 46% (60) families were involved with DCF's Family Services Division; 84% (110) families had children placed in home and 17% (22) families had children placed out of the home. 7% (9) FSH families lost custody of a child during enrollment.

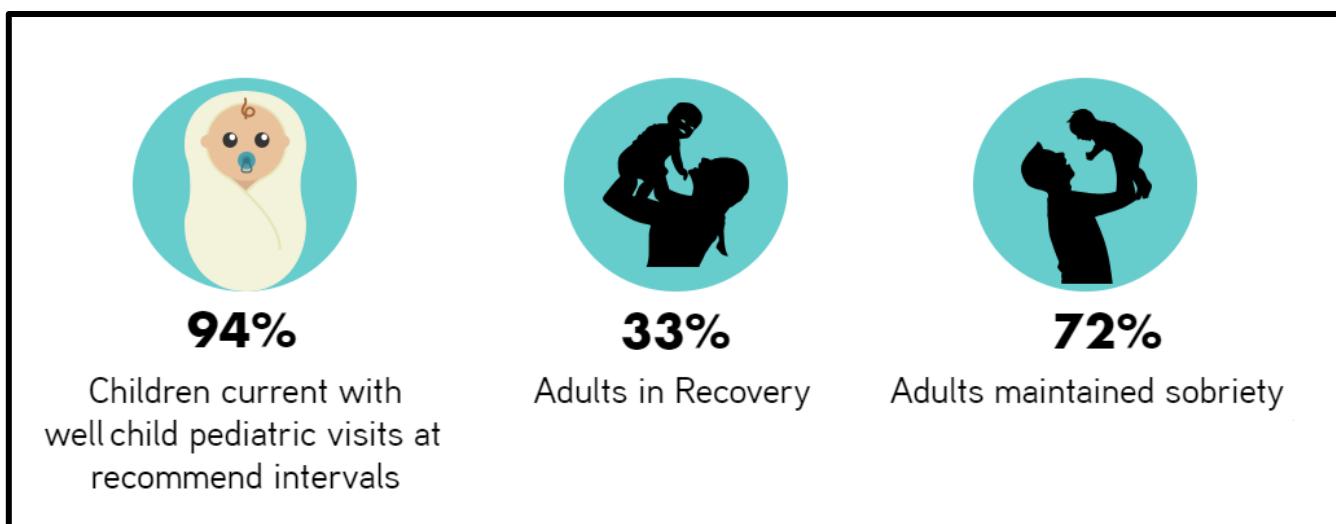


FSH is committed to strengthening the relationship between Family Supportive Housing providers and DCF's Family Services Division and has identified various cross-training opportunities to help improve this partnership.



## Adult and Child Health and Wellness

Child health and development can be compromised when kids grow up in the uncertainty and stress of homelessness. As such, one of the primary goals of the FSH program is to connect children with services that provide practical supports, and interventions that reduce stress and mitigate the negative impact of early childhood trauma.



Participation in the Family Supportive Housing program increased the likelihood of children receiving primary care healthcare. In SFY 2018, at enrollment, 89% (243) of children were up to date with well child pediatric visits at recommended intervals. At the end of SFY 2018, the percentage of children who were up to date with well child pediatric visits increased to 94% (257).

Statewide, about 9% of Vermonters age 12 and older are suffering from substance use disorders, many are adults with children. Connecting and following through with treatment can be nearly impossible for families living in unstable and unsafe conditions. However, in SFY 2018, (40) adults in families enrolled in FSH reported substance use at enrollment and at the end of SFY 2018, 27% (49) adults were receiving substance use disorder treatment services and 72% (132) reported that they maintained sobriety. In SFY 2018, 33% (60) adults enrolled in the FSH program reported that they were in recovery and 41% (75) were receiving mental health services.

## Acknowledgments

On behalf of the Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity, we thank the Family Supportive Housing Service Coordinators who work every day to improve the lives of families in the Family Supportive Program and would like to acknowledge the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity for providing FSH Service Coordinators technical assistance as it relates to financial empowerment.