

Freedom from federal assistance

By [Matthew Ward](#)



Mike Smith is encouraging public housing and Housing Choice Voucher recipients in Suffolk to find out about a federal program to develop self-sufficiency during an open house the Suffolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority — where Smith is the resident services coordinator — will hold this month.

Archived Story

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The Suffolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority plans an open house this month to spread the word about a program designed to move folks off federal assistance.

Families On The Move, as the authority is calling the event, is planned for Feb. 18 at the SRHA offices, 530 E. Pinner St.

“We came up with the title based on the concept of people becoming self-sufficient — moving up economically to better opportunities,” said Mike Smith, the authority’s resident services coordinator.

The event, Smith said, will seek to increase enrollment in Suffolk in the federal government's Family Self-Sufficiency Program, which Smith described as two-pronged.

"We offer support services to assist people overcome any barriers to self-sufficiency," he said.

The authority's two case managers, who share 80 enrolled families, help clients with things like finding work, getting on top of any debt, repairing bad credit and keeping a roof over their heads, according to Smith.

Then, if income increases during the duration of the five-year program, the extra money goes into an escrow account. At the end, Smith said, that money can be used to achieve goals like buying a house or a car.

The program was enacted in 1990 after its proposal by the first Bush administration. It's available to families in public housing and those receiving Section 8 vouchers.

Smith said enrolling more families in Suffolk would have the additional benefit of freeing up public housing and housing vouchers for others. "It's a win-win," he said.

In Suffolk, about 15 families have graduated from the program in the past decade, Smith said, and 14 of those have bought homes.

On the job and job-training assistance, "It's almost like having a career coach," he said.

The authority will host sessions during the open house, at 10 a.m. and then again at 6 p.m.

Smith encouraged those interested to call 925-6507 or email msmith@suffolkrha.org and reserve a seat. "If they don't register, they can still show up," he said.

Smith said the current two caseworkers in Suffolk could handle another 20 to 25 families.

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