Alexander City's HCV FSS Coordinator, Charlotte Mattox gives HCV FSS Graduate, Quwanza Brooks a check for escrow with the amount of $8,082.13.

With a check for $8,082.13 in hand, Quawanza Brooks is a successful graduate of the Alexander City Housing Authority Family Self Sufficiency Program.

"FSS has helped me in so many ways to improve my life and my kids' lives," Brooks said.

As a participant in the Section 8 FSS program, Brooks had to set and achieve a number of personal goals; her goals included finding full time employment, attending workshops and classes, creating and maintaining a budget and attending college, among others.

"I'm trying to help myself manage my money more," Brooks said. "You have to learn how to manage your money, especially with kids."

Participants in the FSS program, once they find full-time employment, pay a higher rent for their housing. The housing authority then sets that money aside for them. Brooks received almost $11,000 total back from her work in the FSS program.

"I think she's come a long way," said Patsy Prater, who signed Brooks up for the program. "She has worked hard."

Brooks said she wants to use the money to continue her education at Central Alabama Community College – she is hoping to earn her degree in early childhood education.

She said FSS also taught her time and stress management.

"I learned that it's OK to take 30 minutes to yourself after you get off work to yourself and just think about what you need to do," Brooks said. "(It's OK to) take a good book and sit down and read it ... If mom's door is closed, that means it's me-time. (My kids) know not to disturb mom while it's me-time."

Another coordinator, Jessica Sanford, praised Brooks' dedication in the FSS program. "She's come to just about every workshop we've offered," Sanford said. "Her attendance has been very faithful."

Brooks said she would encourage others to enroll in FSS. "It's life lessons that you learn," Brooks said. "You can just better your life."