Asset-Building Strategies for Families in Social Housing: Options for Social Housing Providers in BC

by

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Abstract

Numerous studies conclude that social housing provides a stable platform for economically disadvantaged families to rebuild their lives. Many families in social housing, while adequately housed, are unable to escape from poverty. Asset-building strategies may be one method to address this policy problem. This study examines two approaches that can assist families in social housing to increase their assets and become financially self-sufficient. The Family Self-Sufficiency program helps families accumulate savings as their rents increase due to increased earned income. Individual Development Accounts encourage low-income families to save money and build assets through matching funds. A case study of the GOALS program delivered by Home Forward in Portland, Oregon, examines both approaches and concludes they are effective and complementary. Implementing both programs in British Columbia would benefit families with low incomes. Interviews with social housing providers in BC found some support for these initiatives.

Keywords: social housing; asset-building; family self-sufficiency; poverty

I dedicate this to my father, Eli Kraus, who has made all the good things in my life possible.

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List of Acronyms

AFI	Assets for Independence
FSS	Family Self-Sufficiency
GOALS	Greater Opportunities to Advance, Learn and Succeed
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
IDA	Individual Development Account
P.I.	Personal Interview
SEDI	Social and Enterprise Development Innovations
SHSC	Social Housing Services Corporation

Executive Summary

Numerous studies conclude that social housing provides a stable platform for economically disadvantaged families to rebuild their lives. While social housing may be key in assisting families to achieve stability, housing alone does not guarantee economic independence, self-sufficiency, or an escape from poverty.

This study explores two asset-building approaches that social housing providers in BC could use to help their tenants move out of poverty and become more self-sufficient. The two approaches are: the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program developed in the United States and a program of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). These approaches are used widely in the United States and are supported by government funding.

The FSS program is the only asset-building program specifically targeted to families in public housing. This program helps families accumulate savings as their rents increase due to an increase in their earned income. As participants' rents increase due to higher earnings, they pay the higher rent, and an amount equal to the difference between their increased rent and original rent is deposited into an escrow account. Individuals who successfully complete the FSS program receive their accrued savings at the end of the program.

IDAs are savings accounts that encourage low-income families, including public housing tenants, to save money and build assets through matching funds. Program participants make regular deposits to these accounts and, as an incentive, receive a matching grant or credit - often 3 dollars for every dollar they deposit. At the end of the program, participants must use their savings for a long-term asset, such as their first home, a small business, or post-secondary education.

Research on poverty identifies the importance of assets in helping individuals to address poverty and social exclusion. Proponents of asset-building policies argue that traditional welfare-based approaches, which attempt to address poverty through monthly allowances, promote long-term dependency and undermine self-sufficiency. They believe that while income is necessary for "short-term consumption", assets are necessary for “long-term goals”, and that assets, including human, physical, social, personal and financial, are necessary to produce income.

This study addresses three research questions: (1) What are the advantages and disadvantages of the FSS and IDA programs; (2) Which is more effective in helping families in social housing increase their financial assets, the FSS, IDA or both; and (3) Which approach has the most potential to be implemented by social housing providers in BC?

To address these questions, I conducted a case study of the GOALS program delivered by Home Forward in Portland, Oregon, which provides both the FSS program and IDAs. I also conducted interviews with social housing and agency professionals in British Columbia and other parts of Canada. I analyzed the programs using criteria and measures, including effectiveness, stakeholder acceptability, cost, administrative feasibility, and political feasibility.

The study concludes that both the FSS program and IDAs are effective and complementary. Implementing both in British Columbia would provide the maximum benefit to families with low incomes. This approach would enable families to access both employment support and financial literacy training. Employment support provided in the FSS program may help families increase their incomes and ability to save for their IDAs. The potential to accumulate savings in an IDA may provide an additional incentive to seek employment.

Based on the findings in this study, I recommend that BC Housing, in partnership with BC Government ministries and the BC Non-Profit Housing Association implement a pilot project to test new approaches to deliver the FSS and IDA programs, and that the pilot project be designed to include a complete evaluation to determine program impacts. I also recommend that BC Housing and BC Government ministries work with the BC Asset Building Collaborative to increase asset-building opportunities for low-income families.

This study recognizes that the FSS program and IDAs are only one small part of a range of initiatives necessary to end poverty. Other approaches are needed to promote education, increase jobs that pay a living wage, support families and children, increase work incentives, increase incomes for individuals unable to work, reduce welfare clawbacks, and reduce high marginal effective tax rates for low and middle-income families. Nevertheless, these programs are within the scope of what social housing providers could do to help their tenants, and provide a potential new role for social housing providers in addressing poverty.

1. Introduction

Numerous studies identify the benefits of social housing.[1] These include providing decent and affordable housing for households unable to access the private market; a stable base that enables tenants to participate in the economy and society; a platform for the successful delivery of other social policy initiatives; and a foundation upon which tenants can develop independence and break the cycle of poverty (Carter and Poleychok, 2004; Social Housing Services Corporation, 2009; Saugeres and Hulse, 2010). These studies recognize that housing needs must be satisfied before a person can address other issues in their lives, such as their health, education or employment.

While social housing may be key to success in helping tenants achieve stability, housing alone does not guarantee economic independence, self-sufficiency or an escape from poverty (Johnson and Ruddock, 2000; Social Housing Services Corporation, 2009; Saugeres and Hulse, 2010). Many families in social housing are unable to escape the poverty trap and:

> Instead of acting as a platform upon which people can rebuild their lives, obtain personal wealth and meet higher ambitious goals, social housing threatens to live up to the misconception that it is merely a 'static container' for housing people (Social Housing Services Corporation, 2009, p. 10).

In British Columbia, information provided by BC Housing, the province's public housing agency shows that households in their family units are staying for an average of nearly six years. While about two thirds (62%) of households in BC Housing's family units have lived there for four years or less, 30% have lived there five to 14 years, and

[1] In this study, social housing refers to government-owned public housing, non-profit housing, and non-profit housing co-operatives. Additional information is provided in Appendix A.

another 8.5% have lived there 15 years or more. In addition, nearly 90% of households in BC Housing's family units are poor, using after-tax Low Income Cut Offs. Nearly half (47%) receive income assistance as their principal source of income, while about one third (30%) are employed. The remaining tenants in family units receive income from pensions or other sources (BC Housing, 2011).[2]

This is a public policy issue because poverty has a negative effect on the economy and economic growth. It costs taxpayers money for social programs, public health care, lost productivity, and reduced tax revenue (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006; Iglika Ivanova, 2011). Poverty also contributes to social exclusion by preventing individuals from being able to participate in the mainstream economy and society (Government of Canada, PRI, 2005).

Continued poverty of families in social housing means these families have limited options for securing other housing in the private market. This contributes to long waiting lists for social housing, homelessness, family stress, and increasing demand to build more social housing. Early in 2012, about 4,500 families were on the BC Housing Registry waiting list for social housing units in BC (personal communication, BC Housing, February 6, 2012).

Asset-building strategies may be one way to help families in social housing move out of poverty and become more self-sufficient.[3]

[2] BC Housing owns and operates 3,055 units built under family housing programs. Data was available for 2,844 of these units. As of March 31, 2011, 90% of households in these units had annual incomes below $30,000 and 84% annual incomes below $$25,000. This compares to 2010 after-tax LICOs of $28,430 for a 3-person family in CMAs of 500,000 inhabitants or more (BC Housing, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2011).

[3] Self-sufficient means no longer receiving income assistance or a rent subsidy through a public program.

1.1. Purpose and Scope

This study explores how social housing providers in BC can help families in their units move out of poverty and become more self-sufficient. [4] It investigates two approaches to asset-building that could be used for this purpose. The two approaches are (1) the Family Self-Sufficiency program developed in the United States and (2) a program of Individual Development Accounts.

I selected these two programs because the literature supports asset-building as a strategy to help address poverty, and both programs are designed to help low-income families accumulate savings. Both are used widely in the United States and are supported by government funding. The Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program is the only asset-building program specifically targeted to families in public housing. Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are targeted to low-income households and may also serve public housing tenants.

Other types of asset-building policies and programs are available to promote savings, but they are usually for retirement, education, and home ownership (Government of Canada PRI, 2003). I felt these were less able to meet the needs of families in social housing compared to the FSS and IDA programs.[5]

Poverty reduction strategies generally call for actions to address a range of issues, including affordable housing, education, employment, support for families and children, increasing work incentives, and increasing incomes for individuals unable to work. They also identify a need for government programs to reduce welfare clawbacks and high marginal effective tax rates for low and middle-income working families

[4] Families include two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related by blood, marriage, common law or adoption (Statistics Canada, 2007). Programs would most likely target tenants in social housing family (non-senior) units.

[5] Canadian examples include Tax-Free Savings Accounts, Registered Disability Savings Plans, Registered Retirement Savings Plans, Canada Education Savings Grant Program, the Canada Learning Bond, home ownership, and microcredit enterprises loans. Only the Canada Learning Bond and microcredit enterprise loans are specifically targeted to low-income households (Canadian Social Research Links, 2012).

(Government of Manitoba, 2009; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2006; Klein et al., 2008; Cohen et al., 2008; Richards, 2007). These issues are beyond the scope of this study, although the FSS and IDA programs would support tenants in pursuing education and employment opportunities.

There is consensus among social housing providers in Canada that social housing has a role to play in supporting tenants attempting to improve their lives and reintegrate into mainstream society (Carter and Poleychok, 2004; CHRA, 2009; Social Housing Services Corporation, 2009). Some social housing providers take an active role in promoting opportunities for tenants to improve their employment opportunities and self-sufficiency. Others, however, prefer to maintain a focus on landlord-related duties (Toronto Community Housing 2010; Social Housing Services Corporation, 2009).

The Australian National Affordable Housing Agreement 2009 refers specifically to the need to improve employment rates among public housing tenants.[6] A 2009 speech by the Federal Minister for Housing called on social housing providers to help their tenants access employment and education services so they are not “trapped in disadvantage through living in social housing…” (Saugeres and Hulse, 2010). In the US, there is also support for public housing agencies to promote self-sufficiency as evidenced by continued federal funding for the FSS program. One author reports growing support for a *housing plus* approach to subsidized housing that involves providing “not only the bricks and mortar, but also services” to help families escape poverty and address issues that limit social and economic opportunities. This depends, however, on each organization’s mission and priorities (Bratt, 2008, p. 100).

Canada and BC have only a few examples of the FSS and IDA programs, and most are small-scale initiatives or pilot projects. In Edmonton, the Capital Region Housing Corporation offered a version of the FSS program to its tenants as a three year pilot project that ended in 2007 (Another Way, 2007). In Victoria, the Burnside Gorge Community Association adapted the FSS program to fit within the British Columbian

[6] This provides a framework agreement between all Australian governments.

context and has operated the program as a pilot project in partnership with a few non-profit housing providers since 2002.[7] The program received funding from BC Housing, the Ministry of Social Development, and the private sector (Burnside Gorge Community Association, 2011). It is not clear whether this program will expand to other BC communities.

About a dozen asset-building programs with IDAs are available in BC (BC Asset Building Collaborative). One of these, Next Step, is provided by More Than A Roof Housing Society, a social housing provider in Vancouver. This is the only IDA program in BC provided by a social housing agency for their tenants. Other programs exist but are not targeted to social housing tenants. In Ontario, the Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC), in partnership with Social and Enterprise Development Innovations (SEDI) recently launched a three-year asset-building and financial literacy pilot project using the IDA approach for social housing tenants in Ottawa, North Bay and Windsor.[8]

BC has no province-wide strategy or program designed to promote asset-building among social housing tenants. The BC Government does, however, recognize the benefits of IDAs (referred to as Asset Development Accounts) and does not consider funds in these accounts when determining eligibility for income assistance. A single parent applying for income assistance may have no more than $2,500 in assets, unless these assets are in an approved IDA. Accounts must be established and operated by an external agency, and be designed to encourage individuals with low incomes to save money for undertakings that will lead to or enhance self-sufficiency.

1.2. Research Questions

This study explores the FSS and IDA programs and addresses the following research questions:

[7] See Appendix B for descriptions of the Edmonton and Victoria FSS programs.

[8] Descriptions of the North Island Family Self-Sufficiency, Next Step, and SHSC programs are included in Appendix B.

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the FSS and IDA programs?

2. Which approach to asset-building is more effective in helping families in social housing increase their financial assets – the FSS, IDA or both?

3. Which approach has the most potential to be implemented by social housing providers in BC?

Given that the FSS program is used widely throughout the US, that a version of the FSS program has been piloted in Victoria, and that an IDA pilot has just been launched for social housing providers in Ontario, it is timely to consider whether an FSS and/or IDA program should be available throughout BC for families in social housing.

Section 2 provides an overview of asset-building and the FSS and IDA programs. Section 3 describes the methodology and research design for this study, Section 4 provides a case study of the GOALS program in Portland, Oregon, Section 5 compares the GOALS program with Canadian examples, and Section 6 provides a thematic analysis of interviews with social housing providers in BC. Section 7 provides program options, while Section 8 evaluates the options, and Section 9 provides conclusions and recommendations.

2. Background

This section provides a literature review on asset-building and describes the FSS and IDA programs.

2.1. Asset-Building Initiatives and Poverty Reduction

Asset-building initiatives are designed to help individuals develop their assets. The BC Asset Building Collaborative, a group of practitioners and interested stakeholders committed to advancing asset building in British Columbia, identifies five types of assets (BC Asset Building Collaborative):

- Social assets, including family and community support networks;
- Personal assets, including self-esteem, self-confidence, and emotional well-being;
- Human assets, including skills, knowledge and ability to learn and work;
- Physical assets, including the ability to meet basic needs for food, shelter and transportation; and
- Financial assets, including financial knowledge and access to credit, savings and investments.

Research on poverty identifies the importance of these assets in serving as a “buffer” to help individuals cope with setbacks during their lives and prevent social exclusion (Policy Research Initiative, 2004).

Proponents of asset-building policies argue that traditional welfare-based approaches, which attempt to address poverty through monthly allowances, promote long-term dependency and undermine self-sufficiency (Eko Nomos, 2001). This problem is exacerbated by eligibility requirements for income assistance that exclude applicants on the basis of their assets, and force applicants to deplete their assets before applying for assistance (St. Christopher House, 2003). Critics have noted the unintended consequence of this approach in creating a disincentive for families to engage in activities that could help them transition out of poverty (Bashara et al., 2006, p. 4.)

Proponents of asset building also believe that addressing income needs alone is not sufficient to provide individuals with the financial foundation and future orientation they need to achieve stability in their lives. They believe that while income is necessary for “short-term consumption,” assets are necessary for “long-term goals” (Government of Canada PRI, 2003). They also believe that assets, including human, physical, social and financial, are necessary to produce income (Schreiner and Sherraden, 2007).

A number of positive outcomes have been identified with asset-building for low-income households. These include hope; increased resilience in emergencies; reduced dependence on welfare; greater economic security and household stability; and positive effects on physical health, child well-being, educational attainment, and civic involvement (Bashara et al., 2006; Lerman and McKernan, 2008). On the other hand, concerns have been voiced that people with low incomes have too many immediate needs to save for the future, and that social programs should focus on providing adequate income, decent housing, adequate clothing, and nourishing food (Government of Canada PRI, 2003).

2.2. Family Self-Sufficiency Program

This study examines the FSS program introduced by the US government in 1990 to help residents of public housing and participants in the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program become self-sufficient through education, training, case management, and other supportive services (Planmatics, Inc. and Abt Associates Inc. 2011).[9] The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is administered by local public housing agencies throughout the country. HUD defines self-sufficiency to mean a family no longer receiving a housing

[9] The Section 8 program provides rent subsidies to enable low-income households to rent from qualified private landlords who accept rent assistance vouchers.

subsidy or welfare assistance (HUD Regulations). The program is targeted to families where the head of the household is able to work. It is not targeted to seniors or persons with a disability, although these families may participate if they wish (U.S. Code, 2010).

The FSS program enables families to acquire savings as their rents increase. Most families receiving housing assistance pay 30% of their adjusted income for rent and utilities. As their incomes rise, so do their rents. For FSS participants, as their rents increase due to higher earnings, they pay the higher rent, and an amount equal to the difference between their increased rent and original rent is deposited into an escrow account.[10] Individuals who successfully complete the FSS program receive their accrued FSS escrow funds, plus interest.

Families participating in the FSS program must sign a five-year contract that sets out their rights and responsibilities. The contract requires families to comply with their lease and for the head of the family to seek and maintain suitable employment. To graduate successfully, FSS participants must be employed, have stopped receiving welfare for at least 12 months, and have substantially achieved program goals. Families may graduate in less than five years if they achieve their goals. There are no formal restrictions on how families may use their escrow funds, but many families have used the funds for homeownership, debt reduction, post-secondary education, or to start a new business (Planmatics, Inc. and Abt Associates Inc., 2011, p. 2).

Program participants receive case management services to help them develop a self-sufficiency plan and access community support services. Examples of services include education, employment assistance, counselling, child care, and transportation.

A national evaluation of the FSS program was completed in 2011. This study analyzed data for a group of 181 FSS participants in 14 programs over a period of four years. The evaluation found that after four years of being in the program, nearly one-

[10] If a household's monthly rent is $200, and their income from employment increases such that the rent would be $300, the tenant pays $300 and the difference between $300 and $200 ($100) is deposited in the escrow account.

quarter of participants (24%) had graduated and received their escrow savings. More than one-third (37%) had left the program before graduating and forfeited their escrow, and more than one-third (39%) were still enrolled in the program. The average annual income for FSS graduates increased from $19,902 in their first year to $33,390 when they graduated, representing a 68% increase. The average escrow balance was about $5,300 for program graduates (Planmatics, Inc. and Abt Associates Inc., 2011). The evaluation also found that among participants who graduated, 93% were mostly employed during the evaluation period compared with 60% of participants who had exited the program. This may indicate that participants who were receiving income assistance were less successful in meeting the program's goals compared to participants who were mostly employed.

This study did not include an impact evaluation or use an experimental design to determine the impacts of the FSS program on participants relative to a control group. As a result, it is not possible to determine to what extent the program outcomes were a direct result of the program (Planmatics, Inc. and Abt Associates Inc., 2011, p. 38). [11]

2.3. Individual Development Accounts

Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) are savings accounts that encourage low-income households to save money and build assets by providing matching funds at the end of the savings period (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Nam, Ratcliffe and McKernan, 2008). Programs are usually small-scale and delivered by local community organizations (Government of Canada PRI, 2003).

The idea that matched savings programs could be used to promote asset-building and address poverty was first proposed by Michael Sherraden in the 1990s (Leckie et al., 2010; Nam, Ratcliffe and McKernan, 2008; Schreiner and Sherraden, 2007; Bashara, Cramer and Sherraden, 2006). Since then, governments in the United

[11] An impact evaluation is "an assessment of the impacts on participants that can be attributed to direct participation in a program or intervention" (Blomquist, 2003, p. 2).

States, United Kingdom and Canada have introduced IDA programs to promote savings among low-income families, including income assistance recipients (e.g. Government of Canada PRI, 2003; Banting, 2006; Leckie et al., 2010).

In Canada, the federal government introduced the nine-year *learn*$ave IDA demonstration project in 2000 to encourage low-income Canadians to further their education.[12] More recently, the governments of Manitoba, Quebec, and Ontario have expressed support for asset-building as part of their poverty reduction strategies.[13]

In the US, the first federally-funded IDA program, known as the American Dream Demonstration project, operated from 1997 to 2003 (Nam, Ratcliffe and McKernan, 2008; Schreiner and Sherraden, 2007; Schreiner, Clancy and Sherraden, 2002). This program was followed by Assets for Independence (AFI), which is funded by the federal government and administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Under this program, the federal government provides grants for state and local IDA projects across the country (Abt Associates Inc., 2008).

The AFI program is designed to help low-income families move to greater self-sufficiency by accumulating savings and purchasing long-term assets. Program participants open a savings account and are asked to save a certain amount of money on a regular basis (e.g. monthly) over a three-year period. As an incentive, they receive a matching grant or credit, which can range from $1 to $8 for every dollar they deposit in their account. Participants must use their savings for homeownership, a small business, or post-secondary education to be eligible to receive the matching funds (Abt Associates Inc., 2008).

[12] The Learn$ave program was the largest IDA initiative in Canada. It was targeted to low-income Canadians and operated from 2000-2009 in Halifax, Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Digby, Fredericton, Grey-Bruce, Kitchener-Waterloo, Montreal and Winnipeg.

[13] In 2008, the Province of Manitoba committed funding to Manitoba Saves!, an Individual Development Account matched savings program for low-income individuals and families in partnership with Supporting Employment & Economic Development (SEED) Winnipeg.

Case management support helps clients access services such as credit counselling, child care, transportation, or crisis intervention. The program also provides financial literacy/money management training, and training relating to the specific type of asset the participant intends to purchase, including homeownership training, entrepreneurial assistance, and career counselling for participants planning to pursue post-secondary education (Abt Associates Inc., 2008).

An evaluation of the AFI program completed in 2008 examined the effects of IDAs on AFI participants based on a three-year longitudinal survey of 600 participants who were randomly selected. The study adopted a non-experimental evaluation design to estimate the effects of the program. It examined data from the national sample of AFI participants and from a national sample of AFI-eligible nonparticipants in the general US population – to provide a comparison group. The evaluation found that at the end of three years, participants had accumulated an average of $935 in their savings accounts. In determining whether the asset-and income-related outcomes observed among AFI participants were better than they would have been without the program, the evaluation found that the effects were positive and statistically significant for homeownership, business ownership, and education. Participants were 35% more likely to be homeowners at the end of the third year compared to demographically matched nonparticipants and were 84% more likely to own businesses at the end of the third year than nonparticipants. In addition, the program nearly doubled the likelihood that a participant pursued post-secondary education. The evaluation also found that the program increased slightly the probability of employment for AFI participants relative to nonparticipants, but if found no significant effect on participants' monthly earnings or net worth (Abt Associates Inc., 2008, p. vii).

A process evaluation of this program described how delivery agencies initially struggled to decide if it was more important for IDAs to promote changes in behaviour regarding saving or success in purchasing an asset, and whether the agencies should target households most in need or most savings-ready. The evaluation found that project operators were focusing on "IDA-ready" households "whose incomes, credit histories, and motivation made them good prospects for attaining their savings goals" (Abt Associates Inc., 2008, p. 32). This approach, and the fact that the program is most likely to appeal to individuals most interested in saving for one of the designated purposes, could help explain high success rates with IDA programs.

An evaluation of the Individual Development Account Initiative in Oregon found that among more than 2,000 Oregon residents who opened IDAs between January 2008 and June 2010, 667 exited the program. More than 60% of these 667 individuals had “graduated”, meaning they achieved their savings goal and received matching funds. The remaining participants were still involved in the program. The study also found that graduates were able to “maintain their assets over time and that the program helps participants develop sound financial habits such as using a budget, saving regularly, building emergency funds, and setting new financial goals” (Yatchmenoff and Webb, 2010, p. 1). This study did not include an impact evaluation. Data on program performance came from a web-based management information system that tracked information from all program participants. It also included surveys of successful graduates who received their matching funds and participants who exited the program without receiving these funds.

In Canada, the *learn*$ave national demonstration program provided a match of $3 for every $1 saved by the participants. Participants could save a maximum of $1,500, which meant they could earn up to $4,500 in savings credits. At the end of three years, they could accumulate a total of $6,000 in savings, which they could use for only education, skills training, or starting a small business. Similar to the AFI program, the term of the program was three years, and participants received financial literacy training and other support. Also similar to the AFI program, funds were paid directly to a vendor (e.g. the education institution); not to the participant (Leckie et al., 2010). This is different from IDA programs in BC (described in Appendix B), where matched funds are paid directly to program participants.

An evaluation of the *learn*$ave program found that participants were able to save a mean of $959 per participant over three years (about $320/year). This included amounts saved by income assistance recipients, whose average savings amounted to $535 over the saving period (Leckie et al., 2010, p. 47). Sixty-five percent of participants saved the maximum amount of $1500, while 11% accumulated no savings or very low savings (less than $120) (p. 55). The program increased participation in post-secondary education by over 20% and helped participants with small business start-ups and self-employment (Leckie et al., 2010, p. 104).

In addition to reporting on program outcomes, the *learn*$ave evaluation estimated impacts of the program by comparing outcomes of randomly assigned program and control groups (Leckie et al., 2010, p. 24). The evaluation found that *learn*$ave had several positive impacts on participants. At the end of the program (the 54 month follow-up) *learn*$ave participants were more likely to have financial goals and a household budget compared to the control group. In addition, program participants were continuing to save their money on a regular basis. The evaluation also found that *learn*Save had a significant impact on increased enrolment in a university or college program. It also had a positive impact on self-employment income, increasing it by almost $4,000 or 68% above the mean of $4,506 for the control group (Leckie et al., p. 88). There were no significant impacts on net worth or the level of earnings at the 54 month follow-up. One reason could be that at the end of the program, participants used their accumulated savings for one of the permitted assets (education, skills training or starting a small business), and it could have taken some time for these investments to result in increased earnings and net worth (personal communication, March 23, 2012).

3. Methodology

This section includes an overview of my methodological framework. It also provides an overview of my research and describes the two main components: a case study and semi-structured interviews with social housing and agency professionals.

3.1. Methodological Framework

In this study, I used a pragmatic approach to guide my research. According to this approach, I developed a methodological framework I believed would work best to address my research questions (Robson, 2002).

As a pragmatist, I acknowledge my own role in this research. I recognize that my personal history and values played a role in influencing my choice of topic, research questions, approach and methods. Although I tried to be objective, I acknowledge that who I am influenced the way I conducted the research, my research findings and my conclusions. “A pragmatic approach reminds us that our values and our politics are always a part of who we are and how we act” (Morgan, 2007, p.70).

3.2. Research Overview

The first part of my research is a case study of the Greater Opportunities to Advance, Learn and Succeed (GOALS) program delivered by Home Forward, a public housing agency in Portland, Oregon. The GOALS program is an asset-building initiative that incorporates both the FSS and IDA approaches.

The second part of my research involved interviews with social housing and agency professionals in BC, other parts of Canada, and the US. Table 1 shows the types of organizations that participated in this study and the number of interviews I conducted with personnel from each organization.

Table 1. Types of organizations that participated in interviews

Type of Organization	# interviews
British Columbia	
Social housing providers[14]	12
Housing sector and community organizations	4
Canada – outside British Columbia	
Community organizations	2
United States	
Social housing providers[15]	3
Total number of interviews	**21**

Both components of my research involved semi-structured interviews. I used semi-structured interviews because they provide a planned and flexible approach to facilitate a conversation, and are used widely in qualitative research (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Robson, 2002).[16]

I prepared a list of topics for each interview. The topics for the case study were different from the topics with other interview participants. A copy of the guides is in Appendix C. While I often addressed topics in the same order for each interview, I did not always ask the questions in the same way. In addition, I added and omitted questions as appropriate (Robson, 2002). This approach provided flexibility to pursue issues as they arose. As a result, however, I did not cover exactly the same topics with every participant.

[14] I interviewed employees from 10 social housing agencies. This includes three employees from one agency.

[15] Two of these interviews were with employees from Home Forward to prepare the case study.

[16] According to Kvale and Brinkmann, interviews are professional conversations with a structure and a purpose. They are "particularly well-suited for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world" and clarifying their perspectives on their world (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 116).

I conducted the interviews in November and December, 2011. Since most interview participants were located outside Vancouver, I used the telephone. I began each interview by reading the verbal consent script (attached, Appendix D). Upon receipt of the participant's verbal consent, which I noted on my copy of the consent form, I began recording the interview and asking my questions. Nobody objected to being recorded. I recorded 18 of the 21 interviews and transcribed all of them. This assisted with the initial stages of analysis. Appendix E provides a list of all the agencies that participated in interviews for this study.

3.3. The Case Study

According to Robert Stake, a case study is both a process of inquiry about a case and the product of that inquiry (2006. p. 8). The purpose is to increase understanding of how and why something may have happened. It is especially useful for producing a rich description and gaining analytical insights (Thomas, 2011).

A case study is not a method. "Rather, it is a focus and the focus is on one thing, looked at in depth and from many angles" (Thomas, 2011, p. 9). Thomas provides a definition of case studies, which I have adopted for my research. "Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems which are studied holistically by one or more methods…" (p. 23).

According to Thomas (2011), a case study is more than a simple description of something. The case must be *of* something. There must be two elements: a subject; and an analytical frame or object. For example, a description of a particular hospital ward would not be a case study unless it is clear *why* we are studying it.

The GOALS program meets Thomas' criteria for a case study because it provides an example *of* an asset-building program being used by a public housing agency. I was interested in this particular program because it includes both the FSS and IDA components. Since one of my research goals was to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the FSS and IDA programs, I thought it would be ideal to study a program that included both.

While other public housing agencies in the US also deliver both programs, I selected the program in Portland because Portland is well known for innovative approaches to urban planning, and BC often looks to Portland for successful housing initiatives (About Portland; Office of the Auditor General of BC, 2009; Kraus et al., 2005). Vancouver's Portland Hotel, for example, is named after Portland because the society that developed it had been inspired by Portland's housing programs for homeless people (Raising the Roof). I also wished to learn about these programs from the perspective of a social housing provider since one of the goals of this research was to determine if there is potential for social housing providers in BC to implement similar initiatives.

I identified a contact person for the GOALS program by reviewing information publicly available on the internet. This person put me in touch with her supervisor who identified a second person to interview. I contacted each individual by phone and email to ask if they would be interested in participating in the study. Prior to the interview, I sent the participants background information on the study, the interview topics and a consent form.

During the interview, I gathered a mix of quantitative and qualitative information about the GOALS program, including the FSS and IDA components. To prepare the case study, I supplemented information from the interviews with reports available on the internet.

Using terminology provided by Gary Thomas (2011), my case study has the following characteristics:

- A key case – it is an example of an asset-building program I wished to study.
- Instrumental – the case study is a tool to help learn more about asset-building and the FSS and IDA programs.
- Evaluative – one of the goals was to determine how well the program is working, the advantages and disadvantages of the FSS and IDA approach, and which approach is more effective in helping families in social housing increase their assets.
- Explanatory – the case study explains why the programs were implemented.
- Descriptive – the case study "paints a picture" of two different types of asset-building programs – how they work and their outcomes.
- Nested – the FSS and IDA programs are part of the overall GOALS program.

To analyze my case study, I used the *constant comparative* method described by Thomas (2011, p. 171). This method involves "going through the data again and again" and "comparing each element – phrase, sentence or paragraph – with all of the other elements." The goal is to emerge with *themes* that capture or summarize the essence (or essences) of the data. I used these themes as the building blocks of my analysis.

3.4. Semi-Structured Interviews

The purpose of the interviews with social housing and agency professionals was to help answer the research questions, evaluate the proposed options, and determine the potential for social housing providers in BC to implement asset-building strategies for families in their units.

I interviewed participants employed by BC Housing, non-profit housing societies, the BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), and the Co-operative Housing Federation of BC (CHF BC). BCNPHA is the umbrella group for non-profit housing societies in BC, and CHF BC is the umbrella group for non-profit housing co-operatives in BC. While a representative from CHF BC participated in an interview, given the differences between the co-op and non-profit housing sectors, I did not interview personnel from any individual housing co-ops.

BCNPHA helped me identify non-profit housing providers to interview. I decided to select non-profit housing societies with the most units targeted to families, because the scope of this project is asset-building strategies for this population, and I believed the larger housing societies would have the most capacity to implement an asset-building program. I was also interested in including Aboriginal housing societies targeted to families and agencies familiar with FSS and IDA programs geared to social housing tenants in BC.[17] To recruit interview participants from BC Housing, I contacted the Director, Research and Corporate Planning and the Manager of Research. In some ways, the purpose of these interviews was similar to marketing research – to determine the potential interest in a new product or program (Malhotra, 1999).

Finally, I interviewed employees from agencies in Edmonton, Ontario and the US who have experience with FSS and IDA programs to obtain their perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of the two programs.

To analyze the interviews, I used thematic analysis, defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question" (p. 82) and is useful in helping to understand what the data means.

[17] There are at least a dozen examples of IDA programs in BC, but they are not delivered by social housing providers or geared to social housing tenants. One housing provider delivers an IDA program, and a few non-profit housing societies participate in an FSS/IDA pilot project in Victoria, delivered by a community agency.

4. Case Study - The GOALS Program

This section provides a case study of the Greater Opportunities to Advance, Lean and Succeed (GOALS) program delivered by Home Forward, a public housing agency in Portland, Oregon. Most of the information is from two interviews conducted with Home Forward employees. Additional information is from reports.

GOALS is designed to help low-income families become financially self-sufficient through five years of supportive services. The program includes an FSS component, which enables families to save money through an escrow account. It also includes IDAs, which help families save money for education or home ownership, through a match of $3 for every $1 saved by the family.

The following sections provide an overview of Home Forward and describe the agency's FSS and IDA programs.

4.1. Home Forward

Home Forward, (formerly known as the Housing Authority of Portland) was established in 1941. It is a public corporation that serves all of Multnomah County, including Portland, its largest city. Portland is located on the West Coast of the US. Its population in 2010 was about 584,000, slightly less than the city of Vancouver's population of 643,000 (BC Stats; U.S. Census Bureau).

As the largest provider of affordable housing in Oregon, Home Forward serves nearly 15,000 low-income individuals and families in more than 6,000 affordable rental apartments (including about 2,500 public housing units) and 8,400 Section 8 rent assistance vouchers (Home Forward).[18]

Home Forward is "dedicated to providing safe, decent and affordable housing for individuals and families who are challenged by income, disability or special need" (Home Forward). It also recognizes the need to provide support services to help residents move forward in their lives. Most of Home Forward's funding is from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and rent revenues. For the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012, HUD provided $85 million in subsidies and grants (80% of revenues) and rental income accounted for $14 million (13% of revenues).

4.2. Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program

Home Forward began operating the FSS program in 1994 and administers it according to HUD requirements (Home Forward, 2011). The program is voluntary, and the goal is to help families obtain employment that will lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency (HUD).[19] Program coordinators work to help families move into employment that is self-sustaining and able to provide financial security.

One of the reasons Home Forward became involved in the FSS program was to help family tenants become independent from housing subsidies so they could serve more families on their waiting list (P.I., 2011b, 206-213).

[18] Public housing units are directly subsidized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and managed by Home Forward. Rents are set at approximately 30% of a household's adjusted monthly income. The Section 8 rent assistance program enables low-income households to rent from qualified private landlords who accept rent assistance vouchers.

[19] As noted previously, HUD defines self-sufficiency to mean a family no longer receiving a housing subsidy or welfare assistance (HUD regulations). Welfare assistance, for the purpose of the FSS program means income assistance from Federal or State welfare programs, and includes only cash maintenance payments designed to meet a family's ongoing basic needs.

4.2.1. *Eligibility and Participation*

The FSS program is available to families living in Home Forward's public housing and Section 8 units. The corporation cannot discriminate, so that anyone capable or interested in working may participate, including seniors and individuals with disabilities. According to Lead Program Specialist, Bradley Bohlin (name provided with permission), "*most participants are very driven – they want to be employed and independent*". As of June 2011, the program was serving about 280 families (Home Forward, 2011, p. 12). About 30 to 40% were receiving welfare assistance, while others were working in low-paying or part-time jobs, or receiving unemployment benefits (P.I., 2011o, 177-184, 287).

When asked why more residents don't enroll in the FSS program, Bohlin explained:

> It is a hard sell in a community where everyone is under the same housing subsidy. In an environment like that, where no one or very few people are employed, you can become secure with that – and kind of stuck and see this as the end. There's not that motivation or mentoring or modeling that's probably needed...I think housing then becomes your security and I think there's also fear that's based on that. What do I do if I lose my housing? Even if I were to go back to work – how am I going to survive? So, you become so reliant on having this housing that everything else is secondary…" (P.I., 2011o, 212-228).

Generational issues are also a factor, where "*that's all you know and you don't think you have any other option*" (P.I., 2011o, 244-245).

4.2.2. *Requirements*

To participate in the FSS program, the head of each family is required to sign a five-year contract with Home Forward that sets out their rights and responsibilities. Families must also identify goals, which are usually about finding a suitable job (e.g. based on their skills, education, and job opportunities). While the term of the contract is five years, it may be extended for a maximum of two more years to enable participants to meet their goals. During the term of the contract, program participants are required to comply with the terms of their lease.

Program coordinators work with participants to help them identify their goals and how to achieve them. They assess the participant's level of education and employment background and consider, "*Do they need to return to school? Do they need a short-term training program? Or additional work experience?*" (P.I., 2011o, 121-129). If so, these would be identified as interim goals, and participants are required to meet these interim goals as part of their contract and to be eligible for their escrow savings.

Program coordinators provide case management, which means working to connect families with other resources in the community (Home Forward, 2010). These can include assistance with child care, education, and financial counseling (e.g. budgeting and debt re-payments). Home Forward worked with their local community college to create a curriculum based on the needs of their clients. Program coordinators also work closely with community partners who provide training and employment services. Some provide internships where participants can gain work experience and develop networks that could lead to a job. Access to private funding enabled Home Forward to create training programs specifically targeted to their residents. One program is geared to a career in healthcare (starting as a certified nursing assistant) and the other is geared to office administration.

Program participants are required to participate in appropriate job training programs determined in consultation with program coordinators and to seek and maintain suitable employment.

As part of their case management responsibilities, program coordinators support program participants to maintain their jobs. For example, they discuss what it means to be an employee, the need to show up for work on time, how to dress, how to communicate, and how to interact with other team members (P.I., 2011o, 186-190).

Beginning in 2007, Home Forward required participants to sign an agreement stating they would give up their Section 8 subsidy and move out of social housing as a condition for receiving their escrow funds at the end of the contract. Home Forward is planning to eliminate this requirement because the poor economy is making it difficult for families to find housing they can afford on the private market. Home Forward is also considering encouraging FSS graduates to move to other housing units they operate where the subsidy is less and tenants pay rents at the lower end of market rates (P.I., 2011o, 96-106).

4.2.3. *Approach to Savings – Escrow Accounts*

Home Forward creates an escrow account for each participating family. As a participant's income from employment increases, their rent increases, as they are required to pay 30% of their income to rent. The difference between the higher rent and initial rent is deposited into the escrow account during the term of the FSS contract. These escrow savings are intended to provide an economic incentive to increase earnings and reward work (Home Forward, 2011, p. 19).

Participants may access a portion of their escrow funds during the term of their contract (up to $1,000) for expenses related to their goals such as car repairs (if the car is needed for work), education, clothing required for work (e.g. a uniform or shoes for construction) or child care. Interim withdrawals may not be used for rent, utilities, or credit card payments.

At the end of the five-year contract, participants are eligible to receive the funds accumulated in their escrow accounts if they have been independent from welfare assistance for at least 12 months, are employed, and have met the goals in their contract. Participants may "graduate" early, if they meet these conditions in less than five years.

While one of the objectives of the FSS program is to reduce the dependency of families on rent subsidies, HUD does not require families to give up their rent subsidy as a condition of receiving their escrow funds. If a tenant's income increases above a certain threshold, however, the family may no longer be eligible for a housing subsidy.[20]

[20] This has nothing to do with the FSS program, but is due to eligibility requirements for a housing subsidy.

There are no conditions attached to how families may use their escrow funds, although program coordinators usually speak with them about how to make the best use of these funds (P.I., 2011o, 322). According to Bohlin, "*we highly encourage folks to either place it into an account where it can accrue interest or into some asset-building type of program*" (P.I., 2011o, 322-325). Participants with higher escrow savings often invest in homeownership. Other uses for escrow funds include purchasing a vehicle in better working condition, education, or paying off debts. A few families have developed their own business.

Participants are entitled to only one escrow account during their tenancy. If they do not complete the program, they may re-enroll after six months or a year.

4.2.4. *Outcomes*

Since the FSS program began in 1994, close to 600 participants have graduated.[21] Average savings for program graduates is about $7,500, but can be as high as $30,000. About 240-260 families who have participated in the program have purchased homes.

Average earned annual incomes increased from $8,000 at entry to over $22,000 at graduation (Home Forward, 2011, p. 12). According to Bohlin, in his experience, over the long term, participants are usually able to maintain what they've achieved and continue moving forward (P.I., 2011o, 381-382).

When asked if the program has an impact on the community, Bohlin indicated he noticed this more in the past when it was easier to find employment. He noted that if someone saw a person in the community working and achieving things – moving forward – this could be infectious (P.I., 2011o, 395-398). The major challenge now is that it is difficult for families to secure jobs that pay more than the minimum wage. This is one reason Bohlin believes the training aspect of the FSS program is so important – because it provides program participants with opportunities for higher paying jobs with greater

[21] I was unable to obtain information about graduation rates or the total number of participants.

potential. Even so, with the current state of the economy, it is challenging to help families find jobs that pay a living wage – so they can afford food, rent and utilities (P.I., 2011o, 65-69).

According to Bohlin, a key factor for success is providing training and support systems that help participants overcome barriers to employment, such as domestic violence, addiction, and a criminal record (P.I., 2011o, 240-245; 471-474). If a person has a criminal record, for example, there are agencies in the community that can assist with that – employers they call “felony friendly”.

4.2.5. *Funding and Costs*

HUD provides funding for program coordinators and the escrow. The funding is a grant that Home Forward applies for each year. Seven program coordinators are on staff for both the FSS and IDA programs, and program coordinators manage a caseload of about 40 to 60 clients each.

4.3. Individual Development Account (IDA) Program

IDA programs provide matched savings accounts as well as financial education and counseling. In Oregon, IDA programs help low-income/low-wealth individuals and families save to purchase a home, further their education, or start or expand a small business (Yatchmenoff and Webb, 2010). At Home Forward, participating families may use their savings for homeownership or education.

Home Forward became an active member of a local IDA initiative, the Valley Individual Development Initiative Accounts (VIDA) Collaborative Program, in 2005 and has been implementing the IDA program in their portfolio since then.[22] They recognized that the IDA program, when combined with the FSS program, could significantly benefit families in the FSS program by helping them accumulate additional funds, and could be a powerful tool to help families realize homeownership and education goals. Home Forward also recognized that IDAs could support their goal to help tenants move out of social housing (particularly families working towards homeownership) and enable them to serve more households on the waiting list. In 2005, more than 9,000 households were on the waiting list, and Home Forward was unable to provide Section 8 subsidies to new applicants – the waiting list was "closed".

4.3.1. *Eligibility and Participation*

To be eligible for the IDA program, families must be enrolled in the FSS program for at least one year and have at least 18 months left in their five-year contract (i.e. 18 months to save money). They must demonstrate a commitment to the program, the ability to save, and are required to:

- Complete a financial literacy class;
- Develop a budget that shows it will be possible to save; and
- Save a minimum of $25 per month for at least three months prior to being accepted into the program.

If families are interested in saving for education, they must complete a college placement test and meet with a college advisor. If they are interested in saving for homeownership, they must obtain a credit report and achieve a score of at least 620. The purpose is to ensure that homeownership and obtaining a mortgage is a realistic goal.

[22] VIDA is a collaborative of 42 partner organizations in Oregon that are working to help families and individuals to build financial assets through IDAs. The Community and Shelter Corporation (CASA of Oregon) is the administrator and fiduciary organization behind the collaborative. CASA is responsible for overseeing daily program operations, coordinating fundraising and providing technical assistance to VIDA member organizations (VIDA – website).

It is important to Home Forward to ensure families will be successful and able to achieve their savings goal. If a family sets up a savings account and drops out, Home Forward will lose the funding allocated to them. The matched savings accumulated to date cannot be transferred to another family.

The maximum number of participants is based on available funding from VIDA. In 2011, Home Forward received $80,000. As a result, they were able to enroll 12 new participants. Four participants identified education as their goal, and 8 identified homeownership. As of October 2011, 42 families were participating in the IDA program (personal communication, October 18, 2011).

4.3.2. *Requirements*

All program participants are required to attend financial education training sessions to learn how to develop good financial habits and skills for a lifetime of asset-building, how to distinguish between "wants and needs," and other techniques to improve their financial situations (VIDA). They also develop a budget for their household and learn about consumerism, credit cards and predatory lending (VIDA). Home Forward has strong relationships with community partners to provide this financial education.

Program participants saving for homeownership are required to attend classes to learn the basics of the home buying process, including how to make informed decisions for a successful home buying experience. Participants saving for education must meet with an academic advisor to determine education goals and career options and what classes they need to be successful. Home Forward works with community partners who specialize in providing these services. For example, the Portland Housing Bureau provides monthly classes on the home buying process. Portland State University provides an orientation session for participants considering a four year college program as their choice for an asset specific purchase.

Home Forward relies on other agencies in the community to provide additional resources and services including low-interest car loans, affordable and safe childcare, low-cost computers, parenting classes, and employment related services to help participants gain the skills they need for jobs that pay a living wage.

Program coordinators provide case management to help participants overcome multiple barriers related to poverty and health issues. They provide one-on-one meetings, help families connect with additional community resources, stress the importance of budgeting, and review participants' personal, financial and savings goals and monthly statements on a quarterly basis. During these meetings, coordinators emphasize the importance of making savings deposits on time and offer support to help participants achieve their goals.

Program participants are required to save a minimum of $25 every month. At the end of each year, they may contribute a lump sum from either their tax return, earned income tax credit, or a bonus from work. Families in the education stream may save a maximum of $2,000. Using the 3:1 ratio, they are eligible for a matched contribution of $6,000, resulting in a total of $8,000 the family can use for education. Families in the homeownership stream may save a maximum of $3,000 and are eligible for a matched contribution of $9,000, resulting in a total of $12,000 the family can use to purchase a home.

Participants are entitled to the matched savings once they achieve their savings goals. These matched funds go directly to a third party. If the savings goal is education, the cheque is payable to the school. For homeownership, the match component is payable to the agency holding the money in trust to purchase the home. This means all transactions to purchase the savings asset are carried out with two cheques: one from the participant's savings and the other from the agency administering the matched funds. The education savings program provides some flexibility so that after 6 months of saving, participants may attend school and withdraw money to pay for each semester on an ongoing basis.

4.3.3. *Outcomes*

Since 2006, 50 program participants have graduated from the IDA program. Twenty-three purchased a home, 14 used their savings for a small business, and 13 used their savings for post-secondary education (personal communication, October 18, 2011). Since 2010, all participants have met their savings goals.

Factors for success include a strong focus on making sure their limited funding is used for families most likely to succeed. Home Forward believes their application process and eligibility criteria work well to help evaluate potential participants.

4.3.4. *Funding and Costs*

The IDA program receives federal funding through the Assets for Independence (AFI) program. It also receives funding from the state of Oregon, and the Oregon Community Foundation. This funding is provided to VIDA, and administered by the Community and Shelter Corporation (CASA of Oregon). Home Forward applies for IDA funding every year.

4.4. Case Study Analysis

This case study analysis includes a comparison of the FSS and IDA programs and a discussion of the benefits of combining the two programs. The analysis is based primarily on my personal interviews.

4.4.1. *Comparison of FSS and IDA Programs*

This section compares the FSS and IDA programs delivered by Home Forward. It considers the different mechanism for participants to accumulate savings, the goals of the two programs, how savings may be used, outcomes, and sources of funding. The differences are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of FSS and IDA programs

	FSS	**IDA**
Mechanism to achieve savings	Escrow	Matched savings
Goals	Help families obtain employment that will lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency.	Help families save money for education or homeownership and develop skills for a lifetime of asset-building.
Target population	Families capable or interested in employment. Open to all tenants living in public housing or receiving a Section 8 housing subsidy.	Must be participating in the FSS program and demonstrate a commitment and ability to save.

Requirements	• Participate in job training programs • Complete activities in individual training and services plans which specify interim and final goals • Seek and maintain suitable employment • Comply with terms of the lease • Become independent from welfare	• Attend financial education training sessions • If the goal is homeownership - attend classes to learn the basics of home buying • If the goal is education - meet with an academic advisor • Meet with program coordinator at least quarterly • Save a minimum of $25 every month
Use of funds	No requirements. Generally used for homeownership, purchasing a vehicle, education, paying off debts, or starting a small business.	Must be used for a specific purpose: homeownership or education
Payment of funds	Escrow funds payable to the participant	Matched funds payable to a 3rd party
Outcomes	Savings may be as high as $30,000. Average is $7,500 for successful graduates. Average earned incomes increased from $8,000 at entry to over $22,000 at graduation.	For education: participants save $2,000 and receive a match of $6,000. Total of $8,000. For homeownership: participants save $3,000 and receive a match of $9,000. Total of $12,000
Funders	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).	U.S. government through the Assets for Independence Program, funding from the state of Oregon, and the Oregon Community Foundation.

4.4.1.1. Savings mechanism: escrow vs. matched savings

A key difference between the FSS and IDA programs is the way program participants may accumulate savings. In the FSS program, participants save money because they pay a higher rent based on an increase in their income. The housing agency deposits the difference between the higher rent and original rent into an escrow account. In the IDA program, program participants deposit a minimum of $25 every month into their savings account. At the end of the savings period, their savings are matched by program funds allocated to Home Forward.

4.4.1.2. Goals: savings vs. employment

The main goal of the FSS program is to promote self-sufficiency and support families to obtain employment, whereas the goal of the IDA program is to help families acquire assets. While both programs enable participants to accumulate savings, the strength of the IDA program is that it is designed to help families develop life-long money management skills and give families practical experience in saving their money. In the escrow program, savings are accumulated "automatically" as the money is simply deducted from a family's rent. This may be an "easy" way to save, but it does not teach families *how* to save.

According to Bohlin, the strength of the FSS program is that it helps participants improve their employment opportunities, become independent from welfare and become tax payers. He believes very few of the families he works with would have increased their incomes without the program (P.I., 2011o, 536-538). He also believes the program gives participants an excellent opportunity to access training programs they would not have been able to access without the program.

4.4.1.3. Use of savings: in-kind vs. cash

Another key difference between the programs is that the IDA program requires participants to use their savings for specific asset-building purposes: education or homeownership. In contrast, the FSS program places no restrictions on how families may use their savings. The escrow savings are a tool to encourage families to seek employment. Perhaps fewer families would participate in the program if there were rules about how they could use the funds. In addition, families may keep the funds to use in case of an emergency. This could be particularly helpful to provide a "cushion" for families who move into market housing so they do not "cycle back" into the system (P.I., 2011c, 459-460). It was noted that FSS program operators speak with families about how to make good use of their escrow funds.

4.4.1.4. Funding: external sources vs. internal foregone rent revenue

The number of families who can be served in the IDA program is limited by the amount of funding available for matched savings. The FSS program has no such limitation. Savings that accumulate in a participant's escrow account are paid *by that* *participant.* The housing agency could incur a cost in terms of foregone rent. If one takes the view, however, that the family's income would not have increased without the program, one could argue that there has been no lost revenue.

4.4.1.5. Outcomes

Through the IDA program, families are able to apply $8,000 towards their education or $12,000 to purchase a home. In the FSS program, savings may be as high as $30,000, although the average is $7,500 for successful graduates in the GOALS program. While the potential for savings is greater with the FSS program, average savings are higher with the IDA program. The FSS program is able to serve more families than the IDA program, but it appears the IDA program may have been able to achieve a higher graduation rate than the FSS (100% for the IDA program since 2010).

Several reasons could explain why the IDA program has had a higher graduation rate than the FSS. First, it may be more difficult for families to achieve the FSS goal to become independent from welfare than to achieve IDA goals and savings targets. Second, the IDA program is careful to select participants most likely to succeed. Home Forward staff indicated the importance of selecting families most likely to succeed, which is consistent with approaches being used by other agencies delivering IDA programs in the US.

The fact that households participating in the FSS program were able to increase their average earned incomes from $8,000 at entry to over $22,000 at graduation (175%) indicates that escrow savings, combined with supportive services, may provide sufficient motivation and assistance for families to move forward in their lives.

4.4.1.6. Program funders

The FSS program is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The IDA program receives funding from the US government through the AFI program, the State of Oregon, and the Oregon Community Foundation (VIDA; Neighborhood Partnerships).[23]

4.4.2. *Benefits of Combining the FSS and IDA Programs*

Home Forward decided to offer the IDA program to FSS participants because they believed it would provide an additional benefit to them. A newsletter on effective practices for IDAs in the US recommended that agencies delivering IDA programs enter into partnerships with public housing authorities to "pump up" their IDA performance, noting that the public housing authorities could provide a large pool of eligible applicants, conduct financial education and asset training, and ensure ongoing supportive services and case management. It was suggested that combining the FSS and IDA approaches may increase the pace and percentage of successful graduates "on the road to long-term asset building" (AFI).

Combining the two programs offers the following advantages:

1. The two programs together can help a family accumulate considerable savings which they could use for home ownership or another asset – for example, if they save $30,000 in the FSS and $12,000 through the IDA program.

2. Some households are able to accumulate more escrow funds than others. A family that starts the FSS program with a very low income and secures a good paying job will accumulate more escrow funds than a family that starts the program with a relatively high income.

[23] The Oregon State Legislature adopted the Individual Development Account Initiative in 1999. It is overseen by Oregon Housing and Community Services and the Oregon Department of Revenue and administered by Neighborhood Partnerships, a state-wide non-profit organization. The program receives funding through IDA tax credits. If an individual makes a donation to the IDA initiative, 75% of their contribution becomes a credit on their State of Oregon income tax return (Neighborhood Partnerships).

3. A family that starts the FSS program with a relatively high income would not be able to accumulate much savings through an escrow account, but should be able to save money and benefit from an IDA.

4. A family that starts the FSS program with a relatively low income would not be able to save much in an IDA. Hopefully, the employment support offered through the FSS program would help them increase their incomes and their ability to accumulate savings in the escrow and IDA accounts.

5. A family in the FSS program that continues to earn a low income or remains on welfare for the entire program would not be able to accumulate any escrow savings (because of how the program works). This family might be able to save a small amount of money through an IDA, but may not be in a good position to accumulate savings in either program.

6. The IDA is restrictive in terms of how savings may be used. While a family may use IDA funds to purchase a home, they cannot use the funds to buy furniture or other necessary items. There are no restrictions on how a family may use escrow funds. In the FSS program, however, if a family is interested in post-secondary education, they must wait until the end of five years to use these funds, whereas in the IDA program, a family could withdraw funds after six months to pay for courses.

Bohlin believes the two programs work well together because the FSS helps participants maintain employment and the IDA provides an additional way to increase their assets. Home Forward highly encourages families participating in their FSS program to participate in the IDA program (P.I., 2011o, personal communication, January 27, 2012).

5. Comparison of the GOALS Program with Canadian Examples

This section compares asset-building programs in Canada that serve social housing tenants with the GOALS program delivered by Home Forward in Portland, Oregon.[24] A more complete description of the Canadian programs is in Appendix B.

On Vancouver Island, the Victoria Family Self-Sufficiency program is a three-year program operated by Burnside Gorge Community Association. It is similar to the program offered by Home Forward in that it offers both an escrow-based FSS and IDA program. Unlike the GOALS program, however, all participants are required to enrol in an IDA account. Not all participants have an escrow account because some participants do not live in social housing. The program is administered by a community agency, not a housing provider. While participants must be employed to accumulate escrow savings, they are not required to be independent from welfare at the end of the program to receive these funds. Conditions are attached to the use of savings accumulated through the escrow and IDA accounts, and participants must use their savings for a specific goal set out in their program contracts. Participants have used their savings to move into market housing, for unplanned expenditures, education (for themselves and their children), a vehicle, and self-employment. The funds are paid directly to program participants rather than to a third party.

The Victoria program has operated in three phases since 2002. In Phase 3 (2008-2011), 64 out of 77 participants graduated (83%). Most were able to save $2,000 in their IDA accounts. Of 36 participants who received escrow savings, the average amount was $6,300 per person. The next phase of the program will limit the maximum amount a family can save through escrow to $7,500 (personal communication, January 31, 2012).

[24] Home Forward is the public housing agency in Portland, Oregon that administers the GOALS program, including the FSS and IDA initiatives.

The Family Self-Sufficiency program in Edmonton (2003-2007) was funded and delivered by the Capital Region Housing Corporation, a municipal non-profit housing corporation. Participants were able to accumulate savings in an escrow account and the corporation matched this at a rate of 1:1 up to a maximum of $5,000. Families could use these *matched* funds for only home ownership. If participants did not purchase a home, they were entitled to the savings they had contributed to their escrow accounts. A total of 29 families were enrolled in the program and 20 of them (69%) completed it. Eleven participants purchased a home and five moved into market rental housing, for a total of 16 families (55%) who moved out of social housing. Monthly incomes increased 78% for participants, compared to 5% for a quasi-control group.[25] The percentage of families on welfare dropped from 31% to 24%. The social return on investment was 2:1, meaning that "every dollar invested in the Program yielded twice the return to individuals and communities" (Another Way, 2007, p. 1).[26]

The Edmonton Capital Region Housing Corporation launched a new employment and training program, Housing Works, in November 2011 to help families address barriers to employment. One of the goals is to help successful participants move into a form of below-market or market housing.[27] The Corporation is working with four partner agencies that will provide outreach support to help families with employment-related goals and self-sufficiency. They may consider a form of escrow account designed to assist successful participants with move-out related expenses (personal communication, February 9, 2012).[28]

[25] The evaluation team identified 29 families to serve as a quasi-control group to ensure the groups had similar family composition and sources of income. Both populations were tracked for three years – unless they left the Housing Corporation during that time (Another Way, 2007, p. 3).

[26] Costs included the housing subsidy to tenants plus the FSS operating budget. Benefits included higher income from wages, reduced dependence on government assistance, increased personal savings, increased personal taxes paid, and reduced reliance on social housing (Another Way, 2007, p. 14).

[27] Below-market housing includes cooperative housing or affordable housing.

[28] If the escrow account is approved, it will be used only to support a tenant's move out of social housing and will be provided only for certain types of expenses – to be determined.

The Next Step program in Vancouver is an IDA matched savings program delivered by More Than A Roof Housing Society for their tenants. Participants agree to deposit a minimum of $10 per month for at least six months up to a maximum of $50/month or $600 in one year. Savings are matched at a ratio of 1:1 with a total savings possible of $1,200 including the matching funds. Participants must use these savings to achieve a significant life goal. The current program serves single individuals, but the housing provider is planning to raise additional funds to make the program available to families. As a result of the program, some participants reconnected with their families, moved to market housing, and pursued their education. Participants' health also improved. While about half the tenants smoked at the start of the program, five years later, only 8% were smoking. Many former participants are still saving.

The North Island Family Self-Sufficiency program was a three-year IDA program administered by the Comox Valley Family Services Association and Campbell River Family Services Society. The program was targeted to interested low-income families in the Comox Valley and Campbell River. Families were able to save a maximum of $720 during the program, and these savings were matched at a ratio of 2:5 to 1 for a match of $1,800 and a total of $2,520.   This pilot program operated from 2007 to 2010. A total of 30 participants enrolled, and 27 of them (90%) graduated. The families saved an average of $667 per person. Four out of nine families moved out of social housing, five became independent from income assistance, while others secured part-time employment, took steps to upgrade their education, and improved their health.

In Ontario, Saving to Achieve Real Transformation (START) is an IDA matched savings program being delivered in partnership by the Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC) and Social and Enterprise Development Innovations (SEDI). SHSC is providing the funding and SEDI is responsible for administering the project together with local community partners. Housing providers will facilitate access to their tenants and applicants. Program participants will be able to save up to a maximum of $800. With a 3:1 ratio for the matched savings, they could accumulate a total of $3,200. Similar to the IDA program delivered by Home Forward, families must use their savings for a specific purpose (housing, education or a small business), and these funds are payable to a third party. The program was launched in January 2012.

Table 3 shows how the Canadian programs compare with the GOALS program delivered by Home Forward in Portland, Oregon.

Table 3. Comparison of GOALS program with Canadian examples

Name of program	Location	Type of Program	Delivery Agency	Payment and Use of Funds	Status
GOALS Program, Home Forward	Portland, Oregon	FSS and IDA 5 years	Housing	Escrow funds paid to families. Cannot be receiving welfare. No restriction on use of funds. IDA funds paid to 3rd party. Must be used for education or home ownership.	Since 1994
Victoria Family Self-Sufficiency, Burnside Gorge Community Association	Victoria, B.C.	IDA and FSS 3 years	Community	IDA and escrow funds paid directly to participants. Not required to be off welfare. Funds must be spent on items linked to participants' goals.	Since 2002
Family Self-Sufficiency Project, Capital Region Housing Corporation	Edmonton, Alberta	FSS and matching funds 3 years	Housing	Funds paid to person. *Matched* funds were used for home ownership.	2003-2007
Next Step, More Than A Roof Housing Society	Vancouver, B.C.	IDA 1 year	Housing	IDA funds paid directly to participants for a significant life goal.	Since 2006
North Island Family Self-Sufficiency Program	Comox Valley and Campbell River, B.C.	IDA 3 years	Community	IDA funds paid to participants.	2007-2010
Saving to Achieve Real Transformation (START), SHSC and SEDI	Ontario	IDA 3 years	Community	IDA funds paid to 3rd party for specific purposes.	2012-2015

6. Thematic Analysis of Interviews

This section describes themes from the interviews with participants employed by social housing providers in BC. I identified these themes by analyzing the interview transcripts. The main purpose of the interviews was to help answer the research question, which approach to asset-building, the FSS, IDA, or both, has the most potential to be implemented by social housing providers in BC.

6.1. Stakeholder Acceptability

The themes in this section address whether social housing providers may be interested in making asset-building programs available to their family tenants. They address the role of social housing providers, whether asset-building is consistent with their mandate, goals and requirements for asset-building programs, and advantages and disadvantages of the FSS and IDA programs.

6.1.1. *Asset-Building and the Role of Social Housing Providers*

In general, participants agreed that helping families in social housing increase their financial assets would be consistent with their housing society's mandate. These mandates include providing safe and secure affordable housing for households with low to moderate incomes, helping tenants become independent from rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing subsidies, and helping tenants expand their options. As one participant said, *"Ideally, social housing is a step on the path, not the destination, and with savings, you've got an opportunity to change where you're at"* (P.I., 2011d, 34-36).

The extent to which participants believed their housing societies could play an active role in helping families increase their financial assets varied. Some participants see their organizations primarily as landlords. They suggested that their role in helping families increase their assets would likely involve providing information about community resources or inviting community agencies to make presentations to their tenants. Other participants indicated that their organizations would be interested in a more active role. As one participant said, *"We've built our business culture around value added. So for* *us, anything we can give our tenants that's reasonable and feasible for us to do, we want to do that*" (P.I., 2011i, 115-117). Another participant stated that although the organization she works for "sees itself as a bricks and mortar society", they are prepared to consider opportunities to participate in programs they believe would benefit their tenants (P.I., 2011h, 16-19).

6.1.2. *Asset-Building Goals*

Participants identified several goals for asset-building programs that they would support. One participant suggested that any new programs would need to establish clear goals and a program framework to measure and demonstrate results.

6.1.2.1. Increase self-sufficiency

Most participants supported a program that would provide incentives, such as asset-building, to help families move forward in their lives. Just as important or perhaps more important than helping participants build savings, however, would be providing job skills training and support to help families increase their income earning potential, and ultimately reduce their reliance on welfare and housing subsidies. As one participant noted, "*because if somebody is able to change their income earning potential…they may in the future be able to move on through the continuum to another type of housing or require less assistance…even if it's just a small number of people who make moves and improvements in their life…it's a success"* (P.I., 2011k, 14-23, 456-463).

For some participants, the goal of self-sufficiency was related to improving the quality of life of their tenants and helping them reach their potential. As one participant said, "*wouldn't we all rather live in a community and a world where all the citizens - as many as possible - are reaching their potential*" (P.I., 2011r, 165-167)?

6.1.2.2. Independence from income assistance

While most participants supported a goal to help families become independent from welfare, some participants did not see the point because:

- BC's income assistance program is already strict about requiring able-bodied people to work; and
- In their experience, most of their able-bodied tenants were already employed.

Other participants expressed concern that “getting families off welfare” may not be realistic because if families are receiving income assistance, there must be a good reason. One participant noted that many of their family tenants are living with disabilities, and in many families, one or both parents have significant mental health issues.

On the other hand, some participants noted that parents who may become ineligible for assistance could benefit from a program that would help them gain the skills needed for employment. As one participant said:

> There’s got to be programs to help people get off welfare…if you remove welfare from that individual without having something else in place, whether it’s an employment program or …whatever, they are going to turn to either crime, sex, prostitution or something like that….and it costs more to have them in that fringe stuff than it does to actually keep them on welfare… (P.I., 2011q, 273-289).

It was also suggested that some individuals considered unemployable could become employed if they had some support. As one participant said, “*it may just encourage them that little bit to move along”* (P.I., 2011q, 192-193). Another participant stated “*people deemed unemployable – with some support – we have found that they can increase their income and become involved in revenue generation activities*” which could eventually lead to greater independence from income assistance and housing subsidies (P.I., 2011u).

Some participants questioned the value of an asset-building program designed to help families become independent from welfare because they believe it is more important to revise BC’s income assistance program to facilitate the transition to employment. They suggested that if BC wants to encourage families to become independent from welfare, the government should increase the amount recipients can earn without it being clawed back dollar for dollar, and for former recipients to be able to keep benefits (e.g. child care subsidies) for a period of time. One participant noted, “*Most people I know don’t want to be on welfare and they hate all the rules and all the things they have to go through*” (P.I., 2011p, 184-186). He also noted, however, that single mothers face a difficult choice about what is best for their family:

> Would I be better to be home with my child eight hours a day and provide direct care or am I further ahead to not make any more money but put my child in day care, drop them off at 7:00 in the morning, get to my job, work all day, and [then] come home" (P.I., 2011p, 173-178).

Another participant noted that as a result of claw backs, rent increases and other work-related expenses, welfare recipients who try to go out and work end up "*sliding backwards faster than they are going forwards*" (P.I., 2011q, 85-86).

6.1.2.3. Independence from housing subsidies

Most participants supported a program goal to help families move out of social housing or RGI units. One participant noted that while some tenants tend to remain in social housing, most would like to move on.

One participant said her organization is seeing "*generation after generation of social housing residents*". They are renting to people who grew up in their units and who now have children of their own. This participant believes something has to be done to break that cycle. She would like to be able to offer tenants an option so it's not just "*this is how I grew up and this is as good as it gets*" (P.I., 2011r, 28-39).

Another participant explained that his housing society wants to help tenants move on because most families would prefer to be independent and have their own house. He noted, "*when you're in a multi-family complex, there's all kinds of rules and restrictions you have to put up with to get along with your neighbours"* (P.I., 2011p, 42-51). Many families, for example, would love to have a pet, but his society does not permit pets in their buildings.

Participants had different opinions about whether an asset-building program should require tenants to move out as a condition of receiving their savings. This is not a requirement of HUD's FSS program, although it is a goal.

One participant expressed interested in requiring households to move out of social housing, or terminating RGI assistance as a condition for families to receive their escrow savings. His organization believes tenants feel they are entitled to social housing and are staying too long.

On the other hand, another participant expressed concern that requiring families to move out of social housing would be a disincentive to participate in an asset-building program. She also questioned if this approach is realistic given a lack of affordable housing alternatives, and noted that a person could be working in government, in an administrative job, and still not be able to afford market housing. For families with children, daycare is expensive, and requiring them to move out of social housing would be unreasonable (P.I., 2011h, 145- 162). It was noted that the amount of savings a family could accumulate would not be enough for them to make dramatic changes in their lives, and that if families will be expected to move out of social housing, affordable housing options need to be available (P.I., 2011a, 54-56; P.I. 2011j, 65-68).

6.1.2.4. Increase asset-building skills

Most participants supported the idea of a matched savings program that would help families learn how to budget, manage their finances, accumulate savings, and achieve their savings goals. As one participant said:

> … anything we can do that helps people build their assets, whether that's education or a financial asset that allows them to build a different security for themselves and their families, I think builds a stronger community, and is something I think is really important (P.I., 2011l, 278-283).

One participant, who thought programs to help tenants save would be beneficial, noted that often, tenants spend money on expenses that could have been avoided, such as high bank fees for withdrawals, and buying coffee to take out - rather than making it at home.

Another participant noted many tenants have never had the opportunity to save:

> It's already spent before it gets to them really. It's generally for food, hydro, telephone and shelter and that's generally the end of the money. So learning to set up even a small savings plan…those are all skills that if you haven't been taught as a child, it's not something that comes naturally (P.I., 2011q, 145-151).

Another participant described his own personal experience about learning how to save, and how, "*I felt so good… knowing that if we really got into trouble I had a little bit* *of savings I could fall on. And I know that gave me a personal sense of accomplishment and comfort*…" (P.I., 2011p, 244-254).

6.1.3. *Asset-Building Program Requirements*

Most participants felt there should be some restrictions on how families could use funds saved through either an escrow or matched savings program. One participant noted that escrow funds could be viewed as government money that would otherwise have been used to reduce the amount of subsidy paid by the government. He said:

> Maybe BC Housing would say with the FSS that the reason you are saving this money is because we aren't increasing your rent – even though we could…, and so we are actually subsidizing it, and so because of that, this is what we would like the savings to be used for (P.I., 2011d, 190-195).

In general, there was consensus that families should be required to use their savings to "better themselves" – for education, a damage deposit for market rental housing, employment expenses, debt reduction, medical supplies, supporting children (e.g. through education or recreation activities), or starting a small business. There was also support for families to be able to save money in case of an emergency.

Participants had mixed opinions about whether a program should encourage families to move into ownership housing. While some participants supported this goal, one participant expressed concern about experiences in the UK where some tenants were unable to afford the upkeep of homes they purchased and had been better off renting from a landlord.

One non-profit that offers a small matched savings program requires tenants to use their funds for a "significant life goal". For some people, this has meant reconnecting with their families. One tenant just wanted to have money in an account because he had never had that before.

On the other hand, one participant expressed concern that families may not want to participate in a program if there are too many restrictions on how they could use their savings.

Participants also suggested that asset-building programs should:

- Provide sufficient employment support and training to help families acquire job-ready skills and increase their earning potential;
- Provide financial literacy support to help families learn how to save and budget their money; and
- Be sufficiently flexible to reflect different cultural and economic issues in different communities.

One participant suggested that a five-year program be tested to provide more time for participants to accumulate savings, as this would make homeownership a more realistic option.

6.1.4. *FSS Compared to IDA Approach*

Interview participants identified the following advantages and disadvantages of the FSS escrow approach compared to the IDA matched savings approach to help families in social housing increase their assets and self-sufficiency.

Advantages of an escrow approach include:

- The escrow approach would provide an incentive for families who are able, to become independent from welfare and increase their earned income. As one participant said, "I like the aspect, and I get the incentive – if your income goes up, we're not going to take 30%" (P.I., 2011g, 217). At the very least, the approach would remove the disincentive for RGI tenants to increase their incomes.
- An escrow account makes it easy for families to save, since the funds are automatically deducted from an increased rent payment.
- The combination of helping families increase their incomes and providing an escrow payment could help tenants move out of social housing.
- Given the US experience, program participants could save a great deal of money, which would increase their options for private market housing.
- The approach is straightforward for a housing provider to administer (e.g. easy to provide relief on the rent and calculate the amount that should go into escrow) and is straightforward for tenants.
- The escrow approach is more relevant to the mandate of housing providers than a matched savings program.

Disadvantages of an escrow approach include:

- It does not give families an opportunity to practice the skill of saving, since it is a “passive approach” where funds are automatically deducted from their rent payments.
- In mixed social housing developments, RGI families would be able to save while market rent tenants would not have this opportunity. Would this lead to conflict with one’s neighbours?
- Families could accumulate too much in escrow savings. Concern was expressed about the potential for families to accumulate large amounts of savings, particularly if the program does not specify how funds may be used (as in the US). Would this simply be a “cash cow”?

Participants identified the following advantages and disadvantages of using a matched savings approach to help families in social housing increase their assets.

Advantages of matched savings include:

- This approach gives program participants experience with budgeting and saving money – since they are required to put money aside themselves.
- Matched funds provide a good incentive to save.
- This approach could be offered to all social housing tenants (RGI and market).

Disadvantages of matched savings include:

- It may be difficult for families with low incomes and who receive income assistance to save money.
- It may be difficult to secure funding for the matching funds.

Among 10 participants who addressed this question, five thought it would be ideal if both the escrow and matched savings approach could be available to families in social housing because each has its advantages and disadvantages and would benefit different tenants. Three participants preferred the matched savings approach, and one of them is planning to make this program available to his family tenants. One participant preferred the escrow approach.

One participant did not believe his organization would support moving ahead with either option. Although he liked the incentive provided by escrow savings to encourage families to “move up the ladder”, he believed his organization would be more interested in exploring other options to encourage RGI tenants to become independent from their housing subsidies. He was not convinced asset-building would accomplish this goal. He was also concerned about the loss of increased rent revenue, based on his experience that many families in his portfolio are already working hard to increase their incomes.

In comparing the escrow approach with a matched savings program, five participants indicated the escrow approach may be more consistent with their mandate as a housing society, since it is tied to rent payments. This does not mean they preferred the escrow approach. One participant did not think his organization would support linking housing subsidies with asset-building.

6.2. Feasibility

6.2.1. *Likelihood of Securing Funding*

All participants questioned whether funding could be found for asset-building programs. They suggested a matched savings program may be more suited to private or charitable organizations, such as Vancity or the Vancouver Foundation, whereas the escrow program would lend itself more to government funding through housing subsidies.

Participants noted that Vancity could be interested in funding a matched savings program because they could open bank accounts for more individuals. It was also noted that private donors appear interested in matched savings programs, although developing sustainable funding is likely to be a challenge. Some participants said it is increasingly difficult to obtain private funding.

Several participants expressed concern that it would be difficult to access government funding. One questioned whether the government would fund a program not targeted to the “neediest”.

It was suggested that if BC Housing is interested in an asset-building program, it could implement an escrow program without additional funding partners. In addition, BC Housing could make it feasible for non-profit housing societies to implement an escrow program by continuing to provide the same amount of subsidy to the society regardless of whether a family's income increases.[29] It was noted, however, that when operating agreements expire (at the end of the mortgage), it would be up to housing providers themselves to fund the escrow savings if they wanted to offer an FSS program to their tenants.

Participants identified the following arguments in support of government funding for an escrow program:

- If tenants receive the necessary skills and resources to help them transition out of social housing, this would free-up units for others, and enable the government to serve more households with the same number of housing units. Even if families do not move out, at the end of the program, if their incomes have increased, they will pay more rent, and this would reduce the amount of government subsidy required.
- It would give families the necessary skills to become independent from income assistance and pay taxes. As one participant said:

> I think increasingly that's expected of government - to help people stabilize and move on…I think we're moving away from a lifelong welfare state. Increasingly you hear people talk about self-sufficiency and pulling-up your bootstraps, and I think politically it would be wise for us to be involved in that" (P.I., 2011d, 68-73).

- It would improve quality of life for tenants and provide better outcomes for the next generation. As suggested by one participant, any program that improves the education of children and their outlook should be considered a success.

6.2.2. *Program Costs*

Some participants expressed concern that if they were to introduce an escrow program, they would need to make it available to all their tenants. If everyone took

[29] Normally, as tenants' incomes increase, the rent is increased, and BC Housing reduces the amount of subsidy paid to the housing provider. If a non-profit housing society were to participate in an FSS program, it would want BC Housing to maintain the level of subsidy. The tenant would pay the higher rent, and the society would deposit the increased payment into an escrow account.

advantage of it, however, the housing society would not be able to benefit from rent increases, which would have a significant effect on their revenues.[30]

Other participants suggested that some tenants may be able to increase their incomes without government assistance, but they did not know to what extent that would be true in their portfolios. One participant said that based on her knowledge of the pilot project in Victoria, in most cases, an increase in family income was due to the support provided through the program, and that, "*if we believed their income would have gone up anyhow, we wouldn't be doing the program*" (P.I., 2011k, 187-189). Another participant said that the program may have been "*the last piece of the puzzle*" that enabled the family to get ahead (P.I., 2011h, 101). It was also noted that, "*as long as a percentage of people are being helped…and have made steps they wouldn't have without the program, it makes it worthwhile* (P.I., 2011k, 207-216).

Some participants suggested that most tenants would not be interested in participating in an asset-building program, because in addition to saving, the program involves a commitment to receive support and participate in training sessions. One participant estimated that about 10% of their families could be interested. She noted, "*A lot of people who live in our housing are struggling just to get through the day. And so, this would be one more thing on their plate that they could not comprehend doing at this point."* She also noted, however, that for other families, the program may "*just encourage them that little bit to move along*…" This participant suggested that parents with older children could have more time to participate (P.I., 2011q, 180-204).

6.2.3. *Program Benefits*

Participants involved in the Victoria Family Self-Sufficiency program believe the program gives families an opportunity to make significant changes to improve their lives. This can include changing "the pattern of a family", for example, if a parent starts working and becomes independent from income assistance. Even if the change is not

[30] The housing provider would not be able to benefit from a rent increase while a family is involved in the program, for example, a 3-year period.

financial, the program can result in better parenting. One participant noted that the program can benefit the housing society in the longer term if families pay more rent or transition to private market housing, thereby making units available for other families with lower incomes (P.I., 2011h, 89-93, 303-310).

One participant said it was remarkable what families in the program had managed to do. Some had started their own businesses and some had gone back to school. When asked if she thought they would have done this without the program, the participant said she did not know, but the program provided an incentive for people to do it. Another participant said, *“I see it as the last springboard to help people get on with what they want to do and are capable of doing* (P.I., 2011h, 382-385).

Another participant reported that the client-centred aspect of the program and one-on-one support helped families reach their potential - by working with each individual and helping them address issues as they arose (P.I., 2011r, 185-187). This participant also noted that when the program first started, it was assumed the families “*should all be able to get out and get working”.* They soon came to realize, however, that the families were limited by health and other issues, so that full-time work was not realistic. Nevertheless, the families found they could work part-time or volunteer. This participant noted one of the biggest benefits of the program was “*providing the parents with some confidence – self-esteem – and then that feeds off into the children.*” The participant reported that the children also wanted to open savings accounts (P.I., 2011r, 216-221).

One participant who delivers an IDA program to single tenants in his housing portfolio described how participants made friends during the program because they are in meetings together. He described how:

> They start problem-solving, sharing information, setting goals that are attainable…They become forward thinking…Over a period of time, a lot of things become possible, and they suddenly can see that, ’hey I’m not trapped in a poverty cycle, I can move past this if I really put my mind to it’… (P.I., 2011i, 69-91).

This participant also reported how former participants are continuing to save regularly - even if it is only $50 a month. He described how they are “getting the hang of it" and thinking, "hey this is pretty cool". In fact, the tenants have started talking about forming an investment club so they can take financial advantage of their group savings (P.I., 2011i, 299-307).

6.2.4. *Equity*

Some participants raised concerns about introducing asset-building programs that would be available only to social housing tenants. Some communities do not have much social housing and not all low-income families can access social housing because of the waiting list. To address this concern, it was suggested that the escrow approach and/or matched savings program could be available to families in BC Housing's Rental Assistance Program. While this program does not serve families receiving welfare (and therefore helping families become independent from welfare would not be an objective of this program), the program could help families increase their incomes, acquire savings, and reduce the amount of rental assistance required. Second, it was suggested that the IDA matched savings program could help low-income families who are not in social housing.

Some participants also noted that some social housing developments include a mix of tenants. Some pay RGI rents while others pay market rents. Only tenants paying RGI rents would be able to benefit from escrow savings. While on the one hand this makes sense, since RGI tenants have lower incomes, there was concern this could create conflict among neighbours.

Some participants expressed concern that to be equitable, a social housing provider would need to make asset-building programs available to all their RGI tenants. This could be expensive, however, if all tenants wanted to participate, since housing providers would not be able to benefit from any increase in rents. This concern assumes that the incomes of all these tenants would increase without the program. It also assumes that all tenants would want to participate, when as discussed above, this is not likely.

6.2.5. *Administrative Capacity*

Most participants indicated that they do not have the capacity to administer an asset-building program. Some expressed interest in administering a program, provided funding is available. One participant suggested their housing society could be interested in delivering a matched savings program in partnership with Vancity, and another said they could deliver financial literacy programs. Some participants suggested BC Housing would have the capacity to administer an escrow savings program.

Two participants indicated they liked the approach in Ontario for the new IDA matched savings program where provincial organizations are responsible for funding and administering the program and housing providers are responsible solely for facilitating access to their tenants. One participant, who is planning to expand his matched savings program to serve families, believes other social housing providers could offer a similar program to their tenants.

Most participants expressed interest in working in partnership with a community agency that would support tenants in an asset-building program by providing employment training, financial literacy, budgeting and counselling. One participant suggested that BC Housing could contract with the Ministry of Social Development, since they have employment training and budgeting courses. As one participant said, "*We don't need to reinvent the curriculum – just find people who know how to deliver it"* (P.I., 2011d, 241-247).

7. Program Options

I am proposing four options for social housing providers in BC to help families in their units move out of poverty and become more self-sufficient. The policy objectives are to help families in social housing:

- Increase their earnings capacity and employability;
- Obtain employment that will lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency[31]; and
- Increase their assets (human, social, personal, physical and financial).

Option 1 is to maintain the status quo. The remaining three options call on the provincial government to implement asset-building programs to meet the policy objectives. Option 2 is to create an escrow account savings program for families in social housing, similar to the FSS program in the US. Option 3 is to create an IDA matched savings program for families in social housing, and Option 4 is to create both an FSS and IDA matched savings program for families in social housing.

These options are described below. The pros and cons of each option are also provided. They are based on information from the literature review, case study interviews, and other interviews conducted for this study,

7.1. Option 1: Status Quo

This option would maintain the status quo. It involves introducing no new programs to help families in social housing increase their self-sufficiency or assets.[32]

[31] Self-sufficiency is defined as no longer receiving income assistance or a rent subsidy through a public program.

7.1.1. *Option 1 Pros and Cons*

The main advantage of Option 1 is that it imposes no additional costs on government. The disadvantage is that it provides no new opportunities to help families in social housing increase their self-sufficiency or their assets.

7.2. Option 2: FSS/Escrow Savings Program

This option involves introducing an escrow savings program, similar to the FSS program in the US, to help families in social housing accumulate savings. As a family's rent increases due to higher earned income, the family would pay the higher rent and the difference between their base rent and higher rent would be deposited into an escrow account.

Case management services would be available to help families achieve employment goals and access community resources. Families would be expected to meet with case managers at least quarterly and access community resources to meet their goals. Services in the community could include:

- Child care;
- Transportation;
- Education;
- Job training and employment counselling; and
- Mental health and/or addictions services.

[32] Other possible ideas could include increasing earnings exemptions. One interview participant suggested a certain amount of earnings that are clawed back could be held for income assistance recipients in a matched savings account. Another approach would be to develop targeted employment and training programs for families in social housing – similar to the approach being implemented by the Capital Region Housing Corporation in Edmonton.

The program would be open to all families in social housing who pay RGI rents. This would include units owned and managed by BC Housing and could include units owned by other social housing providers, if they wish. The program could also be available to families in BC Housing's Rental Assistance Program.

While all families in RGI units would be eligible for the escrow program, most likely, they would not all want to participate, particularly if there are restrictions on how families may use their escrow funds and requirements to attend meetings and workshops.

Further discussion is necessary to determine how this program should be administered, and the responsibilities of social housing providers and community agencies. A number of issues also require additional consideration, as described below.

7.2.1. *Should the program stipulate how families may use escrow savings?*

This issue addresses the fundamental program design choice of whether escrow savings should be delivered in the form of a cash or in-kind benefit. Cash programs include the direct payment of cash, which recipients may spend as they please, whereas in-kind benefits are designed to induce recipients to use the funds for specific goods (e.g. housing) or services (e.g. education or training) (Kesselman, 2006). In traditional economic analysis, cash benefits are more efficient than providing benefits in-kind, because beneficiaries can choose how to spend the money to maximize their well-being. Another advantage is they enhance a beneficiary's "sense of autonomy, responsibility, self-esteem, and social inclusion" (Kesselman, 2006, p. 5). On the other hand, from a government and taxpayer point of view, there is potential for beneficiaries to spend funds in ways not consistent with what governments or taxpayers think best.

One potential advantage of in-kind benefits is they can "ensure beneficiaries consume particular goods and services they may not otherwise purchase in sufficient quantities or qualities to meet the preferences of policy makers" (Kesselman, 2006, p. 6). Another advantage is that this approach may "enhance support of the voting public for programs of income security and redistribution" (p.6). In addition, "in-kind benefits such as education or training can raise beneficiaries' earnings capacity so that they can save more for the long run" (pp. 6-7). On the other hand, a common criticism of in-kind benefit programs is they "impose the public's or policy makers' preferences on how beneficiaries should spend the transferred resources", may be considered paternalistic, and undermine self-respect, autonomy and responsibility of beneficiaries (p. 6).

In the US, participants are free to use their escrow funds as they wish – although program coordinators encourage families to use these funds wisely. The funds are considered "theirs", as long as the family has met program requirements and has been independent from welfare for 12 months. Most of the interview participants in this study felt the program should stipulate how families could spend their escrow funds, and that this would be more politically acceptable. On the other hand, as noted by some interview participants, this could reduce the incentive for families to participate in a program.

7.2.2. *Should the program require families to be independent from welfare to receive escrow savings?*

Most interview participants supported independence from welfare as a program goal, but not a requirement. Families receiving income assistance are charged a flat rate for their rent.[33] Therefore, the only way they could accumulate escrow savings is to become employed and stop receiving income assistance.[34] Families who become independent from income assistance or who increase their earned income would be eligible to receive their escrow savings at the end of the program. The only question then, is what happens to families who become independent from welfare and accumulate savings for a period of time, but lose their jobs and start receiving welfare

[33] If families earn income while receiving income assistance, this does not affect their rent. Income assistance would claw back these earnings 100% for families considered employable. Families not expected to become financially independent (e.g. Persons with Disabilities or Persons with Persistent and Multiple Barriers) may earn up to $500 per month. Additional earnings are clawed back.

[34] This helps explain why some people on income assistance will not want to participate in the program. If they don't feel ready or able to move into employment, they will not be able to accumulate escrow savings. On the other hand, for families on income assistance who feel ready to move into employment, the escrow savings will provide an incentive.

again before the end of the program. Should they be entitled to receive their escrow savings? Should the program permit them to extend the term of their contract so they could work towards resuming employment? Another question is whether families would re-apply for income assistance after they receive their escrow savings or continue moving forward. Further information on the experience of families in existing programs would help answer this question.

7.2.3. *Should the program require families to give up their housing subsidy to receive escrow savings?*

Interview participants supported the goal to help families move out of social housing, but most did not think this should be a program requirement. They expressed concern that a requirement would deter families from participating in a program unless affordable housing alternatives are available.

7.2.4. *Should the program limit the amount of escrow savings a family could accumulate?*

BC Housing is planning to impose a limit on the amount of escrow savings a family can accumulate in the Victoria Family Self-Sufficiency program. While this may reduce the anxiety of writing large cheques to tenants, the ability to save a large amount could provide a greater incentive for families to increase their incomes and work to become independent from welfare. A large amount of savings would also give families more options to move out of social housing and provide a greater opportunity to make significant changes in their lives. The less a family can save, the more limited their options.

7.2.5. *Option 2 Pros and Cons*

The main advantage of the FSS escrow approach is that it provides an incentive and support for families in social housing who pay RGI rents to increase their earned incomes and become independent from income assistance. As noted by one interview participant with experience delivering the FSS program, "*If you are planning to support people to move forward, you have to give them an incentive……It's not easy to say 'go find a job', when there's no motivation or support"* (P.I., 2011c, 545-547).

A second advantage of the FSS program is that it is possible for families to accumulate a large amount of savings. As well, it is relatively easy for families to save, since the process is automatic and entails no loss of ability to consume.

A third advantage of the FSS program is that escrow savings do not require any *new* sources of funding, since the savings in a family's escrow account are paid *by that participant.* BC Housing could implement an escrow program in its own portfolio and enable interested non-profit housing providers to implement it also – if they wish.

Finally, as noted by a housing provider participant, an escrow program is straightforward for a housing provider to implement and for tenants to understand.

The main disadvantage of the FSS escrow approach is that it is difficult for families to become independent from welfare, and for some families, this may not be a realistic goal. The program will not benefit families who are unable to increase their incomes or become independent from welfare. Secondly, the FSS program does not focus on financial literacy skills or provide families with the experience of learning to budget and set money aside. A third disadvantage is that the program is limited to serving families in RGI social housing units. It cannot serve other low-income families, which could possibly limit public support.

7.3. Option 3: IDA/Matched Savings Program

The third option is to introduce an IDA matched savings program for families in social housing. This would be an in-kind benefit program. Families would be required to use their savings for specific purposes such as employment, private market housing (rental or ownership), starting a small business, education or to purchase other long-term assets to increase self-sufficiency. Further consideration is needed to determine if families could reserve a portion of their savings for emergencies, to pay off outstanding debts, or other purposes consistent with self-sufficiency.

The program would help families in social housing learn how to save, and provide practical experience in actively saving money for a specific asset-building purpose. Families would be required to meet with case managers and attend workshops on financial literacy throughout the program, over a three-year period.

Similar to the escrow savings program, all families in social housing who pay RGI rents would be eligible to participate. This would include families in units owned and managed by BC Housing. Other social housing providers would be able to participate, if they wished. In addition, the program would be available to families in BC Housing's Rental Assistance Program.

Unlike the FSS escrow savings program, this program would require additional sources of funding for the matched component, and therefore, the number of participants would be limited. If more families subscribe to the program than can be served, program administrators could create a waiting list.

This option anticipates that the BC Government would contribute a set amount of funding for the matched savings component. The Government may also be able to engage private partners and foundations to contribute funding. Further discussion is necessary to determine how the program would be delivered. The Government could partner with an agency to assume responsibility - similar to the new IDA initiative in Ontario. Another approach would be to work with existing agencies in BC that currently deliver IDA programs and find out if they are interested in expanding their initiatives to target families in social housing.

A final issue to be considered is whether additional funding for a matched savings program should be available to low-income families not living in social housing. While the focus of this study is to assist families in social housing, if low-income families in social housing are eligible for a government-funded matched savings program, one could argue that low-income families in market housing should also be eligible. In fact, the case may be stronger to assist low-income families in market housing, since they do not have the benefit of a subsidized rent. As well, increasing the self-sufficiency of families in market housing could reduce the demand for social housing. On the other hand, focusing on families in social housing could assist in freeing-up social housing subsidies. This may be one reason why the new IDA program in Ontario will serve families on a social housing waiting list as well as social housing tenants.

7.3.1. *Option 3 Pros and Cons*

The main advantage of the IDA matched savings program is that it specifically focuses on financial literacy. It teaches families how to budget and gives them practical experience. The matched funds provide a significant incentive to save. (See Appendix F for program outcomes). Most participants in IDA programs have been able to reach their savings goals. One reason for this may be that the programs target individuals with the greatest ability to save.

A second advantage of this program is that it could serve low-income families who live in social housing and market housing. While the program would require additional sources of funding for the matched savings, this type of initiative may be of interest to the private sector and charitable foundations.

A key disadvantage of this program is that the number of participants will be limited by the amount of matching funds available. A final disadvantage is that families may not be interested in saving for one of the designated purposes set out in the program.

7.4. Option 4: Both FSS and IDA programs

This option provides for both the FSS escrow and IDA matched savings programs to be available to families in social housing. The reason for introducing both programs is that each has its advantages and disadvantages as noted previously in this study and can meet the needs of different families. If this option is implemented, further discussion will be necessary to determine if families could choose one program or the other of if they would be required to be enrolled in one program to be eligible for the other. In the GOALS program, families must participate in the FSS program to be eligible for the IDA. In the Victoria Family Self-Sufficiency program, all families must be involved in an IDA. Families who do not live in social housing are unable to accumulate savings in an escrow account, but receive the same services as other participants for financial literacy and employment support.

7.4.1. *Option 4 Pros and Cons*

The main advantage of this approach is that it would enable participants to accumulate the maximum amount of savings. These savings could give families more options, and increase their ability to move out of social housing. A second advantage is that families could benefit from *both* employment training support and financial literacy programs to develop lifelong savings skills. Third, the two programs are complementary. The employment support provided in the FSS program can help families increase their incomes, and make it easier to save more in their IDA accounts. There is not much point in a family earning more money if they have no skills to save at least some of it. Fourth, the ability to offer both programs is most equitable. This approach can make it possible to meet the needs of families in different circumstances. Some families may be able to save more through the FSS, while others could save more through the IDA.[35] In addition, it would be possible to serve low-income families in social housing as well as in market housing, for example, in communities with limited or no social housing.

The main disadvantage of this approach is that it may be more administratively complex to ensure the delivery of both employment and financial literacy services. It may also be difficult to manage two types of savings accounts.

[35] Families able to increases their incomes during the FSS program will benefit from escrow savings. A family with a stable income would not benefit from the FSS program, but could save money in an IDA account.

8. Criteria and Measures to Evaluate Options

In this study, I use four criteria and related measures to evaluate the status quo and other proposed options. These include the following (Patton and Sawicki, 1986):

- Effectiveness;
- Stakeholder acceptability;
- Cost and administrative feasibility; and
- Political feasibility.

Table 4 provides a brief description of each criterion and the measures used to assess each option.

Table 4. Criteria and measures to evaluate options

Criteria	Definition	Measures	Data Source	Score
Effectiveness				
Income	Extent to which the program results in increased income	$ (average amount and/or range)	Case study Literature review	None = 0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3
Savings	Maximum and average amount participants can accumulate	$ (average amount and/or range)	Case study Literature review Interviews	None = 0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3
Reach	Number of people who can participate in the program Percentage of participants able to achieve savings goals	# of participants able to participate % of participants able to receive savings	Case study Literature review Interviews	None = 0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3
Stakeholder Acceptability				
Stakeholder Acceptability	Extent to which housing providers would make this program available to tenants	Number of housing providers who would support it	Housing provider interviews	None = 0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3
Cost and Administrative Feasibility				
Program Delivery	Extent to which existing organizations have the capacity to deliver the program	Do organizations exist that could deliver the program (Yes/No)	Interviews	None =0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3

Ability to Fund	Costs Extent to which housing providers would require external sources of funding	$ Costs Is there a need for external funding partners (Yes/No)	Interviews	None =0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3
Political Feasibility				
Consistent with government objectives	Are the options consistent with government policies	(Yes/No)	Interviews Literature review	None = 0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3
Equity	Would families with similar incomes be treated fairly?	Would be considered fair by the general public (Yes/No)	Interviews Literature review	None = 0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3

To evaluate each option based on the criteria, I have applied a score. These scores are based on my interpretation of the literature, the case study, and interviews. I have demonstrated the results of my evaluation using the Goeller Scorecard approach (Patton and Sawicki, 1986). Each criterion is listed in a row, and each option is listed in a column. I have used different colours to illustrate the *relative* strengths of each option, i.e. the strengths and weaknesses of each option relative to each other. Where I have applied a low score to one of the options, this does not necessarily indicate a lack of support in absolute terms, it simply means I have given one option a low score relative to the other options. In addition, I use numbers to show which option "best" satisfies the criterion, and add these scores to further illustrate the ranking of each option. A score of 3 (high) indicates the most favourable option, whereas a score of 0 (none) indicates the least favourable option.

8.1. Effectiveness

This criterion considers whether the proposed option will have the intended effect to help families in social housing increase their self-sufficiency and assets. I have examined three criteria: incomes, savings and reach. Reach is the number of individuals who may participate in the program and achieve their goals.[36]

This section relies on information from a number of different reports. It should be noted, however, that while some evaluations measured program impacts (e.g. *learn*$ave, the AFI program, and Capital Region Housing Corporation program in Edmonton), others simply reported on outcomes. An impact evaluation is necessary to determine the real impacts of a program - to determine whether a program had the desired effects and if the effects are attributable to the program (Baker, 1999, p. 1). This type of evaluation requires a comparison or control group (those who do not participate in the program) and a treatment group (those who do participate in the program). A true experimental design (best choice) requires a random assignment of participants to either the control group or treatment group. A quasi experimental design (next best choice) uses a non-random approach to generate a comparison group that resembles the treatment group. This approach can draw on existing data sources, as was done in the AFI evaluation (Baker, 1999; Abt Associates Inc., 2008).

8.1.1. *Income*

According to the national evaluation of the FSS program in the US, the average annual income for FSS graduates increased 68%. In the Capital Region Housing Corporation FSS program, average monthly incomes for program participants increased 78%, compared to 5% for the control group (see Appendix F).

In the IDA program, a national evaluation of the AFI program, found the program increased “slightly the probability of employment for AFI participants relative to nonparticipants”. In the GOALS program delivered by Home Forward, which includes both FSS and IDA components, average family incomes for successful graduates increased 175%.

[36] It would have been helpful to have more information on the number of program participants who were able to become independent from welfare and move out of social housing, but this was not available.

Given that the main objective of the FSS program is to increase earnings, whereas the focus of the IDA is to increase savings, I believe the FSS program (Option 2) is likely to be more effective than the IDA (Option 3) in helping participants increase their incomes. If IDA participants use their savings for education and training programs, their incomes could increase in the future. There is, however, no data to support this.

Based on the GOALS program, I believe participation in both the FSS and IDA programs (Option 4) would be most effective in helping participants increase their incomes. The potential to accumulate savings would create an additional incentive to increase one's income. The status quo (Option 1) would have no effect on increasing incomes.

Table 5. Ranking for income

Criterion - Effectiveness	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: FSS	Option 3: IDA	Option 4: Both
Income	**None** $0	**Medium** Up 68-78%	**Low** N/A	**High** Up 175%

8.1.2. *Savings*

According to the programs reviewed in this study, successful graduates in the FSS program (Option 2) could accumulate an average of $5,300 to $7,500 in escrow savings and save up to a maximum of about $30,000 over a five-year period (see Appendix F).

In the IDA programs (Option 3), according to the programs reviewed in this study, families could save from $800 to $3,000 over three years. With matching contributions at a rate of 3:1, these families could accumulate a total of $3,200 to $12,000.

The ability to *combine* savings from both the FSS and IDA programs, (Option 4), would result in the greatest possible savings. The status quo (Option 1) would have no effect on increasing savings.

Table 6. Ranking for savings

Criterion - Effectiveness	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: FSS	Option 3: IDA	Option 4: Both
Savings	**None** $0	**Medium** $5,300-$30,000	**Low** $3,200-$12,000	**High** $8,500-$42000

8.1.3. *Program Reach*

8.1.3.1. Number of participants

In the GOALS program, Home Forward was able to serve more people in the FSS program than in the IDA program. As of June 2011, about 280 families were participating in the FSS program, and as of October 2011, 42 families were participating in the IDA program. One reason is the funding mechanism. In the FSS program (Option 2), *it is the family itself that contributes to its own escrow account* through an increased rent payment. The number of families who can enroll does not depend on the amount of funding available from an external source. In the IDA program (Option 3), the number of individuals who can enroll in the program will be limited by the amount of matching funds available for the program. As a result, the FSS program (Option 2) will be able to serve more families than the IDA program (Option 3). Offering both programs (Option 4) could serve the most families if families can choose to be involved in one *or* the other (assumed for this analysis). If participants must be enrolled in one program to be eligible for the other, the number of participants would be limited to the maximum who could be served through either the FSS or IDA program. Option 1 would have no effect on the number of participants served.

8.1.3.2. Graduation rate

As noted previously, in the FSS programs (Option 2), graduation rates ranged from about one-quarter (24%) in the national evaluation of the US program to 69% in the Edmonton Family Self-Sufficiency program (see Appendix F). For IDA programs (Option 3), graduation rates were higher, ranging from 60% in Oregon's Individual Development Account Initiative to 100% in the IDA component of the GOALS program. In the Victoria program, which includes both an IDA and FSS component (Option 4), the graduation rate was 83%.

There may be two reasons why IDA programs have a higher graduation rate than the FSS. First, it may be more difficult for families to achieve the FSS goal to become independent from welfare than to achieve IDA goals and savings targets. Second, the IDA program may be more careful in selecting participants who are most likely to succeed (IDA-ready).

According to the national FSS evaluation, most of the participants who graduated from the program had been employed at the start, and were not receiving welfare (Planmatics, Inc. and Abt Associates Inc., 2011). This supports the idea that it may be difficult for families in an FSS program to meet program goals and become independent from welfare. The program may have greater success in helping working poor families increase their incomes.

Table 7 provides a summary of the options and their effectiveness. Combining both the FSS and IDA programs (Option 4) is likely to be most effective.

Table 7. Evaluation of options based on effectiveness

Criterion: Effectiveness	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: FSS	Option 3: IDA	Option 4: Both
Income	**None** $0	**Medium** Up 68-78%	**Low** Don't Know	**High** Up 175%
Savings	**None** $0	**Medium** $5,300 - $30,000	**Low** $3,200 - $12,000	**High** $8,500 - $42,000
Reach: Number of participants	**None**	**Medium**	**Low**	**High**
Reach: Graduation rate	**None**	**Low** 24-69%	**High** 60-100%	**Medium** 83%
Score	**0**	**7**	**6**	**11**
Ranking	**None**	**Medium**	**Low**	**High**

None = 0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3

8.2. Stakeholder Acceptability

This criterion considers whether the proposed option will be acceptable to social housing providers.

As noted previously, among the 10 interview participants who addressed this issue, five thought it would be ideal if both the FSS escrow and IDA matched savings programs could be available to families in social housing (Option 4).

Three participants preferred the IDA matched savings approach (Option 3), one preferred the FSS escrow approach (Option 2), and one participant did not believe his organization would wish to implement either program (Option 1).

Table 8. Evaluation of options based on stakeholder acceptability

Criterion: Stakeholder Acceptability	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: FSS	Option 3: IDA	Option 4: Both
Number of participants in support	**Low** 1 participant	**Low** 1 participant	**Medium** 3 participants	**High** 5 participants
Score	**1**	**1**	**2**	**3**
Ranking	**Low**	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**

None = 0   Low = 1   Medium = 2   High = 3

8.3. Cost and Administrative Feasibility

This criterion considers whether organizations in BC have the capacity to deliver the proposed options. It reviews available information about the costs of each option and considers the feasibility of attracting sufficient funding.

8.3.1. *Program Delivery*

BC Housing currently administers FSS escrow payments for families in the Victoria Family Self Sufficiency program. If BC Housing decides to make an FSS program available to families within its own portfolio, it would have the infrastructure to administer the escrow payments. BC Housing would also have the infrastructure to administer escrow payments for non-profit housing societies interested in the program, although additional resources may be necessary (Option 2). BC Housing could work in partnership with community agencies to deliver the necessary support services to participating families.

For the IDA matched savings program (Option 3), at least a dozen community agencies in BC are delivering these programs. It may be possible for some of them to serve families in social housing. Additional resources would, however, be necessary if the BC Government would like these agencies to increase the number of people they serve.

The Victoria Family Self-Sufficiency program delivers both an escrow and IDA program (Option 4). This approach could be expanded to other communities, although it may be difficult to find agencies with sufficient resources to deliver the services needed to help families in social housing achieve the goals of both the FSS and IDA programs. Agencies would likely need additional resources. The status quo (Option 1) is most feasible, since it requires no changes in program delivery. I have ranked Option 4 below Options 2 and 3 because it may be more difficult to find agencies capable of delivering both employment support and financial literacy programs.

8.3.2. *Program Costs*

The Victoria Family Self-Sufficiency program, which includes both the FSS and IDA programs (Option 4), costs about $1,800 per person for administration and program costs over three years ($600 per year). I was unable to obtain program and administrative costs for an FSS program (Option 2). Considering the GOALS case study, however, if one assumes a caseload of one coordinator for 50 families, and a coordinator’s annual salary to be $46,000, including benefits, administration costs could be about $920 per year. The new IDA program (Option 3) in Ontario (START) is estimating total administration and program costs to be about $2,100 per person over three years ($700 per year). This will include supporting programs in three cities and program evaluation (personal communication, February 15, 2012).[37]

Based on this information, the FSS program (Option 2) would cost the most at $920 per year, followed by the IDA program (Option 3) at $700 per year. Implementing both programs (Option 4) would cost the least at $600 per year. It seems counter-intuitive that implementing both the FSS and IDA programs (Option 4) should cost the least. It could be that the design of the Victoria program is more efficient than the other programs. The information on costs is useful to estimate a range ($600 - $920 per person per year), or an average of $740 per person per year. Program costs may depend on how each program is designed, and there may not be a significant difference in costs for the different program options.

I used the Victoria program to estimate the cost of providing FSS escrow savings (Option 2). This program spent a total of $227,000 on escrow savings. Thirty-six participants were able to accumulate escrow funds, and they saved an average of $6,300 per person. If we divide the total budget for escrow savings among all program participants, the cost is close to $3,000 per person for a three-year program.[38]

For an IDA program (Option 3), if we assume participants could save $25 per month of their own ($300 per year) and we assume savings will be matched at a rate of 3:1, the family would be eligible for a match of $900 per year, or $2,700 at the end of a three-year program.

The savings component of the FSS and IDA programs combined would be $1,900 per year, or $5,700 at the end of three years. Annual costs are illustrated in Table 9. (Note: “high” is the most favourable and “low” is the least favourable option).

[37] The total budget is about $2 million to serve 500 participants.

[38] BC Housing is considering implementing a cap of $7,500 per person. Based on past experience, however, it is unlikely all program recipients would be eligible to receive this amount. It is therefore, not unreasonable to assume that the average FSS expenditure would be about $3,000 per person.

Table 9. Costs of program options

Annual Cost	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: FSS	Option 3: IDA	Option 4: Both
Program administration	0	$740	$740	$740
FSS escrow savings	0	$1,000	0	$1,000
IDA matched savings	0	0	$900	$900
Cost per person/year	**High $0**	**Medium $1,740**	**Medium $1,640**	**Low $2,640**

In considering costs, potential savings should also be considered. As an example, Table 10 provides income assistance rates for a single parent with two children. If the cost to implement Option 4 for 100 families is $264,000, and the cost for income assistance for one family is $12,420, this option would break even if 22% of participating families became independent from welfare after one year.

Table 10. Income assistance rates

Income assistance	Support	Shelter	Total/Month	Total/Year
Single parent - 2 children	$375	$660	$1,035	$12,420

8.3.3. *Ability to Secure Funding*

As discussed previously, one of the main advantages of the FSS program is that BC Housing would not need to find new sources of funding to implement the escrow savings component (Option 2). This is because savings that accumulate in the participant's escrow account are paid for *by the participant* as a result of their increased rent payments during the program.[39] An IDA program for families in social housing

[39] As a family's income increases due to higher earnings, their rent is increased. Families pay the higher rent. The difference between the higher rent and their original rent is deposited into an escrow account.

(Option 3) would require an additional source of funding to match participants' savings. The BC Government could determine how much it is willing to allocate for the matched savings, as in Manitoba. As well, the BC Government could work in partnership with community foundations and the private sector to raise additional funds.

Some interview participants expressed concern that the FSS escrow program would cost money (lost revenues) because the housing provider would not be able to collect increased rent from families in the program. If one believes tenants' incomes would not have increased without an escrow savings program, one could argue that there is no cost to the government: that the housing provider did not lose any rent revenue because the only reason tenants' incomes increased was because of the escrow savings program. Looking at it this way, BC Housing would not lose any revenue by returning escrow savings funds to families if they achieve the program's goals. On the other hand, if BC Housing believes tenants' incomes would have increased without the program, the escrow accounts could be considered foregone revenue. Regardless, in considering the ability to fund the savings portion of an asset-building program, the FSS program (Option 2) is most feasible, since it requires no new sources of funds.[40]

[40] If a non-profit housing provider implements an FSS program, BC housing could allocate the same amount of subsidy to them, regardless of whether the incomes of participating families increase. As a result, the amount of operating funds available for housing providers would remain the same – at least until operating agreements expire and non-profit housing societies are no longer eligible for housing subsidies.

Table 11. Evaluation of options based on administrative feasibility

Criterion: Cost and Administrative Feasibility	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: FSS	Option 3: IDA	Option 4: Both
Program delivery	High	High	Medium	Low
Cost	High	Medium	Medium	Low
Ability to fund	High	High	Medium	Medium
Score	9	8	6	4
Ranking	High	High	Medium	Low

None = 0 Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3

8.4. Political Feasibility

This criterion considers whether the options presented in this study would be politically feasible. This criterion is important because "policy is developed in the political arena and must survive the political test. If a policy will not be supported by decision makers, officials, or voters, then it has little chance of being adopted, or, if adopted, implemented" (Patton and Sawicki, 1986, p. 163). In considering which of the proposed options might receive the greatest support from the BC Government, I have addressed whether the programs are consistent with government objectives and whether the options are equitable.

8.4.1. *Consistent with Government Objectives*

Interview participants suggested the options presented in this study would be consistent with government objectives to increase self-sufficiency and help families move into the private housing market. The BC Government's housing strategy, set out in *Housing Matters BC* expresses support for self-sufficiency (BC Government). Not only has BC Housing provided funding to the Victoria Family Self-Sufficiency program, which provides both an FSS escrow savings and IDA program (Option 4), it also provided funding to the North Island program, which offered an IDA matched savings program (Option 3) for low-income families. The proposed options are also consistent with the BC Liberal Party's statement of beliefs, "that government must put families first in all decision-making" (BC Liberal Party). BC's New Democrats also support families and investing in human capital to give British Columbians the opportunities and skills needed to succeed (BC NDP, 2010).

Each option is consistent with government objectives to support self-sufficiency. I have assumed that the status quo (Option 1) is consistent with government objectives since this is the current situation.

8.4.2. *Equity*

This criterion considers whether the options are equitable. According to Patton and Sawicki (1986), equity is an issue of "fair distribution, rather than merely equal distribution" (p. 165). It is, however, difficult to determine what is fair. Interview participants expressed concern with introducing an FSS escrow savings program (Option 2) because this option would be available only to families in social housing. Low-income families in private market housing would not have the opportunity to build assets. These families could be on a waiting list for social housing or living in communities where there is limited or no social housing. The second concern is that this option would be available only to RGI tenants, and market tenants in a social housing development would not have the opportunity to build their assets.

In answer to these concerns, an escrow program for RGI families in social housing would be fair as long as it is available to all RGI families in social housing. It is reasonable that some programs should be targeted to these families, especially if one of the goals is to help families become self-sufficient and eventually move out of social housing. While one could argue that a low-income family in social housing is better off than a low-income family in market housing – because their rent is lower – the nature of RGI rents also keeps them "stuck" in social housing and creates a disincentive to increase their incomes. The FSS program (Option 2) would help address this. It is fair for RGI tenants to be eligible for this program and not market tenants because presumably the market tenants have higher incomes. In addition, market tenants do not face the same disincentive to increase their incomes as RGI tenants.[41] Putting a cap on the maximum amount of escrow a family could earn, and requiring that savings be used for certain purposes could increase the sense of fairness about this program and make it more politically feasible.

At present, IDA programs in BC (Option 3), although limited, are generally available to low-income families regardless of whether or not they are living in social housing. IDA programs could be considered more equitable than FSS programs because they can serve families in both social and market housing. If a new or expanded program were introduced that would serve only low-income families in social housing, this would not be fair to low-income families in market housing. In particular, this would not be fair to low-income families in smaller communities where there is limited or no social housing. Therefore, if an IDA program is introduced, it should be available to low-income families in both social housing and market housing.

Offering both the FSS and IDA programs (Option 4) maximizes equity, as these two programs could meet the different needs of low-income families, both in social and market housing.

One could argue that the status quo (Option 1) is least equitable since to date, low-income families in Victoria are the only families in BC able to benefit from a program that offers both FSS escrow and IDA matched savings.

[41] This is because their rents are not geared-to their incomes.

Table 12. Evaluation of options based on political feasibility

Criterion: Political Feasibility	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: FSS	Option 3: IDA	Option 4: Both
Consistent with government objectives	**Medium**	**Medium**	**Medium**	**Medium**
Equity	**Low**	**Medium**	**Medium**	**High**
Score	**3**	**4**	**4**	**5**
Ranking	**Low**	**Medium**	**Medium**	**High**

None = 0   Low = 1   Medium = 2   High = 3

8.5. Evaluation Results

I evaluated the four options in this study according to the criteria of effectiveness, stakeholder acceptability, administrative feasibility, and political feasibility. According to this evaluation, implementing both the FSS and IDA programs (Option 4) achieves the highest scores for effectiveness, stakeholder acceptability, and political feasibility. This option may, however, present more administrative challenges compared to implementing only the FSS program (Option 2). Implementing only the IDA program (Option 3), ranks almost as high as the FSS program (Option 2), but is less effective and will be more difficult to fund. The status quo (Option 1) ranks lowest for effectiveness, stakeholder acceptability and political feasibility. Table 13 illustrates the results of my analysis.

Table 13. Policy evaluation summary matrix

Criterion	Option 1: Status Quo	Option 2: FSS	Option 3: IDA	Option 4: Both
Effectiveness	None	Medium	Low	High
Stakeholder Acceptability	Low	Low	Medium	High
Cost and Administrative Feasibility	High	High	Medium	Low
Political Feasibility	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Score	5	8	7	10
Ranking	Low	Medium	Medium	High

None = 0   Low = 1 Medium = 2 High = 3

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study examines two approaches to asset-building that social housing providers in BC could use to help families in their units move out of poverty and become more self-sufficient. These programs are: (1) the Family Self-Sufficiency program developed in the United States and (2) a program of Individual Development Accounts. The study concludes that both approaches are effective and complementary. Implementing both in British Columbia would provide the maximum benefit to families with low incomes. Interviews with social housing providers in BC found that some of them would support being able to offer these programs to families in their units.

This study recognizes that these two programs in themselves will not end poverty, and that other approaches are needed. Nevertheless, these programs are within the scope of what social housing providers could do to help their tenants, and provide a potential new role for social housing providers in addressing poverty.

9.2. Recommendations

Based on my evaluation of options for this study, I recommend that:

1. BC Housing, in partnership with BC Government ministries and the BC Non-Profit Housing Association, implement a pilot project to test new approaches to deliver the FSS and IDA programs for families in BC Housing and non-profit housing units.[42] It will be necessary for these pilot projects to include a complete evaluation to determine program impacts. Further consideration is

[42] Testing the program among families in BC Housing's Rental Assistance Program could be done in the future.

needed to determine if the FSS program should specify how families may use their escrow savings, require families to be independent from income assistance as a condition for receiving escrow savings, or impose a limit on the total amount of escrow savings a family could accumulate. The program should not require families to move out of social housing as a condition for receiving escrow savings.

2. BC Housing, in partnership with BC Government ministries and the BC Non-Profit Housing Association identify options for one or more community agencies to deliver services as part of a new IDA and FSS pilot program, including employment support and financial literacy.

3. BC Housing and BC Government ministries connect with the BC Asset Building Collaborative to find ways to expand the capacity of agencies currently delivering asset-building programs, including IDA matched savings opportunities and financial literacy training.

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Interviews

P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011a.	November 1
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011b.	November 2
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011c.	November 4
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011d.	November 24
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011e.	November 29
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011f.	November 29
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011g.	December 1
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011h.	December 1
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011i.	December 1
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011j.	December 6
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011k.	December 6
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011l.	December 6
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011m.	December 7
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011n.	December 8
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011o.	December 9
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011p.	December 14
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011q	December 14
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011r.	December 15
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011s.	December 16
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011t.	December 16
P.I. [Personal Interview]	2011u.	December 29

Appendices

Appendix A - Overview of Social Housing in Canada

This section provides a brief description of social housing in BC, including public housing, non-profit housing and co-operative housing. It also provides a brief history of social housing in Canada.

1. Social Housing in BC

Social housing in this study refers to government-owned public housing, non-profit housing, and non-profit housing co-operatives. The housing is affordable to tenants who generally pay about 30% of their incomes to rent. Tenants who receive income assistance are charged a flat rent based on household size. For example, a family of three would pay $595 per month, and a family of four would pay $635 (BC Housing, 2011).[43] The rents are subsidized by the provincial and/or federal governments.

In general, in housing built prior to 1986, tenants pay about 30% of their incomes to rent, up to a maximum rent ceiling. The way rent ceilings are set depends on the particular program (P.I., 2011k).

Housing units built under a federal program between 1986 and 1993 have no rent ceiling. Tenants pay about 30% of their incomes to rent with no limit. At a certain point, which will vary by community, the tenant's rent should be similar to market rates, and it is expected the tenant will move out, thereby freeing up the subsidized unit for someone else (P.I., 2011k).

In 1993, BC initiated an income-mixed housing program, which includes a market component. The target is for 60% of units to be rented on a rent-geared-to-income (RGI) basis, and 40% to be rented at lower end of market rates (between 80 and 90% of equivalent units in the private market). This program includes a maximum rent ceiling in the RGI units so a tenant in one of these units will not pay more than a tenant in a market unit (P.I., 2011k).

BC Housing

Public housing is owned by a government or government agency (Sewell, 1994). In BC, public housing is owned and managed by BC Housing, a crown corporation established in 1967 to fulfill the BC Government's commitment to the development, management and administration of subsidized housing. BC Housing's mandate is to assist British Columbians in greatest need of affordable and appropriate housing by providing a range of options, including emergency shelters, transitional and supportive housing, independent social housing, rent assistance for people living in the private market, and initiatives to support home ownership.

BC Housing assists about 95,000 households in 200 communities throughout the province in subsidized housing. This includes individuals living in about 7,200 units managed directly by BC Housing and 59,300 units managed by non-profit societies and housing co-operatives. It also includes about 28,500 households receiving financial assistance to make their rent more affordable in the private market (BC Housing, 2010/11).

A portion of BC Housing's portfolio is targeted to families. Their directly managed stock includes 3,055 units built under family housing programs for families (BC Housing, 2011). BC Housing's Rental Assistance Program provides subsidies to about 10,330 low-income working families to help them afford rent payments in the private rental market. Families must have a gross

[43] The shelter maximum for a family receiving disability assistance would be $570 for a 2 bedroom unit and $660 for a three-bedroom unit (BC Ministry of Social Development, 2007).

household income of $35,000 or less, at least one dependent child, and have been employed at some point during the year (BC Housing).

Non-Profit Housing

Non-profit housing is owned and managed by local non-profit housing societies. There are about 595 non-profit housing providers in BC with 56,201 permanent housing units. Of these, 13,016 units provide permanent housing for families. Most non-profit societies are small organizations. More than half of them (58%) own and manage 50 units or less. Only a few non-profit societies (3%) own and operate more than 500 units (BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 2012).

Non-Profit Co-operative Housing

Non-profit housing co-operatives are owned and managed by the members who live there. There are more than 261 non-profit housing co-ops with more than 14,500 units in British Columbia (Co-operative Housing Federation of BC). Similar to non-profit housing providers, most co-ops are relatively small – the average co-op in BC has 50 units. One of the main differences between co-op and non-profit housing is that co-op housing provides mixed-income communities for individuals with low and middle incomes. As well, co-ops are run mostly by volunteers – the members. One of the goals of co-op housing is to provide a place for families to raise their children where they have security of tenure.

2. History of Social Housing

Social housing in Canada began in 1946 when the federal government established Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to build and maintain affordable housing for veterans returning from World War II and their families.[44] The continuing challenge to address housing needs was picked up by city governments, and in 1947, voters in Toronto endorsed expenditures to build Regent Park, the first city-owned public housing project that included about 1,300 units rented on a geared-to-income basis (ONPHA; Sewell, 1994).

During the 1950s and 1960s, CMHC's mandate was expanded to build and manage rental housing for low-income families, in partnership with the provincial governments. Development proceeded at a dramatic rate, and this is known as the "era of public housing" (ONPHA; Sewell, 1994). Municipalities became increasingly critical of the growing public housing presence and expressed concerns about concentrating large numbers of "needy" people in large projects. In 1968, Prime Minister Trudeau established a Task Force on Housing and Urban Development headed by Paul Hellyer. The report, released in 1969, "condemned public housing as ghettos of the poor" and recommended that the public housing program be abandoned (Sewell, 1994, p. 136). This led to the introduction of a new non-profit and co-operative housing program in 1973. The public housing program was scaled down and terminated in 1978.[45]

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, most of the government funded housing was built by community-based non-profit and co-operative housing organizations, with funding from CMHC (Chisholm, 2003). A new model of housing emerged, targeted to a mix of low and moderate income households. Housing developments were specifically designed to fit into existing neighbourhoods and foster a healthy social environment. Social housing production peaked in the early 1980s and began to decline steadily in 1986 until 1993, when the federal government cancelled all new commitments for social housing programs, except for on-reserve housing. According to Barbara

[44] At the time, it was called Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The name was changed in the 1970s (Sewell, 1994).

[45] Public housing was terminated in the provinces, but not in the territories.

Carroll and Ruth Jones (2000), in 1986, the federal government began the process of policy devolution that significantly changed how social housing was delivered in Canada. The authors suggest that housing was "no longer an agenda item" (Carroll and Jones, 2000, p. 280). In addition, the federal government was likely responding to the need to address the deficit. Altogether, CMHC provided funding for a total of 167,000 non-profit, 51,300 co-operative and 205,300 public housing units in Canada (CMHC, 1998).

After 1993, British Columbia and Quebec were the only provinces that continued to fund the development of new social housing units without federal funding. In 2000, the federal government resumed funding for housing, although on a much more limited scale, with the Affordable Housing Program (administered by the provinces), and through subsequent Housing Agreements with the provinces. To address homelessness, in 1999, the federal government launched the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), now known as the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. Funding was not available for social housing through this program until 2007, when the federal government adopted a "Housing First" approach (ONPHA).

Appendix B - Examples of FSS and IDA programs in Canada

1. Victoria Family Self-Sufficiency Program, Victoria, BC

Location	**Capital Region District, Vancouver Island, BC**
Type of program	IDA and FSS
Status	Four Phases: 2002-2005; 2005-2008; 2008-2011; and 2012-2014
Organizations	Administered by Burnside Gorge Community Association. Participating housing providers include Pacifica Housing Advisory Association, Capital Region Housing Corporation, and BC Housing.
Goals	Help families increase their financial literacy skills, develop and manage long-term goals, build financial assets and increase their employment opportunities.
Target population	Families who live in social housing.
Number of participants	Phase 3 (2008-2011) was able to serve 77 families.
Description	This is a voluntary program that includes the following components: • All participants are enrolled in an IDA account so they can develop savings habits and have a concrete experience of what it is like to have savings. • Participants are also able to build savings through an escrow savings program with social housing providers. Not all participants have an escrow account because some participants do not live in social housing and others did not receive rent increases. • One-to-one support and educational workshops. At the end of the program, escrow and IDA funds must be used for goals set out in each person's program contract. Funds have been used to move into market housing, for unplanned expenditures, as a "nest egg", education (for themselves and their children), a vehicle, and self-employment. The funds are provided directly to program participants. In Phase 4, the maximum amount of escrow will be capped at 7,500.
Outcomes	Sixty-four families graduated in Phase 3 (83%). Most participants were able to save a total of $2,000 in their IDA accounts. Among 36 participants who received escrow savings, the average amount was about $6300.[46] Program graduates who wrote letters about the program say it helped them learn new skills; get control over their finances; become more stable, hopeful, confident and self-reliant; and create a positive family life for their children.

[46] The total amount of escrow savings was $227,068. Divided among 36 participants = average of $6307 per person.

Funding	BC Housing and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation provided funding for the escrow accounts ($227,068). Vancity Savings and Credit Union provided funding for the IDA matched savings ($90,000). Both BC Housing and the Ministry of Social Development contributed funding for program administration ($180,000).
Sources	Personal Interview 2011j. Burnside Gorge Community Association. *Journeys to Self-Sufficiency, Phase III* and *Phase III Final Report 2008-2011.* Personal communication, January 31, 2012.

2. Family Self-Sufficiency Project, Edmonton, Alberta

Location	**Edmonton, Alberta**
Type of program	FSS and a matched savings component
Status	Was a pilot project 2003-2007
Organizations	Administered by the Capital Region Housing Corporation, Edmonton, a municipal non-profit housing corporation.
Goals	Help families gain self-sufficiency through further education, changes in employment, and assistance with personal, mental and physical health issues over a three year period. Attainment of the goal was measured based on families moving out of CRHC housing into market rental or home ownership.
Target population	Families who had lived in CRHC housing for an average of five years.
Number of participants	A total of 29 participants were accepted into the program.
Description	Key program components included case management and matched savings. Participants were able to accumulate savings in an escrow account. The amount of savings was the difference between their “base” rent (based on an average rent paid the year prior to entry into the program) and any increase in rent resulting from an increase in family income. This amount was deposited into the participant’s escrow account and was **matched 1:1 up** to a maximum of $5,000 by the FSS program (p.18). Participants could use the total amount in escrow upon graduation from the program and only towards the purchase of a house. If a participant chose to exit the program for other reasons, they were entitled to the amount they contributed; not the matched amount.
Outcomes	At the end of the program, 38% (11 participants) graduated – meaning they became home owners, 31% (9 participants) completed the program without purchasing a home, and 31% (9 participants) dropped out of the program. Out of the 18 participants who completed or dropped out of the program, 5 moved into market rental housing, meaning that 55% of participants moved out of subsidized housing and into homeownership or market rental housing. A final evaluation of the program (2007) found: • 55% of program participants left CRHC for market accommodation (owned or rented) compared to 2% of the control group.

	• FSS participants' total monthly incomes rose 78% over three years compared to 5% for the control group over the same period. • FSS participants' reliance on wages as a source of income increased from 59% to 76% over three years compared to a slight decline for the control group. • FSS participants' reliance on government sources of income (e.g. welfare and employment insurance) decreased. The percentage of families on welfare decreased from 31% to 24%. Reliance on public funds remained constant for the control group. The evaluation also found that allowing for all the major costs and benefits associated with the program, the program yielded a positive net benefit of almost $1 million over three years. The Social Return on Investment was 2:1 – every dollar invested in the Program yielded more than twice the returns to individuals and communities. NPV Benefits $1,884,819 NPV Costs $ 957,596 SROI (Benefits/Costs) 2:1
Funding	Capital Region Housing Corporation received permission from the Alberta government to use their operating surplus for the program.
Sources	Another Way, 2005 and 2007, Program evaluations.

3. Saving to Achieve Real Transformation (START), Ontario

Location	**Ontario: Ottawa, North Bay and Windsor**
Type of program	IDA
Status	A 3-year pilot project launched in January 2012.
Organizations	A joint venture between the Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC) and Social and Enterprise Development Innovations (SEDI). SHSC is providing the funding, and SEDI is responsible for administering the project together with local with community partners. Housing providers will facilitate access to their tenants and applicants.
Goals	Help participants build personal assets.
Target population	Individuals or families living in social housing or on the social housing waiting list. This includes households in co-ops, as well as non-profit and social housing.
Number of participants	The goal is to serve 500 participants.
Description	Participants will receive case management supports and financial literacy training in addition to a financial incentive for saving. Their savings over a two year period will be matched at a rate of 3:1. The matched money from the project will go directly to the participant's chosen savings goal, which could include: • Housing – affordable home ownership, first and last month's rent

	• Education – post-secondary education for adults, translation and assessment of foreign credentials, supports to learning, or • Entrepreneurship – small business start-up and cost of tools for employment.
Outcomes	Participants will be expected to save up to a maximum of $800. With a 3:1 ratio, the matched savings will be $2,400, leaving each participant with a total of $3,200.
Funding	Funding will be provided by SHSC. The budget is about $2 million.
Sources	SHSC Website and Personal Interview, 2011m.

4. Next Step, Vancouver, BC

Location	**Vancouver, BC**
Type of program	IDA
Status	Operating for 6 years. Planning to expand the program to serve families.
Organizations	More Than A Roof Housing Society
Goals	Help participants: • Break the cycle of poverty • Develop good personal money management skills • Develop a savings habit • Plan for the future and achieve personal financial goals to help them reach the "next step"
Target population	Residents of the society's buildings in the Downtown South Granville area of Vancouver.
Number of participants	Each round of the program (1 year) involves about 20 people at a time.
Description	Next Step works with low-income residents to help them develop strong money management skills and a savings-conscious lifestyle – to help them develop skills for saving and get into savings habit. Participants are expected to sign up for 6 personal finance and money management workshops. They agree to deposit a minimum of $10 per month for at least six months up to a maximum of $50/month or $600 in one year. Savings are matched at a ratio of 1:1 with a total savings possible of $1,200. These savings must be used to achieve a significant life goal.
Outcomes	The program has been successful and the Society is working to make this program available to tenants in other buildings that serve families. Some participants have reconnected with their families and purchased tickets to visit them, some have moved to market housing, one has taken a course and is working, another purchased a computer to start a business and moved out of social housing, and one participant just felt good having the money sit in his bank account. Many former participants are still saving. One of their strategies is shopping together to buy in bulk.

	The health of participants also improved. Instead of buying "fast food, which is expensive, participants started cooking more nutritious and less expensive meals. Many participants stopped smoking. Whereas initially 50% of tenants smoked, 5 years later, only 8% were smoking. Most participants attributed this to the Next Step program. One of the first assignments for participants is to write down how they spend their money. When they saw how much they spent on cigarettes, they wanted to quit.
Funding	More Than A Roof does its own fundraising through More Than A Roof Foundation
Sources	Contact: Lorne Epp, Executive Director, More Than A Roof Housing Society

5. North Island Family Self-Sufficiency Program, Vancouver Island, BC

Location	**Comox Valley and Campbell River, Vancouver Island**
Type of program	IDA
Status	3-year Pilot Project 2007-2010. Seeking additional funding.
Organizations	Administered by the Comox Valley Family Services Association and Campbell River Family Services Society.
Goals	Help low-income families increase their self-reliance, employability, education and financial stability.
Target population	Low-income families in the Comox Valley and Campbell River
Number of participants	30 participants. At the start of the program, 9 participants lived in social housing.
Description	Participants were able to accumulate savings through an IDA account that provided matched savings at a ratio of 2.5 to 1. Participants could contribute a maximum of $720 and receive a match of $1,800 up to a total of $2,520. Other key features included a family advisor, access to financial advisors, and financial literacy training sessions. Monthly meetings provided support and encouragement for participants to move forward and develop a social support network. It was not possible to provide an escrow component in this program because of the lack of social housing in the area.
Outcomes	A total of 27 participants completed the program. Participants saved a total of $17,998 ($667 per person). Several secured full-time, part-time or contract employment, while others took steps to upgrade their education and improve their health. Four participants moved out of social housing, and five became independent from income assistance. According to the final report, participants had been motivated, but "felt trapped in a

	cycle that kept them broke, dependent, and challenged their hope and self-confidence". The program helped break that cycle by introducing new patterns, encouraging and supporting participants, and focusing on practical solutions.
Funding	BC Housing, Vancouver Foundation, Columbia Foundation, M'Akola Housing, Homalco First Nations, Comox Valley Family Services, and a private donor. Scotiabank volunteers served as financial advisors and facilitated four Money Skills Workshops each year. Various community organizations and corporations volunteered their time as guest speakers or to assist individual participants.
Sources	Program evaluation, personal communication, Executive Director (retired), and personal communication with program staff February 1-2, 2012 and February 6, 2012.

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Study Title: Asset-Building Strategies for Families in Social Housing: Options for Social Housing Providers in B.C.
Principal Investigator: Deborah Kraus, Masters Candidate, School of Public Policy, Simon Fraser University

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Research Purpose
The purpose of this study is to investigate strategies social housing providers in British Columbia could use to help families in their units increase their financial assets.

The study will examine two different approaches: (1) the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program and (2) Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). It will aim to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the FSS and IDA programs?
2. Which approach to asset-building is more effective in helping families in social housing increase their financial assets?
3. Which approach has the most potential to be implemented by social housing providers in B.C.?

Social housing in this study includes government-owned public housing, non-profit housing and non-profit housing co-operatives.

Interview process
Interviews will be conducted by phone and are expected to take up to 45 minutes. They will be recorded – if participants agree.

Part 1. Case Study

Interview topics: Home Forward GOALS program
1. Number of social housing units

2. Program goals and expectations (expectations to move out of social housing?)

3. Program background

- When introduced
- Why introduced
- Capacity of program (e.g. maximum number of participants)
- Total number of families currently enrolled

4. Eligibility criteria

5. Role of housing authority

6. Role of community partners

7. Program operations

8. Outcomes

- How much money do families save (average and range)
- What do most participants use their funds for
- Does income increase? Get job?
- Do people move out of social housing?
- Completion/graduation rate

9. Lessons for BC and conditions for success

10. Advantages/disadvantages of FSS and IDA (are there circumstances when one is better than the other?

11. Comments on benefits of combining FSS and IDA

12. Program costs and funding sources

Part 2. Interviews with social housing providers

1. What is the role of your housing society in addressing the needs of families in social housing units?

2. Do you think helping families in social housing increase their financial assets (e.g. savings) is consistent with this mandate?

3. Do you think helping families in social housing increase their financial assets would be of interest to your housing society? To your family tenants?

4. Which asset-building program, the FSS or IDA would be:

- More acceptable or interesting to the Board? Tenants? Potential funders?
- Easier for your non-profit society to implement
- More effective in BC (e.g. result in more potential savings/assets)

5. What challenges/issues would need to be addressed to implement these programs?

6. Do you think it would be better to implement both the FSS and IDA together? Just one (which one)? Neither?

7. Should the programs be available to families on your waiting list? Families in rent supplement units?

8. Should other strategies be considered to help families in social housing increase their financial assets?

9. Any other thoughts?

Appendix D - Consent Form

Asset-Building Strategies for Families in Social Housing: Options for Social Housing Providers in B.C.

By providing my verbal consent, I agree to be interviewed for a research project on asset-building strategies for families in social housing.

I understand that:

1. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate strategies social housing providers in British Columbia could use to help families in their units increase their financial assets.

The researcher is a Master candidate at the school of Public Policy at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, B.C.

The information will be used to develop and inform the student's masters research project as part of the requirements for a graduate student in the School of Public Policy at Simon Fraser University.

2. Interview process

The interview will be conducted by telephone/skype and will be recorded. If I object to the interview being recorded, the student will take notes.

3. Anonymity and privacy

The student would like to include my name and the name of my organization in this study. If I do not agree to have my name and name of my organization used, my comments will simply be attributed to "one of the interview participants…." or a pseudonym will be used to protect my anonymity and identity.

I agree that my name and name of my organization may be used when referencing some of my comments Yes ______No _____ Signature of student________________________________

The student cannot guarantee confidentiality of my responses or identity because the telephone and skype are not confidential mediums.

4. Voluntary participation and stopping participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I am not required to participate. I may end the interview at any time and may choose not to answer any particular question. After the interview, if I decide not to be part of the study, I may contact the student any time before December 15, 2011 and ask to have all my information destroyed. (dkraus@sfu.ca)

5. My employer

The student has not gained permission from my organization or employer to participate in this study.

6. Storage of data
All interview data (transcriptions and recordings) will be stored on a USB device and kept in a locked filing cabinet in the student's home office. Data will be stored in this cabinet for two years following completion of this study and will then be destroyed.

7. Future contacts

The student may need to contact me after the interview for additional information or clarification. I agree: Yes_______________ No______________ Signature of student____________________________________

8. Risks and benefits
There are no foreseeable risks or benefits associated with the study other than those encountered by me in my everyday life.

9. SFU Ethics
The research is being done according to research ethics policies at Simon Fraser University.

10. Comments or concerns
If I have any concerns or questions about this study or interview I may contact:
Principal ethics supervisor: Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director of SFU's Office of Research Ethics, at hal_weinberg@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.
8888 University Drive, Multi-Tenant Facility, Burnaby, BC Canada V5A 1S6
Student faculty supervisor: Professor Royce Koop (roycek@sfu.ca).

11. Final report
A copy of the final report can be obtained by contacting Deborah Kraus at dkraus@sfu.ca.

CONSENT
I agree to participate in this study. Yes___ No____. If no, the interview cannot proceed.
I understand that the student will record my verbal consent on her copy of this form and will record my name, name of my organization, date and time of our call.
I further understand that the student will sign her name indicating that she has recorded my responses to the specific questions that have been asked.
Signature of student_________________________
Name of participant__________________________
Organization________________________________

Date________________________________ Time_______________________________________

Appendix E – Interview Participants

Organization	Knows Sector	Number of units targeted to families	Experience	Aboriginal
British Columbia				
Housing Sector Organizations				
BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA)	√			
Co-operative Housing Federation of BC (CHF BC)	√			
Public Housing				
BC Housing	√	3,055 units 10,330 rent subsidies to families in the Rental Assistance Program	√	
Non-Profit Housing Provider				
Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation, Burnaby		3,415		
Affordable Housing Societies, New Westminster		2,072		
Capital Region Housing Corporation, Victoria		1,000	√	
M'akola Housing Society, Victoria		811		√
Pacifica Housing Advisory Association, Victoria		782	√	
Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society, Vancouver		392		
Society of HOPE		238		
More Than A Roof		202	√	
43 Housing Society		153		
Community organization				
Burnside Gorge Community Association			√	

Comox Valley Family Services Association[47]			√	
Canada – outside B.C				
Capital Region Housing Corporation, Edmonton, Alberta			√	
Social Housing Services Corporation, Ontario			√	
U.S.				
Home Forward – Goals Program (2 people)			√	
King County Housing Authority			√	

[47] I spoke with the Executive Director (retired) from Comox Valley Family Services.

Appendix F – Summary of Program Outcomes

Source	Program Type	Increase in Average Income	Escrow Savings	IDA Savings (achieved) – not including matched contribution	Graduation	Other
US – FSS Evaluation	FSS	From $19,902 in their first year to $33,390 at graduation (68%)	Average escrow balance at graduation $5,300	N/A	24% graduated, 37% exited, 39% still enrolled	
US – AFI Evaluation	IDA	Slight increase in probability of employment	N/A	$935 over 3 years	Don't know	
US – Oregon	IDA	Don't know	N/A	$1,300 - $1,500	60% graduated	
US – Portland GOALS program	Both FSS and IDA	From $8,000 at entry to over $22,000 at graduation (175%)	Average of $7,500 but as high as $30,000	$2,000 for education $3,000 for ownership over 3 years	100% IDA participants since 2010	
Canada-*learn*$ave	IDA	Don't know	N/A	$959 over 3 years	65% achieved maximum savings	Increased participation in post-secondary education by over 20%
Victoria BC – Burnside Gorge	Both FSS and IDA	Don't know	Average $6,300 (for 36 people)[48]	Most were able to save $2,000 over 3 years	83% graduated (64 out of 77 participants)	
Capital Region Housing Corp., Edmonton - FSS	FSS	Monthly incomes increased from $15,492 to $27,624 (78%) compared to 5% for control group	38% were able to purchase a home		69% completed (20 out of 29 participants)	55% moved out of social housing. Families on welfare dropped 31% to 24%. Social return on investment was 2:1
Vancouver - Next Step	IDA	Don't know	N/A	$600 over one year	Don't know	Reduced smoking from 50% of tenants to 8%
North Island FSS	IDA	Don't know	N/A	Average of $667 per person	90% (27 out of 30)	Four moved out of social housing. Five got off welfare
Range		**FSS: 68-78% IDA: N/A Both: 175%**	**$5,300 - $30,000**	**$600-$3,000 plus match – up to $12,000**	**FSS: 24-69% IDA: 60-100% Both: 83%**	

[48] Some participants did not live in social housing.