

From Homeless to Hero

SHERMAN, October 16, 2018 – Hard work, perseverance and determination has just paid off for a participant in Texoma Council of Government's (TCOG) Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program. Just over six years ago, Tavay Carroll enrolled into the FSS Program desperate to make changes in order to ensure a better life for her and her family. After setting and achieving many goals, including obtaining and maintaining full-time employment, Carroll recently received her graduation certificate. Graduation is a big deal for anyone who reaches success in the program; however, Tavay is especially excited because she believes this step not only changed her story but the future story of her girls.

Carroll's journey of parenthood started out rocky. She made choices that no parent should have to make and then spiraled out of control— she was lost, deep in her emotions. Tavay found herself homeless and living out of her car. She was fighting for her parental rights and desperately needed and desired a change. Shortly after receiving a hand up with a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher, Carroll started helping for herself by making different, positive choices. One of these choices was deciding to put the needs of her family first, which she did by completing an application for the FSS Program.

At TCOG, the FSS program is a voluntary, goal-centered program with monetary incentive in the form of an interest-bearing escrow account available to participants who actively work to increase their wages during the program participation. Participants are given 5 years to achieve their goals with up to 2 years additional time, if needed. Throughout this process, they work with an FSS coordinator who truly becomes one of the family's loudest and proudest cheerleaders. The ultimate goal of the FSS program is to assist in transitioning families into full economic independence.

Carroll tirelessly worked towards her goals one-by-one and fought daily to be the best version of herself she could be. She led her family by example over the last 5-6 years and it has definitely paid off. Both of Tavay's daughters recently graduated from Sherman High School. Ysatis, a new student enrolled at Grayson College, will be pursuing a degree in either education or criminal justice. Ymani has bravely answered the call to defend her country with the United States Marine Corps where she currently is fulfilling her commitment at basic training in North Carolina. Carroll's daughters have witnessed their mother persevere and claim triumph over her trials.

"Tavay's story is inspiring and a lesson to us all," said Eric Bridges, Executive Director of TCOG. "It exemplifies what's possible when a person accepts responsibility, put others ahead of themselves, and perseveres instead of succumbing to life's challenges; characteristics Tavay has clearly instilled in her children."

FSS programs everywhere share success stories similar to Carroll, nevertheless she and her family have much to celebrate as they complete their journey from homeless to hero.

As Tavay likes to say, "The FSS program helped me to realize that success is just a failure turned inside-out and *anybody* can accomplish their goals when they put their minds to it. FSS inspires hope."

The Texoma Council of Governments is a voluntary association of the local governments in Cooke, Fannin, and Grayson counties. Established in 1968, Texoma Council of Governments promotes economy and efficiency in the coordinated planning and development of the tri-county region through its community and economic development activities. Both directly and through contractors, the Council provides housing, utility assistance, and weatherization services for low-income citizens in the region

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and assists the elderly through a variety of Area Agency on Aging programs. The Council also facilitates the delivery of grant funding for homeland security and criminal justice.

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