

June 12, 2009

## Family Scholar House honors grads 5 single mothers got needed help

**By Linsen Li**  
*lli@courier-journal.com*



By Arza Barnett, The Courier-Journal  
Five college graduates, from left, Brooke McQuillen, Crystal Phoenix, Ricki Mathis, Olearia Scoggins and Khalilah Collins, were recognized at the Family Scholar House last night.

Brooke McQuillen, a single mother of two, thought it was improbable to finish her college education less than a year ago.

"I was working full time, I had to pay more than \$200 per week on child care, and I only had time to take one course per semester," she said.

But since November 2008, McQuillen has been receiving free housing and child care from the Family Scholar House, which allowed her to become a full-time student.

Last month, she received her associate degree from Jefferson Community & Technical College.

"The program helped me tremendously," McQuillen said. "I couldn't have done anything without it."

Last night, Family Scholar House celebrated the college graduation of McQuillen and four other single mothers at its early learning center on Reg Smith Circle, just west of the University of Louisville's Belknap campus.

Formerly know as Project Women, Family Scholar House has provided housing, child care and basic necessities to single parents pursuing higher education since 1995.

According to the organization's Web site, its mission is "to end the cycle of poverty by giving single-parent students the support they need to achieve a four-year college degree."

To qualify, an applicant needs to be single, have or expect a child, meet low-income housing requirements, and have a high school diploma or GED.

The residential program currently houses 56 families.

The economic downturn has swelled the program's applicant pool, said Cathe Dykstra, executive director of Family Scholar House.

"The need has been absolutely overwhelming this year," she said. "With this economy, we've had people who thought they'd never need help from us call us."

The increased demand has made the waiting period longer -- now 12 months, Dykstra said. About 400 families are on the wait list.

The program has helped 30 people complete their college degrees, and two completed doctoral degrees; 75 percent of the people have exited to stable employment, according to Dykstra.

With continued support from Family Scholar House, McQuillen will begin in the fall her bachelor's degree in special education at U of L, where she also hopes to pursue her master's degree in the same field.

"I know I am getting a sweet deal, and I am taking full advantage of it to complete my education," she said.

Additional Facts  
Family Scholar House

For more information on Family Scholar House's programs, call 584-8090 or go to [www.familyscholarhouse.org](http://www.familyscholarhouse.org).