



Serving Homeless Families and Youth: Overview of HUD's Programs for Families & Youth

April 2015

According to HUD's recent *Worst Case Housing Needs Report to Congress*, there are 7 million very low-income households that are paying more than half of their income in housing, of that 2.8 million are families with children.¹ The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates there are an additional 7.7 million families living in doubled up situations just to manage their housing needs. The recent Point in Time data shows that more than 216,000 people in families experienced homelessness on a given night in 2014, including 194,000 children and youth. Further, an additional 45,000 unaccompanied homeless youth and children were identified in shelters or in places not intended for human habitation-but this figure likely underrepresents the number of young adults who experience one night of homelessness in a given year. It is clear the needs far outweigh the availability of affordable housing. While the need for affordable housing has grown over the past decade, the number of households receiving federal rental assistance has decreased.²



The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s core programs that are aimed at preventing homelessness and helping at-risk families are the McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance programs and the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. Together, these two programs provide an array of housing options that communities use to help homeless families and homeless youth.

In addition, the Runaway Homeless and Youth Act (RHYA) provides dedicated funding to serve unaccompanied homeless youth and children. This program is administered from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). RHYA supports three core programs that target unaccompanied and homeless youth: basic care centers (including emergency shelters), transitional living programs and street-outreach.

I. McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance Programs: Families & Youth

A. Overview: Communities can use McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance grants in a variety of ways to support homeless youth and families. According to data collected from Continuums of Care (CoC), over 175,000 beds were dedicated to serving homeless families and 6,850 beds were serving homeless youth.³ Across the country, 73,000 of these units are permanent supportive housing for homeless families with children. Many communities also pair CoC funding with RHYA programs to support programs that are specifically serving youth.

These are the primary interventions serving homeless families that are supported by the McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance Programs:

¹ HUD's Worst Case Housing Needs (March 2015).

http://www.huduser.org/portal/Publications/pdf/WorstCase2015_summary.pdf

² Doug Rice, *Obama Budget Restores Housing Vouchers*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (March 2015),

<http://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/obama-budget-restores-housing-vouchers>

³ See HUD's Congressional Justifications, Homeless Assistance Grants, FY2016 Summary Statement and Initiatives.

- **Emergency Solutions:** Communities receive Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) to provide an array of emergency services to homeless individuals and families. Funding can be used to maintain and operate homeless shelters, provide housing stability services for homeless populations and provide homeless prevention services such as short-term rental assistance.
- **Supportive Housing:** Supportive housing is affordable rental housing combined with services and case management aimed at serving the highest-need individuals and families. Services are voluntary and are tailored to fit the needs of the individual youth or family. The housing is affordable, meaning residents will pay 30% of their income towards rent. Supportive housing does not have any time limit restrictions, allowing the family or youth to stay as long as they see necessary to address their needs and reach their goals.
- **Rapid Re-Housing:** Rapid Re-Housing is an intervention that provides homeless families assistance to secure housing quickly. Programs provide financial assistance to families to secure housing (including short-and-long term housing assistance, security deposits or costs associated with moving) housing location services and case management to help the family stabilize and connect to other mainstream systems. The goal of the program is to help families and individuals address their emergency housing crisis quickly and transition out of homelessness.

B. Who is eligible for this assistance? Families with children that are homeless who are living in places that are unsuitable for habitation, including on the street, living in an unstable doubled-up housing situation or fleeing domestic violence are eligible for assistance under these CoC programs. Unaccompanied youth that are couch surfing, in unstable doubled up situations⁴, living on the street or fleeing domestic abuse or violence are also eligible for these programs.

The Northwest Youth Services (NWYS) in Bellingham, WA combines ESG funding with state and local funding to provide rental assistance and case management to homeless youth. NWYS permanently housed 39 homeless youth in 2014, and the average amount of subsidy used by a youth in NWYS’s rapid re-housing program was approximately \$2800. NWYS employs a step-down approach to rental assistance, and the average time of assistance in their program is five months. For youth who need a little more time to achieve self-sufficiency, the program is flexible enough to allow for changes in employment or household composition (both which are developmentally appropriate) and to request an additional subsidy until the young person is able to pay the full rent.

C. Funding For McKinney-Vento: The HEARTH Act passed in 2009 provided an authorization level of \$4 billion to support these programs and activities to assist homeless families and individuals. Unfortunately, funding for this program has never reached its full authorization level due to budget constraints, including sequestration. Congress provided \$2.1 billion in FY2015 for these programs, which

HUD has requested an additional \$345 million for the McKinney Vento Homeless programs in FY2016, a portion of which will be used to provide additional resources to serve homeless families through an

⁴ Unstable doubled up housing situations are those that do not exceed 14 days.

improved Rapid Re-Housing program. Further, recognizing the longer-term housing needs for homeless families with children, HUD has requested funding for Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV).

II. Housing Choice Vouchers: Connecting Homeless Families & Youth to Affordable Rental Housing

A. Overview: The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program provides rental assistance to 2 million households. HCV recipients are able to lease rental units in the larger housing market and pay no more than 30 percent of their income toward the housing costs, with the HCV program paying the difference. The rent subsidies are permanent and households retain the subsidy as long as they remain eligible. By far it is the largest rental assistance provided by HUD, but 100,000 fewer households have been served through this program since sequestration in 2012. Almost half of the households that receive assistance through the HCV program are elderly or disabled. In addition, HUD's Family Unification Program provides rental assistance specifically targeted to at-risk or homeless youth who have left foster care.

PHAs have some flexibility in administrating their programs and can create preferences or set-asides that target certain high-need populations. Many PHAs have created preferences or set-asides for their voucher program to serve homeless families and young adults. For example, the King County Housing Authority created a set-aside in their voucher program for homeless families, dedicating 650 project-based vouchers for affordable rental housing with services. King County has also dedicated 84 vouchers for homeless young adults.

B. Who is Eligible? Any household that meets the income requirements and can meet the lease requirements are eligible. Housing authorities have to target extremely low-income households, which are defined as households that have income at or below the poverty level.

C. Funding. Even though funding for the Housing Choice Voucher program has been increasing, there have been no new incremental vouchers to serve at-risk or homeless families. The increases in this program have been yearly renewal costs to ensure that households currently receiving assistance will not see dramatic rent increases or lose their assistance altogether.

In the HUD FY2016 budget, HUD has asked for \$177.5 million for new vouchers to target homeless families. Included in this amount, would be a set-aside for \$20 million vouchers to serve young adults exiting foster care and families that are involved with the child welfare system. Further, HUD has requested an additional \$277 million to provide rental assistance to 37,000 additional households based on need in the community.

Families Moving Forward: In San Francisco, CA the San Francisco Human Services Agency and the San Francisco Housing Authority (SFHA) have joined together to create a program targeting high-need homeless families that are involved with child welfare. SFHA has dedicated 100 Family Unification vouchers to provide housing assistance and services are provided through other public and private agencies. The SFHA made significant changes to their administrative plan to better serve homeless families, including modifying the rent payment standard and screening requirements.

III. What We Need to End Family & Youth Homelessness?

Many homeless families have incomes that fall well below the federal poverty line and are headed by a single mother with young children.⁵ The heads of households are often under employed or unemployed. Only 41% of homeless families are utilizing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for income support. Further, homeless families have high incidences of domestic violence, mental health issues, low education achievement and have limited access to other social programs that can provide critical support.

Housing alone cannot solve all issues associated with poverty, but it provides a stable platform enabling families and young adults to address their issues while living in a safe environment. To end family and youth homelessness across the country, it will take a mix of housing solutions and programs. Part of the solution has to be increased affordable housing options to give households safe places to live stably. In addition, many families that experience homelessness need other supports, such as workforce and education training, access to health care and child-care.



- Access to affordable housing with services;
- Case management and service coordination that is tailored to meet the needs of families and young adults;
- Improved access to income support, workforce training and education programs;
- Coordination between the different support systems, such as Continuum's of Care (CoCs), housing providers, community-based service providers, education, child-welfare and healthcare to ensure that the needs of the families and youth are being served.

True Colors Residences (TCR), is a project of West End Residences HDFC, Inc. builds upon West End's history of pioneering new models to serve the most underserved and vulnerable New Yorkers, by creating supportive housing formerly homeless lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender young adults (18-24). This population makes up approximately 40% of homeless youth in New York City. There are 30 furnished apartments, supported by Project-Based Section 8 Vouchers, all of which can be converted to Tenant Based Vouchers to allow residents to move out when they are ready. The project utilizes a Harm Reduction and Trauma Informed Care model that provides case management, counseling, life skills coaching and career building to address the needs of each, individual resident.

"I find it amazing to open my own door at 19 years old. After my family rejected me for being transgender, I thought I would not accomplish anything. I remember times sleeping at friends' houses asking myself: Where am I going to sleep? What am I going to wear the next morning? What am I going to eat? Now, here I am at TCR with a place to better my life. What else can I ask for?" - True Color Resident

⁵ Office of Policy Development and Research, *Costs Associated with First-Time Homelessness for Families and Individuals* (March 2010) and *The 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress* (October 2014), <https://www.hudexchange.info/onecpd/assets/File/2013-AHAR-Part-2.pdf>