

How State Leaders Can Take Action to Keep Families Together and Support Youth Transitions

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CSH estimates that there are approximately 90,000 families and youth in need of supportive housing, [including 43,646 families with child welfare involvement](#). While lack of housing should not necessitate child welfare involvement, housing instability alongside additional challenges such as substance use or mental health needs can affect the overall placement decision. Access to permanent housing often means that families can stay together while receiving child welfare prevention services or reunify more quickly if children are in out-of-home care. [Research has demonstrated](#) that children and youth who have a reliable place to call home also spend fewer days in foster care, experience a reduction in subsequent abuse and neglect cases, reduce their risk of subsequent homelessness, and increase their school attendance.

Housing vouchers and rental assistance play a significant role in keeping families together and supporting youth in transitioning successfully into adulthood. While most housing vouchers are issued from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) via local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs)¹, there are many states that have funded voucher and rental assistance programs for families and transition age youth. States like New Jersey, California, Washington, and Colorado have all developed and funded housing assistance to support child-welfare involved families and youth.

¹ Those unfamiliar with federal housing vouchers for families can take a deeper dive into the voucher application and administration process with two briefs published by CSH and Casey Family Programs, which may be [found here](#).



New Jersey – Keeping Families Together

As part of the Christie Administration’s efforts to reduce homelessness across the State of New Jersey, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) launched the Keeping Families Together (KFT) program in 2014. Initially launched as a pilot program for 10 families in one county, the program further expanded in 2017 [as part of an initiative to address the opioid epidemic](#). The program has grown through state funding to serve approximately 660 households with over 1200 children across the state.

The KFT program offers housing vouchers to families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have co-occurring challenges that might include substance use disorders, medical or mental health needs, domestic violence, and/or a child with developmental disability. KFT is a model of supportive housing designed specifically for child welfare involved families. Supportive housing combines quality affordable housing with trauma-informed services to support family stability and well-being. In addition to providing a stable place to live, KFT provides support services and case management with a goal of increasing overall housing stability, reducing recidivism, and improving overall child and family well-being.

KFT collaborates with housing providers and partners, including landlords and developers, to help ensure that families can find an apartment after receiving a voucher. KFT Practitioners support families by helping them identify apartments that will meet their needs, providing transportation to apartment viewings, and working with the landlord if the family has previous evictions or poor credit. They also help families understand the terms of their lease, make sure all the required paperwork is completed, and ensure the required move in and security deposit fees are paid. These fees may be paid for through KFT or funded by another community resource.

The goal of KFT is to keep families together and stably housed, reduce their child welfare involvement, and improve child and family well-being. KFT enables parents to provide a safe and stable home for their children, while families are provided with support and guidance to manage their lives and improve their overall well-being. As families progress with their stability, they may be ready to move on to an aftercare model. The primary criteria for determining family readiness to move on is their interest and willingness to do so. If this is the case, then the family and the Practitioner work together to transition. This includes working with local housing partners to identify rental support that aligns with the family’s current financial needs.

For those interested in learning more, the [New Jersey Keeping Families Together Program Manual](#) provides significant detail around the family assessment and engagement process, collaborating with housing partners, program staffing and delivery, and program evaluation.



California – Bringing Families Home

When the [Bringing Families Home \(BFH\)](#) program was proposed in 2016, county child welfare agencies and housing systems had yet to identify how systems could collaborate to address the housing needs of families involved in the child welfare system. BFH was initially funded through [Assembly Bill 1603](#) at \$10 million over three years, and has since expanded in 2019 with [Senate Bill 80](#) and the [2021](#) and [2022](#) budget bills. The most recent appropriation is for \$92.5 million available through June 2025.

BFH is a state-funded, county-administered grant program that aims to reduce the number of families in the child welfare system who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, prevent out-of-home placements, and increase the number of family reunifications. For the first several years, there was a dollar-for-dollar grantee match for the counties. However, as of 2021, that is no longer required. The [CA Department of Social Services](#) administers the grant and provides technical assistance, training, and support to grant recipients.

Families in the BFH Program receive case management along with housing related services such as a housing voucher, housing navigation and other services. Funds can also be used for security deposits, utility payments, moving costs, interim shelter assistance, legal services, and credit repair. Since 2016, the program has expanded from 12 counties to nearly 60 jurisdictions, including counties and tribes. As of 2022, over 2,000 families have been permanently housed through this program.

The report [Bringing Families Home Program Support Child Welfare-Involved Families](#) by Chapin Hall provides an analysis of one of the BFH sites in San Francisco. The reported interim results found that more than half of the families had exited the program, most commonly because they achieved housing stability. Additionally, approximately three quarters of the families in the program who had children in an out-of-home placement were reunified. The adults in the program had significantly fewer incidents of trauma and substance use.

Washington – Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program



In 2019, the Washington State Legislature passed [Senate Bill 5718](#) to establish the Child Welfare Housing Program. The initial program was developed as a pilot with an initial budget of \$767,000 per year through 2022. The pilot was later extended to 2023 through [Senate Bill 5693](#). The pilot was designed to provide housing vouchers, rental assistance, housing navigation, and other supportive services specifically to families with children in out-of-home placements. The intention was to reduce the amount of time children remain out-of-home when the primary barrier to reunification is lack of appropriate housing.

SB 5718 also required the creation of a stakeholder group to help develop the design of the pilot. The stakeholder group included parents with lived experience, parent attorneys and social workers, housing experts, community-based organizations, behavioral health providers, and other advocates. As part of designing the program, the stakeholder group was asked to develop eligibility criteria and strategies for equitably distributing program resources considering racial, ethnic, gender, and geographic needs. A total of 29 stakeholders participated.

The pilot was set up so that families could be referred through multiple channels, including caseworkers, attorneys, guardian ad litem, parent mentors, other social service works, or the court. [The outcomes of the pilot](#) were released in March 2022. A total of six families, which included eight adults and seven children, received housing and an additional. An additional 29 families with 90 children were provided case management and support services to connect to public benefits, employment services, or other rental assistance.

In 2023, the pilot became a permanent program with the passage of [Senate Bill 5256](#). The bill further expanded program eligibility to include a focus on prevention. From then on, eligible families included those at risk of having children in an out-of-home placement due to housing instability. SB 5256 also established annual reporting requirements that include the breakdown of resources from the program by race, geography, ethnicity, gender, and address – to ensure that resources are distributed equitably.

Colorado – Fostering Success Housing Voucher Program



Youth aging out of foster care are at high risk for becoming homeless during the transition to adulthood. Research has found that [over 40%](#) of youth exiting foster care experience housing instability within two years. Though interventions are designed to provide stability and promote positive outcomes, transitional age youth still face considerable obstacles. These challenges include finding employment, taking care of their mental and physical health, building social networks, early parenthood, and substance use. Also, youth exiting foster care often lack safety nets from their parents or other family members when compared with their peers.

After several years of working to maximize access to federal housing vouchers for youth², Colorado is the most recent example of a state creating a voucher program. Earlier this year, [Senate Bill 23-028](#) created the Fostering Success Housing Voucher Program and appropriated \$2.64 million for housing vouchers and case management services for youth exiting foster care. The program will support up to 100 youth as they exit foster care with the goal of preventing homelessness during their transition. Youth between 18 and 26, who were in foster or kinship care at the age of 14 or older, and are homeless or at risk of homelessness will be eligible to receive a voucher. The vouchers will be paired with resources from the [Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood](#) or the [Colorado Foster Youth Successful Transition to Adulthood State Grant Program](#) to maximize available resources and services for youth. The CO Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) are responsible for developing an administration and implementation plan for the program.

² Those unfamiliar with or interested learning more about federal housing vouchers available for transition-aged youth briefs can access two briefs published by CSH and Casey Family Programs, which may be [found here](#).

ABOUT CSH

CSH (Corporation for Supportive Housing) advances affordable and accessible housing aligned with services by advocating for effective policies and funding, equitably investing in communities, and strengthening the supportive housing field. Since our founding in 1991, CSH has been the only national nonprofit intermediary focused solely on increasing the availability of supportive housing. Over the course of our work, we have created more than 467,600 units of affordable and supportive housing and distributed more than \$1.5 billion in loans and grants. Our workforce is central to accomplishing this work. We employ approximately 170 people across 30 states and U.S. Territories. As an intermediary, we do not directly develop or operate housing but center our approach on collaboration with a wide range of people, partners, and sectors. For more information, visit www.csh.org.



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