

How Federal Housing Vouchers Create Pathways of Stability for Young People Exiting Foster Care

Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWA) across the country are working to safely prevent the separation of children and youth from their families and keep young people from exiting care without the connections and supports needed for long-term success. Access to safe and stable housing is important for keeping families together and preparing youth to transition to adulthood. Housing vouchers are the primary housing resources for supporting families and youth with their long-term stability goals.

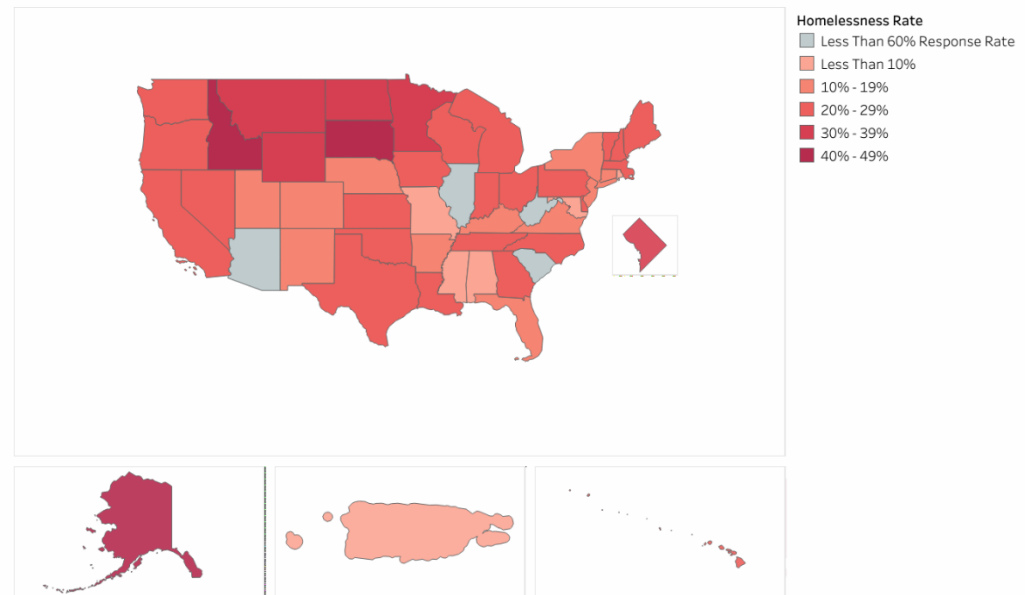
CSH estimates that there are approximately 90,000 families and youth in need of supportive housing, including over 12,000 young people exiting child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems.ⁱ Black, Indigenous, and Latinx families and youth are over represented within these numbers.ⁱⁱ According to the U.S. Department of Housing Development, 2022 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, there were 30,090 unaccompanied youth/young adults, and 6,398 parenting youth/young adults experiencing homelessness.ⁱⁱⁱ National estimates by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago show that as many as 1 in 30 adolescents (13 to 17 years old) and 1 in 10 young adults (18 to 25 years old) experience some form of homelessness during a year. Further, 20 to 40 percent of young people across the nation that experience homelessness identify as LGBTQIA+, and a vast majority are young adults of color. LGBTQIA+ youth are 120% more likely to experience homelessness. The risk of experiencing homelessness is 200 percent higher for unmarried parenting young people than for those who are not parenting.^{iv} In addition, people of color represent a 89% percentage of youth experiencing homelessness.^v



Youths aging out of foster care are at high risk for becoming homeless during the transition to adulthood. Though housing interventions are designed to provide stability and promote positive outcomes, considerable obstacles, including finding employment, taking care of their mental and physical health, building social networks, early parenthood, and substance abuse may hinder the effectiveness of such interventions. More than 40 percent of youth aging out of the child welfare system experience housing instability in the two years after leaving care. Unlike their peers, youth aging out of child welfare lack a safety net from their parents or other family members^{vi}. Young people with experiences of foster care frequently report facing discrimination and landlord bias due to their age, race, source of income and other factors. Factors often relate to either a lack of rental or credit history or past eviction, legal or financial challenges, substance misuse or incarceration histories identified through background checks. These hurdles and biases further prevent or delay voucher issuance and housing access.

Data Shows Strong Need for Housing Support for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care

Rate of Homelessness Over Past 2 Years Experienced by Youth at Age 19



Source: The National Alliance to End Homelessness analyzed data from the [National Youth & Transitions Database State Data Snapshots 2017-2021 Cohort](#).

OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL HOUSING VOUCHERS

Most housing vouchers available today are issued from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD administers a range of housing vouchers or rental subsidies that young people may be able to use to rent housing.

The [Housing Choice Voucher \(HCV\) program](#), historically referred to as “Section 8,” is one of the better-known HUD housing programs. Through a competitive process, HUD allocates HCV to public housing authorities (PHA), which then provide tenants with a subsidy that covers a portion of their rent. Tenants typically contribute approximately 30% of their household income towards housing costs. HCV are often tenant based, meaning that voucher holders receive the subsidy and provide it directly to a landlord on the private rental market. HUD does allow PHAs to designate a portion of their HCV as project based, meaning that a voucher is tied to a specific housing unit and a person must meet certain criteria to live there. The unit could be in the private rental market or housing owned by the PHA.

[Special Purpose HCV programs](#) have also been created within the larger HCV program.^{vii} Special Purpose HCVs represent just under 10% of the overall HCV program.^{viii} They are tailored to the needs of specific populations and are allocated to PHAs as separate awards with specialized criteria for eligibility and often requiring specific partnerships with other entities. Special Purpose Voucher programs designated for populations impacted by the child welfare system include the Family Unification Program and Foster Youth to Independence.^{ix}

FEDERAL HOUSING VOUCHERS FOR YOUTH

The Family Unification Program (FUP) is administered by PHAs in partnership with a Public Child Welfare Agency (PCWA). FUP can be used by both young people transitioning from care and families involved with the child welfare system. Expectant and parenting young people may fall into either category depending on other eligibility factors present.

FUP provides a non-time limited voucher for Families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in:

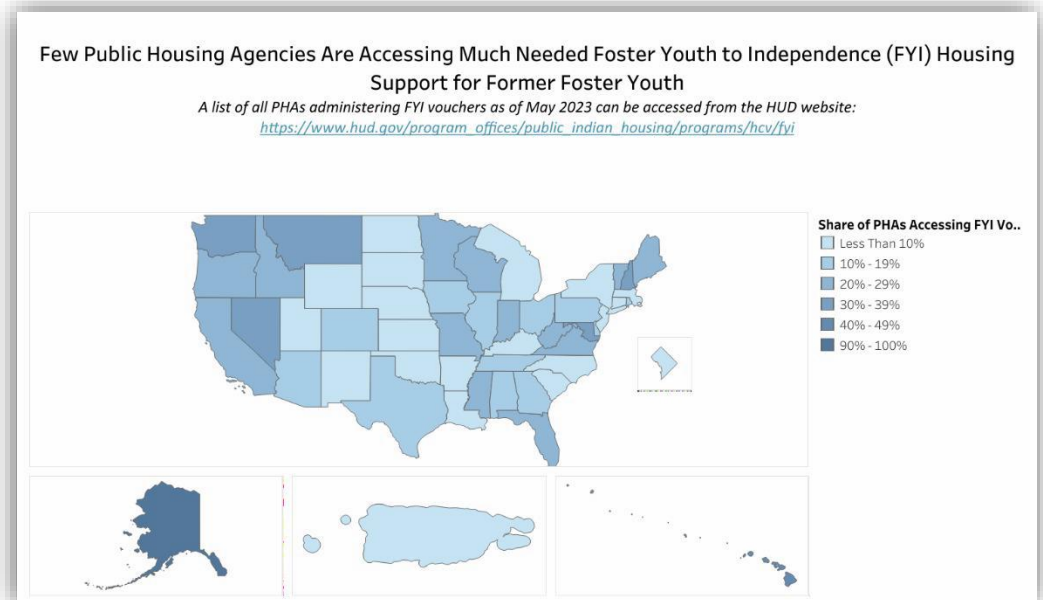
- The imminent placement of the family’s child(ren) in out-of-home care (i.e. foster care), or,
- The delay in the discharge of the child(ren) to the family from out-of-homecare.

FUP provides an up to 36-month housing voucher for Youth ages 18 through 24 years who:

- Left foster care or will leave foster care within 180 days through the formal child welfare transition plan, and
- Is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing homelessness at age 16 or older.

Since program inception in 1990, many jurisdictions have accessed and utilized FUP vouchers for child welfare populations to the benefit of families, youth, and communities. FUP vouchers have been awarded to over 500 PHAs across the country through a national competition by HUD.^x However, if a PHA shows an inability to fully distribute and maintain voucher utilization, HUD can recapture vouchers and reallocate them to another PHA. Further, low FUP utilization may impact eligibility to receive new voucher awards.

As of June 2025, HUD reports current FUP awards effectively create 33,045 housing vouchers, of which 25,756 are currently leased (77.94% utilization).^{xi} PCWA that continue to experience a lack of housing resources should see this as an opportunity to work with their local PHAs to increase voucher utilization by connecting families with child welfare involvement and youth exiting care to available vouchers.



Source: [The National Alliance to End Homelessness analyzed existing public data.](#)

FOSTER YOUTH TO INDEPENDENCE HOUSING VOUCHERS

[Foster Youth to Independence](#) (FYI) is administered by PHAs in partnership with a Public Child Welfare Agency (PCWA). FYI is the name of a HUD initiative established in 2019 that creates access and funding for additional housing vouchers made available specifically to FUP eligible youth. The FYI initiative resulted from national advocacy by young people with relevant lived experiences in partnership with national and local organizations, and as a federal response to growing recognition of the need for and opportunities provided through ensuring timely access to housing assistance and appropriate services and supports for all.^{xiixiii} To date, FYI have been made available through competitive awards and non-competitive processes using newly appropriated funds and by authorizing other existing appropriations of HUD voucher resources to be used for FUP.^{xiv} FYI, like FUP, provides dedicated rental assistance to youth exiting foster care who are at risk of homelessness or who have become homeless after having been in foster care. FYI created mechanisms for eligible PHAs to request vouchers for youth on a rolling basis under circumstances outlined below.^{xv}

FYI provides an up to 36-month housing voucher for Youth ages 18 through 24 years who:

- Left foster care at age 16 or older or will leave foster care within 90 days through the formal child welfare transition plan, and
- Is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing homelessness.

HOW DO FUP-YOUTH AND FYI WORK?

The information below provides a basic overview of FUP-Youth and FYI. For more detailed information on the application process, program requirements, and innovative practices, please see: [Housing Vouchers for Young People After Foster Care: How-to Guide for Public Child Welfare Agencies](#).

Both FUP-Youth and FYI provide time-limited rental assistance on behalf of a young person for up to 36 months, with limited exceptions that may allow rental assistance to be extended up to an additional 24 months under certain conditions for youth engaged in [Family Self-Sufficiency](#) or a similar programs.

How to obtain vouchers/eligibility requirements to apply

New awards of FUP-Youth and FYI housing vouchers are made available in multiple ways, including:

1. Periodically through a **competitive process** outlined in a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) from HUD^{xvi}. HUD notifies PHAs as funding becomes available and posts updates on available funding on their website^{xvii}. To qualify for FUP and FYI, a PHA must have a formal partnership with a PCWA that has been established through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and signed during the application period established in the NOFO.
2. In addition to FUP-Youth/FYI vouchers made available through HUD national competitive processes, a limited number of rental assistance vouchers can also be drawn down by local Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) partnering with child welfare agencies to assist youth on a rolling “as-needed” basis through a **noncompetitive process**. The noncompetitive process provides opportunities for eligible youth nationally to receive rental assistance when required, not just those who reside in localities that have recently received funding through a national competition.

PHA and PCWA Partnerships

If a PHA receives the FUP or FYI award, the partnership moves forward with each agency playing specific roles. The role of the PHA includes formally administering the program, training PCWA on the FUP/FYI program requirements, develop tracking metrics, determining youth eligibility once referred from the PCWA, providing services for youth, assisting youth in locating housing, engaging landlords, and conducting unit inspections.

Successful implementation of the FUP-Youth/FYI requires PCWA to take an active role in coordinating with PHAs, identifying and referring eligible youth, and ensuring supportive services are in place to help young people attain stability and realize their own personal goals. PCWA plays a lead role in estimating the number of needed vouchers for a 12-month period and training the PHA and other housing partners on working with youth.

In addition, HUD “strongly encourages [the] involvement of State, local, philanthropic, faith-based organizations, Continuum of Care (CoC) or designated CoC recipient”. The CoC’s may help to identify CoC-funded services available for young people and help identify eligible youth who may no longer be involved in child welfare services but have come to the attention of the homeless system. Homeless service systems may ask questions at coordinated entry or intake to screen for youth who may be eligible for an FYI voucher.

Invested state and local partners, including people who have experienced homelessness and their allies, may be critical to ensuring necessary support is in place for the PHA and child welfare agency to develop an MOU and apply for FUP-Youth and/or FYI vouchers. The voices of those with lived experience and their allies can also be instrumental in bringing other needed partners to the planning table, including housing providers, to ensure youth have fair access to housing opportunities and to overcome discriminatory housing practices. Think of FUP/FYI not as separate programs but instead as a housing subsidy resource to pair more holistically within a broader wraparound service array, or as a part of a supportive housing model^{xviii}.

Identifying Youth/Young Adults Eligible for FUP/FYI Housing Vouchers

The PCWA is responsible for creating a system to identify and prioritize youth for vouchers.

Based on guidance from HUD, youth must be homeless or at risk of homelessness:

- Homeless refers to the population included in the definition of this term at 24 CFR 578.3.
 - Living in substandard or dilapidated housing
 - Homeless.
 - In imminent danger of losing their home

- Displaced by domestic violence
- Living in an overcrowded unit
- Living in housing not modified to accommodate the child or children with a disability, or to youth due to the nature of the disability.
- At Risk of Becoming Homeless means the population defined as “At Risk of Homelessness” at 24 CFR 576.2.
 - Have an annual income below 30 percent of median household income for the area, as determined by HUD;
 - Does not have sufficient resources or support networks, such as family, friends, faith-based or other social networks, immediately available to prevent them from having a lack of housing or moving to an emergency shelter; and
 - Meets one of the following conditions:
 1. Has moved because of economic reasons two or more times during the 60 days immediately preceding the application for homelessness prevention assistance;
 2. Is living in the home of another because of economic hardship;
 3. Has been notified in writing that their right to occupy their current housing or living situation will be terminated within 21 days after the date of application for assistance;
 4. Lives in a hotel or motel and the cost of the hotel or motel stay is not paid by charitable organizations or by Federal, State, or local government programs for low-income individuals;
 5. Lives in a single-room occupancy or efficiency apartment unit in which there reside more than two persons or lives in a larger housing unit in which there reside more than 1.5 persons per room, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau;
 6. Is exiting a publicly funded institution or system of care (such as a healthcare facility, a mental health facility, foster care or other youth facility, correction program or institution); or
 7. Otherwise lives in housing that has characteristics associated with instability and an increased risk of homelessness.

For youth still in foster care, case workers can begin working early to help them to gather necessary documents and prepare so that referrals to housing can be made 180 days prior to their transition from care in order to prevent housing gaps at case closure.

PCWA are encouraged to work on supporting other transition pathways while young people are still in care – including permanency options, other stable housing/living situations upon exit, and simultaneously prepare for potential referral to a housing voucher resource in the event that other plans are delayed or fail to materialize.

PCWA and their partners should seek to identify and engage young people through multiple means and partners - to create ‘no wrong door’, especially for those that have already exited care and are now experiencing homelessness.

Best practices for creating a system to identify and prioritize young people for FUP-Youth/FYI include partnering with youth so that the criteria and the selection process centers the experiences of those most affected, avoiding judgements on “housing readiness”, and working to house quickly.

Identification of youth no longer on PCWA caseload may include leveraging data and processes from the CoC and their coordinated entry systems, reviewing young people on the PHA HCV wait list, and partnering with other youth services and outreach providers.

Supportive Services

For youth people who have histories of involvement with the child welfare system including foster care placements, housing alone is often not enough to support their stability. Providing supportive services paired with rental assistance can allow for young people to access and maintain housing, as well as make progress toward their independent living and other life goals and gain a sense of self-sufficiency.

The PCWA is responsible for providing and/or ensuring additional support services are secured for young people. HUD requires that an array of supportive services be available and offered to young people for the duration of their 36 months of FUP-Youth/FYI rental assistance. This is different that FUP Family requirements, whereby HUD encourages, but does not require partners to provide an important array of supports and services such as:

- Housing case management, services coordination, tenancy supports, concrete resources/supports
- Financial - Direct cash assistance, banking, savings, public benefits access, and other economic supports
- Health and Behavioral Health - clinical/treatment services
- Independent living skills
- Career pathways including education and employment
- Social, cultural, spiritual, community building

HUD has even included potential to earn additional points in funding applications when FUP partners commit to providing all FUP recipients with access to Family Self Sufficiency or similar programs and case management services for at least 6-12 months.

Such services should be flexible and appropriate. Providers should offer and engage young people in services, yet the housing assistance cannot be made contingent on participation in these voluntary services. It is important for young people to have agency and control - make choices about their goals, the services and supports that they need, sequencing of their services and plans.

Several jurisdictions have shifted to think of FUP-Youth/FYI not as a separate program but instead as a housing subsidy resource to pair more holistically within a broader wraparound service array, leveraging core components of the supportive housing model.

CONCLUSION

Housing stability is essential to support a successful journey through emerging adulthood for young people exiting foster care, and multiple agencies have a role to play. Partnerships between PHA and PCWA are critical in equitably addressing these housing and stability needs. Once effective partnerships are established, FUP – Youth/FYI housing vouchers are a vital tool to achieve youth housing stability for young people and promote a sense of truly thriving as they build their futures. Ensuring timely access to housing and services resources can facilitate a smoother transition and prevent experiences of homelessness and a myriad of related challenges.

To ensure housing stability for young people exiting foster care in your community, we recommend the following next steps:

Start by making the case for the need for youth housing, including the anticipated number of FUP eligible referrals over the course of a year. This can be demonstrated by using PCWA data, information gleaned from [National Youth in Transition Database](#), and documentation from the homeless service sector showing the prevalence of youth who enter homeless programs each year after exiting care.

If you are unsure if your jurisdiction currently has or has received FUP in the past, HUD maintains a list of all jurisdictions with FUP vouchers and their contact information. That information can be found here:

- [FUP Awards](#)
- [FYI Competitive Awards](#)
- [PHA Contact Information](#)

Include young people with lived experience related to child welfare and housing instability early in the process. The data collected to make the case can be coupled with the voices of young people to lend urgency for the need to act.

Establish and/or further develop partnerships between PHA, CoC and others in advance of an application to identify FUP and FYI as opportunities to increase the local supply of vouchers.

What have you tried that has been successful? What lessons about child welfare and housing partnership do you have that might benefit the larger community of practitioners? What are other challenges to utilizing FUP, FYI and/or other housing tools to support youth transitions beyond foster care? Send a note with your questions or examples to 1Roof@csh.org.

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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RESOURCES

- [Foster Youth to Independence Program \(HUD\)](#)
- [Building Partnerships to Support Stable Housing for Child Welfare-Involved Families and Youth \(HHS\)](#)
- [Child Welfare and Housing Resource Hub \(One Roof\)](#)
- [Foster Youth to Independence \(FYI\) Voucher Program \(National Alliance to End Homelessness\)](#)

ⁱ[Supportive Housing Need in the United States \(CSH\)](#)ⁱⁱⁱ

^{iv}[Annual Homeless Assessment Report - 2022 \(HUD\)](#)

^{iv}[Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America – Voices of Youth Count \(Chapin Hall\)](#)

^v[Phase One Study Findings, \(2018\). The Center for Social Innovation](#)

^{vi}[Are Housing Interventions for Youth Aging Out of Child Welfare Enough? | Housing Matters \(urban.org\)](#)

^{vii}[An overview webinar and fact sheet on Special Purpose Vouchers can be found here: Special Purpose Vouchers: Working Collaboratively to Achieve Community Goals to End Homelessness \(HUD\)](#)

^{viii}[Housing Choice Voucher Data Dashboard \(HUD\)](#)

^{ix} Additional Special Purpose HCV not covered in this brief including Veteran’s Affairs Supportive Housing, Mainstream, Non-Elderly Disabled, Stability, and Emergency Housing Vouchers.

^x[Housing Choice Voucher Data Dashboard \(HUD\)](#)

^{xi}[Housing Choice Voucher Data Dashboard \(HUD\)](#)

^{xii}[News Release - One Year Anniversary of Foster Youth to Independence Initiative - July, 24, 2020 \(HUD\)](#)

^{xiii}[Positive Changes in FY2021: Universal FUP Vouchers for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care \(NAEH\)](#)

^{xiv}[Federal Register: Implementation of the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Amendments](#)

^{xv}[Foster Youth to Independence Notice PIH 2023-04 \(HUD\)](#)

^{xvi}[Recent examples: FY2022 FUP NOFO and FY2022 FYI Competitive NOFO](#)

^{xvii} HUD published all information on available funding at <https://www.hud.gov/hud-partners/grants-info-funding-opps>.

^{xviii}[Supportive Housing 101 \(CSH\)](#)