

Vouchers: Foster Youth to Independence Initiative

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Administering Agency: HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH)

Year Started: 2019

Number of Persons/Households Served: Since the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative was implemented on July 26, 2019, nearly 1,250 youth have received time-limited Housing Choice Vouchers and supportive services to support their efforts toward self-sufficiency. Vouchers continue to be distributed as needed to youth leaving foster care in increments as small as one.

Population Targeted: Current and former foster youth between the ages of 18 to 24 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Funding: On October 6, 2020, HUD issued \$10 million from the FY2020 appropriations through notice PIH 2020-28 (HA), allowing PHAs to request vouchers on a non-competitive basis. This notice replaced the original FYI Notice (PIH 2019-20) which drew FYI vouchers exclusively from HUD's Tenant Protection Vouchers. FYI remains an eligible use of Tenant Protection Vouchers. Congress appropriated an additional \$20 million for FYI in FY2021, half of which continues to be available on a non-competitive, rolling basis and the other half was distributed in September 2020 to 18 PHAs in nine states. The FY2022 Appropriations Act includes \$30 million for vouchers to be distributed through the FYI mechanism.

See Also: For related information, refer to the *Housing Choice Voucher Program, Family Unification Program, Tenant Protection Vouchers, and HUD-Funded Service Coordination Programs* sections of this guide.

HUD's FYI Initiative is a new way of administering an existing program, the Family Unification

Program (FUP) for youth. FYI is aimed at synchronizing FUP vouchers with emancipation from foster care in order to prevent youth from experiencing homelessness. Initially, FYI vouchers were drawn exclusively from HUD's Tenant Protection Voucher fund. Appropriators have included the FYI distribution mechanism in appropriations language, allowing most of HUD's FUP youth vouchers to be issued on demand for youth leaving foster care.

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

Since 2014, the Fostering Stable Housing (FSHO) Coalition, a group of current and former foster youth led by ACTION Ohio in partnership with the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare (NCHCW), has worked with HUD career staff to devise a plan to close the gaps through which youth leaving foster care fall into homelessness and human trafficking. Each year, 17,000 young people emancipate from foster care and enter adulthood alone, having not been adopted or reunified with their parents. As they struggle to gain economic footing in their communities without the support of extended family, nearly 25% experience homelessness upon emancipation.

In 2018, the FSHO Coalition determined that the best way to prevent homelessness was to synchronize HUD's existing, time-limited FUP vouchers for youth with emancipation and eliminate geographic disparities. To do this, the FSHO Coalition recommended to HUD that they tap the flexible, on-demand nature of the TPVs for which FUP was already an eligible use and which can be distributed all over the country in a flexible, somewhat on-demand manner. The FSHO Coalition delivered this proposal directly to HUD Secretary Ben Carson and his leadership team on March 4, 2019, at which time Sec. Carson directed his staff to vet the proposal's legality and viability. HUD determined within weeks that the

proposal was indeed viable, named the proposal the “Foster Youth to Independence Initiative,” and composed the details of a notice for PHAs. On July 26, 2019, HUD issued an invitation to PHAs with contracts to administer Housing Choice Vouchers (that do not already administer FUP) to apply for FYI, thus making FUP for youth available nationwide. The first vouchers were awarded on October 31, 2019, and HUD continues to accept applications on a rolling, non-competitive basis.

The following year, on October 6, 2020, using authority offered by the FY2020 Appropriations Act, HUD issued a new Notice inviting all PHAs with Annual Contributions Contracts (meaning that they are capable of administering tenant-based Housing Choice Vouchers) to apply for Family Unification Program Vouchers for youth on a non-competitive basis. Nearly 2,000 vouchers were distributed in this manner.

FUP Housing Choice Vouchers available for families involved in child welfare will be distributed through the competitive NOFA process and vouchers for youth will be distributed on demand through the non-competitive process, allowing communities to synchronize vouchers with emancipation from foster care. In the future, youth vouchers, and the associated distribution mechanism, will be referred to as FYI. Family vouchers will be referred to as FUP.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Like FUP, FYI is administered at the local level through a partnership between public housing authorities (PHAs) and public child welfare agencies (PCWAs). In order to apply, sites must identify at least one eligible youth and sign a memorandum of understanding or a letter of agreement outlining their commitment to the success of FYI, the youth served by FYI, and the roles their organizations will play in this regard. Sites can apply for up to 75 FYI vouchers annually on the non-competitive basis. PHAs wishing to apply for FYI vouchers through the competitive NOFA must execute an MOU (a letter of intent will not suffice) and the maximum number of vouchers PHAs can request is based upon their housing authority size.

The PCWA must agree to provide a host of independent living services either directly or identify service providers in the community that will do so. The PCWA also must agree to identify eligible youth and certify that the young person is at least 18 years old and not more than 24 years old (has not reached his/her 25th birthday), that they will age out of foster care or have already aged out, and that the young person is homeless or has been at risk of homelessness at some point after the age of 16. Communities are also encouraged to involve their local homeless service providers in locating eligible youth who are currently homeless but have lost touch with the child welfare system.

To select youth, PCWA staff should monitor a young person’s housing needs as they go through their transition plan and approach the age of emancipation. If a young person is at risk of homelessness and is interested in the stability of renting their own apartment, then they and their PCWA independent living worker should consider a referral to FYI. The PCWA staff will notify the FYI point of contact at the local PHA about three months prior to emancipation (in most states this is just before age 21) to let them know that the young person is eligible for and interested in a FUP voucher.

PCWAs should also begin to forecast and predict how many young people will need vouchers within their caseload so that they can request vouchers in batches from their local PHA.

HUD offers all the tools and training necessary to implement and operate an FYI partnership on their [website](#) free of charge. HUD’s tools are an excellent formula generally for all community partnerships aimed at preventing youth homelessness beyond FYI. Tools and training can also be found at www.nchcw.org.

FUNDING

FYI is an eligible use of the \$30 million for FUP youth provided in the FY22 spending bill. FYI remains an eligible use of the Tenant Protection Account.

FORECAST FOR 2022

The bill from which FYI emerged, “The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act” (HR 4300/S. 2803), became law when the “Consolidated Appropriations Act” was signed on December 27, 2020. This legislation permanently authorizes the FYI approach to administering FUP for youth. This legislation also encourages self-sufficiency by extending the time-limit from 36 months to 60 months for youth who voluntarily enroll in self-sufficiency programs. Advocates should reach out to HUD and encourage the Department to implement FSHO. Additionally, HUD should be encouraged to continue to include the foster youth and advocates who wrote FYI in their efforts to swiftly implement this groundbreaking law.

TIPS FOR LOCAL SUCCESS

FYI is intended to prevent homelessness among youth leaving foster care, but it certainly is not intended to replace child welfare resources. Therefore, it is important to point out that child welfare agencies nationwide have access to flexible child welfare resources, including entitlement funding through Title IV-E of the “Social Security Act” to provide housing and independent living services for youth through the age of 21 aimed at preparing youth to avoid homelessness. Funding for independent living services and non-recurring housing expenses is available through the age of 23 under the “John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.” Community leaders must encourage child welfare agencies to provide a platform for economic success for youth while they are under the care and custody of the state in order to reduce the need for current and former foster youth to tap homeless services.

WHAT TO SAY TO LEGISLATORS

Advocates should thank legislators for passing the “Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act” and for supporting robust appropriations for FUP and FYI. Advocates can also help their elected officials understand that affordable housing is an effective and prudent investment in ending youth

homelessness. Providing affordable housing and services is a tenth of the cost of undesirable remedies to homelessness such as residential treatment and juvenile justice involvement. Coupling FYI and FSS has the potential to vastly improve each young person’s individual economic security and will reduce racial wealth disparities as well. Seventy-five percent of young people who emancipate are youth of color and regardless of a young person’s race or ethnicity, foster youth disproportionately reside in neighborhoods that have been stripped of wealth, infrastructure, and opportunity for years due to flawed government policies. Helping each one of these young people build wealth and move towards financial success is something we can all be proud of as advocates.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Center for Housing & Child Welfare, 301-699-0151, www.nchcw.org.