

Vouchers: Family Unification Program

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Administering agency: HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing

Year program started: 1990

Number of persons/households served: Nearly 30,000 households currently hold Housing Choice Vouchers through the Family Unification Program (FUP).

Population targeted: Homeless or precariously families in danger of losing children to foster care or that are unable to regain custody primarily due to housing problems, as well as youth aging out of foster care who are at risk of homelessness.

FY18 funding: HUD has not yet issued the \$10 million in funding appropriated for FY17. The FY18 Senate bill includes \$20 million for new FUP vouchers as well. Additionally, FUP remains an eligible use of HUD's Tenant Protection Fund.

Also see: *Housing Choice Voucher Program, Tenant Protection Vouchers, Services for Residents of Low Income Housing – Family Self-Sufficiency Program*

HUD's FUP is a federal housing program aimed at keeping homeless families together and safe, as well as preventing homelessness among youth aging out of foster care. HUD provides FUP Housing Choice Vouchers to Public Housing Authorities who must work in partnership with public child welfare agencies in order to select eligible participants for the program. These vouchers can be used to prevent children from entering foster care, to reunite foster children with their parents, and to help ease the transition to adulthood for older youth in foster care. In 2016, Congress initiated an extensive program to allow PHAs to couple FUP youth vouchers with the Family Self Sufficiency Program.

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

FUP was signed into law in 1990 by President George H. W. Bush. The program was created as a part of the Tenant Protection Fund within the Cranston-Gonzalez Affordable Housing Act of

1990. FUP is designed to address the housing-related needs of children in the foster care system. According to HHS, more than 58,000 children who entered foster care because their families lack access to safe, decent, and affordable housing. FUP is also a valuable resource for the 25,000 youth who age out of foster care each year without the support of a permanent family. Nearly a quarter of these young people experience homelessness within a year of leaving foster care. Despite these staggering figures, child welfare workers seldom have access to the housing resources or supportive services necessary to prevent and end homelessness among vulnerable families and youth. A recent Chapin Hall study found that each year nearly 3 million youth between the ages of 18 and 24 experience homelessness; roughly half of these young people report a history of foster care involvement.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

FUP is administered at the local level through a partnership between public housing agencies (PHAs) and public child welfare agencies. PHAs interested in administering FUP vouchers must sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with their partner agency in order to apply to HUD in response to a Notice of Funding Availability. FUP vouchers are awarded through a competitive process. Depending on the size of the PHA, communities can receive a maximum of 100, 50, or 25 vouchers. Communities are encouraged to apply only for the number of vouchers that can be leased up quickly, meaning that both families and youth have been identified and landlords have been recruited for the program.

PHAs receiving an allocation of FUP vouchers then administer these vouchers to families and youth who have been certified as eligible for FUP by the local public child welfare agency. The FUP vouchers work in the same way a typical housing choice voucher does. The child welfare agency is required to help FUP clients gather the necessary Section 8 paperwork, find suitable housing, and to maintain their housing through aftercare services. If a child welfare agency elects to refer a young person aging out of foster care with a FUP voucher, the child welfare agency must offer educational and training

vouchers, independent living programs, counseling, and employment assistance. The housing subsidies available to youth under this program are limited to 36 months. FUP youth who participate in HUD's Family Self-Sufficiency Program may keep their voucher for up to five years.

Eligible families include those who are in imminent danger of losing their children to foster care primarily due to housing problems, and those who are unable to regain custody of their children primarily due to housing problems. Eligible youth include those who were in foster care any time after the age of 14 and are currently between the ages of 14 and 24 (have not reached their 24th birthday) and are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Unlike families, youth can only participate in FUP for 36 months.

FUNDING

Each year between 1992 and 2001, HUD awarded an average of 3,560 FUP vouchers to public housing agencies. Unfortunately, from FY02 through FY07, HUD used its rescission authority to avoid funding FUP, even though the Housing Choice Voucher program's Tenant Protection Fund—out of which FUP is funded—had carryover funds ranging from \$18 million to \$170 million. Thanks to the efforts of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, \$50 million in new funding was awarded for new FUP vouchers in FY08 and FY11. Despite the continuing availability of Tenant Protection Fund vouchers for FUP, HUD has failed to issue new vouchers for FUP for the past decade from this account. Advocates must urge HUD to issue the \$10 million in funding appropriated for FY17. Further, advocates must encourage the House to include the \$20 million requested in the FY18 Senate bill for new FUP vouchers in the final FY18 appropriations act.

FORECAST FOR 2018

There is growing interagency support for FUP at the federal level in Congress and within the administration. With the recent passage of the Housing Opportunity through Modernization Act of 2015, Congress extended the time limit on FUP vouchers for youth from 18 months to 36 months. In addition, HUD and HHS recently worked together to create a pilot program that will allow Public Housing Authorities to enroll young people

using FUP vouchers into the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program. Young people who participate in FSS can maintain their subsidy for five years.

In 2017, HUD issued the final regulation (Notice PIH 2015-10) on the project-basing of FUP vouchers, which was made possible as a part of HOTMA. The opportunity to project-base FUP vouchers will give communities the opportunity to improve access to supportive services particularly for youth leaving foster care. HUD encourages PHAs interested in project-basing FUP vouchers to consider an appropriate balance between family units and units for youth leaving foster care. Additionally, PHAs and the child welfare partner agencies must be aware that they cannot exclude families or youth who are pregnant or parenting from project-based FUP units, as this is a violation of the Fair Housing Act.

TIPS FOR LOCAL SUCCESS

Throughout the years, it has become clear that the most successful FUP partnerships require cross training, single points of contact (liaisons) within each partner agency, and ongoing communication. In fact, HUD now requires that FUP sites have regular communication, liaisons, and other elements to support their partnership and provide case management and other supportive services to FUP households. FUP sites must include ongoing, intensive case management provided by the local child welfare agency or through a contract funded by the child welfare system. HUD underscores the importance of child welfare partners taking part in landlord recruitment, housing training for frontline staff, and emphasizes regular communication with the PHA point of contact. Finally, HUD encourages PHAs to enroll FUP households in the FSS program because this adds an extra layer of supportive services, and helps ensure that FUP households will successfully maintain permanent housing and reduce the amount of subsidy paid by the government over time.

The MOU required by HUD provides an excellent formula for all community partnerships designed to share resources and information in an effort to prevent and end family and youth homelessness. PHAs use this model in communities across the country. In doing so, they demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to these at-risk populations by matching services to Section 8

vouchers in order to successfully serve hard-to-house families and youth leaving foster care.

WHAT TO SAY TO LEGISLATORS

Advocates help legislators understand that housing is a vital tool for promoting family unification, easing the transition to adulthood for foster youth, and achieving significant cost savings. Advocates can inform their elected officials that when a FUP voucher is used to reunify a family and subsidizes a two-bedroom unit, the community saves an average of \$32,500 per family in annual foster care costs. This cost-benefit information is an excellent way to help legislators understand the importance of new funding for the FUP.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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