Vouchers: Family Unification Program

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

**Year Started:** 1990

**Number of Persons/Households Served:**
Nearly 35,000 households currently hold Housing Choice Vouchers through the Family Unification Program (FUP)

**Population Targeted:** Homeless or precariously housed families in danger of losing children to foster care or that are unable to regain custody primarily due to housing problems and youth aging out of foster care who are at risk of homelessness

**Funding:** In November 2018, HUD issued $30 million in funding for FUP; this included $10 million appropriated in FY17 and $20 million appropriated in FY18. Additionally, FUP remains an eligible use of HUD’s Tenant Protection Fund.

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

**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 27,000 children enter foster care each year because their families lack access to safe, decent, and affordable housing. FUP is also a valuable housing resource to many of the 25,000 youth who age out of foster care each year, nearly a quarter of whom experience homelessness within a year of leaving the system. Despite the obvious impact of America’s affordable housing crisis on foster children, child welfare workers seldom have access to the housing resources or supportive services necessary to prevent and end homelessness among vulnerable families and youth. FUP is one of the few cross-systems partnerships that communities can draw upon to keep families together and safe and ease the transition to adulthood for young adults.

**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 vouchers to families and youth...
who have been certified as eligible for FUP by
the local public child welfare agency. The most
recent HUD announcement regarding FUP
emphasizes the importance of ensuring that
families in the homeless assistance system that
are involved with child welfare are aware of
available FUP Vouchers. In an effort to ensure
that these families are included in FUP, HUD
required the local Continuum of Care (CoC)
leader to sign the FUP MOU and encourages the
participating FUP partners to meet regularly
with the local CoC groups.

FUP Vouchers work in the same way as a typical
Housing Choice Voucher and are subject to the
same eligibility rules. 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 25th 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, $80 million in new funding was
awarded for new FUP Vouchers in FY08 and
FY18. 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
encourage the House to include the $20 million
in the FY19 appropriations act and continue
urge HUD to tap the Tenant Protection Fund to
expand the reach of FUP.

FORECAST FOR 2019
There is growing interagency support for FUP
at the federal level in Congress and within the
Administration. Leadership in authorizing and
appropriations committees have expressed a
high level of confidence and support for FUP
and it is likely that FUP will continue to receive
steady funding as well as serve as a blueprint
for similar interagency housing collaboration.
PHAs and nonprofit partners are working to
implement the changes included in HOTMA that
allow for the project-basing of FUP Vouchers
in order to increase the number of units of
affordable housing available for both families
and youth. HUD encourages PHAs interested
in project-basing FUP Vouchers to consider an
appropriate balance between family units and
units for youth leaving foster care.

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. HUD 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.

HUD offers the tools and training necessary to implement and operate a FUP partnership on their website free of charge. The FUP tools offered on the HUD website is 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 administering FUP nationwide demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to at-risk populations and the ability to match existing 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. Furthermore, supportive housing for young adults is a tenth of the cost of more restrictive placements like juvenile justice or residential treatment. This cost-benefit information is an excellent way to help legislators understand the importance of new funding for the FUP.

FOR MORE INFORMATION