

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 250 youth have received time-limited Housing Choice Vouchers and supportive services to support their efforts toward self-sufficiency. The application for FYI is a “rolling” application which means that public housing agencies (PHAs) can access the program as needed (up to 25 vouchers annually per PHA) when youth age out of foster care in their communities.

Population Targeted: Current and former foster youth between the ages of 18 to 25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Funding: On July 26, 2019, HUD issued notice PIH 2019-20 (HA), inviting certain PHAs to apply for vouchers from HUD's Tenant Protection Fund. While HUD did not specify a maximum for FYI funding nationally, no PHA can receive more than 25 FYI vouchers.

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.

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. FYI vouchers are drawn from HUD's Tenant Protection Voucher fund; hence the name “FYI TPVs.” FYI TPVs are provided to PHAs that agree to work in partnership with public child welfare

agencies to select eligible participants for the program and provide supportive services.

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, 19,000 young people emancipate from foster care and enter adulthood alone, having not been adopted nor 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 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 Sec. 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 basis.

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 25 FYI TPV vouchers annually.

The PCWA must agree to provide a host of independent living services either directly or through a contract. 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 he/she left foster care at age 16 or older, and that the young person is homeless or at risk of homelessness. 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 move along the continuum of foster care services. When a young person approaches emancipation and it is clear that the young person is at risk of homelessness and is interested in the stability of renting their own apartment, they should consider a referral to FYI. If it is the case that a young person will not be able to afford to rent an apartment without a government subsidy, then 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. In fact, HUD's tools are an excellent formula generally for all community partnerships aimed at preventing youth homelessness beyond FYI.

FUNDING

FYI draws vouchers from HUD's Tenant Protection Vouchers. This is possible because youth are eligible for the Family Unification Program, which was offered as an original purpose of the Tenant Protection Voucher fund when it was established in 1990. The TPV received only \$75 million in the "FY2020 Appropriations Act." This was significantly less than the \$150 million that advocates were hoping for. That said, HUD did not limit the amount of resources that can be drawn from the TPV for FYI, but because FYI is targeted to a small population of youth, NCHCW estimates that FYI will not exceed 2,000 vouchers annually, or roughly \$20 million. Advocates must encourage congressional appropriators to continue to allow FUP to be an eligible use of the Tenant Protection Fund. In fact, the first allotment awarded on October 31, 2019 was just \$1.7 million.

FORECAST FOR 2020

There is growing interagency support for improving access to FUP for youth leaving foster care. In fact, the House passed "The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act" (HR 4300) by voice vote in November 2019. HR 4300 will permanently authorize 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 the Senate and encourage them to move the companion bill, S. 2803, this year.

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 “Chafee Independent Living Act.” 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 can help legislators understand that housing is a vital tool for easing the transition to adulthood for foster youth. Advocates can inform their elected officials that when a Housing Choice Voucher is used to prevent homelessness, the cost of that voucher is a tenth of the cost of residential treatment or a juvenile justice placement. The “Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act” (S. 2803) currently in the Senate will permanently authorize the distribution process and the access to supportive services outlined in FYI. Please ask your senator to co-sponsor S. 2803.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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