

Vouchers: Family Unification Program

By Ruth White, Executive Director,
National Center for Housing and Child
Welfare

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

Year Started: 1990

Number of Persons/Households Served:

Nearly 45,000 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 April 2020, HUD issued \$25 million in funding for FUP to serve youth and families which included funding appropriated by Congress in FY2019 and a portion of the funding made available FY2020. HUD issued a non-competitive notice for \$10 million to serve youth in October 2020. Congress appropriated \$25 million for FUP in FY2021. FUP remains an eligible use of HUD’s Tenant Protection Fund.

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

HUD’s FUP is a federal housing program aimed at keeping homeless families together and safe and preventing homelessness among young adults 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 (PCWAs) in order to select eligible participants for the program. These vouchers can be used to prevent children from entering foster care, reunite foster children with their parents, and help ease the transition to adulthood for older

former foster youth. In 2016, Congress initiated an extensive program to allow PHAs to couple FUP youth vouchers with HUD’s Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS). Through the most recent NOFA, HUD encourages Public Housing Authorities to engage families in FSS as well.

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, one in ten children who enter foster care are removed from their homes due to inadequate housing. In 2019, nearly 28,000 children entered foster care because their families lacked access to safe, decent, and affordable housing. FUP is also a valuable housing resource to many of the 22,000 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 an effective 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 apply for 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 families and youth that have been identified as well as landlords who will rent to them.

PHAs receiving an allocation of FUP vouchers will then administer vouchers to families and youth who have been certified as eligible for FUP by the local public child welfare agency. The 2019 HUD Notice of Funding Availability 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 are administered in the same manner as Housing Choice Voucher and are subject to the same eligibility rules. The child welfare agency is required to help FUP clients gather the necessary paperwork, find suitable housing, and 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 or identify an agency that will offer educational assistance, independent living programs, counseling, and employment assistance. The housing subsidies available to youth under this program are limited to 36 months.

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 aged out of foster care and are currently between the ages of 18 and 24 (have not reached their 25th birthday) and are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

FUNDING

Each year between 1992 and 2001, HUD awarded an average of 3,560 FUP Vouchers to public housing agencies. Unfortunately, from FY02 to FY07, HUD used its rescission authority to avoid funding FUP. Funding for FUP was re-established by the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development in 2009 and since then, FUP has received widespread support and a consistent investment of roughly \$20 million annually. In fact, Congress increased the funding for FUP in FY2020 to \$25 million along with language that synchronizes vouchers for youth with foster care emancipation in order to eliminate homelessness for youth leaving care. Vouchers for youth continue to be time-limited to three years, thus HUD incentivizes communities (particularly local child welfare agencies) to provide housing stability services to youth for the life of the voucher to help move youth towards self-sufficiency.

FORECAST FOR 2021

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.

An important development in the evolution of FUP is an increasing interest in synchronizing FUP vouchers with emancipation in order to eliminate homelessness among youth leaving foster care. Congressional appropriators included language in the “FY2021 Appropriations Act” again that allows \$10 million of the FUP funding to be awarded non-competitively so that a portion of the FUP vouchers can be issued “on demand” in such a manner that child welfare agencies can properly time the voucher request with a young adult’s emancipation from foster care.

HUD requires that the local public child welfare agencies (PCWA) find partners to ensure that young people have access to a range of self-

sufficiency services. Further, child welfare agencies should create relationships with local shelters and the Continuum of Care (CoC) so that youth who have been failed by the child welfare system and end up homeless are identified and referred to the PCWA for FUP.

TIPS FOR LOCAL SUCCESS

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. PHAs administering FUP nationwide demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to at-risk populations and the ability to match existing services to Housing Choice 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 \$32,458 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

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