

# 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 3,500 young people have received time-limited Housing Choice Vouchers and supportive services to help them chart a path towards success.

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

**Funding:** FYI began in 2019 as a Secretarial Initiative which tapped HUD’s ultra-flexible Tenant Protection Account to provide “on demand” Family Unification Program (FUP) Youth Housing Choice Vouchers. Appropriators responded by adding language to the FUP line item as well allowing HUD to distribute nearly all of the FUP youth vouchers in a “non-competitive” manner. In FY 2023, Congress increased the FUP youth allotment by an additional \$5 million for a total of \$25 million, of which \$25 million may be distributed through the rolling, non-competitive process and \$5 million must be offered through a competitive Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and split, according to PHA requests, between families and youth.

**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 *Advocates’ Guide*.

## 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 age-out of 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. 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. 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. Today, nearly 3,000 vouchers have been distributed through FYI.

In 2020, Congress passed the “Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Amendments Act” (FSHO). FSHO amends FUP to encourage participation in HUD’s Family Self-Sufficiency Program to help move youth towards economic independence and build wealth. Under FSHO, all youth may earn an extra two years of rental assistance (for a total not to exceed 60 months) if they choose to (and are able to) participate in activities that will move them towards economic independence and success. FSHO includes generous exemptions for the extension as well.

## 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). To apply, PHAs sites must identify at least one eligible youth and sign a memorandum of understanding or a letter of agreement (either will satisfy the “Partnership Agreement” requirement) outlining their commitment to the success of FYI, how youth will be selected and notified, and the roles organizations will play. The PCWA must agree to identify an entity that can offer a host of independent living services to help youth obtain and maintain permanent housing. The PCWA also must agree to identify eligible youth who would benefit from a voucher after leaving extended foster care. Eligible youth must be at least 18 years old and not more than 24 years old (has not reached his/her 25th birthday); be preparing to leave foster care or have already aged out; and have been homeless or at risk of homelessness at some point after the age of 16.

HUD offers all the tools and training necessary to implement and operate an FYI partnership on their [website](#) free of charge. Tools and training can also be found at [www.nchcw.org/fyi](http://www.nchcw.org/fyi).

## FUNDING

FYI is an eligible use of the \$30 million for FUP, \$25 million of which is specifically targeted to youth in the “FY2023 Appropriations Act.”

## FORECAST FOR 2024

FYI enjoys bi-partisan support because it offers foster youth who reach adulthood alone the opportunity to use permanent housing as a platform for economic success. Advocates should thank Congress for passing FSHO and encourage congressional appropriators to continue robust funding of \$30 million annually to ensure that both youth and families can benefit from FUP and FYI.

## 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 to local child welfare agencies nationwide that they can use 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. 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 stable developmentally appropriate housing options for youth who are younger than 21. Then, as youth move towards emancipation and independence, local PCWAs can refer youth to FYI and help them successfully lease-up.

## 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. Since the implementation of FYI and the passage of FSHO, nearly 4,800 new Housing Choice Vouchers have been made available “on demand” to youth leaving foster care and alumni who are struggling with housing instability. As a result, one of the few encouraging trends in HUD’s Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress was the decrease in homelessness among youth leaving foster care. 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](http://www.nchcw.org).