

F Y I

foster youth independence program

FAST
FACTS

Knitting existing programs together to create a platform for economic success for all youth leaving foster care who are at risk of homelessness.

● What is the Foster Youth Independence Program (FYI)?

Since 2013, the FYI Coalition, led by ACTION Ohio, has worked in partnership with the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare (NCHCW), elected officials including foster youth champions, Reps. Turner and Bass, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to study how to knit existing federal programs together to eliminate the gaps through which foster youth fall into homelessness.

The FYI Coalition discovered that the best way to eliminate gaps is to synchronize existing programs such as HUD's Family Unification Program (FUP), with the predictable nature of emancipation (the date a young person leaves state custody). FYI allows all local Public Housing Authorities to provide an "on demand" FUP voucher that is timed with a young person's emancipation from foster care. In this way, existing federal resources, can be knitted together and used as a platform for economic success.

● What is the Family Unification Program?

HUD's Family Unification Program (FUP) is the only national housing program aimed at preventing family separation due to homelessness and easing the transition to adulthood for aging-out youth. HUD provides Housing Choice Vouchers ("Section 8") to local public housing authorities (PHAs) who apply to administer the program. These PHAs are then required to work in partnership with the local public child welfare agency to identify youth and families to refer to the program. FUP has existed since 1990 for families and youth were added as an eligible population in 2000. Unlike families, young people participating in FUP receive vouchers that are time-limited to three years.

The impact of this relatively small program is extraordinary. Each year more than 75,000 children live in safe, affordable housing and avoid out-of-home placement and homelessness due to FUP. Since youth were added in the year 2000, more than 5,000 young people have received housing vouchers and their own, independent apartment upon leaving foster care.

● How does FYI change FUP for youth?

Currently, FUP vouchers for youth come from an unpredictable pool of funding and are only administered by certain PHAs. FYI will address this challenge in two ways. It will provide a method for national consistency by allowing all PHAs to administer FUP. FYI will also make it possible to issue youth vouchers on demand, by changing the funding source to a flexible but little-known account at HUD called the Tenant Protection Account. Vouchers (TPVs) from this account can be issued "on demand" at the discretion of the HUD Secretary. To learn more about TPVs visit www.nchcw.org.



FSHO Coalition Members visiting HUD Headquarters in Washington, DC.

● Who is eligible?

FYI does not change FUP eligibility for youth. You can read all about eligibility on the HUD website here: https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/FUP_FACT_SHEET.PDF

For youth, the PCWA will certify that the youth 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 or will leave foster care within 90 days, in accordance with a transition plan, and is homeless or at risk of homelessness. Keep in mind that a housing choice voucher requires that an individual sign a legal document called a lease with a private landlord. Thus, the FYI Coalition recommends and research by the University of Denver indicates that young people who are participating in extended foster care or Chafee Independent Living Services, are close to reaching their 21st birthday, and who participate in supervised independent living placements are the best candidates for referral.

● How does a child welfare agency make a referral?

First, all public child welfare agencies (PCWAs) should establish a point of contact at their local PHA and begin to develop a relationship with their peer at that organization.

Next, PCWAs use a variety of independent living funding sources to prepare young people who are likely to reach adulthood in state care. As young people move along this continuum of services, PCWA staff should monitor if a young person is at risk of homelessness and interested in the stability of renting their own apartment. 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 their peer at the local PHA about three to six months prior to emancipation (in most states this is just before age 21) 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.

● How many young people will this program serve annually?

The National Youth in Transition Database report indicates that 20% of 19-year-old alumni (1,576) and 28% of 21-year-old alumni (1,991) experience homelessness. Given these figures, the FSHO Coalition estimates that approximately 2,000 youth people who are leaving foster care could benefit from FYI/FUP for youth. It is certainly the case that many young people have been failed by the system and as such, these young people are currently homeless. PCWAs must begin to work with their local homeless service providers and identify young people who can be brought back into the fold of the public child welfare system and provided with appropriate services to prepare for access to independent apartments through FYI/FUP. The FYI Coalition anticipates that fewer young people will turn to the streets due to the predictability and stability that FYI will create for older youth in care.



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To join the FYI Coalition or for more information on how to access FYI/FUP for youth and how to use this program as a platform for economic success and self-sufficiency visit the www.FosterACTIONOhio.org or www.nchcw.org.



NATIONAL CENTER FOR HOUSING & CHILD WELFARE