

Housing and Economic Self Sufficiency for Youth Leaving Care

Since 1983, foster care alumni have shared painful personal stories with policy makers, researchers, and advocates to illuminate the unimaginable struggles young people face when they fall through the obvious and persistent gaps between the public systems.¹

Over the past seven years, young people have taken it upon themselves to visit Washington, DC annually to meet directly with members of Congress, housing experts, and federal agency staff to better understand the nature of these gaps and how they can best be closed.

THE SOLUTION: “Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities.”

After synthesizing lived experience, the technical aspects of public systems, and an extraordinary contribution of guidance and encouragement from Congressman Rep. Turner (R-OH) and Rep. Bass (D-CA) the youth have arrived at an elegantly simple solution, “Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities.”

This approach capitalizes on the predictable nature of emancipation and coordinates existing and available government resources to insure a platform for a successful transition to independence.

“Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities” (FSHO) addresses the synchronization problems of existing housing and social services programs in two ways: expanding HUD’s Family Unification Program – Family Self Sufficiency Program Youth Demonstration and by tapping the flexibility of the Tenant Protection Account. More specifically Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities will:

1. ***Require PHAs to offer all eligible youth aging out of foster care access to the FUP-FSS Demo.***
This means that eligible young people leaving care are guaranteed a Housing Choice Voucher for three years. If young people voluntarily enroll in FSS (or the PHA’s closest approximation) they can extend the voucher for an additional two years
2. ***Rename FUP youth vouchers FSHO vouchers to add clarity to the difference between vouchers available to young people leaving care and families participating in FUP.***
3. ***Set aside up to \$20 million within HUD’s Tenant Protection Account to issue FSHO vouchers “on demand” for Fiscal Year 2019.***
4. ***Require all PHAs to address the FUP-FSS Demo Expansion in their Five Administrative Plan,*** including how the PHA will partner with their local Public Child Welfare Agency when a PCWA provides a youth referral. If a PHA does not have an FSS program, the PHA will need to include information in their Administrative Plan about how they will connect a young person to self-sufficiency services within the broader community.

SCOPE OF THE NEED

In 2014, the U.S. Children’s Bureau reported that five percent of all 415,129 children in foster care had a goal of aging out into independence (AFCARS, 2016). During 2014, nine percent of the 238,230 children who exited the foster care system aged out – or a total of 21,440 young people. Due to recent changes to child welfare law under the Families First and Prevention Services Act of 2018, which encourages

¹ Festinger, T. (1983). *No one ever asked us*. Columbia University Press: New York, NY

extended and proper utilization of foster care resources through the age of 21, it is the case that the most likely candidates for these housing resources will be 21-year-olds at risk of homelessness, not the entire portfolio of youth aging out.

The most recent AFCARS report indicates that the total number of 21-year-old foster youth in care in 2016 was 2,129. It is a portion of this group of young adults would transition from independent living programs into a subsidy administered by a PHA after having been adequately prepared for adulthood, connected to work, and self-sufficiency services.

NUMBER OF FOSTER YOUTH REPORTING EXPERIENCES WITH HOMELESSNESS²

Age	Sample Size	Youth Reporting Experiences w/ Homelessness	National Percentage
17	15524	2499	16.10%
19	7886	1576	20.00%
21	7010	1991	28.40%

BACKGROUND ON EXISTING PROGRAMS THE YOUTH SEEK TO SYNCHRONIZE AND COORDINATE

It is important to understand some important background on existing programs and what FSHO intends to fix.

The Family Unification Program

Congress established The Family Unification Program as one of the four eligible uses of the Tenant Protection fund in the Cranston-Gonzalez Affordable Housing Act in 1990. In October of 2000, at the request of the CWLA Youth Advisory Committee, young people leaving care were added as an eligible population for time-limited housing choice vouchers under FUP. At the request of PHAs and housing providers, this time-limit was extended to 36 months by Congress in the Housing Opportunity through Modernization Act of 2016.

The FUP-FSS Demonstration Program

For the past five years, HUD has allowed PHAs with the Family Self-Sufficiency program to enroll FUP youth into the program, provided they are working, going to school or otherwise improving their economic prospects, and thus, youth are able to extend their voucher by an additional two years.

However, participation in both FUP and the FSS demonstration is subject to availability. First, a PHA must have FUP and/or FSS. Second, even within the jurisdiction of such a PHA, a young person's emancipation must be timed with the availability of a voucher. Thus, PHAs nationwide express frustration with the synchronization flaws of these programs.

Tenant Protection Vouchers

As it turns out, the FUP synchronization problem is alleviated entirely by the existing funding mechanism available under the Tenant Protection Vouchers. **Youth leaving foster care have been eligible for Tenant Protection Vouchers under FUP since 2000.** Tenant Protection Vouchers are issued at the discretion of the HUD Secretary and can be issued in increments as small as one in an expedient and efficient funding mechanism delivered on an "as needed, non-competitive" basis.