

HUD'S 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. In June 2011, HUD awarded 1,900 new Section 8 vouchers to public housing authorities nationwide in partnership with their local public child welfare agencies.

History

The Family Unification Program (FUP) was signed into law in 1990 by President George H. W. Bush. The more than 46,000 FUP vouchers that HUD has awarded since FUP's inception have enabled over 200,000 children to reunite with their families from foster care or avoid foster care placement altogether.

Program Summary

Over a half million children live apart from their families in America's foster care system. A third of these children are separated from their families because their parents lack access to safe, decent, affordable housing. Equally troubling are the housing challenges faced by the 29,000 youth who age out of foster care each year without the support of a permanent family. Nearly a quarter of these young people experience homelessness within a year of leaving care. Despite these staggering figures, child welfare workers seldom have access to the housing resources or supportive services necessary to prevent and end homelessness among vulnerable families and youth.

The Family Unification Program aims to provide the child welfare system with the resources necessary to prevent family separation due to homelessness *and* to prevent homelessness among aging-out youth. Eligible families include those families who are in imminent danger of losing their children to foster care primarily due to housing problems and families who are unable to regain custody of their children primarily due to housing problems. Eligible youth include those who were in foster care anytime after the age of 16 who are currently between the ages of 18- 21 (have not reached their 22 birthday) and are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

HUD's Family Unification Program (FUP) is administered through local level partnerships between public housing authorities and public child welfare agencies. Public housing authorities apply for FUP vouchers from HUD in response to a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). PHAs then administer FUP vouchers to families and youth who have been certified as eligible for FUP by the local public child welfare agency. The child welfare agency is required to assist FUP clients to gather the necessary Section 8 paperwork, find suitable housing, and provide aftercare services maintain their housing.

Funding

Each year between 1992 and 2001, HUD awarded an average of 3,560 vouchers to public housing authorities. In fact, even during years when NEW regular Section 8 vouchers were not awarded, HUD kept its commitment to provide vouchers for FUP. Unfortunately, from 2002 through 2007, HUD used its rescission authority to avoid funding FUP, even though the Tenant Protection Fund (out of which FUP is funded) had carryover funds ranging from \$18 million to \$170 million. Working with key appropriators lead by Senators Murray (D-WA) and Bond (R-MO), NCHCW was successful in urging HUD to spend \$50 million in new funding for FUP since 2009. HUD announced the latest round of \$15 million on June 2, 2011. For a list of the awardees visit www.nchcw.org.

What Advocates Need to Know Now About FUP

HUD currently has enough funding available in the Tenant Protection Fund to provide at least \$15 million in new vouchers for the Family Unification Program. Advocates interested in freeing this funding up for a new allotment of vouchers may call their elected officials and request that their elected officials urge HUD to issue these funds as soon as possible.

Given the government's growing interest in controlling spending, it is important to point out that placing children in the foster care system in lieu of a prudent investment in affordable housing is a poor use of federal money. The request that HUD issue \$15 million out of the existing Tenant Protection Fund account, is not a request for new appropriations, it is simply a request to use these funds for the purpose for which they were appropriated. FUP is an eligible use of the Tenant Protection Fund.

In the absence of an adequate supply of FUP vouchers to intervene and end youth and family homelessness, child welfare agencies are placed in the unenviable position of separating families in order to protect the children from the lingering effects of homelessness. This is a costly solution to homelessness both in terms of the emotional impact upon each child and the cost to the taxpayer. Nationally, the average family involved in the child welfare system has 2.7 children. The cost of keeping the children of one family of this size in foster care is \$47,608 annually. The average cost for a FUP voucher and supportive services for a family of this size for one year would be a fraction of this cost at approximately \$13,412. In fact, recent research has demonstrated that a federal investment to address the housing and social services needs of the families who are separated due to homelessness would save the United States \$1.94 billion annually.

As a result of FUP, more than 500 young people aging out of foster care have received the resources they needed to avoid homelessness and make successful transitions to adulthood. Additionally, a \$15 million investment in FUP means that more than 7,500 children will avoid foster care placement or be reunited with their parents. This investment in affordable housing will result in a savings of nearly \$131 million in foster care costs annually.

For more information about FUP, communities should read HUD's 2010 Notice of Funding Availability. For more information about how to create and improve FUP, please visit the National Center for Housing & Child Welfare website at www.nchcw.org.

*****About the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare**

The National Center for Housing and Child Welfare bridges the gap between affordable housing and child welfare in order to improve the lives of America's most economically disadvantaged youth and families. NCHCW is dedicated to matching permanent housing resources with child welfare and community-based supportive services in order to ensure that no child lingers needlessly in foster care as a consequence of their family's inability to provide safe, decent, affordable housing. NCHCW is equally committed to ensuring that each young person who faces adulthood without the support of a permanent family has a solid plan for stable housing and services to support their successful transition to adulthood. For more information, visit www.nchcw.org.