



Best Practices for Local Administration of Federal Housing Vouchers for Former Foster Youth in California



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Introduction

As the nation’s most populous state, California is also home to the nation’s largest foster care population, with 43,517 youth in care as of April 1, 2024. Of these youth, 7,412 are between the ages of 18 and 21, referred to as “nonminor dependents.”ⁱ California also has the largest population of youth and young adults up to age 24 experiencing homelessness, totaling 11,219 as of 2023—more than one-quarter (27%) of the nation’s youth experiencing homelessness.ⁱⁱ

There’s widespread awareness about California’s lack of affordable housing: In 2023, a study showed that half of the nation’s most expensive cities for apartments were in California.ⁱⁱⁱ What is less publicized is the impact of this tough housing market on youth and young adults, especially those transitioning out of the foster care system with little to no income, rental history, or credit; and without the support of a forever home or willing co-signer.

The federal government has recognized the unique housing needs of youth leaving foster care, establishing rental subsidies via Special Purpose Housing Choice Vouchers for this population through the Family Unification Program (FUP) in the 1990s, expanding in scope and accessibility through the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative in 2019. However, the availability of these federal rental subsidies has not yet resulted in California ending homelessness for youth leaving foster care, even when taken in sum with other state and local resources.

Since 2021, John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) has published two reports to better understand the rate at which California

communities were accessing these federal housing vouchers and the obstacles preventing or hindering access. In November 2021, JBAY published the “[2020-2021 Statewide Analysis of Supportive Housing for Former Foster Youth in California](#),” analyzing the inventory of available supportive housing for former foster youth, including both state- and county-funded transitional housing and federally-funded housing vouchers.^{iv} In November 2022, JBAY built on its existing research by publishing “[What’s Stopping California From Maximizing Federal Housing Assistance for Youth?](#),” which found that the number of FYI/FUP vouchers for youth in California had increased approximately 54%, from 870 in 2021 to more than 1,300 in 2023.^v

The current report builds on this earlier research and integrates lessons learned through extensive conversations with county child welfare agencies, Public Housing Authorities, and other stakeholders to determine the best practices for California communities to effectively administer these vouchers for maximum impact.



Background on the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative and Family Unification Program (FUP)

Overview

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administers two Special Purpose Housing Choice Voucher programs for transition-age former foster youth: The Family Unification Program (FUP) and the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative. Both programs provide Housing Choice Vouchers to Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), which administer the vouchers to youth, in partnership with Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWAs).

History

FUP was enacted in 1992, providing housing vouchers to child welfare-involved families and transition-age former foster youth. Launched in 2019, FYI and a new, innovative voucher administration process grew out of advocacy from the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Coalition, a group of current and former foster youth led by ACTION Ohio in partnership with the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare. This group of advocates worked with HUD to develop the FYI program, ensuring it was responsive to the specific needs of young people leaving foster care. In 2020, The Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act (FSHO) was passed as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and made FYI law.^{vi}

With the introduction of FYI, a new “on-demand” voucher administration process was established, with the goal of making vouchers available to youth on an as-needed, rolling basis throughout the year.

Program & Eligibility

To qualify for FYI or FUP vouchers, youth must be between the ages of 18 and 24 (not yet age 25), have left foster care or will leave foster care within 90 days, and are or were homeless or at risk of homelessness at age 16 or older.

FYI and FUP vouchers provide transition-age former foster youth with up to 36 months of housing assistance via a Housing Choice Voucher, coupled with supportive services offered by a PCWA. These supportive services include housing navigation (assistance with locating housing, rental lease agreements, and move-in costs) as well as ongoing services once in housing, such as basic life skills counseling, education, and job support.

Youth with FYI/FUP vouchers may extend the life of their 36-month voucher for an additional 24 months (for a total of five years), either by opting into the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program if offered by the PHA from which they are receiving assistance, or by fulfilling certain education or employment participation conditions if the PHA does not offer FSS or if it is impacted. PHAs are required to offer this voucher extension to all youth with FYI/FUP vouchers.

In addition to a voucher extension, FSS provides services such as childcare, transportation, education, job training, financial literacy and the establishment of an interest-bearing escrow account. Any increases in the youth’s rent due to increased earned income during the youth’s participation in the program result in a credit to the youth’s escrow account, which is accessible to the youth upon exit from the program.

Background on FYI/FUP

Voucher Administration

FYI and FUP are administered by HUD directly to PHAs in partnership with PCWAs, which in California are county child welfare agencies. PCWAs are responsible for identifying, prioritizing, and verifying eligible youth; as well as providing or securing a commitment for the provision of supportive services. PHAs, which administer the rental subsidy (voucher), are governmental bodies that assist in the development or operation of housing for low-income families.

The PHA may apply for FYI/FUP vouchers in one of two manners:

COMPETITIVE

FYI and FUP vouchers are administered competitively, through a Notice of Funding Opportunity released annually by HUD. Through this competitive process, PHAs may request a minimum of three and a maximum of 75 FYI/FUP vouchers for youth, based on the size of the PHA's overall voucher program and the identified need of eligible youth.

NON-COMPETITIVE

In addition to the time-limited competitive process, PHAs may request FYI vouchers on a rolling basis throughout the year as youth are identified by the PCWA. Through this non-competitive, "on-demand" process, PHAs may request FYI vouchers in batches as little as one or as large as 25. PHAs may request up to 50 on-demand FYI vouchers in a fiscal year.



California FYI/FUP Community of Practice

Overview

In 2023, JBAY launched the FYI/FUP Community of Practice for California county child welfare agencies, Public Housing Authorities, and their partners, with the goal of improving and increasing utilization of FYI/FUP vouchers, and explicitly motivating communities to begin utilizing FYI's on-demand voucher request process. JBAY partnered with the National Center for Housing & Child Welfare, one of the creators of FYI with extensive experience in assisting communities with FYI implementation.

Between February 2023 and April 2024, representatives from 15 counties participated in monthly virtual sessions, alternating between one-on-one technical assistance sessions with partners from each county and larger peer-learning sessions convening the 15-county group to discuss topical issues related to local voucher administration. The table to the right lists the counties that participated in the Community of Practice. A list of specific agencies that participated from each county is included as Appendix A.

Counties participating in the Community of Practice brought varying levels of respective progress in local voucher administration, with some counties already possessing more than 100 FYI/FUP vouchers and some not yet having established the infrastructure to request any vouchers.

This report describes the recommended practices and policies that both informed the Community of Practice curriculum, as well as new practices drawn from the expertise of those who participated in the Community of Practice.

PARTICIPATING COUNTIES

Alameda

Butte

Contra Costa

Los Angeles

Marin

Nevada

Orange

Sacramento

San Francisco

San Joaquin

San Mateo

Santa Clara

Santa Cruz

Sonoma

Stanislaus

PEER LEARNING TOPICS

February 2023: Kick-Off Session

April 2023: Building and Maintaining Partnerships and Requesting Vouchers from HUD

June 2023: Identifying and Preparing Eligible Youth

August 2023: Offering, Funding, and Finding Support Services

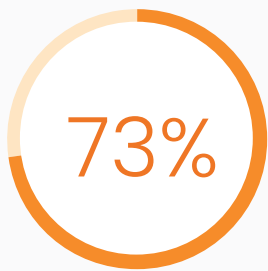
October 2023: Landlord Recruitment and Incentives

February 2024: Voucher Extension/Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program

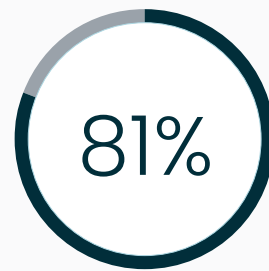
California FYI/FUP Community of Practice

Progress & Outcomes

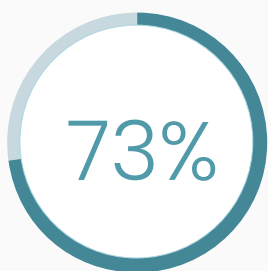
At the start of the Community of Practice, participants took a pre-assessment to identify the status of FYI/FUP voucher administration in each county. At the conclusion of the Community of Practice, participants took a post-assessment to identify progress achieved, and areas for continued support and exploration. The following, are select highlights of the collective progress achieved over the course of the Community of Practice.



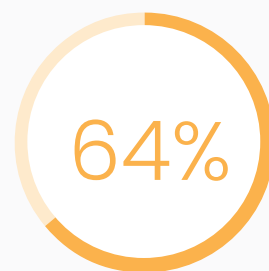
The number of FYI/FUP vouchers for youth **increased in 11 (73%) of the 15 participating counties.**



The number of vouchers collectively increased by **81% across these counties, from 529 to 956.**



Public Housing Authorities **across 11 (73%) counties have now requested FYI vouchers** from HUD via the on-demand process, compared to just one county at the start of the Community of Practice.



The number of Public Housing Authorities administering **FYI/FUP vouchers in partnership with county child welfare increased by 64%, from 16 to 25**, with five counties engaging in new partnerships with one or more Public Housing Authorities.

Recommended Best Practices & Policies

For Child Welfare Agencies

1. Expend the county's full allocation of funding from the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program (HNMP) on an annual basis.

County child welfare agencies are required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide or secure supportive services for youth for the duration of their 36-month voucher. In 2021, a lack of designated funding to offer these services was cited by county child welfare agency representatives as the number one obstacle to implementing or expanding FYI/FUP locally.^{vii} This finding prompted advocacy to expand HNMP for this express purpose, which resulted in an increase to the HNMP statewide budget from \$5 million to \$13.7 million in 2022.^{viii}

While HNMP is an ongoing funding source, it is administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) in a manner that is structured more like a one-time grant program, requiring counties to go through an acceptance process with several steps each year, including requesting a resolution from the County Board of Supervisors.

The expenditure period for each year's HNMP allocation spans two years from the date that the Standard Agreement is executed between the state and county. Given the lengthy administrative process leading up to execution of the Standard Agreement, counties' expenditure deadlines are often a full three years from the time the funding was appropriated in the state budget.

Despite this drawn out expenditure period, it is important that county child welfare agencies fully spend their allocation over the course of one fiscal year. This way, they can maximize their service capacity and provide more youth with vouchers and services. Fully spending the HNMP allocation has also become increasingly important as California faces a budget deficit. HNMP was proposed for elimination in the 2024-25 state budget, and although it was preserved in the final budget, it

remains at risk if the need for this program is not evident in its spending patterns, despite significant need on the ground.^{ix}

The HNMP administrative process has undergone improvements since the inception of the program in 2019, however more improvement is needed and continued efforts are underway.



2. Utilize multiple resources to expand service capacity, thereby maximizing the number of FYI/FUP vouchers that can be offered to youth.

While HNMP provides an ongoing source of funding for county child welfare agencies to serve youth with housing vouchers, the total annual budget is \$13.7 million, which does not meet the full demand statewide. In counties with high demand, child welfare agencies often grapple with how to expand their service capacity beyond what their annual HNMP allocation can fund, so they are able to offer services to all youth with vouchers. Child welfare agency representatives report this is important for two reasons:

- So that all youth with vouchers may be offered the supportive services they need to successfully lease up and remain stably housed, and
- To fulfill the federal mandate of offering services.

When a county child welfare agency reaches its capacity serving youth with HNMP, there are strategies to consider that will increase service capacity, thus increasing the number of vouchers the Public Housing Authority and child welfare agency can offer youth:

a. Identify referral partners in the community that can provide services to the youth they refer, drawing on existing resources.

Partnering with additional community-based providers including those serving a broader population than current or former foster youth can increase service capacity and make vouchers more accessible. These providers often have existing funding to provide case management, employment support, or other types of services to transition-age youth and may identify youth within their programs who are eligible for FYI/FUP and in need of housing support. These providers can refer young people to the county child welfare agency for a voucher while continuing to provide them with services through the duration of their voucher without further burdening the child welfare agency's services budget.

b. Utilize Medi-Cal to fund housing support provided to youth with FYI/FUP vouchers, drawing on reforms underway through California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM).

Under CalAIM, California has made significant changes to Medi-Cal that can be paired with FYI and FUP vouchers to increase housing stability and wellness for transition-aged youth. First, CalAIM provides the benefit of Enhanced Case Management (ECM) for young people with experience in foster care up to age 26 as well as youth and adults experiencing homelessness.^x This benefit is provided for young people enrolled in Managed Care Organizations (MCOs).^{xi} The ECM benefit includes comprehensive care management from a single lead care manager who coordinates the young person's health and health-related care, including physical, mental, and dental care, and social services.

Second, MCOs also have the opportunity to provide an array of services called "community supports" that meet health-related social needs. Included in this array are services that can be critical to housing stability, including housing navigation, housing tenancy and sustaining services, and housing deposits.^{xii}

Some communities are leveraging these benefits in a coordinated way to provide the service component for FYI/FUP vouchers. As counties explore and pursue new opportunities under CalAIM, county child welfare agencies and their providers should consider engaging with these local efforts to explore drawing on Medi-Cal to fund services for youth utilizing FYI/FUP vouchers. A guide for community-based organizations considering becoming CalAIM providers is included in Appendix B.

SPOTLIGHT



Sacramento County partners with several community-based organizations to provide supportive services to youth seeking an FYI/FUP voucher. Some of these providers have contracted with Managed Care Plans to fund these services through Medi-Cal, made possible by CalAIM.

c. Consider alternate sources of public funding that could be utilized to provide services to youth with FYI/FUP vouchers.

In addition to HNMP, HCD also administers a funding source called the Transitional Housing Program to county child welfare agencies. While this program is intended to fund transitional housing, its eligible uses in state law are quite vague.^{xiii} For counties with great need, one strategy would be to reduce the amount of funding spent on transitional housing, which covers both rent as well as services, and draw on it for services only, leveraging the federal rental subsidy provided by HUD through FYI/FUP. Functionally, this would mean a reduction in transitional housing capacity, but an increase in vouchers that would more than make up for the transitional housing capacity loss. Ultimately, this strategy would result in more youth being provided with housing and support, maximizing both federal and state funding.

Another funding stream to consider is the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) program. Although this program is funded on a one-time basis, it has been funded consecutively each year since 2019 and requires that local jurisdictions spend at least 10% of their HHAP allocation on addressing homelessness among youth.^{xiv} Counties, homeless Continuums of Care, and the 13 largest cities receive this state funding. County child welfare can consult with their housing department or Continuum of Care regarding this funding. Lastly, 11 communities in California have federal funding through the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP).^{xv} County child welfare can consult with the Continuum of Care regarding YHDP funding.

d. Identify philanthropic partners interested in improving utilization of federal housing vouchers for former foster youth.

After exploring public funding options, consider approaching philanthropic partners to further increase capacity. In some communities, existing initiatives are underway to address housing instability, or foundations may be interested in awarding new grants to the county child welfare agency, Public Housing Authority, or local service provider to increase support for youth with vouchers.

3. Establish baseline activities or expectations for any parties assisting youth from the point of applying for their voucher to leasing up.

Whether a county child welfare agency contracts with a provider to assist youth with the process of applying for a voucher, identifying housing and leasing up, or offers this support directly, it is important that the assistance is tailored for this explicit purpose and is inclusive of financial support for move-in costs. For example, while many youth providers are seasoned in case management and other types of social service interventions, they may not have expertise in housing navigation, landlord engagement, or other types of support necessary to assist voucher holders.

Once youth have been issued a voucher, they have a limited time to lease up and it is critical that they receive appropriate support to successfully utilize their voucher, including support with covering the security deposit or other move-in costs. Even if the PHA or county child welfare agency partners with a separate third party to engage landlords, the party assisting the youth with the front-end activities of applying for a voucher to lease-up, must have appropriate expertise and resources.

4. In executing contracts for ongoing service provision to youth with vouchers, allow for variation in intensity of the intervention, based on the individual needs of the youth.

If contracting with a provider to offer ongoing supportive services once in their lease, ensure the provider's contract reflects the optional nature of the services provided, and that the contractor can tailor the type, intensity and frequency of services based on the needs of each youth. This is not only a practice-level strategy of "meeting youth where they are," but also ensures that scarce resources are being used efficiently. If there are accountability concerns among provider or county child welfare personnel when a young adult declines services altogether, one practice to assuage these concerns is to employ a waiver for youth choosing to "opt out" of services. This ensures documentation and transparency in terms of equitable access and choice.

5. For counties with multiple Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), recruit as many as possible to partner on FYI/FUP, maximizing the number of youth that can be served and the areas in which youth can reside.

Each PHA may apply for up to 75 competitive FYI/FUP vouchers through the annual Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) issued by HUD, as well as up to 50 non-competitive FYI vouchers through the on-demand request process. Competitive awards are based on the size of the PHA's overall voucher program and the identified need of eligible youth. Non-competitive vouchers are provided based on the number of youth for which the PHA submits a request. For larger counties with multiple PHAs, the more PHAs requesting vouchers, the more youth able to be served. Additionally, the geographic area where youth use their voucher is governed by the jurisdiction of the PHA. For a county PHA, the voucher may generally be used anywhere in the county or in cities or unincorporated areas without PHAs. For a city PHA, the voucher may be used only in that city, which creates limitations if residing in a particular city is problematic for reasons of work or school location, connections to community, or problematic associations with a given city.

SPOTLIGHT



Los Angeles County is home to 20 Public Housing Authorities (PHAs). The child welfare agency has held partnerships with three of them for several years. Recently, the county engaged in partnerships to administer FYI/FUP with several new PHAs, with the help of community partners who arranged meetings to educate housing authorities on the relatively new on-demand request mechanism, and system for supporting young tenants.

A similar scenario has played out in Alameda County, which has historically worked with two to three housing authorities, and for the first time is in partnership with a total of five.

6. In recruiting PHAs to partner on FYI/FUP, highlight recent policy changes, the robust support role of county child welfare, and the priorities of local government.

Most PHAs participate in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Housing Choice Voucher Program. However, given the small size of FYI/FUP relative to other voucher programs, not all PHAs are familiar with the specifics of FYI/FUP, its unique on-demand request process, or its recent policy changes to ease administration.

In March 2023, HUD established an exemption to its policy requiring PHAs to have a minimum 90% voucher utilization rate before requesting additional FYI/FUP vouchers. PHAs now may submit with their FYI voucher request, an explanation of why their existing FYI or FUP vouchers are not at the minimum 90% utilization rate, and why these vouchers are needed. This policy change was significant—in many counties, tight housing markets make it challenging for 90% of voucher holders to be leased up at a moment in time and have a long list of young people in need of vouchers.

Citing policy changes like these can be an important talking point in recruitment conversations, as can emphasizing the support the county child welfare agency or its partners provide to youth tenants. This may alleviate potential concerns of PHA personnel about the challenges of young, first-time renters, and their ability to successfully lease up and remain stably housed.

Lastly, local government such as city councilmembers and county supervisors may be helpful in establishing former foster youth as a priority population for its PHAs. Former foster youth are a very small, niche population, sometimes meaning FYI/FUP is not prioritized among HUD's larger voucher programs. Enlisting the help of local government and community advocates can support a county child welfare agencies' recruitment efforts.

7. Establish a county policy making referral to FYI or transitional housing a mandatory step leading up to 90-day transition planning or earlier, for foster youth preparing to exit the system.

California requires a 90-day transition plan for nonminor dependents exiting foster care. At these meetings, county case workers (social workers and/or probation officers) discuss several topics, including housing. FYI/FUP vouchers are authorized to be provided to youth who are 90 days from leaving foster care for this very purpose—to ensure their availability as a resource during transition planning.

Assembly Bill 674 (Bennett), which took effect in 2022 also requires the report at the last scheduled court review hearing for a nonminor dependent to include information about housing referrals and efforts toward securing stable housing. State guidance encourages counties to utilize FUP to meet this housing referral requirement.^{xvi} Studies consistently demonstrate that youth exiting foster care are at heightened risk for homelessness and housing instability, even when they initially have a housing plan. While most counties have some transitional housing available to former foster youth up until they turn 25, it is rare that a county's transitional housing program even comes close to meeting the local need. The on-demand nature of FYI provides counties the opportunity to formally incorporate voucher referrals into the 90-day transition planning process for every youth in need of housing support.

In order to ensure a request is made in a timely manner, it is advised to start these planning conversations much earlier than 90 days, and even to make the FYI referral prior to the 90-day mark. As long as the youth is not issued the voucher prior to the 90-day mark, the voucher can be requested earlier.

8. Prioritize and expedite FYI/FUP vouchers for youth close to reaching the eligible upper age limit of 25.

In order to be eligible for an FYI/FUP voucher, youth must be no more than 24 years old at the time of eligibility certification and also at the execution of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract. Given what can be a lengthy process of identifying and securing qualifying

housing, youth who are close to turning 25 are on a tight timeline. To ensure youth do not miss the opportunity to access stable, affordable housing and supportive services, prioritize applications for youth close to turning 25 so that they have executed their HAP contract before losing eligibility. An example of a prioritization process that includes youth nearing their 25th birthday is included in Appendix C.

9. In smaller counties with less demand, consider “stacking” vouchers with transitional housing to create a longer runway of housing support.

Counties with large foster care populations often must draw on both transitional housing and voucher programs to provide housing support to youth as they exit the foster care system at age 21. However, some smaller counties may not have a level of demand that exceeds their transitional housing capacity. These counties may be able to offer all youth leaving foster care at age 21 with three years of transitional housing, funded with their realigned THP-Plus distribution and state funding through the Transitional Housing Program. Toward the end of their time in transitional housing, youth can then be offered an FYI/FUP voucher, which, when combined with the two-year extension through FSS, provides an additional five years of housing support. This model enables youth to receive affordable housing with supportive services up until turning 29 years old.

SPOTLIGHT



Marin County “stacks” their vouchers, commonly issuing them to youth once they’re close to exiting transitional housing, but not yet 25 years old. Marin having the third most expensive Fair Market Rent in the state (tied with San Francisco and San Mateo Counties), this stacking of resources offers Marin’s youth leaving foster care the security of affordable housing, enabling them to remain in their county of origin while pursuing educational and/or career goals.

10. Maintain and actively manage a waiting list for FYI/FUP vouchers.

County child welfare agencies maintaining their own FYI/FUP voucher waiting list enables the agency to accept requests on a rolling basis, even if the PHA has temporarily closed the official voucher waiting list or paused referrals. This also allows for the efficient re-issuing of vouchers when another youth's voucher expires or when a voucher is returned by a youth who was unable to or chose not to utilize their voucher. A waiting list also allows a county to assist youth with other resources, if available, while they wait for their voucher. Lastly, waiting lists can be a rough proxy for need, which can inform the development of longer-term goals related to voucher and service capacity increases.

11. Ensure key personnel and community stakeholders are aware of and informed about FYI/FUP eligibility and the local referral process.

It is important that information about FYI/FUP is made available to county agency personnel including social workers and probation officers, and that all parties are aware of the local referral process. Additionally, it is critical that community partners are informed about FYI, including foster care providers and other community-based organizations, coordinated entry system personnel, college campus support programs serving foster youth, McKinney-Vento Liaisons, and legal aid organizations serving youth and young adults. Community stakeholders often report confusion around the availability of FYI/FUP and its referral process, including associated timelines. With consistent and clear information about eligibility and referral, key community partners can play a critical role in identifying eligible young people in need of housing support, as well as communicating to youth what to expect during the referral process. Given staff turnover, it's recommended that counties hold regular training for their social workers, probation officers, and community stakeholders about housing resources for former foster youth.

12. Arrange a standing meeting of all local partners involved in the administration of FYI/FUP vouchers to ensure efficient and effective processes remain in place.

Effective FYI/FUP voucher administration is a multi-partner process, requiring significant coordination and establishment of strong protocols. At a minimum, this group includes the county child welfare agency and the PHA, but may also include any contracted housing navigation and/or service providers working with youth voucher recipients, entities assisting with landlord recruitment, the homeless Continuum of Care, and other youth-serving community-based organizations and legal aid. These standing meetings allow partners to discuss the status of referrals and issued vouchers, anticipate future voucher requests, and address obstacles. Communities with strong, established partnerships often report a monthly meeting suffices, however budding partnerships usually require more frequent meetings until strong protocols are in place, and the group has processed their first vouchers from request to lease up.

For Public Housing Authorities

1. Ensure landlord recruitment is an integral part of the local FYI/FUP program.

Recruitment of landlords who will rent to youth with an FYI/FUP voucher is essential to a successful program, where youth are able to lease up quickly and the PHA is able to maintain a high voucher utilization rate. Although exemptions now exist allowing PHAs to request on-demand FYI vouchers despite not meeting the 90% minimum voucher utilization rate, these exemptions are neither guaranteed nor granted consistently.

Landlord recruitment is often achieved through the provision of various types of incentives. This may include signing bonuses for property owners, modified tenancy requirements to address low or no credit or tenancy history, a risk mitigation fund that covers damages and lost rent, a repair fund, and holding fees.

PHAs often have staff that conduct these types of activities for various voucher programs or may contract with another entity to assist, such as a realtor or community-based organization with appropriate expertise. These activities are eligible uses of funding under the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program that county child welfare agencies receive and may provide to their partner PHA(s), however, given the size of some counties' allocations, this may not be possible because the entire allocation may be needed to provide direct services to youth. In this case, PHAs are encouraged to consider what existing funding they have from HUD or other sources, including philanthropy.

2. For PHAs in communities with large foster care populations, utilize both the competitive and non-competitive voucher request processes.

While PHAs located in communities with a small number of foster youth may be able to meet demand solely utilizing the non-competitive voucher request process, communities with larger foster youth populations can maximize the number of vouchers they have available for youth by utilizing both the competitive and non-competitive voucher request process. Each PHA may apply for up to 75 competitive FYI/FUP vouchers through the annual NOFO issued by HUD, their amount determined by the size of the PHA's overall voucher program and identified need of eligible youth. They may additionally request up to 50 non-competitive FYI vouchers in a fiscal year through the on-demand request process, in batches as little as one or as large as 25. The on-demand nature of FYI vouchers makes them a unique and critical tool for social workers, probation officers and others helping ensure youth leaving foster care have stable housing.

SPOTLIGHT

County of Orange Social Services Agency, Santa Ana Housing Authority, and Orange County Housing Authority has incorporated landlord recruitment as a main component of their FYI/FUP program for several years. They do this in partnership with Orange County United Way, who engages landlords under their WelcomeHomeOC initiative, funded primarily through philanthropic sources. Orange County's FYI/FUP program also includes Orangewood Foundation, which provides youth the supportive services, funded through the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program.



3. Establish policies that will lead to awareness of and participation in the two-year voucher extension.

Under the 2022 amendments to the federal Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities (FSHO) Act of 2020, PHAs are required to inform youth of the provisions that allow for a two-year extension of FYI/FUP assistance (for a total of five years) and the requirements to receive such an extension.^{xvii} Youth can access this two-year extension by opting into the FSS program, offered at some PHAs. If the PHA is not carrying out an FSS program or is offering an FSS program in which the youth has been unable to enroll, a youth can still qualify for two separate 12-month extensions through participation in an education, workforce development, or employment activity for at least nine of the twelve months preceding each extension.^{xviii}

Given the great value of this extension of housing support, it's critical that PHAs develop strategies to ensure every youth is well-informed and that accessing the extension is as seamless as possible. One strategy for PHAs with FSS programs is to auto-enroll youth in FSS when they are issued an FYI/FUP voucher. For PHAs without FSS programs, with impacted FSS programs, or that choose not to utilize an auto-enrollment policy, a promising practice is to ensure the FSS coordinator or other point person on staff is present at one of the early meetings held for youth being issued a voucher. This ensures youth receive full information about the opportunity and can ask questions. Lastly, PHAs may choose to consistently invite FYI/FUP voucher holders to FSS events, which both helps youth with self-sufficiency skill-building and engages them in the FSS program as they approach the expiration date of the FYI/FUP voucher.

SPOTLIGHT



The Santa Ana Housing Authority has a Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program auto-enrollment policy for youth issued FYI/FUP vouchers, ensuring they can take advantage of the two-year extension afforded to them under federal law through participation in FSS.

4. Transition youth to a permanent Housing Choice Voucher upon the expiration of their FYI/FUP voucher.

FYI/FUP vouchers are the only time-limited Housing Choice Vouchers that HUD administers. California's housing market makes it challenging for young adults to afford independent housing, even after they may be more than capable of living independently. This is particularly true for young adults finishing school with less time to earn an income and those who are custodial parents. As a local homelessness prevention strategy, PHAs may employ a policy to issue youth permanent Housing Choice Vouchers at the conclusion of their FYI/FUP voucher term. PHAs are permitted by HUD to adopt a waiting list preference to assist youth reaching the end of their FYI/FUP voucher term who will lack adequate housing as a result of their termination from the program, or other similar category. PHAs may also choose to offer permanent Housing Choice Vouchers to a particularly vulnerable subpopulation of FYI/FUP voucher holders, such as parenting youth.

5. Do not require youth to go through the homeless Continuum of Care's coordinated entry system to access FYI/FUP vouchers.

The homeless Continuum of Care is a critical referral partner for FYI/FUP, identifying former foster youth who come through the community's coordinated entry system. However, it is not recommended to require youth to go through the coordinated entry system to access FYI/FUP vouchers, unless designed in a manner that will not limit access. Most communities that have utilized coordinated entry report that in this scenario, youth are often unintentionally screened out of receiving a voucher, due to failure to score high enough on the coordinated entry assessment tool, despite their categorical eligibility for the resource. Given that child welfare agencies are the parties responsible for eligibility verification, youth should be referred directly to the child welfare agency.

6. Do not require FYI/FUP referral minimums before submitting voucher requests to HUD.

Utilizing the on-demand voucher request process, a PHA may submit to HUD a request for as few as one voucher and as many as 25 vouchers at one time. To streamline administration, some PHAs require a minimum number of referrals before they submit the voucher request to HUD. Unfortunately, this practice creates a delay for youth who have completed their application process but are waiting for the referral list to reach its minimum. This delay can have serious consequences for youth who are actively homeless or unstably housed.

7. For PHAs with impacted Housing Choice Voucher programs, re-open the voucher waiting list to accept FYI-eligible youth without opening the waiting list for other applicants.

Due to the limited availability of Housing Choice Vouchers and overwhelming demand, some PHAs temporarily close their voucher waiting lists. When the waiting list is closed, a PHA cannot submit a request for on-demand FYI vouchers because HUD requires PHAs to first add youth to their voucher waiting list and ensure no one who is FYI-eligible is ahead of them. HUD permits PHAs with closed voucher waiting lists to temporarily reopen their waiting list to accept an FYI-eligible youth without opening the waiting list for other applicants. This practice prevents delays in administering FYI vouchers in communities with impacted Housing Choice Voucher programs.

8. Continue to use awarded FYI/FUP vouchers for eligible youth upon turnover.

Once a youth's FYI/FUP voucher term expires or a youth fails to use an FYI/FUP voucher, HUD permits PHAs to retain the voucher and issue it to another eligible youth. If another eligible youth has not been identified, the PHA must report to HUD by the end of the calendar year, readjusting the PHA's voucher allotment. Given the youth demand as well as the administrative workload required to administer vouchers, it is a best practice for PHAs to work closely with child welfare to ensure turned over or unutilized vouchers can be re-issued to youth on the voucher waiting list.



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- The creators of FYI, Action Ohio and NCHCW. Without them, this innovative resource would not exist for youth in California or across the nation.

For questions about this document, or to learn more about JBAY's work, contact Simone Tureck Lee, Director of Housing & Economic Mobility at JBAY: simone@jbay.org.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Agencies that Participated in the FYI/FUP Community of Practice

County	Agency
Alameda	Alameda County Social Services Agency
	Beyond Emancipation
Butte	Butte County Department of Employment and Social Services
	Housing Authority of the County of Butte
	Youth for Change
Contra Costa	Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department
	Contra Costa County Health Services
	Housing Authority of the County of Contra Costa
	Hope Solutions
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services
	Los Angeles County Development Authority
	City of Pomona Housing Authority
Marin	County of Marin Department of Health and Human Services
	Marin Housing Authority
	Alternative Family Services
Nevada	Nevada County Superintendent of Schools
Orange	County of Orange Social Services Agency
	Santa Ana Housing Authority
	Orangewood Foundation
	Orange County United Way
Sacramento	County of Sacramento Child, Family and Adult Services
	Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency
San Francisco	San Francisco Human Services Agency
	San Francisco Housing Authority
	Unity Care
San Joaquin	San Joaquin County Human Services Agency
	Housing Authority of the County of San Joaquin
	Aspiranet
San Mateo	San Mateo County Children and Family Services
	San Mateo County Department of Housing
Santa Clara	County of Santa Clara Department of Family and Children's Services
	Santa Clara County Housing Authority
	Santa Clara Office of Supportive Housing
	Bill Wilson Center
Santa Cruz	Santa Cruz Family & Children's Services Division
	Santa Cruz Housing for Health Division
	Housing Authority of the County of Santa Cruz
Sonoma	Sonoma County Family, Youth and Children's Services
	Sonoma County Housing Authority
Stanislaus	Stanislaus County Child Welfare Department
	Center for Human Services

Appendix B: Informational Resources

RESOURCES FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

- [Webpage on the Foster Youth to Independence \(FYI\) Initiative](#)
- [Webpage on the Family Unification Program \(FUP\)](#)
- [Webpage on the Family Self-Sufficiency Program \(FSS\)](#)
- [2023-04 Public Information Notice on FYI non-competitive vouchers](#) (March 15, 2023)
- [Non-competitive FYI Application for Public Housing Authorities](#)

RESOURCES FROM THE ADVOCACY COMMUNITY

- [California FYI/FUP Points-of-Contact Roster](#): This roster was developed by JBAY to provide a point-of-contact in each county for youth interested in requesting an FYI/FUP voucher. It includes the county child welfare agency, their partnering Public Housing Authority (PHA), and their contracted service provider (if applicable). It also indicates whether the county's PHA requests vouchers for youth on an on-demand basis, and whether the PHA offers FSS.
- [List of FYI Resources and Tools for Advocates in California and Nationwide](#): This list of resources and tools was developed by Youth Law Center in collaboration with Alliance for Children's Rights, California Youth Connection, JBAY, NCHCW, and Public Counsel. It includes documents to aid advocates in helping young people access FYI vouchers and support stakeholders to build their FYI programs and spread the word about the availability of vouchers.
- ["To CalAIM or Not to CalAIM? The Question Every Community-Based Organization is Asking"](#) (August 2024): This guide was developed by the Public Works Alliance and California Children's Trust to help CBO leaders think through the various CalAIM reform opportunities and help them decide if pursuing CalAIM services makes sense for their organization from a mission and financial perspective.

Appendix C: Sample Documents & Templates

- [Sample FYI Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) between the Public Child Welfare Agency and the Public Housing Authority](#): Provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- [Sample FYI Referral Form from Public Child Welfare Agency to Public Housing Authority](#): Adapted from a document provided by Orange County Social Services Agency
- [Example of FYI/FUP Youth Prioritization System](#): Adapted from a document provided by Orange County Social Services Agency document

Appendices

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- ii. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports. URL: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/>
- iii. Serlin, Christine. Dwellsy. 20 Cities With the Highest One-Bedroom Rents in January (February 2023). URL: https://www.multifamilyexecutive.com/property-management/rent-trends/dwellsy-20-cities-with-the-highest-one-bedroom-rents-in-january_o
- iv. John Burton Advocates for Youth. “2020-2021 Statewide Analysis of Supportive Housing for Former Foster Youth in California” (2021). URL: <https://jbay.org/resources/2020-21-supportive-housing-for-ffy/>
- v. John Burton Advocates for Youth. “What’s Stopping California From Maximizing Federal Housing Assistance for Youth?” (2023). URL: <https://jbay.org/resources/2023-fyi-report/>
- vi. The provision can be found at 42 U.S.C.A. 1437f(x).
- vii. John Burton Advocates for Youth. “2020-2021 Statewide Analysis of Supportive Housing for Former Foster Youth in California” (2021). URL: <https://jbay.org/resources/2020-21-supportive-housing-for-ffy/>
- viii. The California Department of Housing and Community Development maintains the following webpage for the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program, in addition to their two other Transition Age Youth programs: <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-and-funding/programs-active/transitional-age-youth-program>
- ix. See this fact sheet for more information about the preservation of the Housing Navigation and Maintenance Program in the 2024-25 state budget: <https://jbay.org/resources/hnmp-fact-sheet-2024/>
- x. 1-CalAIM Enhanced Care Management Policy Guide (September 2023). URL: <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/MCQMD/ECM-Policy-Guide.pdf>
- xi. Young people under age 21 who are not enrolled in MCOs can receive the benefit of case management as Intensive Care Coordination (ICC) and may be eligible for Targeted Case Management (TGM) when they reach age 21.
- xii. Transformation of Medi-Cal: Community Supports. URL: <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/CalAIM/Documents/DHCS-Medi-Cal-Community-Supports-Supplemental-Fact-Sheet.pdf>
- xiii. California Health and Safety Code Section 50807 states “the Department of Housing and Community Development shall allocate funding to county child welfare agencies to help young adults who are 18 to 24 years of age, inclusive, secure and maintain housing, with priority given to young adults formerly in the state’s foster care or probation systems.” URL: https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC§ionNum=50807.
- xiv. See this fact sheet for more information about the Homeless, Housing Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) program and its 10% youth set-aside: <https://jbay.org/resources/2024-fact-sheet-hhap/>. Also see the California Department of Housing and Community Development’s webpage on HHAP:
- xv. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has awarded seven rounds of funding totaling \$451.3 million to 110 communities, including \$69.2 million to ten California communities— Alameda, Los Angeles, Monterey, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz: <https://www.hudexchange.info/sites/onecpd/assets/File/Map-of-YHDP-Funded-CoCs.pdf>
- xvi. Assembly Bill 674 (Bennett) was enacted in 2021 and took effect January 1, 2022. See All County Letter 23-40 (2023) for related state guidance provided to counties: <https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2023/23-40.pdf?ver=2023-04-28-161403-437>
- xvii. Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act of 2020, H.R. 133, P.L. 116-260. 116th Cong. (2020). URL: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-116publ260/pdf/PLAW-116publ260.pdf>
- xviii. Youth who do not have access to the Family Self-Sufficiency Program may qualify for two separate 12-month extensions of their FYI/FUP voucher through participation in one of the following activities for at least nine of the 12 months preceding each extension:
 - Education: The youth was engaged in obtaining a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent.
 - Workforce Development: The youth was participating in a career pathway, as such term is defined in section 3 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
 - Employment Activity: The youth was employed
 - Exception: The FSHO Act also provides a 24-month extension to youth who are responsible for the care of a dependent child under the age of 6 or for the care of an incapacitated person; regularly and actively participating in a drug addiction or alcohol treatment and rehabilitation program; or incapable of complying with the requirement to participate in an FSS program or engage in education, workforce development, or employment activities, as applicable, due to a documented medical condition.