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September 11, 2024

How Counties Are Using Federal Housing Vouchers to Prevent Homelessness Among Former Foster Youth in California





Agenda

1. Welcome & Introductions
2. Background on FYI & FUP
3. FYI/FUP Community of Practice
4. Best Practices & Policies
 - for Child Welfare Agencies
 - for Public Housing Authorities
5. Resources & Upcoming Events
6. Q & A

PUBLICATION

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

Available at:

<https://jbay.org/resources/2024-fyi-bp>



Today's Presenters

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Background on FYI & FUP

The Federal Government Has Recognized the Unique Housing Needs of Youth Leaving Foster Care

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administers two **Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) programs** for youth exiting foster care or who have already exited.

FAMILY UNIFICATION PROGRAM (FUP)

- Enacted in 1992.
- Began as a federal effort to address housing needs of child welfare-involved families.
- Expanded to include transition-age former foster youth.

BOTH PROVIDE

HCVs to Public Housing Authorities in partnership with Child Welfare Agencies which provide/secure supportive services.

FOSTER YOUTH TO INDEPENDENCE (FYI)

- Launched in 2019.
- Specifically serves transition-age former foster youth.
- Vouchers available through competitive NOFA and on an “on-demand” basis.

FYI/FUP Eligibility & Administration

Eligible Population

- Ages 18 up to 24, inclusive (have not yet turned 25 at time of eligibility determination and execution of the Housing Assistance Payment contract).
- Has exited foster care or will exit within 90 days.
- Is/was homeless or at risk of homelessness at age 16 or later.

What the Program Provides

- Up to 36 months of housing assistance via a Housing Choice Voucher, coupled with supportive services.
- Can be extended an additional 24 months for a total of 5 years through participation in the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program or via participation conditions.

How the Program is Funded & Administered

- Administered by HUD to Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in partnership with Public Child Welfare Agencies.
- PHA provides the voucher; child welfare verifies eligibility and provides or secures supportive services.
- Two processes for PHAs to access vouchers from HUD: competitively and non-competitively

FYI was Designed to Prevent Youth from Leaving Foster Care into Homelessness through its **Unique** Request Process

COMPETITIVELY (FYI & FUP)

through a NOFO process,
usually once a year.

May apply for a minimum of 3
and maximum of 75. Awarded
based on size of PHA's overall
voucher program and identified
need of eligible youth.

Two processes
for PHAs to
access FYI/FUP
vouchers from
HUD

NON-COMPETITIVELY (FYI)

through an “on-demand”
process where vouchers are
requested on a rolling basis
as youth are identified.

May request in batches as little as
1 or as large as 25. Each PHA can
request up to 50 in a fiscal year.

A photograph of a group of people in a meeting, overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter. The text 'FYI/FUP' and 'Community of Practice' is centered over the image in white. The background shows a man in a suit sitting at a table with laptops, surrounded by other people in a meeting room with large windows and a whiteboard.

FYI/FUP Community of Practice

JBAY Led an FYI/FUP Community of Practice with National Center for Housing & Child Welfare

15 Counties

- County child welfare agencies
- Public Housing Authorities
- Service providers *(if applicable)*
- Homeless Continuums of Care *(if applicable)*

1. Alameda
2. Butte
3. Contra Costa
4. Los Angeles
5. Marin

6. Nevada
7. Orange
8. Sacramento
9. San Francisco
10. San Joaquin

11. San Mateo
12. Santa Clara
13. Santa Cruz
14. Sonoma
15. Stanislaus

Monthly Virtual Sessions

- **Group peer learning sessions on alternating topics** →
- Individual technical assistance calls to work toward goals set at start of initiative

- **Feb. 2023**
In-Person Kick-Off
- **Apr. 2023**
Building & Maintaining Partnerships & Requesting Vouchers from HUD

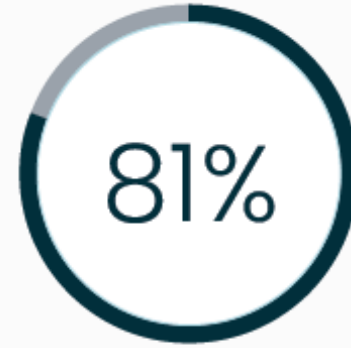
- **Jun. 2023**
Identifying & Preparing Eligible Youth
- **Aug. 2023** Offering, Funding, & Finding Support Services

- **Oct. 2023** Landlord Recruitment & Incentives
- **Feb. 2024**
Voucher Extension/Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Community of Practice: Progress & Outcomes



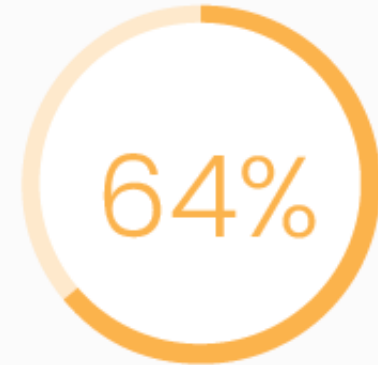
The number of FYI/FUP vouchers for youth **increased in 11 (73%) of the 15 participating counties.**



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.



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.

HNMP was expanded to provide county child welfare agencies with designated funding for the supportive services that must be offered to youth with FYI/FUP vouchers.

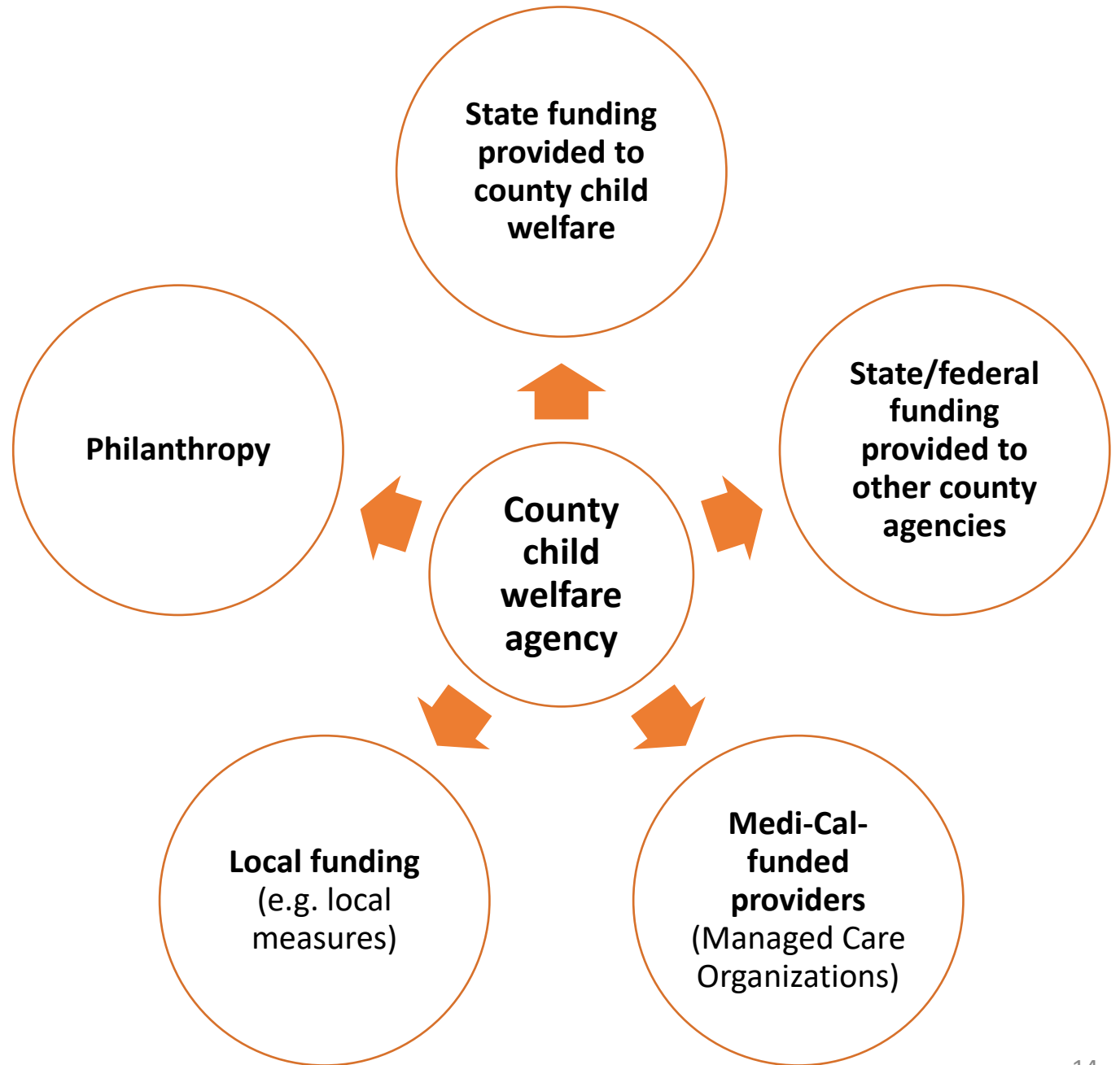
HNMP is an **ongoing** funding source, although administered in a manner structured more like a one-time grant program.

- Lengthy administrative process (~1 year in some cases)
- Two-year expenditure period from execution of Standard Agreement


Despite a drawn-out expenditure period it is important that counties **fully expend** their HNMP allocation over the **course of one fiscal year**.

- Maximize service capacity = maximize issuance of vouchers
- Protect against state budget cuts

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



There are different ways to serve youth with vouchers, depending on county size and demand.



Can refer youth with vouchers to providers through a contract

The diagram consists of two large arrows pointing towards each other. The left arrow is light blue and contains the text 'Can refer youth with vouchers to providers through a contract'. The right arrow is dark blue and contains the text 'Can make vouchers available to youth already being served by providers drawing on their existing resources'. In the center, between the two arrows, is the text '(Can also employ both strategies!)' in orange, italicized font. Below each arrow is a bulleted point.

(Can also employ both strategies!)

Can make vouchers available to youth already being served by providers drawing on their existing resources

- May result in “capping” the number of youth that can be served.

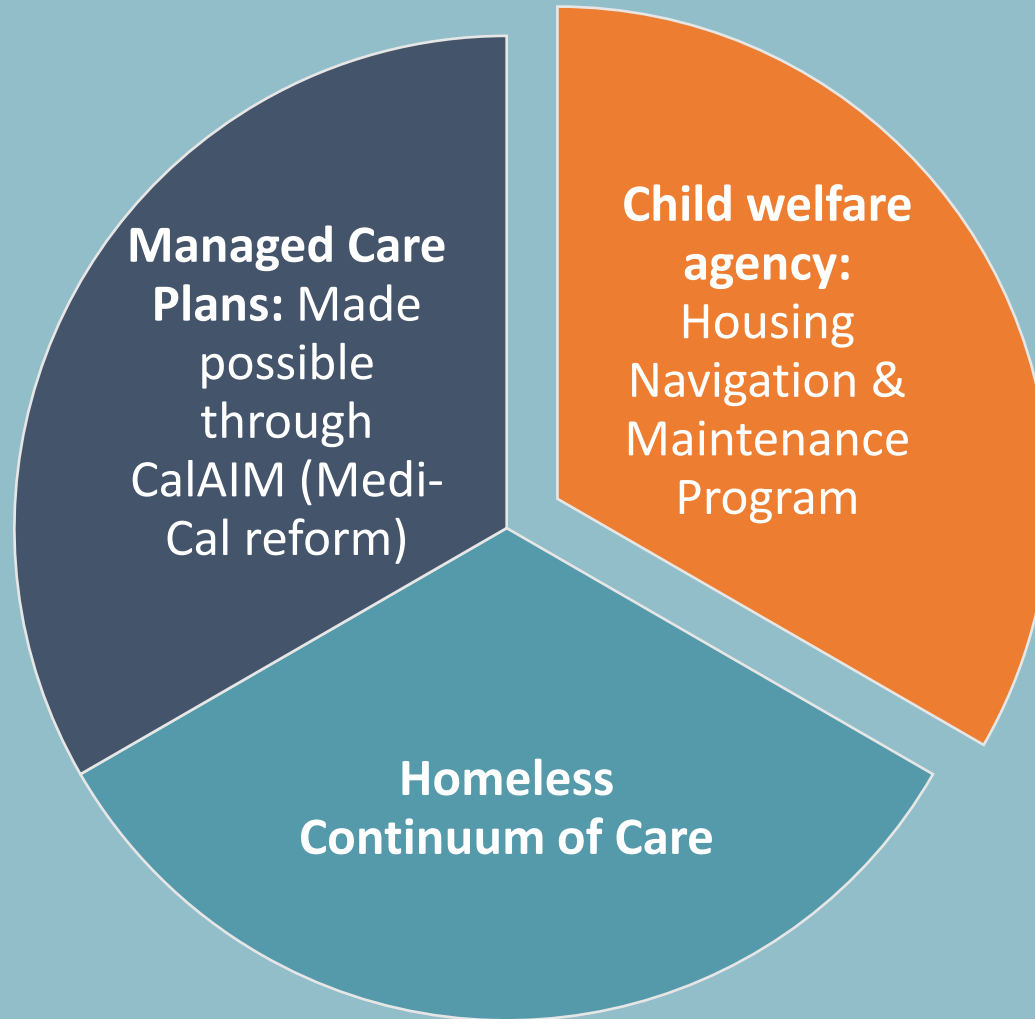
- May provide more flexibility and service capacity.

Sacramento County Provides Supportive Services to Youth with FYI Vouchers Using a Varied Approach, Drawing on Multiple Resources.

- Most FYI referrals come through providers already working with a young person.
- If a young person is referred/requests a voucher who is not already being served by a provider, they are referred to one.
- The provider assists the young person with the voucher application process and housing search through lease up, then may continue to serve them for the duration of the voucher term or may link them to additional providers or community resources.



Sacramento: Providers Are Funded By Various Sources, Not Just Through Child Welfare.



This arrangement:

- ✓ Addresses capacity challenges because the county isn't limited to specific provider(s) funded through county child welfare.
- ✓ Is positive for youth because they may continue to be served by a provider/case manager they are familiar with and choosing to receive services from.

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



Assistance provided to youth on the front-end of voucher issuance should explicitly help youth with:

- ✓ Navigating the application process, completing paperwork and gathering documentation
- ✓ Identifying housing
- ✓ Leasing up
- ✓ Covering security deposit and other move-in costs

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 provider(s), ensure contracts reflect:

- ✓ Optional nature of the services
- ✓ Contractor can tailor the type, intensity and frequency of services based on individual needs

Any accountability concerns may be assuaged by employing a waiver for youth who want to opt out of ongoing services.



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 Public Housing Authority

- **Non-competitive:** Up to 50 vouchers annually
- **Competitive:** Based on PHA's voucher program size & identified need; up to 75 vouchers

Where youth can rent is governed by the PHA's jurisdiction

- **City PHA:** Must live in that city
- **County PHA:** Must live in that county OR in cities or unincorporated areas in that county

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.

- Ensure PHAs are familiar with:
 - ✓ The on-demand, non-competitive FYI voucher request process
 - ✓ Recent policy changes to improve accessibility (e.g. exceptions to 90% minimum utilization rate for requesting additional vouchers)
 - ✓ The support provided by child welfare
- County Board of Supervisors and City Council can be helpful in establishing former foster youth as a priority population for its PHAs



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.



- AB 674 (Bennett, eff. 2022) requires the **report at the last scheduled court review hearing** for a nonminor dependent to include info about housing referrals and efforts toward stable housing.
 - State guidance encourages counties to utilize FUP to meet this requirement.



- To ensure timely requests, start these planning conversations and make the FYI referral **earlier than 90 days**.

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



Youth must be no more than 24 years old at the time of FYI/FUP eligibility certification and at the execution of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract.

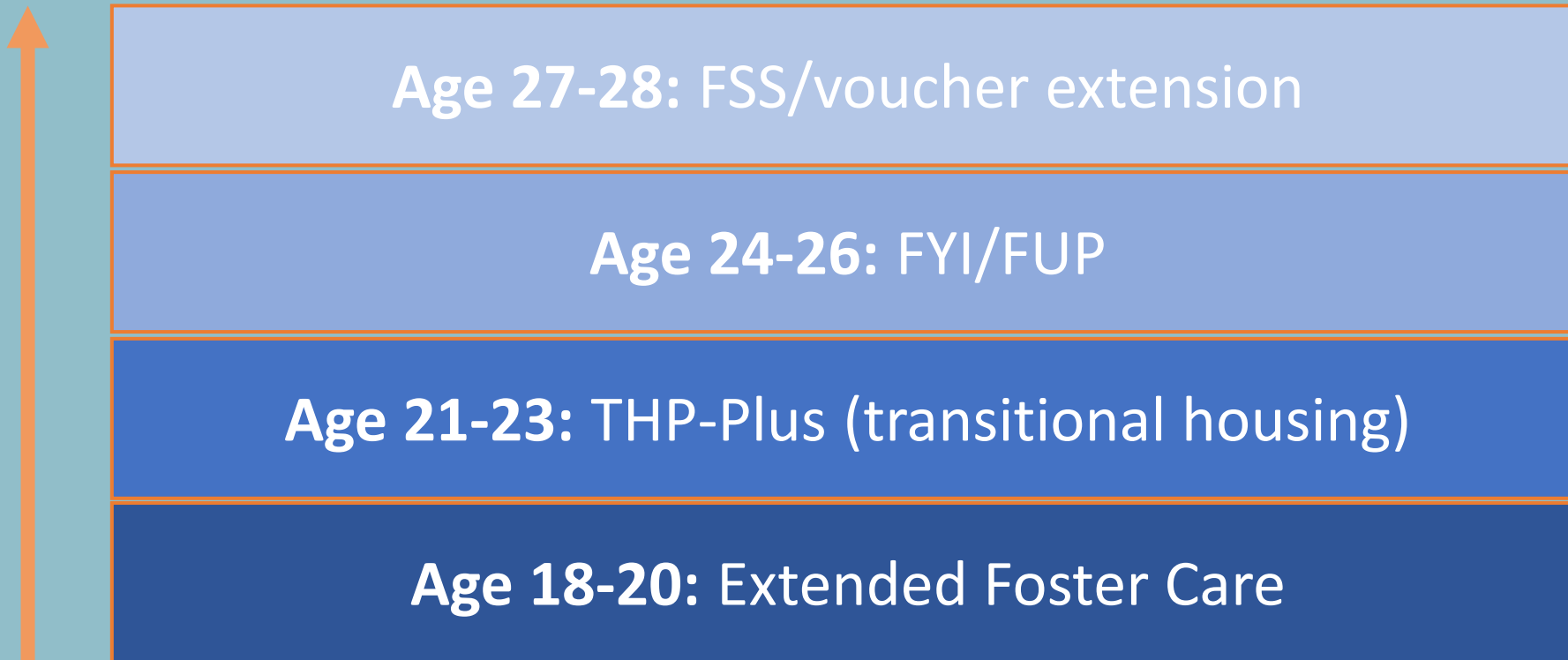
- ✓ Given the time it may take from the time of application to execution of the HAP contract, ensure the FYI/FUP prioritization system makes youth who have already turned 24 a priority population.
- ✓ Expedite the process for any youth close to turning 25.

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 draw on both vouchers and transitional housing in attempt to meet demand for youth leaving foster care.
- Smaller counties may not have a level of demand that exceeds their transitional housing capacity, providing the opportunity to offer a voucher after transitional housing.
- This is particularly resourceful in counties with high housing costs.



Marin County “stacks” their vouchers, commonly issuing them to youth once they’re close to exiting transitional housing, but not yet 25 years old.



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



- Enables child welfare agency to continue to accept voucher referrals on a rolling basis, even if the PHA has temporarily closed the official voucher waiting list or paused referrals.
- Allows for efficient re-issuing of vouchers.
- Opportunity for county to assist youth with other resources, if available, while they wait for their voucher.
- Waiting lists can also be a rough proxy for need, which can inform the development of longer-term goals.

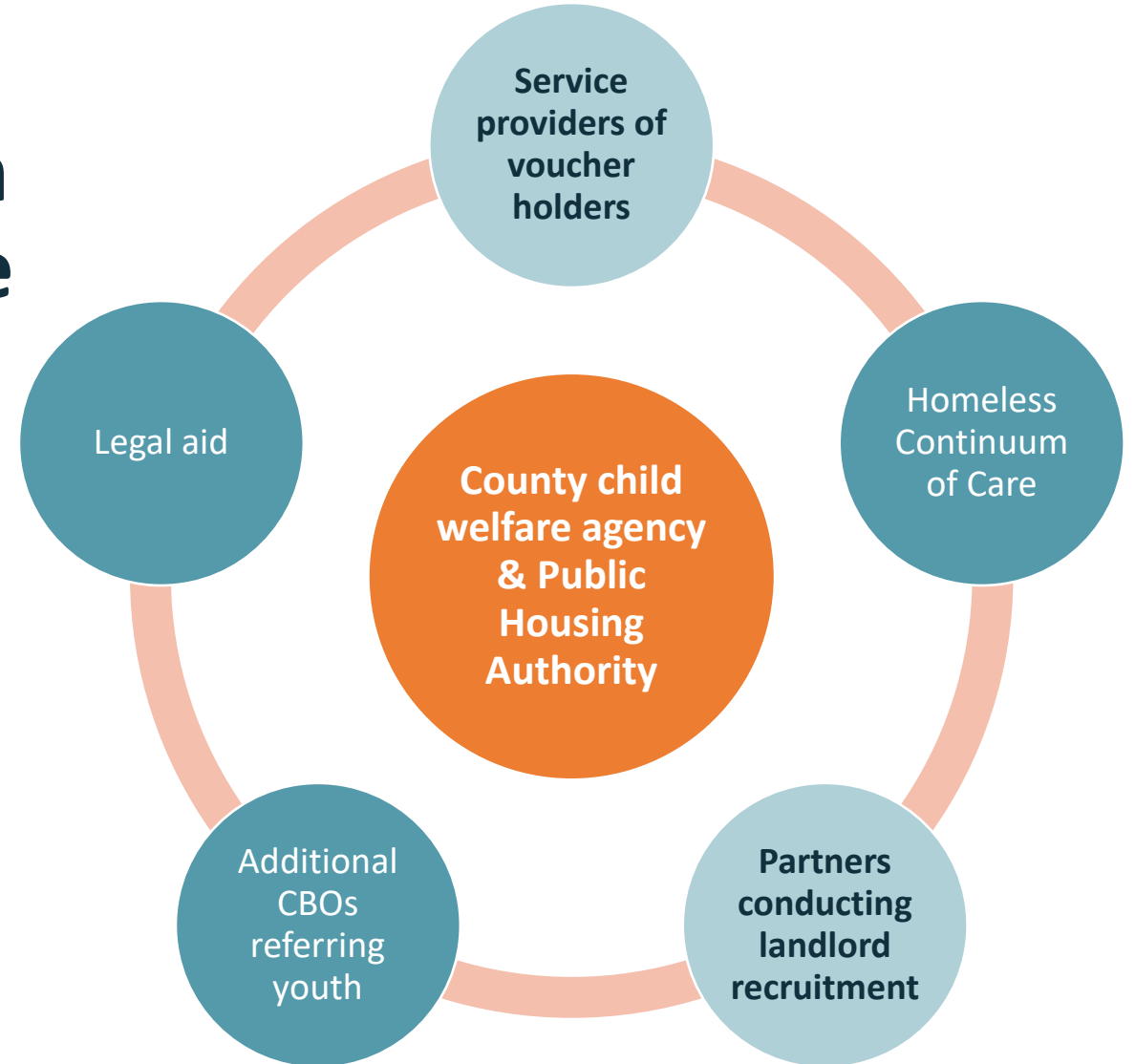
11. Ensure key personnel and community stakeholders are aware of and informed about FYI/FUP eligibility and the local referral process.

- County agency personnel (regular training)
- Community partners should also be informed:
 - ✓ Foster care providers
 - ✓ Other CBOs
 - ✓ Coordinated entry system personnel
 - ✓ College campus support programs
 - ✓ McKinney-Vento Liaisons
 - ✓ Legal aid serving 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.

Communities with strong, established partnerships report a monthly meeting suffices, however budding partnerships usually require more frequent meetings.





Best Practices & Policies for Public Housing Authorities

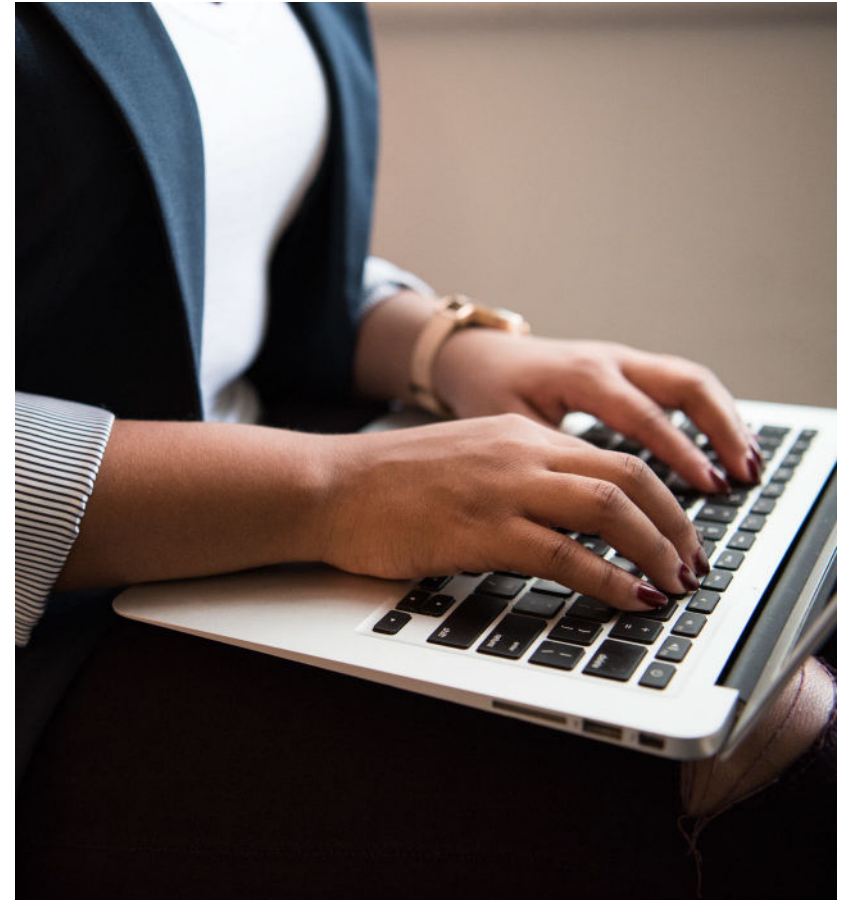
1. Ensure landlord recruitment is an integral part of the local FYI/FUP program.



- Signing bonuses for property owners
- Modified tenancy requirements to address low or no credit or tenancy history
- Risk mitigation fund covering damage or lost rent
- Repair fund
- Holding fees

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

- The non-competitive, on-demand mechanism for requesting FYI/FUP vouchers enables each PHA to request **up to 50 FYI/FUP vouchers annually**, on top of the competitive FYI/FUP vouchers they apply for.
- The on-demand nature of FYI/FUP vouchers makes them a **unique and critical tool** for social workers and probation officers.



FYI Non-Competitive Vouchers “101”

Notice PIH 2023-04

- Can request up to **25** vouchers at a time, up to **50** a federal fiscal year (October 1st – September 30th)
- If a PHA has **10** vouchers or less, must be at least **50%** utilization
- If a PHA has **11** or more vouchers, must be at **90%** utilization
- **New policy:** If can't meet utilization rate, PHA can request exemption so they can still receive FYI vouchers.



FYI Non-Competitive Vouchers: Process

Alternative Requirements to Utilization

- Project-Based Voucher FYI units
- Families Searching for a unit

Application Process

- Complete online application form
- Complete and submit HUD-52515
- Submit additional documentation for alternative requirements if applicable



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

2022 amendments to the federal FSHO Act require Public Housing Authorities to offer youth with FYI/FUP vouchers the opportunity to extend their vouchers for an additional two years by:

Participating in the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program, or

Fulfilling participation conditions if they do not offer FSS or it is impacted.

Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS):

- Must execute **FSS Action Plan**
- Must be **employed** (*but not at the start of the program*);
- FSS provides and/or coordinates **services**; and
- Establishes an **interest-bearing escrow account** where increases in voucher holder's rent from increased earned income result in a credit to the escrow account which they receive at exit.

Participation Conditions:

- Education;
- Workforce development;
- Employment; or
- *Exceptions: has child under 6, cares for incapacitated person, in drug/alcohol treatment, documented medical condition*

Marin & Sacramento Counties educate youth early on about FSS and the available voucher extension.

- Arranges initial meetings with youth at a time where the FSS Coordinator can attend and share information.
- Invites youth to FSS events which help with self-sufficiency skill building and engages youth in the program as they approach the expiration date of their voucher.
- Notifies youth 6 months from voucher expiration to go over what needs to be done to extend ahead of time.



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



- FYI/FUP vouchers are time-limited to 3-5 years, which can present youth with **housing challenges** when their voucher ends, given the **cost of housing** in California and **limited income** of young adults.
- Federal guidelines permit PHAs **discretion to establish local preferences** to reflect the housing needs and priorities of their community.
- Counties and PHAs can ensure the safety and well-being of former foster youth by **transitioning them to a permanent Housing Choice Voucher** when their FYI/FUP voucher concludes.

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 1 voucher and as many as 25.
- To streamline administration, PHAs may require a minimum number of referrals before submitting 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 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 waiting lists.
- This prevents PHAs from submitting requests for FYI vouchers because HUD requires PHAs to first add youth to their voucher waiting list to ensure no one 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 it for other applicants.
- This prevents delays in administering FYI vouchers.



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



- Once a youth's FYI/FUP voucher expires or a youth fails to use a voucher, HUD permits PHAs to retain the voucher and issue it to another youth.
- If another eligible youth is not 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 administrative workload required to administer vouchers, it is a best practice to work closely with child welfare to ensure turned over or unutilized vouchers can be reissued.



Resources & Upcoming Events

Resources

FYI/FUP Point-of-Contact Roster *

<https://jbay.org/resources/fyi-roster/>

*Roster to be updated in November—JBAY will be surveying county child welfare agencies to determine updated statewide voucher numbers and transitional housing capacity. *Stay tuned for a November report & webinar!*

List of FYI Resources and Tools for Advocates in California and Nationwide

<https://tinyurl.com/YLC-FYI-Resources>

Developed by Youth Law Center in collaboration with partners.

“To CalAIM or Not to CalAIM? The Question Every Community-Based Organization is Asking”

<https://tinyurl.com/PWA-CT-CalAIM>

Developed by the Public Works Alliance and California Children’s Trust to help CBO leaders think through the various CalAIM reform opportunities.

Upcoming In-Person Sessions Related to FYI and Other Housing Resources

- County Welfare Directors Association of CA Conference (Oct. 9th – 11th in San Diego)
Workshop on FYI on Thursday, Oct. 10th from 10:45am – 12:15pm
Register for the conference by Sept. 13th: <https://www.cwda.org/event/closing-soon-cwda-2024-conference-registration>
- Blueprint for Success Conference* (Oct. 28th – 29th in Los Angeles)
Workshop on housing resources (incl. FYI) on Tuesday, Oct. 29th from 9:45-11:00am
Register for the conference: <https://cacollegepathways.org/blueprint-2024/>
**Conference focuses on supporting foster youth in post-secondary education*



WEBINAR

Aligning Services with Housing for Thriving Families

Learn about policy opportunities to fund supportive services

National Webinar Hosted by Corporation for Supportive Housing in Partnership with Casey Family Programs

Registration: <https://tinyurl.com/9-24-24-webinar>

SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

9AM - 10:30AM PT | 12PM - 1:30PM ET



Question & Answer



Please submit questions via the
questions box.

For future questions contact Simone
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