



THE FAMILY UNIFICATION PROGRAM:

A Housing Resource for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care



Monograph



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Prepared for:
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development,
Office of Policy Development and Research
Washington, D.C.

Prepared by:
M. Robin Dion
Rebecca Kleinman
Jackie Kauff
Mathematica Policy Research
Amy Dworsky
Chapin Hall

May 2014

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people contributed in significant ways to this study. The authors are particularly grateful for the excellent guidance of Anne Fletcher in the Office of Policy Development and Research of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Others at HUD who provided valuable input include Brianna Benner, Caroline Crouse, Amaris Rodriguez, and Todd Shenk. The authors thank Catherine Heath and Laura Radel at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for their continued support, information, and feedback, all of which were necessary for the successful completion of this report.

The authors especially appreciate staff from the local public housing agencies, public child welfare agencies, and community-based organizations who shared their experiences using the Family Unification Program (FUP) for youth. Their insights contributed to the understanding of how FUP can help youth as they transition to adulthood and highlighted promising practices for serving youth through FUP.

Many colleagues at Mathematica Policy Research provided valuable research assistance and advice. Lisa Vogel and Debra Wright led the survey development and administration, and Shilpa Khambhati prepared the survey data. Brandon Coffee-Borden, Miriam Rosenau, and Lisa Vogel arranged and participated in site visits alongside the authors of this report. Matthew Stagner provided insightful reviews. Amanda Bernhardt carefully edited the report, and Donna Dorsey provided production support.

Any errors that remain are solely those of the authors and are not the responsibility of HUD or HHS.

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	vii
Use of FUP for Youth.....	vii
Potential Barriers to Referring Youth for FUP.....	viii
Cross-Agency Coordination.....	viii
Implications.....	ix
I. BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION.....	1
Program Serves Child-Welfare-Involved Families and Youth Aging Out of Care.....	1
Program Requires Distinct Agency Roles and Interagency Collaboration.....	3
II. SURVEY FINDINGS ON FUP USE AND PROCESSES.....	5
Communities Use FUP Primarily To Serve Families.....	5
Reasons for Lack of Youth Referrals.....	6
Most Youth With a FUP Voucher Are Able To Lease Up.....	8
Agencies Offer Assistance To Help Youth Find and Maintain Stable Housing...	9
Most PCWAs Offer Youth Services To Promote Independent Living Skills.....	10
Some PHA-PCWA Partnerships May Need Strengthening.....	11
III. SITE-VISIT FINDINGS ON STRATEGIES FOR SERVING YOUTH THROUGH FUP.....	13
Agencies Must Balance Referrals for Youth and Families.....	13
Communities May Target Youth With Specific Characteristics for FUP.....	14
Joint Decisionmaking on Targeting and Allocation Is Vital.....	15
Open Communication and Agency Flexibility Enhance Process.....	15

Strategic Partnerships and Policies May Encourage Participation in Supportive Services 16

Agencies Suggest Reconsidering the Time Limit on FUP Vouchers for Youth 17

IV. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS 19

Areas for Future Research..... 19

APPENDIX A. METHODOLOGY..... 21

Survey of FUP Providers..... 21

Site Visits to FUP Communities..... 22

REFERENCES 23

LIST OF TABLES

I.1. Services and Assistance Offered to FUP-Eligible Youth 2

III.1. PHAs and PCWAs Included in Site Visits 13

A.1. Response Outcomes for Survey Sample..... 21

LIST OF FIGURES

II.1. Fewer Than One-Half of PHAs Operating FUP Currently Serve Youth 5

II.2. Primary Reason PHAs Do Not Serve Youth Through FUP Is Lack of Referrals 6

II.3. Most—but not All—Youth With a FUP Voucher Lease Up and Stay Leased Up..... 8

II.4. One or Both Partner Agencies Offer Assistance To Help Youth Find and Maintain Housing 9

II.5. Most PCWAs Offer Supports for Independent Living and Rental Compliance..... 10

II.6. One-Half of PHAs Serving Youth Hold Regularly Scheduled Meetings With Their PCWAs 12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When youth in foster care reach age 18 (age 21 in some states) and leave the child welfare system without having achieved permanency through reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship, they must abruptly transition to living independently. Unlike their peers, these youth typically must make the transition without financial or other support from parents. As a result, many who age out of foster care find themselves homeless or precariously housed.

One resource for such youth is the Family Unification Program (FUP). FUP is a special-purpose voucher program under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Housing Choice Voucher (HCV, also known as Section 8) program. The primary purpose of FUP is to provide housing vouchers to child-welfare-involved families for whom the lack of adequate housing is the primary reason for imminent out-of-home placement of children or delays in family reunification. Youth ages 18 to 21 who leave foster care at age 16 or older and who do not have adequate housing, however, are also eligible for a time-limited housing voucher. FUP vouchers offer up to 18 months of rental subsidy and supportive services to help such youth gain skills for independent living.

FUP functions as an interagency collaboration between local public housing agencies (PHAs) and public child welfare agencies (PCWAs). Participating communities decide whether to apply for FUP vouchers, and, if awarded vouchers, whether to serve families, youth, or both in their FUP programs. In communities using FUP for youth, PCWAs refer eligible youth to PHAs and offer supportive services to those who receive a FUP voucher. When PHAs receive youth referrals, they verify HCV eligibility and subsidize the rent of eligible youth who are able to find and secure housing.

This report describes the extent to which—and how—communities are using FUP to support youth. The research draws on findings from a survey of PHAs administering FUP, a survey of PCWAs partnered with PHAs that serve youth, and site visits to four areas that use FUP to serve

youth. The surveys were designed to identify the universe of communities providing FUP vouchers to youth and to gather basic information about how they administer the program. The site visits sought to provide a finer grained understanding of how communities are using FUP to serve this population and sought to identify promising practices and lessons learned.

The surveys and site visits were conducted as part of a larger study undertaken by Mathematica Policy Research and Chapin Hall on housing options for youth who are aging out of foster care. The larger study included a review of the relevant literature on housing for youth aging out of foster care, developed an inventory of state and local housing programs for this population, and identified several potentially innovative features of non-FUP programs that merit additional attention (Dworsky et al., 2012). Other study activities included a forum focused on current research in this area and its policy implications.

USE OF FUP FOR YOUTH

The results of the survey indicated that 47 percent (91 of 195) of PHAs operating FUP had awarded vouchers to former foster youth in the 18 months prior to the survey. Many PHAs also offered FUP-eligible youth assistance with their housing searches and premove and postmove counseling to help them secure and maintain housing. PHAs reported that the majority of youth receiving a FUP voucher were able to obtain a lease in the allotted time; many kept their leases for the full 18-month term. For their part, most PCWAs reported offering a wide range of supportive services to youth receiving a FUP voucher, including those required by FUP regulations, although the quality of the services, the number of youth receiving them, and their effectiveness remains unknown.

Youth represented only about 14 percent of total FUP program participants. Of the 20,391 FUP vouchers in circulation, 2,912 were being used by youth in the fall of 2012. The overall number of youth with FUP vouchers was relatively small for two reasons: (1) slightly more than one-half of FUP-operating PHAs were not serving youth, and (2) PHAs that were serving youth allocated less than one-third of their FUP vouchers, on average, to youth.

Another contributing factor to the small number of youth with FUP vouchers is that vouchers initially awarded to youth may wind up in the hands of families after the youths' 18-month voucher terms expire. Families, unlike youth, can keep their vouchers for as long as they remain HCV eligible, are compliant with program rules, and continue to need housing assistance. One way communities can address this issue is to set aside some proportion of FUP vouchers specifically for youth. Under a set-aside, youth vouchers are reallocated to other youth, rather than families, when the 18-month period expires. Only one-third of FUP communities had established such set-asides at the time of the surveys.

Among the 53 percent of FUP-operating PHAs that reported not serving youth, the most common reason given for not doing so was a lack of referrals. More than 70 percent of these PHAs indicated that their partner PCWAs do not refer youth. The lack of youth referrals, however, likely did not arise from a lack of demand. Only 9 percent of the PHAs not serving youth reported that the reason was too few youth who age out of foster care; only 10 percent reported that the housing needs of youth aging out of care are being met in other ways.

About one-half of the PCWAs working with youth-serving PHAs reported that they do not refer all FUP-eligible youth they identify. The lower level of referrals in communities serving youth with FUP vouchers and the lack of referrals in communities that do not provide FUP to youth may reflect unintended barriers or disincentives.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO REFERRING YOUTH FOR FUP

One disincentive to referring youth may be the financial burden on PCWAs of providing supportive services. Although FUP requires that PCWAs provide such services, the cost of doing so is not funded by FUP. Many communities struggle to identify sources of funding for the required supportive services for FUP youth because state and federal funding that could be used for this purpose is often tight. Privately funded services are available in some resource-rich areas (through foundations, for example) but not across the board. Of the child welfare agencies surveyed, 40 percent indicated that the cost of providing supportive services was somewhat of a challenge or a major challenge.

A second factor that may function as a disincentive is that providing FUP vouchers to youth, although important, does not directly address the key goals of PCWAs, such as permanency, reducing caseloads, or reunifying families. Although many agencies offer some aftercare services, youth are no longer in the child welfare system after they age out.

A third barrier to greater youth participation in FUP may be the time limit on the rental subsidy for that age group. Most staff at PHAs and PCWAs suggested that the 18-month time limit is too short. First, they noted that landlords generally prefer annual leases and are reluctant to extend a 12-month lease unless it is for another year. Second, frequent turnover of vouchers requires more agency staff resources and creates greater administrative burden. Third, staff reported that the 18-month period often does not align well with youths' educational needs and may not be appropriate for youth who need more time to become self-sufficient and ready for independent living. Communities reported they would prefer to see voucher terms for youth that are 2 to 5 years in length or that incorporate some flexibility to be tailored to the needs of individual youth.

CROSS-AGENCY COORDINATION

The findings suggested that serving youth with FUP requires considerable cross-agency communication and collaboration. Effective implementation of FUP requires joint, upfront decisionmaking between agencies about how to balance the needs of families and youth and, because demand usually exceeds supply, which youth to target. The findings indicate that some communities preferred to target the youth most in need (such as those who are pregnant or parenting); others preferred to target youth who are in school or working and lack only housing to help them succeed as they strive for self-sufficiency and independence. Ongoing cross-agency collaboration is also needed to ensure that supportive services are coordinated. Among PHAs that were not serving youth, nearly one-third (31 percent) said they would be more likely to do so if they had assistance establishing or strengthening their collaboration with their partner PCWA.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest that FUP can be a useful resource, but for various reasons it is not widely used for youth. More research is needed to fully understand why more than one-half of the communities that issued FUP vouchers do not allocate any to youth despite the apparently high need and to understand more about the takeup, intensity, and quality of supportive services offered to youth receiving FUP vouchers.

These findings suggest that to increase the potential of FUP for serving eligible youth, more communities should develop awareness of the risk of homelessness in this population, learn how FUP can be used as a resource to help prevent and address youth homelessness, and understand the importance of cross-agency collaboration and set-asides to ensure that at least some portion of eligible youth get served. Because FUP is a small, resource-constrained program, however, FUP is unlikely to be a major resource for youth aging out of care. Additional policy innovations to meet the housing needs of former foster youth should be explored.

I. BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Among the groups at greatest risk of becoming homeless are the 25,000 to 30,000 youth who “age out” of foster care each year (HHS, n.d.).¹ Aging out occurs when youth turn age 18 or, in states that have extended eligibility for foster care, 21. These youth are more likely to be on their own when they age out of care than non-foster care peers, who often continue to live with or receive financial assistance from parents.

One of the greatest challenges youth face as they leave foster care is finding and maintaining housing (Brown and Wilderson, 2010; Osgood, Foster, and Courtney, 2010). A review of the research published between 1990 and 2011 suggests that 11 to 36 percent of these youth become homeless during their transition to adulthood. In one recent study, 36 percent of 26-year-olds who aged out of foster care reported at least one episode of homelessness after aging out (Dworsky and Courtney, 2010; Fowler, Toro, and Miles, 2009; White et al., 2011). By comparison, about 4 percent of the nationally representative sample of 18- to 26-year-olds who took part in the third wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health reported ever being homeless (Harris, 2009).

PROGRAM SERVES CHILD-WELFARE-INVOLVED FAMILIES AND YOUTH AGING OUT OF CARE

The Family Unification Program (FUP) is a relatively small, special-purpose program that provides Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) to eligible families and youth. FUP vouchers are awarded to communities through a competitive process (although funding for FUP vouchers has not been appropriated and awarded since fiscal year 2010). Because only some public housing agencies (PHAs) administer the program, the number of PHAs with FUP vouchers is much fewer than the number of PHAs that administer an HCV program. Approximately 20,391 FUP vouchers (leased or available to be leased) were in circulation as of September 2013, spread across 243 PHAs.

FUP was first authorized by Congress in 1990 to preserve or reunite families. Families are eligible for FUP if the lack of adequate housing is a primary reason for the imminent foster care placement of their children or for the delay of children in foster care being returned home.²

In 2000, Congress extended FUP eligibility to youth ages 18 to 21 who exit foster care at age 16 or older, and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) eligibility criteria further specified that eligible youth must lack adequate housing.

Public child welfare agencies (PCWAs) determine whether families and youth meet these criteria and refer eligible candidates to PHAs. PHAs then determine their HCV eligibility and issue vouchers. Like other HCV participants, FUP families and youth typically contribute 30 percent of their monthly adjusted gross income toward rent and utilities, and FUP vouchers ensure that the PHA will cover the difference between the contribution of the voucher holder and the total monthly rent. Those with no income (as is common for youth leaving foster care) are typically not required to pay anything.³

FUP operates differently for youth than for families. As with general HCV voucher holders, FUP families can keep their voucher for as long as they are compliant with program rules and continue to be in need of housing assistance. In fact, federal regulations prohibit PHAs from revoking a FUP voucher even if parental rights are terminated or if all the children in the family have reached adulthood. PCWAs may, but are not required to, offer FUP families case management and other supportive services. By contrast, FUP vouchers for youth are time-limited: they provide a maximum of 18 months of rental assistance. In addition, the PCWAs are required to offer supportive services to youth throughout the period of FUP participation, to help them develop the skills necessary to live independently. Required services include instruction in basic life skills, such as money management, nutrition, and housekeeping; counseling to prepare youth for employment; educational and career-advancement counseling; and individual case plans. These services differ from assistance provided to FUP-eligible youth to help them locate, obtain, and retain a housing unit (table I.1).

¹ In FUP, “homeless” is defined as any person (including a youth) or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or has a primary nighttime residence that is (1) a supervised, publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing); (2) an institution that provides a temporary residence for people intended to be institutionalized; or (3) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

² In FUP, “lack of adequate housing” is defined as a family or youth who is (1) living in substandard or dilapidated housing; (2) homeless; (3) in imminent danger of losing housing; (4) displaced by domestic violence; (5) living in an overcrowded unit; or (6) living in housing not accessible to the family’s disabled child or children, or to the youth, due to the nature of the disability. For definitions of other terms used in this brief, see <http://archives.hud.gov/funding/2010/fupsec.pdf>.

³ Families and youth are required to pay more than 30 percent of their monthly adjusted gross income if their rent exceeds the payment standard for the local housing market, if 10 percent of the family’s monthly income is more than 30 percent of the family’s monthly adjusted income, or if the PHA’s minimum rent is higher than 30 percent of the family’s monthly adjusted income. Payment standards are generally set by the PHA at any level between 90 and 110 percent of the HUD-determined fair market rent (FMR) for a particular unit. FUP covers (1) the payment standard for the family minus the family’s required contribution, or (2) the rent and utilities minus the family’s required contribution, whichever is less.

Services and Assistance Offered to FUP-Eligible Youth

Type of Service or Assistance	Definition	Required or Encouraged*	Provider	
			PHAs	PCWA
SERVICES TO PROMOTE INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS				
Basic life skills	Information/counseling on money management; use of credit; housekeeping; proper nutrition and meal preparation; and access to physical and mental health care, including doctors, medication, and mental and behavioral health services.	Required		✓
Employment	Job preparation and attainment counseling (for example, where to look, how to apply, dress, grooming, and relationships with supervisory personnel).	Required		✓
Education	Educational and career-advancement counseling regarding attainment of GED; attendance or financing of education at a technical school, trade school, or college, including successful work ethic and attitude models.	Required		✓
Assessment and individual case planning	Participation of FUP-eligible youth in the assessment and implementation of actions to address their needs, including developing an individualized case plan regarding services to be received and the youth's commitment to the plan (youth are required to sign a service plan agreeing to attend counseling or training sessions and to take other actions deemed appropriate to the youth's successful transition from foster care).	Required		✓
ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING AND RETAINING HOUSING				
Housing search	Help locating a housing unit; working with a landlord to secure a unit.	Required		✓
Assurances to landlords	Providing assurances to owners of rental property that are reasonable and necessary to assist a FUP-eligible youth to rent a unit with a FUP voucher.	Required		✓
Compliance with rental lease agreements	Counseling on compliance with rental lease agreements, including assistance or referrals for security deposits, utility hookup fees, and utility deposits.	Required		✓
Compliance with HCV program	Counseling on compliance with HCV program participant requirements.	Required	✓	✓

Table I.1

Services and Assistance Offered to FUP-Eligible Youth

Type of Service or Assistance	Definition	Required or Encouraged*	Provider	
			PHAs	PCWA
ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING AND RETAINING HOUSING				
Housing search in low-poverty census tracts	Providing a current list of organizations that can help find units in low-poverty census tracts, and at least one of the following—neighborhood tours, unit viewings, landlord introductions in low-poverty census tracts, or financial assistance for moving costs (security deposit, for example).	Encouraged	✓	✓
Premove and postmove counseling	Providing information on the benefits of living in low-poverty areas, information on tenant rights and responsibilities, and at least one of the following—budget counseling, credit counseling, or landlord mediation.	Encouraged	✓	✓
Cash assistance	Cash assistance for security deposits, utility arrears, and rent arrears.	Encouraged		✓

FUP = Family Unification Program. GED = general equivalency diploma. HCVP = Housing Choice Voucher Program. PHA = public housing agency. PCWA = public child welfare agency.

* “Encouraged” means the grant applicant receives points for including these services.

Note: Services required of PCWAs can be provided by the PCWA or another agency under agreement or contract with the PCWA.

Source: HUD (2010)

Table I.1 (continued)

⁴ The most recent NOFA, released in fiscal year 2010 (posted on <http://grants.gov> on October 5, 2010), announced the availability of \$15 million for about 1,900 new FUP vouchers, which were awarded in 2011. Previous NOFAs awarded vouchers in 2010, 2009, and each year from 1992 through 2001.

⁵ Eligibility is also determined based on the PHA’s family definition, documentation requirements of citizenship or eligible immigration status, and history of eviction from public housing or any HCVP for drug-related criminal activity, among other criteria. For more information on HCV and FUP regulations, see http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/about.

⁶ According to the 2010 FUP NOFA, PHAs must add referred families and youth to their HCV waiting list. In addition, they must identify potential FUP families or youth on their HCV waiting list and refer them to the PCWA to determine their FUP eligibility. For more information on FUP program rules, see the 2010 NOFA available at <http://archives.hud.gov/funding/2010/fupsec.pdf>, or HUD’s frequently asked questions on FUP, available at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=fupfaqs_dec2012.pdf.

PROGRAM REQUIRES DISTINCT AGENCY ROLES AND INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

PHAs and PCWAs have distinct roles but share responsibility for the implementation of FUP.

PHAs and their partner PCWAs apply for FUP vouchers in response to a notice of funding availability (NOFA) from HUD.⁴ The applications for vouchers must include a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the PHA and PCWA. As described in HUD’s latest NOFA (HUD, 2010) and a sample MOU (HUD, n.d.a.), the roles and responsibilities of each agency generally include the following.

- PCWAs or their contractors identify youth and families who meet the FUP eligibility criteria and refer them to the PHAs. PCWAs typically offer, but are not required, to help youth find suitable housing and must provide supportive services throughout their 18 months of rental assistance. During

housing searches, PCWAs may provide youth with listings of vacant units, offer information about different neighborhoods, educate youth about their rights and responsibilities as tenants, and take youth on neighborhood tours or to view specific units.

- PHAs determine whether families and youth are HCVP eligible based on general income guidelines and other criteria.⁵ They must serve eligible families and youth referred by the PCWA as FUP vouchers become available.⁶ During meetings with youth and families (called voucher briefings), PHAs issue vouchers, explain the program’s rules, and inform participants about their rights and responsibilities as tenants. After issuing vouchers, PHAs may provide basic housing search assistance and counseling. They also inspect and approve units, establish payment contracts with landlords, and make adjustments to housing assistance payments (HAP) based on family size and income once a year.

To facilitate interagency collaboration, HUD requires both partner agencies to (1) designate a “FUP liaison” responsible for referrals, (2) meet at least quarterly, and (3) cross-train one another on HCV eligibility and referral procedures. In the most recent NOFA, partner agencies that collaborated on a plan to provide premove or postmove assistance to youth were ranked more favorably than agencies that did not plan for this assistance. Such assistance includes providing information on arranging utility hookups, budgeting and credit, landlord mediation, and the benefits of living in low-poverty areas. HUD further requires that partners ensure that when vouchers are turned in because a household exits the program, those vouchers be reissued to other FUP-eligible families or youth.

PHAs and PCWAs must decide how they will divide their vouchers between families and youth. For example, partner agencies may decide to designate a fixed percentage of their FUP vouchers (which some PHAs referred to as a “set-aside”) for youth based on perceived needs or the availability of other housing options for youth and families in the community. Alternatively, they may decide to refer all FUP-eligible youth and allow them to compete with eligible families on a first-come, first-served basis. These decisions ideally are made intentionally and collaboratively.

II. SURVEY FINDINGS ON FUP USE AND PROCESSES

Although FUP is a potential source of housing and supportive services for youth aging out of foster care, little is known about how it is being used to address the needs of this population. To learn more about how communities are using FUP to serve youth, all PHAs identified by

HUD as operating FUP were surveyed. If the PHA indicated that it currently served youth through FUP, the PHA's partner PCWA was also surveyed. The surveys requested that PHAs or PCWAs contracting out any administrative or service provision responsibilities seek input from their partner organizations when completing the surveys. The surveys, which were fielded in the fall of 2012, addressed the allocation of FUP vouchers, the nature of the PHA-PCWA collaboration, the provision of supportive services (if relevant), and factors that may help or hinder program implementation. This section highlights key findings from the surveys.

Fewer Than One-Half of PHAs Operating FUP Currently Serve Youth

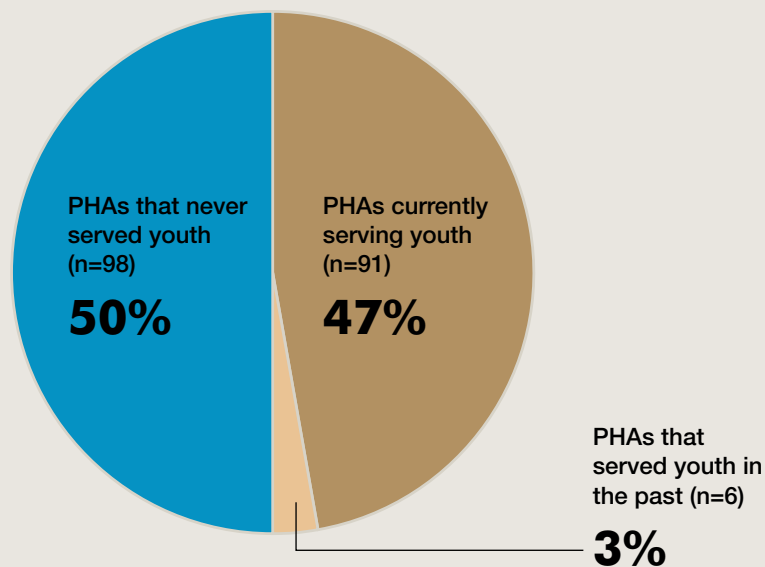


Figure II.1

COMMUNITIES USE FUP PRIMARILY TO SERVE FAMILIES

Less than one-half of the PHAs operating FUP are providing vouchers to youth. Of the responding PHAs with FUP vouchers, 47 percent had served at least one youth within the past 18 months (figure II.1). One-half reported never serving youth, and another 3 percent had most recently served youth more than 18 months before the survey.

PHAs that do serve youth still allocate most of their FUP vouchers to families. Agencies have a finite number of vouchers. On average, PHAs

serving youth had 112 FUP vouchers at the time of the survey, 29 percent of which were being used by youth who had “leased up,” or were leasing a unit with FUP assistance. Most of the remaining vouchers were being used by families (a few were unused). Applying these averages across all PHAs operating FUP, youth make up about 14 percent of program participants. Of the 20,391 FUP vouchers in circulation, 2,912—an average of 32 vouchers each across 91 PHAs—were leased up by youth. In part, this figure reflects the fact that only one-third of PHAs serving youth set aside vouchers for youth, and, on average, those set-asides make up less than one-third of their vouchers (31 percent).

IN THE FALL OF 2012...

91 PHAs were serving youth through FUP. Youth made up about 14 percent of FUP program participants.

REASONS FOR LACK OF YOUTH REFERRALS

Some PCWAs do not refer any FUP-eligible youth; others refer only a few. Of the PHAs that do not serve youth, more than 70 percent cite the lack of PCWA referrals as a reason (figure II.2). PHAs that do serve youth receive an average of about 20 youth referrals per year from their partner PCWAs. Survey data suggest that other youth may be eligible but are not referred. Among PCWAs working with youth-serving PHAs, about one-half reported that they do not refer all eligible youth they identify.⁷ Because the surveys covered only those PCWAs whose partner PHAs serve youth, no information on this question is available from the subset of PCWAs whose partner PHAs did not report serving youth.

Lack of referrals does not appear to reflect lack of demand for services. Of the PHAs that do not serve youth through FUP, only 9 percent say it is because too few youth age out of foster care, and only 10 percent say it is because the housing needs of youth aging out of care are being met in other ways (figure II.2). It is also likely not the case that policies extending eligibility for foster care to age 21 have eliminated youths' need

for FUP.⁸ About 20 states have extended foster care to age 21. The survey results suggest that the number of referrals reported by PHAs and PCWAs in these states is similar to the number of referrals in states that have not extended eligibility.

PCWAs appear to be very selective in determining the number of youth they refer for FUP. To the extent that PCWAs selectively refer candidates to the PHA, they serve as gatekeepers to FUP vouchers. Survey responses from PHAs and PCWAs suggest several reasons why PCWAs are not referring more potentially eligible youth.

- **Lack of service funding for independent living skills may be a deterrent.** PCWAs are required to provide supportive services to youth while they are leased up, but HUD does not fund these services. PCWAs are expected to finance the services using their own resources or resources available elsewhere. Of the respondent PCWAs, 60 percent reported using funds from the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (hereafter, Chafee),⁹ 64 percent reported using state funds, and 41 percent reported using funds from other sources to support required services. The fact that

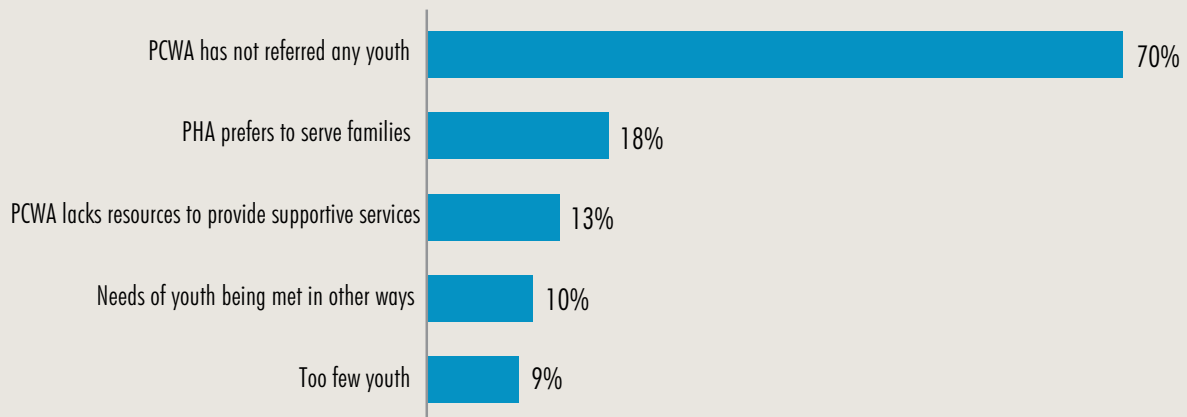
⁷ About 46 percent of PCWAs that partner with youth-serving PHAs reported they do not refer all eligible youth; another 9 percent did not know whether they referred all eligible youth or they did not respond to the survey question.

⁸ The *Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* (P.L. 110-351) provides federal reimbursements to states for the costs of providing foster care until eligible youth turn 21.

⁹ Authorized by Title I of the *Foster Care Independence Act of 1999* (P.L. 106-169) and administered by the Children's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Chafee is the primary source of federal funds for services for independent living. Youth who age out of foster care or exit foster care when they are at least 16 years old are eligible for Chafee-funded services until they turn 21. In addition to providing services that promote education, employment, positive connections with adults, and basic life skills, states can also spend up to 30 percent of Chafee funds on housing-related costs (Dworsky et al., 2012).

Primary Reason PHAs Do Not Serve Youth Through FUP Is Lack of Referrals

Percentage of PHAs (n=104) reporting reasons for not serving youth



Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 percent because PHA respondents could choose more than one answer.

Figure II.2

PCWAs are not required to provide services to FUP families may create a disincentive to referring youth (who must be offered services). Fewer than 6 percent of PCWAs reported the cost of providing services was a major challenge, however. Another 34 percent indicated these costs were somewhat of a challenge, but 47 percent of PCWAs reported that the costs were not a challenge at all.

- **PCWAs may not have sufficient training on FUP.** PCWAs may need more knowledge of FUP and HCV eligibility requirements. Although 84 percent of PHAs serving youth provide training on FUP eligibility and other requirements to their partner PCWAs, only one-third do so more than once per year. Given the high rate of staff turnover in child welfare agencies, more frequent training may be needed.
- **PCWAs may have difficulty identifying FUP-eligible youth.** Families who are referred to FUP have an open child welfare case. One or more of their children is in foster care or at imminent risk of being placed. By contrast, youth do not typically become eligible for FUP until their cases are closed and they are no longer in care. Hence, identifying FUP-eligible youth may be a greater challenge than identifying FUP-eligible families.
- **PCWAs may perceive better alternatives to FUP.** PCWAs might be concerned that youth with FUP vouchers do not receive adequate supervision. They may, therefore, be inclined to refer youth to other types of housing programs, such as single-site or clustered apartments. Only 16 percent of the PCWAs reported that single-site or clustered apartments would be available in their community within the next 6 months, however. Other near-term options identified by PCWAs include scattered-site or semi-supervised apartments (37 percent), adult-roommate apartments (10 percent) and host homes (16 percent). These options provide some degree of supervision, although typically less than single-site or clustered apartments provide.
- **Families may be a higher priority than youth.** PCWAs may prioritize serving families over youth for several reasons. They may perceive families as having greater needs than youth because not serving families

could result in more children being placed in foster care or lead to children not being able to leave foster care as soon as they otherwise would. In this respect, prioritizing families may also be a cost-saving measure for PCWAs. Furthermore, providing FUP vouchers to families is responsive to the pressure to preserve and reunify families, a key objective of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These hypotheses are consistent with the fact that 18 percent of PHAs that do not serve youth reported that they prefer to devote FUP vouchers to families (figure II.2). The relatively low rate of set-asides for youth among youth-serving PHAs provides further evidence of prioritizing families.

- **The 18-month time limit on assistance for youth may create a burden for agencies.** PCWAs may prefer to refer families instead of youth because the time-limited nature of vouchers for youth could create an administrative burden. Frequent turnover of vouchers requires more staff resources to identify and serve additional participants. Extra resources may also be needed to assist youth whose landlords are reluctant to extend a 12-month lease for the 6 additional months the voucher is available (leases are typically 1 year in duration). Again, the survey data provide some support for this hypothesis. Of PHAs that do not serve youth, 13 percent cite the 18-month time limit as a reason; 30 percent say they would be more likely to serve youth if the time limit were eliminated. In addition, 46 percent of PCWAs and 41 percent of PHAs reported that the 18-month time limit was a major challenge to administering FUP. Another approximately one-third of PCWAs and PHAs reported that it was somewhat of a challenge.
- **Agencies may believe they do not have enough FUP vouchers to serve youth and families.** Nearly two-thirds (61 percent) of PHAs not currently serving youth say they would be more likely to do so if they had more vouchers. Many PHAs have relatively few FUP vouchers. Data collected by HUD to monitor utilization indicate that, in the fall of 2012, 42 percent of PHAs in the analysis sample administering FUP had fewer than 50 vouchers; another 36 percent had 50 to 100 vouchers.

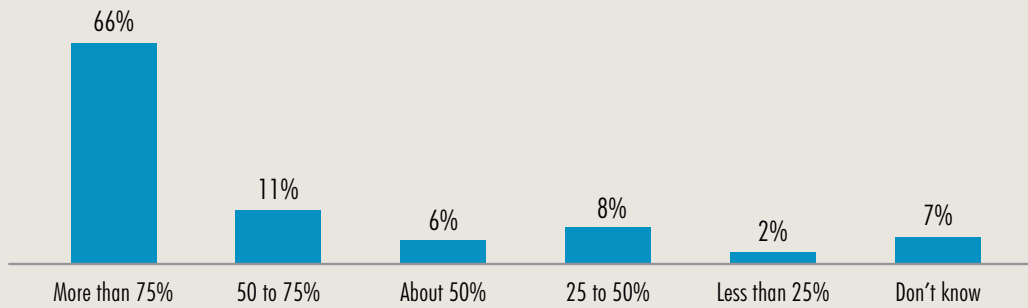
MOST YOUTH WITH A FUP VOUCHER ARE ABLE TO LEASE UP

In communities serving youth via FUP, most youth who are issued a voucher successfully lease up within the allotted time. Like other HCV voucher holders, youth with FUP vouchers have at least 60 days to lease up. Two-thirds of youth-serving PHAs give youth an initial 60 days to find housing, and they usually extend this period if needed. Even PHAs that give youth 90 or 120 days (13 and 18 percent of PHAs, respectively) are more likely than not to extend this period if needed. Nearly three-fourths of the PHAs serving youth reported that youth

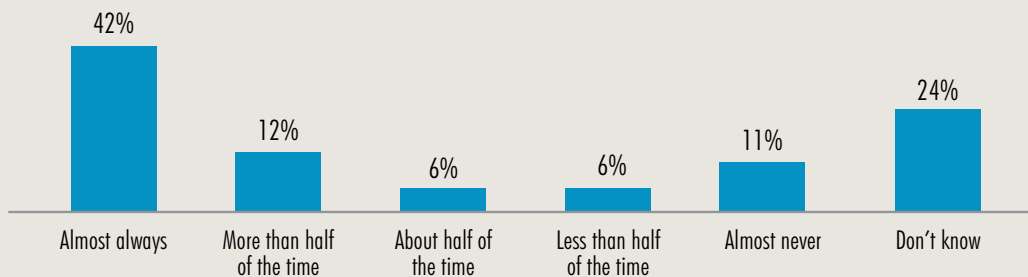
secure housing before the initial period expires more than half the time, and two-thirds of the PHAs said that more than 75 percent of youth who receive a voucher lease up eventually (figure II.3). That said, some PHAs reported much lower rates of success. For example, 16 percent of PHAs reported that youth issued a voucher do not usually lease up or that they lease up only about half the time. To put this finding in perspective, slightly more than one-half of all youth-serving PHAs think it takes youth with FUP vouchers about the same amount of time to lease up as it takes families with traditional HCVs, and about one-fourth think it takes youth more time.

Most—but not All—Youth With a FUP Voucher Lease Up and Stay Leased Up

Percentage of PHAs (n=91) reporting the proportion of youth that lease up



Percentage of PHAs (n=89) reporting how often youth use full 18 months of subsidy



FUP = Family Unification Program. PHA = public housing agency.

Figure II.3

Slightly more than one-half of youth who lease up with a FUP voucher are likely to receive the full 18 months of housing assistance. Of youth-serving PHAs, 42 percent said that youth nearly always receive payments for housing assistance for the full 18 months and 12 percent said that youth receive payment for the full 18 months more than half the time. Another 22 percent, however, reported that youth receive the full 18 months of rental assistance only half the time or less, one-half of which reported that youth nearly never receive the full 18 months of assistance. Another one-fourth of PHAs were not sure.¹⁰

AGENCIES OFFER ASSISTANCE TO HELP YOUTH FIND AND MAINTAIN STABLE HOUSING

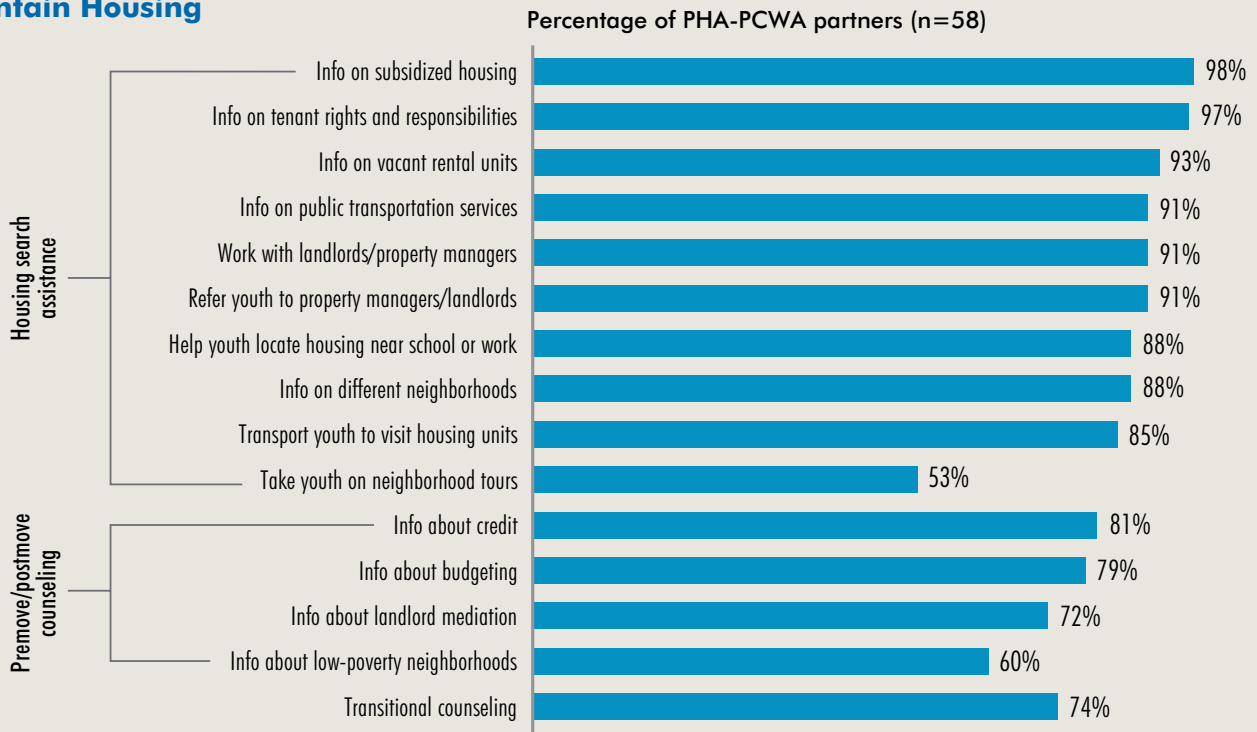
Most communities serving youth through FUP offer several types of housing-search assistance. Nearly all PHAs (96 percent) and PCWAs (87 percent) report offering youth who are issued a FUP voucher at least some help finding housing.

In more than 90 percent of the FUP communities serving youth, the PHA, PCWA, or both provide information and referrals to help them with their search (figure II.4). PCWAs, however, are more likely to provide more intensive, hands-on assistance (such as taking youth to vacant units or on neighborhood tours, or working with landlords to help secure housing) than their PHA partners.

Most agency partnerships offer premove or postmove assistance to help youth maintain housing. Most youth-serving agencies (72 to 81 percent) offer premove or postmove information about budgeting, credit, and landlord mediation to youth who lease up (figure II.4). Although not required to, many PCWAs also report helping youth cover the costs of security or utility deposits (84 percent) or rent or utility arrearages (59 percent). In addition, most PCWAs report that they will work with landlords or property managers to respond to problems identified by youth (80 percent), landlords or property managers (70 percent), or the PHA (69 percent).

¹⁰ It is unclear from the data if the attrition rates for youth are similar to the rates for general HCV holders or for FUP families. Although these groups are not limited to 18 months of rental assistance, they nonetheless may be terminated from the program if they are not compliant with program rules, or they may voluntarily relinquish their voucher.

One or Both Partner Agencies Offer Assistance To Help Youth Find and Maintain Housing



PHA = public housing agency. PCWA = public child welfare agency.

Figure II.4

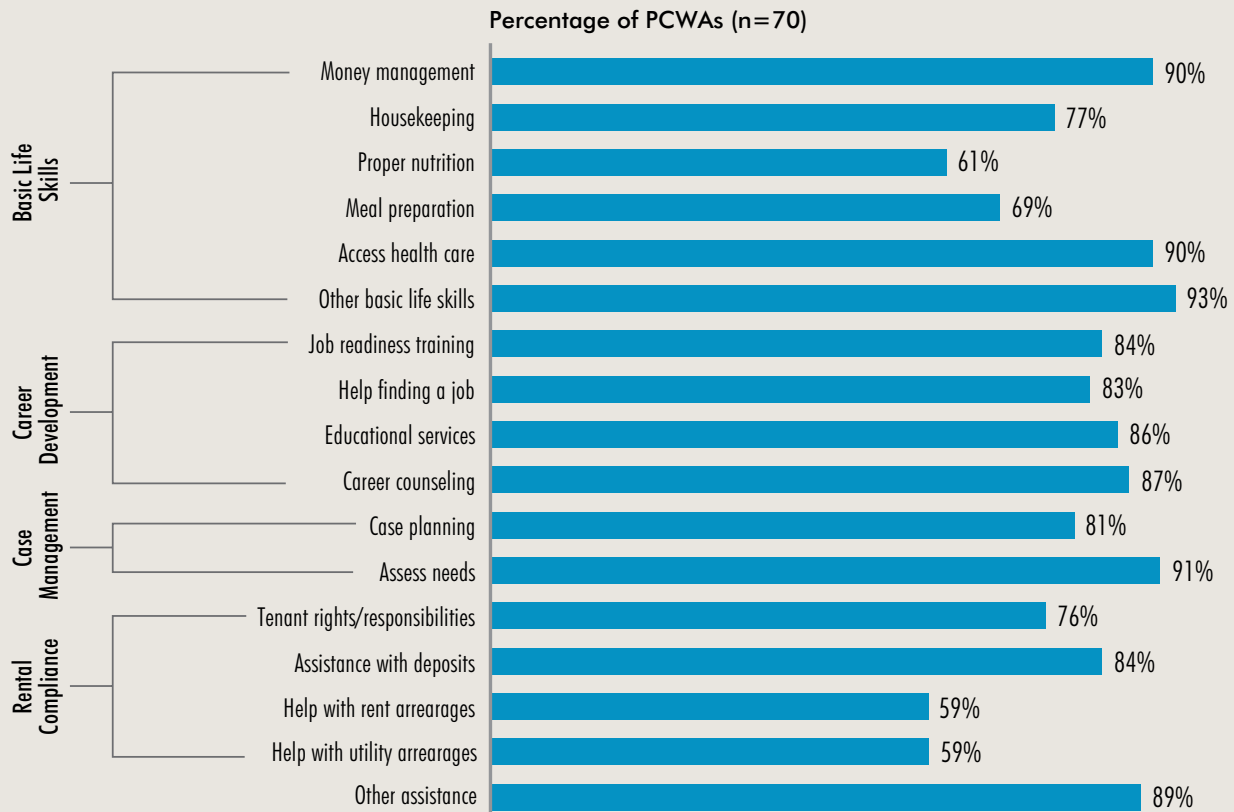
Most agency partnerships help youth transition out of FUP as they approach the end of their 18-month time limit. In nearly 75 percent of the communities that serve youth with FUP, one or both agency partners help find housing the young person can live in after the FUP voucher expires, although the program does not require doing so. The assistance typically involves informing youth about other housing programs in the community, but it also may include taking youth to visit vacant units or referring them to vacant units and property managers or landlords. PHAs can also give preference to youth on their HCV waiting list whose FUP vouchers have expired, enabling them to receive vouchers before a general HCV applicant. About one-fourth of the 76 PHAs that give preference to some groups on their general

HCV waiting list have a preference category for youth whose FUP voucher expired, and one-fifth have a preference category for youth who aged out of foster care.

MOST PCWAs OFFER YOUTH SERVICES TO PROMOTE SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Most PCWAs or their contractors offer the requisite services to promote skills for independent living. Although evidence of the effectiveness of life-skills programs is limited, more than 90 percent of the PCWAs report teaching at least one basic life skill to youth. These skills most commonly include money management and help accessing physical and

Most PCWAs Offer Supports for Independent Living and Rental Compliance



PCWA = public child welfare agency.

Figure II.5

mental health care (figure II.5). Fewer PCWAs, but still a majority, report teaching youth about proper nutrition and meal preparation. About 85 percent of the PCWAs reported providing some form of career development, such as career counseling or help finding a job. Although the survey did not ask about the extent to which youth are involved in their own case planning, most PCWAs communicate with youth in person (74 percent) or by telephone, e-mail, or text message (81 percent) once a month or more while they are leased up.

Additional research is needed to assess the intensity and quality of the supportive services offered, the percentage of youth who receive them, and how helpful the services are.

Although the survey findings give some insight into how FUP works for youth, they do not indicate whether PCWAs that provide youth with a particular supportive service do so for all FUP youth. Moreover, 7 to 19 percent of the 70 PCWA respondents did not know whether youth in their community were even offered a particular type of supportive service. This knowledge gap might be because PCWAs may rely on one or more community partners to provide the supports. Although PCWAs were asked to collaborate with their partners during survey completion, some may not have done so. This research also cannot determine the extent to which supportive services contribute to young people's success, which forms of assistance matter most, and what other supports youth need to live independently.

SOME PHA-PCWA PARTNERSHIPS MAY NEED STRENGTHENING

Some PHAs and PCWAs might not be collaborating effectively. Among PHAs that are not serving youth, nearly one-third (31 percent) said they would be more likely to do so if they had assistance establishing or strengthening collaboration with the PCWA. In addition, PCWAs and PHAs often did not agree about key facets of the program. For example, of the steps involved in administering FUP, the referral process arguably benefits most from collaboration between the two agencies, and that should be an area in which they agree about the process and statistics. A wide discrepancy exists, however, between the number of referrals PHAs report receiving and the number that PCWAs report making in a single year. More than one-third

of the time, the number of referrals reported by one agency was at least 75 percent more than the number reported by the other. Partners also disagreed about the percentage of youth referred to FUP who ultimately lease up.

Discrepancies between partner agencies may be in part because of differences in record keeping, question wording, response options, or recall issues. For example, PHAs were asked about the number of referrals in a typical quarter; PCWAs were asked about referrals made during the past fiscal year.¹¹ Partners may also differ in how they count referrals, such as whether ineligible referrals are included. Nevertheless, many PHAs and PCWAs do not appear to be taking full advantage of cross-agency meetings and training that could facilitate communication and collaboration.

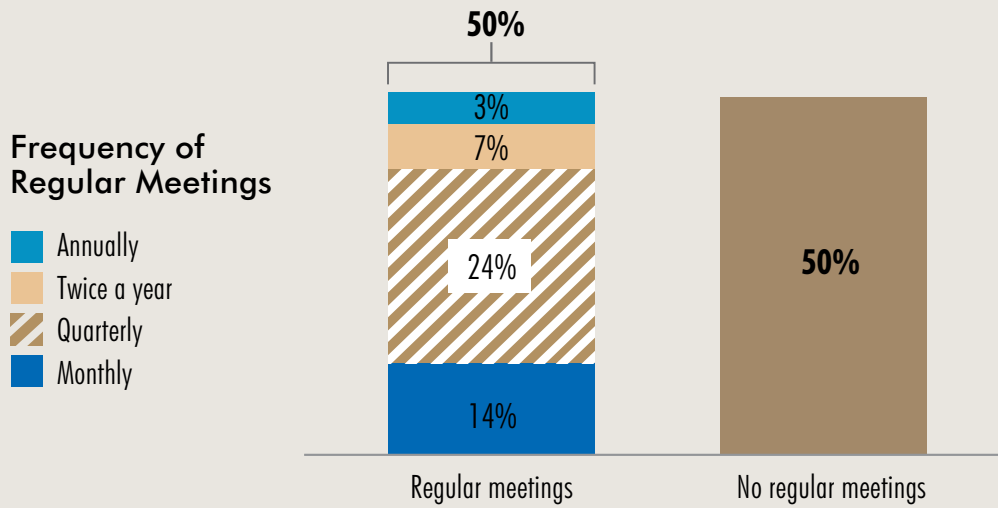
- **More communication occurs informally than through regularly scheduled cross-agency meetings.** One-half of the PHAs currently serving youth hold regular meetings with their PCWAs, one-fifth of which meet with their partners less than once per quarter (figure II.6). Most of the partners that do not have regularly scheduled meetings do communicate informally through e-mails, through phone calls, or in person. More than one-half of the PHAs reported having informal communication with PCWA staff at least quarterly, and more than one-third reported having informal communication as needed or when youth are referred. Although this type of communication may be useful, it might not be a good substitute for regular in-person meetings when it comes to coordination.
- **Although most PHAs do train their partner PCWAs, PCWAs are less likely to train the PHAs.** The percentage of youth-serving PHAs that provide training to PCWA staff ranges from 80 percent (for training on the HCV housing search and lease-up process) to 92 percent (for training on HCV eligibility). By contrast, the percentage of PCWAs that provide training to PHA staff ranges from slightly more than one-third (for training on the characteristics and housing needs of youth aging out of foster care) to two-thirds (for training on the referral process). For both agencies, training sessions are generally infrequent. About one-half of the PHAs and three-fourths

¹¹ The PHA responses were multiplied by 4 to make them more comparable with PCWA responses.

¹² Only PHAs were asked about training that PHAs and PCWAs provided. It is possible that PCWAs would have reported providing more training to the PHAs and receiving less training from the PHAs if they had been asked.

of the PCWAs that provide training do so less than once a year.¹² This frequency may be insufficient, given the frequent staff turnover in child welfare agencies and PHAs.

One-Half of PHAs Serving Youth Hold Regularly Scheduled Meetings With Their PCWAs



PHA = public housing agency. PCWA = public child welfare agency.
 Note: Numbers do not sum to total because of rounding.

Figure II.6

III. SITE-VISIT FINDINGS ON STRATEGIES FOR SERVING YOUTH THROUGH FUP

To obtain a deeper and more nuanced perspective of how communities use FUP to serve youth aging out of foster care, site visits were made to four communities (table III.1). Each selected community was providing FUP vouchers and associated services to former foster youth at the time of the visit.¹³ In each community, conversations with administrators and staff at the PHAs and PCWAs, along with other community agencies involved in FUP, focused on issues that could not be fully explored through the surveys.¹⁴ Although these communities are not necessarily representative of all that serve youth with FUP, the information gathered identified several themes and lessons that may be useful for other communities interested in serving youth through FUP.

¹³ Altogether, 178 youth were housed with FUP vouchers at the time of the visits (ranging from 7 to 117 per community); additional youth had been issued vouchers and were searching for units.

¹⁴ In all, the site visits included conversations with 70 individuals. PHAs if they had they been asked.

AGENCIES MUST BALANCE REFERRALS FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES

The site visits suggested two interrelated factors that may explain why the proportion of youth served with FUP is smaller than the proportion allocated to families: (1) local decisions regarding set-asides and the referral process, and (2) the time-limited nature of FUP vouchers for youth. Decisions regarding set-asides and choices underlying the referral process and allocations differed across communities.

Two communities set aside a proportion of their FUP vouchers specifically for youth. One community set aside 30 percent of its FUP vouchers for youth; the other dedicated 15 percent of its FUP vouchers to youth. Set-asides mean that as the 18-month terms for youth expire and vouchers are returned to the PHA, they are reallocated to other youth rather than families, effectively maintaining the agreed-on balance between youth and families. These upfront and explicit agreements between the PHAs and PCWAs to reserve a specific proportion of FUP vouchers for youth eliminated the need to make

PHAs and PCWAs Included in Site Visits

Community Jurisdiction	Location Visited	PHA	PCWA
Massachusetts ^a	Boston	Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development	Massachusetts Department of Children and Families
Colorado ^b	Denver	Colorado Department of Local Affairs ^c	Colorado Division of Child Welfare
Broward County, Florida	Fort Lauderdale	Broward County Housing Authority	ChildNet
Salt Lake County, Utah	Salt Lake City	Housing Authority of the County of Salt Lake	Utah Division of Child and Family Services

PHA = public housing agency. PCWA = public child welfare agency.

^a The Massachusetts site visit focused on the Lowell and Lawrence region.

^b At the time of the visit, Colorado was serving youth mainly in the Denver metropolitan region.

^c Colorado’s PHA contracts with Mile High United Way to allocate Family Unification Program vouchers to youth.

Table III.1

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR HOUSING YOUTH THROUGH FUP

Setting aside a proportion of vouchers ensures their availability for other youth when the 18-month terms expire.

judgments on a case-by-case basis regarding whether to refer an eligible family as opposed to an eligible youth.

The third community allowed the balance to establish itself by referring all eligible youth and families for FUP and serving them on a first-come, first-served basis. At the time of the visit, about 30 vouchers were issued to youth and 70 vouchers were issued to families. Although this approach achieves a fair balance of families and youth in the first year of operations, without a set-aside, many, if not all, vouchers may end up with families over time. That is, after the first 18 months, the 30 youth vouchers will expire and become available for other families and youth who are referred to the waiting list. Assuming the waiting list holds a similar proportion of families and youth (a ratio of 70 to 30), fewer than 10 vouchers would be issued to youth after 18 months, and only a few would be available for youth after 36 months. Although some families exit FUP over time, thereby opening those vouchers to youth or other families, this example illustrates the importance of a set-aside for youth.¹⁵

In the fourth community, the PCWA made case-by-case decisions about whether to refer a FUP-eligible youth or family, and the proportion of vouchers that went to youth dwindled over time. An initial allotment of vouchers was allocated fairly evenly between youth and families, but as the youths' 18-month voucher terms expired, eligible youth competed against families for referrals. Decisionmakers at the PCWA chose to refer more families than youth, and few youth were receiving FUP vouchers by the time of the visit. As this community's experience illustrates, set-asides are needed to ensure that vouchers remain available for youth over time.

The tradeoffs the fourth community faced may shed light on why communities tend to serve relatively few youth. First, staff noted that more families than youth are typically identified at a given time. One staff member mentioned that for a single FUP voucher, the PCWA might receive 30 to 35 referrals, of which fewer than 10 are youth. Second, serving a single family can help multiple children, whereas awarding a voucher to a youth generally helps only one individual (unless that youth is a custodial parent or has another household member, such as a spouse). Third, providing a FUP voucher to a family allows for the PCWA to avoid the high costs of out-of-

home placement; providing a FUP voucher to a youth does not have that effect. Finally, whereas providing a FUP voucher to a family can help reduce the number of children in out-of-home care, the caseload of out-of-home care does not decline when youth are the recipients (at least in states that have not extended federal foster care to age 21).

COMMUNITIES MAY TARGET YOUTH WITH SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS FOR FUP

With the need for FUP vouchers available for youth outstripping supply, some communities targeted vouchers to a subset of eligible youth, which raises the question, "Which former foster youth should be given preference for the time-limited FUP voucher?" Responses to this question varied within and across the four communities, but generally reflected four rationales.

- **Youth who appear to be focused on education and employment.** According to some staff, youth who are motivated and ready to improve their prospects for independence are the ones most likely to attain self-sufficiency in 18 months. Although such youth may be at somewhat lower risk of homelessness, lack of supportive and subsidized housing can be a barrier to completing a degree or training program (for example, such individuals might have to drop out of school to pay for housing), jeopardizing their long-term outcomes. In three communities, at least some PCWA staff target youth who are "on track"; all the staff at one of the communities do so.
- **Pregnant youth and those with their own children.** Targeting pregnant and parenting youth makes the most sense to some because the voucher would be used by more than one person (at least for 18 months), and such youth may have the greatest need for housing and support. (Note, however, that some of these youth may be eligible for FUP for families if they meet the definition of a FUP-eligible family, which provides potentially longer term support.) Staff from only one of the PCWAs visited expressed a preference for targeting pregnant and parenting youth.

¹⁵ At the time of the visit, youth had not yet reached the 18-month time limit, so the community had not yet experienced a decline in the number of vouchers available for youth. Staff were beginning to consider options for serving new youth when that decline does occur, however.

- **Youth who appear likely to engage in supportive services.** Staff at some programs thought that youth are more likely to be helped by FUP when they take advantage of the supportive services that programs are required to offer. Several of the communities visited indicated that it was important to take into account the likelihood of participation in services when considering which youth should receive a FUP voucher.
- **All eligible youth.** One of the communities visited believed that all youth should have equal access to FUP on a first-come, first-served basis, because no research indicates which type of youth is likely to benefit most from the assistance. Without objective information about the characteristics of youth who are mostly likely to avoid homelessness through FUP, staff did not feel confident ranking youth or selecting some for priority over others.

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR FUP STARTUP

Decisions on how to balance the needs of youth and families—and which youth to target—should reflect the goals of all agency partners and be included in the MOU. Doing so can minimize tension relating to these difficult decisions.

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR ONGOING COLLABORATION

Build a foundation of trust, openness, and flexibility.

Clear communication channels facilitate information sharing, which is especially vital among many partners.

JOINT DECISIONMAKING ON TARGETING AND ALLOCATION IS VITAL

Collaborative decisionmaking regarding how to distribute vouchers between youth and families and whether to target certain youth minimizes cross-agency tension. The communities in which leaders made an upfront decision about how to distribute the vouchers between youth and families—via set-asides or first come, first served—seemed to experience much less tension related to this tradeoff. In the community that did not do so, tension arose, as the number of available vouchers diminished, among the involved PCWA, PHA, and youth-serving organizations regarding the resulting distribution between youth and families. This finding suggests that establishing a policy reflecting all stakeholders' goals is an important step when first applying for FUP vouchers and also when implementing FUP. Including agreed-on decisions in the memorandum of understanding can help establish clear expectations.

The experiences of the four communities visited suggest that mutual agency agreement on the type of youth targeted for FUP is another important decision point for partners. Tension arose in two communities regarding whether the PCWAs should be able to refer only a subset of eligible youth. In one of the communities, the PCWA caseworkers expressed a desire to have

more control over the referral process so only the youth they felt would be most appropriate for FUP would be referred. The agency that filled the PHA role in this community permits youth to self-refer, in part to ensure that all the available vouchers will be leased up. Youth in that community can arrive at the PCWA and request an application; the PHA then asks the PCWA to determine the youth's eligibility for FUP. In the second community, the PCWA preselected certain youth over others before making referrals, without input from the PHA.

OPEN COMMUNICATION AND AGENCY FLEXIBILITY ENHANCE PROCESS

Effective operation of FUP for youth involves cross-agency trust, openness, and flexibility. PHAs and PCWAs—which typically do not have a history of collaborating—must build a foundation to work together. As one caseworker noted, the seemingly simple task of submitting a referral to another agency can feel like putting the welfare of one's client in someone else's hands. Staff must have faith that others are as committed to the client as they are. Creating and maintaining a trusting relationship is also necessary for ensuring workers feel comfortable voicing concerns to staff in other agencies. For example, a PHA staff member may have to inform the PCWA when he or she learns a youth is not being offered the agreed-on services. Flexibility in institutional processes and patience is also important. One PHA, for instance, adapted its procedures to notify staff in the PCWA when a youth failed to turn in all required paperwork in time or did not show up for an appointment. PHA staff may also need to have more patience with youth than with other HCV holders and more willingness to advocate with landlords on a youth's behalf (for example, if rent is not paid on time).

PCWA leaders in one community emphasized that occasional or even standing meetings are not sufficient for generating an open and trusting dialogue. Operating a collaborative program requires breaking down silos and building relationships. They recommended that when parties first come together, they focus on finding common ground and determining what each agency can gain through the collaboration, rather than on what each stands to lose (in other words, turning the “zero-sum game” into a “win-win”).

The more agencies and stakeholders are involved, the greater the need for clear communication channels to facilitate a regular and open exchange of information. At a minimum, FUP requires a partnership between a PHA and a PCWA, but, in practice, many partners and staff at each partner agency might play a regular role in referring youth to FUP, providing services, and managing relationships with landlords. Thus, FUP may require extensive communication and a great deal of relationship building. In the regions visited, the number of agencies involved in FUP on a regular basis ranged from 3 to more than 20.¹⁶

Partners must keep each other informed throughout the process—from referral, to voucher issuance, to lease up, to exit. For instance, the PCWA should be notified of the status and ultimate outcome of their referrals so the agency can ensure supportive services are begun. If a youth is found to be HCV-eligible, the PCWA should be informed when the voucher briefing will be held and whether the youth showed up for the briefing. The PHA should be informed of any assistance the PCWA provides youth in searching for housing. After a youth is leased up, the PHA should keep the PCWA apprised of any problems that put the youth at risk of being evicted. Finally, as the 18-month limit approaches, it might be useful for the PHA to know whether the PCWA or its contracted service providers are working with the youth on a transition plan.

Filtering communication through a single point of contact at the PHA or PCWA may streamline communication but should not hinder it. Each of the four communities appointed single points of contact at the PHA and PCWA. This structure may be especially beneficial in communities where multiple agencies are involved or turnover is high. For instance, it means that PHAs and landlords need not keep track of which case manager or life coach to call on behalf of each youth. These benefits, however, must be balanced against the need for open dialogue among all partners. Ensuring that all staff working on FUP have the opportunity to voice concerns, learn about another agency's processes, and directly ask questions is likely to enhance collaboration and ensure smoother operations.

¹⁶ In the visited community with the most partners, the state-level PHA contracts with a nonprofit agency to administer FUP for youth. Because the child welfare system is supervised by the state and administered by the county, many county-level PCWAs provide referrals and services. In addition, referrals and services also come from community-based organizations.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND POLICIES MAY ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION IN SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

A concern voiced by some of the communities visited was what might be described as an unfunded mandate for supportive services. PCWAs are required to provide supportive services to youth who are leased up with a FUP voucher. They receive no additional funds to provide those services, however. Although PCWAs can pay for these services with their Chafee funds, that funding is already stretched thin. Moreover, in some states, such as Colorado, youth who leave care before their 18th birthday may be eligible for FUP but not for Chafee-funded services. Communities use differing strategies to identify additional resources for providing supportive services.

Strategic partnerships can bring in additional resources for referrals and services. The type, amount, and intensity of supportive service available to youth are typically driven by the agency providing support or funding. In three of the communities, a mix of community-based organizations (CBOs), foundations, and other public agencies provided supportive services to youth or provided funding for those services. Rallying local and state advocates and policymakers in support of youth aging out of foster care helped create these relationships in some communities visited.

- **CBO partners were responsible for providing case management to the youth they refer for FUP in two communities.** CBOs paid for this service through their own resources. The CBOs typically provided the same or similar services to non-FUP youth who are similarly at risk for homelessness or other undesirable outcomes.
- **Foundations (one private, one public-private) sponsored life coaches to fill gaps in services provided by case managers in two communities.** These services included helping youth find an apartment, developing a transition plan, or providing ongoing support for

independent living. One of these communities had 3 life coaches for 117 youth; in the other, life coaches carried low caseloads, served as mentors to youth, and may have had more frequent contact with youth than their PCWA case manager.

- **A state-level workforce agency coordinated education and training supports in one community.** Through a youth-focused workforce program, FUP-eligible youth (and non-FUP youth) accessed education and training classes, stipends, or scholarships funded by the *Workforce Investment Act of 1998*,¹⁷ Chafee, and the state.

Advocacy efforts in two communities led to the formation of interagency teams focused on transitioning youth. Such teams can build awareness of the risk of homelessness among youth aging out of foster care and improve coordination of existing resources. In one community, for example, state and local advocacy for youth transitioning out of foster care resulted in the formation of a Transition to Adult Living Network. Representatives from several public and private agencies gather monthly to discuss specific youth and the broader issues affecting this population. In another community, public and private agencies formed a Transitional Independent Living System of Care. Among other benefits, the network helps ensure resources are available to all youth aging out of foster care, that the resources spread over many agencies are well coordinated and not duplicated, and that youth outcomes are measured.

Partnering with service providers may help engage youth in services. In some communities, PCWA staff responsible for providing supportive services found it difficult to engage youth, many of whom appear to be eager to cut ties with the child welfare system. In addition, PCWA staff often have large caseloads that allow for only infrequent meetings. The same youth, however, welcome or even seek out support from CBOs or other providers. Thus, partnering with such organizations was helpful for some communities. One PCWA did, however, use Chafee funds to hire outreach workers whose caseloads are low enough that they could meet with youth weekly and provide individualized life skills.

Takeup appears to be greater when engagement in services is strongly encouraged. FUP requires that the PCWA offer youth supportive services. Youths' eligibility for FUP cannot be made

contingent on participation in those services, however. That said, the communities visited seemed to believe that youth who participate in services are more likely to be successful, and those communities take a variety of steps to strongly encourage participation. For example, youth in one community are asked to meet weekly with an outreach worker; in another, they are asked to sign a statement agreeing to work with a life coach.

Pairing youth with a life coach or mentor may provide much-needed support. Three of the four communities visited matched youth with a life coach or mentor, and staff in the one that did not noted this kind of support would be helpful. In one community with multiple housing programs for youth, the contractor providing supportive services expected all participants to meet regularly with a life coach; they believe youth with a life coach are more likely to maintain housing. Having someone to call for help with basic life skills (such as raising issues with landlords or writing a check) or more serious issues (such as an unexpected pregnancy) is extremely helpful for some youth, especially those with little or no other support network.

AGENCIES SUGGEST RECONSIDERING THE TIME LIMIT ON FUP VOUCHERS FOR YOUTH

Most staff in all four communities thought FUP for youth should have a time limit but suggested the voucher term be longer. The mission of most PCWAs and CBOs that work with youth is to help them achieve independence. They view the time limit as a strength, without which youth may grow dependent on the system. Some staff members who work with youth in other housing programs that do not have limits experienced this dependence first hand. The time limit also prevents complacency among staff, forcing service providers to actively help youth transition out of FUP nearly from the time they lease up. A few staff, however, especially those in PHAs, said the time limit should be eliminated, believing it unfair to treat families and youth differently.

- Most staff felt a longer time limit would better serve youth; they generally thought assistance should last 2 to 5 years. Some staff advocated for a flexible time limit so youth could exit FUP as they become more independent and self-sufficient. As one staff member noted, youth are at different stages with respect to maturity and independence,

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR SERVICE PROVISION

Coordinating and, in some cases, formally partnering with other organizations can enhance available resources.

Partnering with CBOs or other public agencies to provide services may increase participation of youth.

Agencies can set policies to encourage youth participation.

Having a dedicated life coach or mentor is an important support for youth.

¹⁷ Public Law 105-220.

and FUP should be able to accommodate those who need more time to learn how to live on their own. Others recognized that youth exiting foster care face tremendous hurdles and questioned whether it is realistic to expect foster youth transitioning to adulthood to achieve complete self-sufficiency within 18 months. Staff in one agency noted that 18 months is especially challenging for those who have been homeless, inasmuch as it can take a full year for chronically homeless youth to stop seeing themselves as homeless.

- At a minimum, staff favored a 24-month rather than 18-month time limit because lease terms are typically 12 months. The 18-month time limit creates complications when it comes to signing a new lease after the first year. If youth with a FUP voucher sign a second 1-year lease, they become solely responsible for the final 6 months of rent. This provision can be a deterrent for some landlords or property managers and can limit the housing options available during youths' last 6 months of housing assistance. Youth and their advocates sometimes negotiate with landlords or property managers to permit an 18-month lease (or a 6-month lease after the 12-month lease term), but many landlords will not do so.

- Longer time limits would better align with educational opportunities. Some staff pointed out that it takes longer than 18 months to earn an associate's degree and suggested that the housing assistance payments continue long enough for individuals to complete school. Enabling them to finish their education in the short term could increase the chances for long-term self-sufficiency. Without that assistance, they could drop out to work full time to pay their rent. One community is using Moving to Work funds to extend housing subsidies to FUP youth for 3 additional years. Youth are eligible if they received the full 18 months of HAP, are in school, and are working at least part time.¹⁸ The subsidy is \$600 to \$800 a month for the first year then declines 15 percent each year thereafter.
- It can take a full year for some youth to fully comprehend that the housing voucher does not last forever, leaving only 6 months to concentrate on taking steps to achieve self-sufficiency.

¹⁸ Moving to Work (MTW) is a HUD demonstration program that grants participating PHAs exemptions from many existing public housing and voucher rules to give them more flexibility about how they use their federal funds to reduce costs, help residents find employment, and increase housing choices. MTW PHAs are expected to design and test innovative strategies and inform HUD about ways to better address local community needs (HUD, n.d.b.).

IV. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Youth aging out of foster care face many barriers to obtaining stable housing, and a real need exists for housing assistance programs to prevent their homelessness. Research on homelessness prevention programs for youth aging out of foster care is very limited. This report focuses on one federal resource, FUP, which can be used to address this concern. Four key findings shed light on how this program is viewed and how it is currently being used to address the housing needs of youth.

First, although not all communities implementing FUP serve youth, the communities visited consider the program to be a valuable resource in an environment in which housing for youth who age out of care is scarce. In one community, staff referred to FUP as the gold standard, because it offers youth maximum flexibility in where they live and enables them to gain experience living independently.

Second, communities are challenged to carve out space to serve youth in a small program with high demand, which was originally intended to reunify and preserve families whose children are at risk of placement because they lack housing. Communities must find ways to balance the housing needs of young people and families at imminent risk of homelessness. Some communities are more successful at achieving this balance than others. Set-asides for youth are important to ensure the continuing availability of housing vouchers for eligible youth.

Third, interagency collaboration among PHAs, PCWAs, and their partners is essential for providing housing vouchers and supportive services to youth, but such cooperation may be challenging because the agencies are not accustomed to sharing decisionmaking. Communities may need more guidance for working together effectively.

Fourth, both the survey findings and site visits suggest that the 18-month time limit on FUP for youth often presents problems. A 24- or 36-month time limit would alleviate mismatches between the program's time limit and annual lease terms and would also give youth time to complete their education. Most survey respondents thought the time limit should not be eliminated, but agency

staff suggested that a flexible term might work better, so youth can exit FUP as they become more self-sufficient.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The FUP surveys and site visits represent first steps in understanding how FUP is used for eligible youth, and they point to several areas that warrant further research.

- The findings suggest that FUP can be a useful resource, but for various reasons it is not widely used for youth. More research is needed to fully understand why more than one-half of the communities that are issued FUP vouchers do not use any for youth despite the apparently high need.
- The visits to communities using FUP revealed that some communities target certain types of youth. Research identifying whether FUP is more effective in preventing homelessness among certain types of youth could help communities make these difficult decisions.
- At present, no research addresses the quality, intensity, or even takeup of supportive services in FUP. It remains to be seen whether merely offering supportive services to youth (without requiring them) improves youth self-sufficiency and whether certain types of services are more useful than others in contributing to positive outcomes.
- Finally, FUP has not been evaluated to determine whether it is effective in preventing or ending youth homelessness after assistance expires or whether its main benefit is to provide short-term housing.

Although additional research into the use of FUP for youth is warranted, FUP is a small, resource-constrained program, and it should not be considered the only solution or even perhaps a main solution to the problem of housing for youth aging out of foster care. Additional policy innovations should be considered and explored to prevent and address homelessness among these vulnerable youth.

APPENDIX A. METHODOLOGY

SURVEY OF FUP PROVIDERS

The purpose of the survey of Family Unification Program (FUP) providers was to determine which communities serve youth via FUP and how they serve youth. To obtain several perspectives, two online survey instruments—one for public housing agencies (PHAs) and one for public child welfare agencies (PCWAs)—were developed. These surveys were designed to be self-administered via the Internet and take about 30 minutes to complete. The PHA sampling frame included administrators of the 249 PHAs identified by the U.S. Department of Housing

and Urban Development as operating FUP. The PCWA sampling frame included the PCWA contacts for the 83 PHAs that reported serving youth in the survey. The surveys were fielded in the fall of 2012 and yielded information about 211 PHAs and 73 PCWAs. Response outcomes for the survey samples are presented in table A.1.

Analyses of PHA responses focused on the 195 PHAs that currently serve youth (91), served youth in the past (6), or never served youth (98). Analyses of PCWA responses were based on the 70 PCWAs named as partners by the 91 youth-serving PHAs.

To examine responses at the community level, youth-serving PHAs were matched with their PCWA partners, based on the name each provided for the PHA. Of the 70 PCWA records, 58 could be definitively matched to a PHA

Response Outcomes for Survey Sample

	Number of PHAs	Number of PCWAs
Total PHA respondents	211	-
Currently serves youth with FUP	91	-
Served youth with FUP in the past	6	-
Never served youth with FUP	98	-
Does not currently serve youth with FUP but did not indicate whether served youth in the past	16	-
Total PCWA respondents	-	73
PHA partner currently serves youth with FUP	-	70
PHA partner does not currently serve youth with FUP	-	3
Total ineligible^a	14	1
Not operating FUP	14	-
Not a PCWA	-	1
Total nonrespondents	24	9
Did not complete most of the survey	6	2
Refused to participate	1	0
Unable to contact	17	7
TOTAL SAMPLE	249	83

FUP = Family Unification Program. PHA = public housing agency. PCWA = public child welfare agency.
^a Responses to the screener questions at the beginning of the PHA survey suggested that 14 of the 249 PHAs were ineligible for the survey because they did not operate FUP. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, however, subsequently determined that at least 7 of these PHAs were, in fact, operating FUP.

Table A.1

partner in the analysis sample and are the basis of the PHA-PCWA analyses included in this report, 11 PCWAs could not be definitively matched to a PHA based on the PHA name each provided, and 1 PCWA was matched to a PHA that was excluded from the analysis because the PHA did not sufficiently complete the survey.

SITE VISITS TO FUP COMMUNITIES

The goal of the site visits was to obtain a more fine-grained understanding of how selected communities are using FUP to serve youth and to identify lessons that could be useful to other communities. Four communities were selected from among those that reported in the survey that they had served youth in the past 18 months. To narrow the pool of potential sites, communities were excluded in which less than 75 percent of referred youth ultimately leased up and in which PHAs had been serving youth for less than 3 years. The resultant 17 sites were ranked based on the number of youth referrals the PHA reported receiving from the PCWA in an average quarter and the top 4 were selected. The number of youth referred to the PHA by the PCWA each quarter ranged from 10 to 30 among the four communities visited. Three of the communities had less than 5 years of experience serving youth; the other had more than 10 years of experience. The PHAs were county based in two sites (Broward County, Florida, and Salt Lake County, Utah) and state based in the other two (Massachusetts and Colorado). The visit to Colorado focused on Denver because FUP vouchers were provided to youth primarily in the Denver metropolitan area. The visit to Massachusetts focused on the Lowell and Lawrence region, which serves relatively more youth than the state's other regions.

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