

Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Voucher Program: **THE ROLE OF HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDERS**

The [Foster Youth to Independence \(FYI\)](#) program has profound potential to end homelessness for youth who have been in foster care. FYI vouchers can both prevent homelessness for youth transitioning out of foster care and offer a pathway into housing for youth who are currently experiencing homelessness.

Across the country, youth in homeless service programs and youth transitioning from foster care do not have the support they need to attain and sustain housing. FYI vouchers can help them, but only if their local PHA and child welfare agencies act to do so.

Every locality committed to ending homelessness should leverage this critical resource. The advocacy and expertise of the homeless service sector is needed to ensure they do so and to maximize the opportunity FYI vouchers affords to reduce youth homelessness.



Advocating for FYI Utilization Locally

The FYI program requires a partnership agreement between a public housing agency (PHA) that administers Housing Choice Vouchers and a child welfare agency.

Homeless service providers can elevate the voices of those with lived experience and their allies to ensure the necessary support (and pressure) is placed on PHA and child welfare agency leaders to create a partnership that enables the PHA to draw down vouchers to assist youth. Homeless service providers can organize meetings with local political leaders that include youth with lived expertise to generate interest about FYI vouchers and how at-risk and homeless youth could benefit from receipt of a voucher. System leaders should also consider collecting and providing state and local data on the prevalence of youth who become homeless after exiting foster care. They should share this data with political leaders, PHA and child welfare leaders, and other key stakeholders invested in promoting the well-being of youth to advocate for the local utilization of FYI vouchers.

Homeless service providers and those with lived experience can also be instrumental in encouraging other providers to join the advocacy and planning table, and to explore how best to prioritize FYI vouchers and promote youth success in housing. Housing providers can join in this advocacy to ensure youth have fair access to housing opportunities and to overcome discriminatory housing practices. Providers can also advocate for tailored education and social service support as youth transition from foster care (or out of homelessness) with FYI voucher assistance.

Facilitating Successful FYI Implementation

To use FYI vouchers most effectively, here are the main roles that homeless service providers can take:

Identify Eligible Youth

Homeless service providers can assist in the identification of eligible youth, particularly those who have already exited foster care and are seeking emergency shelter or other assistance from homeless service providers. Providers may ask questions at coordinated entry or at program intake to screen for eligible youth, who may include young pregnant and parenting youth and/or youth who recently exited a juvenile justice facility. Homeless service providers may also occasionally survey young adults in their programs, including those engaged via street outreach, to identify eligible youth.

Provide Rich and Tailored Support

Homeless service providers are already serving youth experiencing homelessness who can benefit from FYI vouchers, such as youth who became homeless two to three years after exiting foster care. Homeless service providers can leverage their own Continuum of Care (CoC) resources to support youth eligible for their services to transition from homelessness with FYI voucher assistance. As an example, young parents staying in a homeless shelter with their children after exiting foster care can receive CoC-funded housing navigation assistance, landlord mediation assistance, and follow-up case management that can augment the supports that homeless youth receive alongside FYI vouchers.

Homeless service providers and other partners with expertise in youth development, employment and workforce development, and housing navigation can also augment the supports that child welfare agencies deliver to youth transitioning from care to improve their housing access and retention.

While an agreement between a child welfare agency and a PHA meets the threshold to enable PHAs to apply for FYI vouchers, HUD “strongly encourages adding other important partners [to the agreement] such as the State, local (including schools), philanthropic, faith-based organizations, and the CoC or a CoC recipient it designates to the partnership.” Child welfare agencies are responsible for ensuring social service support for youth receiving FYI voucher assistance; they can deliver these services themselves, or they can contract with other social service and housing providers.

Homeless service providers should encourage child welfare agencies to foster partnerships that can provide a robust array of support to help youth receiving FYI assistance tailored to their individualized needs. For example, homeless providers may encourage the child welfare agency to coordinate with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) agencies that can provide case management support, resource connections (such as connection to childcare), and workforce development assistance to young parents exiting foster care. Nonprofits with expertise serving LGBTQ+ youth can deliver culturally responsive support services tailored to the needs of a subpopulation at particularly elevated risk of homelessness.

Some potential partners already receive funding to serve subpopulations of youth exiting foster care. As an example, youth with young children transitioning from foster care or from a homeless shelter are already eligible for TANF services. Homeless service providers can encourage child welfare agencies to establish referral pathways to expedite young people’s connections to the community-based services they are already eligible to receive to bolster and expedite

supports youth receive and reduce their risk of future homelessness. PHAs can also contribute to supporting youth receiving FYI assistance as PHAs' administrative fee reserves may also be used to cover some supportive service costs with HUD approval.

Provide Housing Expertise

Many homeless service providers have developed deep expertise in helping youth, adults, and families to access housing with housing navigation and landlord mediation support. They have spent years cultivating relationships with landlords who trust they will provide the connection and follow-up support that allow those who recently experienced homelessness to achieve stability.

Rather than build this expertise independently, child welfare agencies can leverage the relationships and expertise that already exists within the homeless service sector to house youth receiving FYI voucher support. For example, they may contract with a homeless service provider to offer housing navigation assistance to youth exiting foster care. Homeless service providers may also train child welfare staff, so they build internal capacity to meet the housing needs of the youth and families they serve.

Improve Program Implementation

Homeless service providers, advocates, and allies can provide expertise to PHAs and child welfare agencies so that implementing the FYI voucher program effectively reaches highly vulnerable youth, offers relevant and impactful services, and helps youth attain stability.

Invested stakeholders should regularly review program implementation to identify challenges and adapt their practices to improve performance. This will result in better outcomes for youth and improve voucher utilization rates. Such monitoring can also create accountability to ensure resources are achieving equitable impacts and allowing for rapid readjustment when benchmarks are not being met.



Contribute to Building Practice and Policy Expertise

The National Alliance to End Homelessness and its partners understand the value of learning from the successes of those working at the state and local level to prevent and end homelessness. The Alliance welcomes input from partners utilizing FYI vouchers so lessons learned can be translated to other localities. Please feel free to reach out to Sharon McDonald (smcdonald@naeh.org) and Malik Rivers (mrivers@naeh.org) with local insights and experiences.