

## **Rental Assistance Programs Helping to End Homelessness for Youths Aging Out of Foster Care in Texas**

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Each year in Texas, nearly 1,200 foster children reach adulthood without returning home or being adopted (Murphy, 2020). According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, between 31% to 46% of youth will experience homelessness after leaving foster care by age 26 (McDonald, 2021). In 2019, HUD worked to synchronize the Family Unification Program (FUP) with child welfare transition planning to eliminate homelessness. This new program is called Foster Youth to Independence (FYI). The FYI program is a new rental assistance program targeting youths aging out of foster care.

The FYI program requires local-level partnerships between public child welfare agencies (PCWA) and public housing authorities (PHA). Before a community can begin utilizing the FYI rental assistance program targeting young adults from HUD, local partners must sign a letter of agreement or a MOU outlining the roles and details of the partnership. This includes indicating that the PCWA will refer eligible youth and verify foster care involvement, and youth will have access to Chaffee-like services the PCWA or an approved third-party community partner provides while they participate in FYI. The PHA will administer the FYI program and can apply for up to 25 vouchers each year (see the most recent notice from HUD for current guidelines). Current or former foster care youths ages 18 up to 24 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are eligible for the FYI program. The voucher is time limited and can be used for up to 36 months.

In addition to this new FYI rental assistance program, there is the Family Unification Program (FUP) rental assistance program and the Section 811 Project Rental Assistance (PRA) Program. These programs also provide rental assistance targeting youths and young adults aging out of foster care. The

FUP rental assistance program is like the FYI program regarding eligibility requirements, targets mostly families at risk, but can support individuals, time limited (36 months), and is administered by local Public Housing Authorities. The Section 811 PRA program is for youths with disabilities, is restricted geographically, and is administered through the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs. The eligibility requirements for the Section 811 PRA program include adults with disabilities, ages 18 through 62, and unlike the other two programs the assistance is not time limited. For the complete details on these programs and eligibility requirements, contact the agencies that administer them directly. These three rental assistance programs should be a top priority and consideration for eligible youths needing rental assistance to secure housing after foster care and should be part of their housing and transitional plan.

Texas DFPS has FYI partnerships with 21 Public Housing Authorities (PHA) that covers 7 of the 11 regions throughout the state. There are 3 regions and 5 PHAs in progress of securing partnerships which will bring the total to 10 regions and 26 PHA's overall. Since the FYI program began in 2019, Texas has submitted 134 FYI applications for consideration. HUD has issued 66 vouchers, and there are 62 vouchers pending. Texas has housed for 46 young adults through the FYI program. This information was self-reported by DFPS regional housing liaisons. HUD is working to provide FYI data soon. Although vouchers have been issued, some barriers preventing youth from utilizing them include youth changing their minds or finding alternative options, limited housing availability, and lack of affordable housing overall.

Texas DFPS has 26 FUP partnerships with Public Housing Authorities across the state. According to the HUD Dashboard (March 2021), Texas has been awarded 1,068 FUP vouchers and 718 young adults have leased up overall. Although FUP vouchers may be awarded, local PHAs may not be able to issue them due to budget constraints and other reasons. According to Section 811 PRA Program, Texas DFPS has submitted 36 applications for consideration and has housed 11 young adults with disabilities

overall. Texas is working closely with the Section 811 PRA Program team to remove barriers and increase referrals and placements dramatically. There have been three statewide trainings and there are over 30 new local registered Section 811 PRA Program referral agents.

This is a brief summary of the three rental assistance programs targeting youths aging out of foster statewide. There are opportunities to increase referrals and utilization of these programs. These options must be a top priority and consideration for youths and staff working with them to address housing needs. These options and assessment of eligibility for them should be included in a housing plan as a primary strategy. If there is a location that does not offer one of these options, you can also consider traditional housing choice vouchers (section 8) and emergency housing vouchers at most PHAs throughout the state, if they offer them and youths are eligible.

Texas DFPS has created a Youth Housing Specialist position, and the Housing Services and Program plan is to continue to expand partnerships with PHAs, increase awareness about rental assistance programs and referrals overall. These rental assistance programs are a valuable resource and provide support necessary for obtaining housing which helps end homelessness for youths aging out of foster care. One successful story is Syd, who transitioned out of foster care, and with the help of a rental assistance program found a great home.

Syd is a 20-year-old youth who transitioned out of care and is taking advantage of the new HUD/FYI rental assistance program. She learned about the program through her PAL Coordinator and aftercare case manager. Syd reported at first, she wasn't sure she wanted to go through the program as she worried about how long the wait would be and finding stable housing was on top of her priority list. However, with support from her case manager and PAL Coordinator she was provided information and assistance and she learned about the benefits of such a program. Syd applied and was approved for an

FYI voucher and found an apartment to call home. Syd stated, “I love my apartment and I’m so happy to call it my home”. Syd provided a photograph of her home below.



When asked how the new rental assistance program helped her and if she would recommend it to others Syd said, “The voucher helped me in more ways than I can count! Not everyone can afford rent in a decent or nice place at 18-20 years of age, so this voucher gave me a chance to live in a decent and nice place without having to worry if I was going to be able to afford housing! Syd would give a piece of advice to other youth and workers who may be interested in this new program. She said, “I would recommend this program to others. I’d just advise you to stay on top of it and make sure you keep emailing and calling if you don’t get a response right away! Don’t’ give up. Don’t shut out help either.

Your PAL and aftercare workers are big supports.” Although targeted youth rental assistance programs can take time and effort, they can help end homelessness by securing a safe and affordable home.

DFPS Region 10 (West Texas) currently has 14 youth taking advantage of the new HUD/FYI rental assistance program and used vouchers to secure their own apartments. There are 5 more youth currently in the application process. The partnership between HUD, the local Public Housing Authority, and DFPS – the Public Child Welfare Agency, continues to develop and strengthen as improvements to the rental assistance program are made. Now, efforts to increase awareness and understanding of these programs for youths is a top priority. This is vital, so staff and youths can access these rental assistance programs, secure vouchers and most importantly find safe and affordable housing. Molly Wegner, Region 10 PAL Coordinator said, “We are thrilled to have these rental assistance program options for our young adults leaving the system and starting their next journey in their life without having to worry about having a roof over their heads. We are grateful for our new partnership with HUD and the El Paso Housing Authority, and I encourage staff and youths to explore these rental assistance programs, screen for eligibility, apply for consideration as part of a housing plan. The housing plan is vital for preparation, assessing housing readiness, exploring rental assistance programs, and choosing the best option to secure safe and affordable housing.”

For more information about youth targeted rental assistance programs and other options, please contact the local public housing authorities directly or the DFPS State Office Youth Housing Specialist.