

Deploying Federal Resources to Help Youth Succeed

Rhode Island Housing

Special Needs Housing: Combating Homelessness

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth aging out of foster care experience many challenges in accessing a stable home and the services they need to retain that home and succeed. **RIHousing's Foster Youth Initiative (FYI) deploys federal resources in the form of Housing Choice Vouchers, supported via creative partnerships with local service providers, to assist young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability.** The program has been especially significant in the midst of a pandemic.

The Need

Studies show that youth aging out of foster care are at high risk for becoming homeless during the transition to adulthood, with about 25% of former foster youth nationwide experiencing at least one period of homelessness after exiting foster care. According to the National Foster Youth Initiative, an estimated 23,000 young Americans age out of foster care annually.

Housing is one of the most immediate needs for youth aging out of the foster care system, with many becoming homeless at disconcerting rates. Recent studies note that within 18 months of emancipation, 40-50% of foster youth may become homeless. A large percent of the nation's homeless adults report foster care history.

Many young people aging out of foster care are not prepared for the transition to adulthood. These individuals face many challenges, which can derail their successful transition to adulthood: unemployment, poor educational outcomes, homelessness, and inadequate healthcare are all barriers to success. As part of the transition, these individuals must find and maintain suitable housing—in most cases, with little or no support from either their family or the state. These young people experience high rates of homelessness and housing instability, and like the total U.S. child welfare population, they are disproportionately youth of color, and the families from which they were removed are predominantly low-income.

National Effort – *Local Impact*

In an effort to provide stable housing to young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability in the midst of a pandemic, in 2020, U.S. Senator Jack Reed delivered \$94,340 to help RIHousing prevent youth homelessness. The federal funds provided under HUD's Homeless Foster Youth to Independence Initiative (FYI), target needed housing and supportive assistance to at-risk former foster youth who are aging out of foster care.

Senator Reed, along with Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), led the bipartisan effort to create and fund the FYI program, which invests in local, cross-system collaborative efforts to prevent and end homelessness among youth with a current or prior history of child welfare involvement. *FYI provides housing vouchers to qualified young people so they can find and afford a rental unit.*

Program Goals

The initiative aims to help communities across the country:

- Address gaps in the availability of Family Unification Program for youth.
- Increase housing options for youth with a current/prior history of child welfare involvement that are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Contribute to the federal goal of preventing and ending youth homelessness.



How the Program Works

The Foster Youth Initiative (FYI) allows qualified Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to utilize up to 25 tenant protection vouchers for youth transitioning out of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), as authorized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

As a PHA, RIHousing is able to utilize the FYI vouchers to help provide up to 36 months of housing and voluntary supportive services for at-risk kids aging out of foster care, such as education and employment support. Before the 36-month period ends, young people who still need assistance are connected via the State's Centralized Wait List (CWL) to local PHAs where RIHousing has established a preference in the Housing Choice Voucher Administrative Plan to ensure ongoing support.

RIHousing has entered into a partnership agreement with DCYF, the state's public child welfare agency. The initiative also includes the commitment of a supportive services provider to ensure household stability among program participants: in Rhode Island this is Foster Forward, a non-profit entity that works to empower lives impacted by foster care. Foster Forward serves as a "supporting partner" to access HUD's FYI program as a part of our state's efforts to end homelessness among youth aging out of foster care.

Supportive Services Include:

- Basic life skills training, including money management, proper nutrition/meal prep, access to healthcare
- Housing counseling: assistance/referrals for assistance on security deposits, utility hook-ups and utility deposits
- Landlord support services: assistance to owners of rental property to assist youth in renting a unit with a voucher
- Employment and training: job prep
- Education and career advancement services: GED, attendance/financing of education at a technical school, trade school or college

Youth Eligibility

- Between 18-24 years old
- Has left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days
- Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

Eligibility is not limited to single persons. Pregnant and/or parenting youth are eligible to receive assistance.

Why It's Award-Worthy

Youth homelessness is a growing problem that requires funding and innovation to prevent vulnerable children and young adults from ending up on the streets. Many young people aging out of foster care are not prepared for the transition to adulthood and need the services and supports as they try to balance school, work, and living on their own.



The benefits of a safe and stable place to live are widely recognized -- in addition to meeting the basic human need for shelter, safe and stable housing can function as a “platform” that promotes positive outcomes, including education, employment and physical and mental health.

This federal funding is a smart investment in providing opportunity for young people and helping them find a stable home. It has assisted RIHousing and our partners in our collective efforts to curb youth homelessness and reduce housing insecurity.

A lack of stable housing can impede efforts to become self-sufficient. It is difficult for young people to pursue education and training or to find and keep a job if their housing is unstable. Conversely, young people are better able to continue their schooling and maintain gainful employment if they are stably housed.

Given the number of youth aging out of the foster care system, the total cost of providing services to help them successfully transition to adulthood is relatively small. Helping these youth become stable and productive citizens creates substantial social benefits. Safe and stable housing along with supportive services can function as a “platform” that promotes positive outcomes from education to employment to physical and mental health. Conversely, living in housing that is unsafe or unstable can be a significant impediment to positive outcomes.

Success to Date

To date, the RIHousing’s FYI has worked with DCYF to identify 25 young adults to access the housing and services they need to thrive. With trusted support and guidance, they can successfully achieve independence and avoid potential negative outcomes, like unemployment or homelessness.

In addition to the 25 youth currently receiving housing and services, [**RIHousing has taken a leadership role in shepherding other PHAs to also participate in the FYI program.**](#) To date, RIHousing has provided technical assistance and support to 3 additional PHAs in an effort to replicate the Foster Youth Initiative. ***While 25 vouchers may not seem like a lot, if 10 PHAs participate in the program, that is nearly the entire transition population in the entire state of Rhode Island!***

ROLE OF PARTNERS



RI Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF)

Responsible for making eligibility determinations and referrals to RIHousing

Public Child Welfare Agency (PCWA)



RIHousing

Provides staffing and housing expertise as PHA

Public Housing Authority (PHA)



Foster Forward

Provides a variety of supportive services to ensure household stability among program participants.

Identify eligible youth, verify eligible child welfare history.	Accept referrals from DCYF.	
Develop system of prioritization for referral to RIHousing based on youth's level of need and appropriateness of intervention.	Verify eligibility for HCV program.	Work with RIHousing and DCYF to match eligible youth to services.
Provide a written certification to RIHousing verifying eligible child welfare history.	Request FYI voucher from HUD.	Provide variety of services and supports to eligible youth.
Provide or secure 36 months of supportive services.	Update administrative plan. Administer FYI for eligible youth for up to 36 months.	

**FYI-TPVs are time-limited to 36 months and sunset when a youth transitions off the voucher. This means the PHA cannot reissue the FYI-TPV assistance. A single PHA may request a maximum of 25 FYI-TPVs in a fiscal year.*