

Evaluation of the Family Unification Program (FUP)

WHO IS CONDUCTING THE EVALUATION?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is collaborating with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to oversee this evaluation. ACF has contracted with the Urban Institute and our partners, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, and Child Trends, to conduct evaluations to support evidence building in child welfare. This evaluation will study how FUP is used to support families. Although youth are eligible for FUP vouchers, only FUP vouchers used for families will be part of this evaluation.

WHAT IS THE URBAN INSTITUTE?

The Urban Institute is a nonpartisan, nonprofit social policy research organization in Washington, DC. Among other things, we are known for research and for evaluating programs and other interventions in child welfare and for homeless families.

WHY EVALUATE FUP?

Many families involved in the child welfare system face unstable housing and homelessness. Lack of housing is a major contributor to their child welfare involvement and makes it difficult for the family to focus on its child welfare plan. FUP offers an important resource to support these families. To date, there is limited evidence on FUP's effectiveness.

WHAT WILL BE LEARNED FROM THE EVALUATION?

The evaluation will test whether providing housing vouchers and supportive services helps keep families together, by reducing the need to remove children from their home and by helping parents and children reunify when their children are in out-of-home care. It will explore the housing search and leasing process to examine how Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) are working with Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWAs) and Continuums of Care (CoCs) to make the housing search and leasing process effective for families. It will compare how the FUP program is implemented across sites to better understand what works and how local context matters. And finally, it will gather the perspectives of the program from the various stakeholders including agency managers, staff, and frontline workers, as well as from the families who receive the vouchers.

HOW WILL FUP PROGRAMS BE SELECTED FOR THIS EVALUATION?

The Urban Institute will be evaluating five to ten FUP programs that received vouchers under the 2018 NOFA. The Urban Institute will select FUP programs based on the number of vouchers received, the number of families in need of housing at the site, and the number of vouchers that the site expects to give to families. The Urban Institute evaluation team will contact your site to answer any questions about the study, find out more about your program, and determine if your program may be eligible.

HOW WILL FAMILIES BE SELECTED FOR THIS EVALUATION?

Participating FUP program sites will identify families who are eligible to be referred for FUP vouchers. Those families will be randomly assigned to one of two groups: one group will be referred for FUP vouchers, the other group will receive any other services available to families in the site's child welfare system. Only families will be randomly assigned; you may allocate vouchers to youth however you choose.

WHY IS RANDOM ASSIGNMENT NECESSARY?

Many families involved in the child welfare system could benefit from a FUP voucher, but there aren't enough vouchers for all of them. Random assignment is a lottery that provides a fair way to allocate vouchers among many deserving families. Random assignment is also the best way to determine if the program is truly effective at helping families. We will work with you and your partners to design a referral and randomization process that meets your needs, is in compliance with all regulations, and makes the evaluation possible.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

You will operate your FUP program as you planned. We will work with you to create a process that allows for random assignment of families with as little disruption to your normal process as possible.

In addition:

- We will give you a project-specific housing screening form and a referral form. We would like you to use them or adapt your current forms so they include the information that is on those forms. The evaluation team will work with you to adapt their form to meet your needs if you prefer.
- We will ask you or your partners to complete two forms for each FUP family; one capturing the housing search support the family received, the other capturing any other services they received. We will also ask you to enter information into a dashboard about your FUP families over a two-year period. This dashboard will allow you and the evaluation team to track the progress of your FUP families.
- On three occasions, evaluation team staff will visit you and conduct interviews and focus groups with managers and staff at the PCWA, PHA, CoC, and any other partners in your FUP program.
- We will ask the PHA to ask FUP families to consent to be interviewed to get the families' perspectives on the program.
- Finally, we will ask each agency to share administrative data: PCWA administrative data collected for the Adoption and Foster Care Administrative Reporting System

(AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), PHA administrative data on voucher issuance and leasing, and the CoC's shelter entries from the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS). We will work with you and follow all local requirements to develop data sharing agreements.

HOW WILL YOUR PROGRAM'S INFORMATION BE USED?

All information gathered from agency managers, staff, and frontline workers at any of the partner organizations involved in your FUP program will be combined to create a picture of your program and to understand how your program is similar to, and different from, other FUP programs in the evaluation. The evaluation will not identify any individuals in any documents or publications. In addition, information the evaluation collects about and from families will be combined in a way that no individual family will be identified in any documents or publications. The evaluation team will provide and read an informed consent statement to every participant telling them of their rights. All evaluation team staff are required to keep all information private to the extent permitted by law, and have signed a privacy pledge.

The Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: The described collection of information is voluntary and will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Family Unification Program. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number and expiration date for the described collection are OMB #: 0970-XXXX, Exp: XX/XX/XXXX.