

# InFOCUS

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## Housing for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

Each year, about 25,000 young adults “age out” of the foster care system in the United States. At age 18 (or 21 in some states), they are discharged from the system and must immediately find and maintain housing. With little or no family assistance and means of self-sufficiency, the transition is often challenging, putting these youth at high risk of homelessness. There are no national estimates for homelessness among youth aging out of foster care, nor is there much information on the breadth or effectiveness of housing programs available to them. Mathematica Policy Research collaborated with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to learn more about public resources and policies that can help prevent or mitigate homelessness among this population.

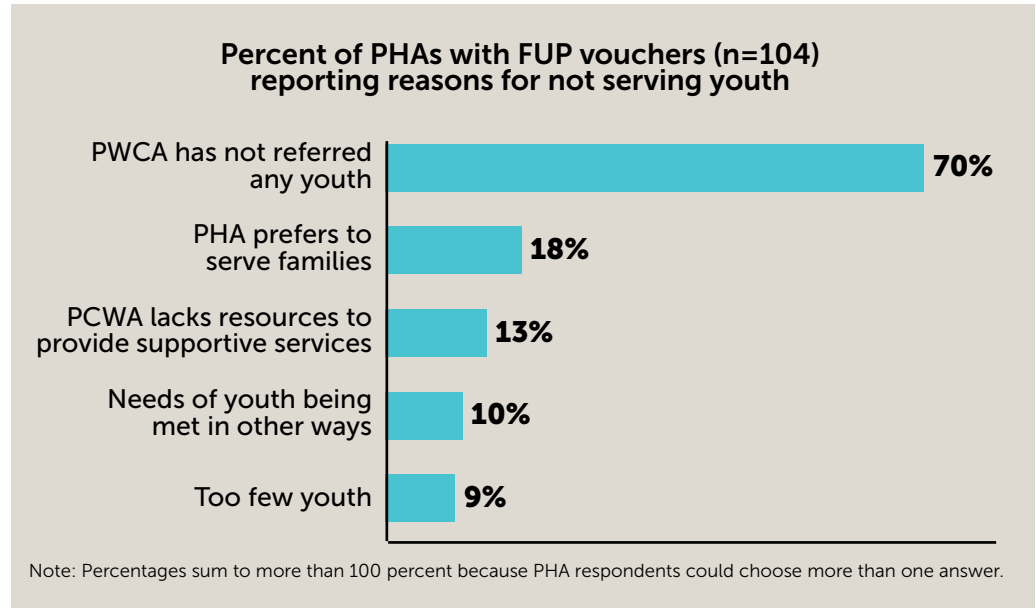
### KEY FINDINGS



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- Stable housing is important yet elusive for youth aging out of foster care.** Researchers estimate that 11 to 36 percent of youth who age out of foster care become homeless, and 25 to 50 percent experience unstable housing arrangements, such as “couch surfing”—temporarily staying at the homes of various friends and acquaintances—moving frequently within short periods of time, having trouble paying rent, and facing eviction. Unstable housing can contribute to compromised physical and mental health, which can further limit employment and the prospect of housing stability.
- Policies and programs offer few housing opportunities for youth exiting foster care.** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) each provides a handful of key programs and policies to support youth exiting foster care. Communities must often combine the various federal funding streams with state, local, and private dollars, though, to develop suitable housing programs for transition-age youth at risk of homelessness.
- HUD’s Family Unification Program (FUP) has promise for supporting youth but is not widely applied to this population.** Less than half of all public housing authorities (PHAs) administering FUP are serving youth, instead directing this form of rental assistance to families involved in the child welfare system. In 2012, youth accounted for about 14 percent of households assisted under this special-purpose voucher program. Just 2,912 FUP vouchers were in use by youth..
- Public housing authorities are not serving more youth largely because public child welfare agencies (PCWAs) are referring relatively few or no young adults to them.** To the extent that public child welfare agencies selectively refer FUP candidates to the public housing authorities, they serve as gatekeepers to vouchers. Among the public housing authorities with FUP vouchers that do not serve youth, more than 70 percent cite the lack of PCWA referrals as a reason.

**PHAs do not serve youth through FUP primarily due to lack of referrals**



## **ABOUT THE STUDY**

Mathematica and Chapin Hall conducted the study on behalf of the Office of Policy Development and Research at HUD and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at HHS. The findings are based on multiple data collection methods, including:

- A **review of the literature** on homelessness and housing instability among youth aging out of foster care and the federal policies and programs that address their housing needs
- A **web-based environmental scan** of state and local housing programs available to youth (which enabled the research team to create a typology characterizing the programs and identifying their innovative features)
- A **survey** of agencies that administer FUP to determine the extent to which communities use FUP to provide housing and supportive services to youth aging out of foster care and how they use the program
- **Site visits** to selected communities that use FUP to serve youth to conduct in-depth reviews of how the program works in practice and identify promising strategies

To view the full report and other background materials, please visit HUD's website at [http://www.huduser.org/portal/youth\\_foster\\_care.html](http://www.huduser.org/portal/youth_foster_care.html).

