

## The Foster Youth to Independence Housing Voucher Program in California: The Role of the Child Welfare Agency and the Probation Department

### 1. What is the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Program?

The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Program provides a type of housing choice voucher for young people who are leaving or have left foster care. These vouchers were developed to improve housing security for youth aging out of foster care. In fact, the FYI program was the idea of young people across the country who created the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Coalition (FSHO). Their advocacy, led by ACTION Ohio and the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare, led to the FYI program becoming law and ensuring that housing vouchers can be provided “on demand” for young adults with experience in foster care to improve their transition to adulthood.

These vouchers can be requested by Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) when they collaborate with local child welfare agencies. The PHA will provide the voucher and the child welfare agency provides or arranges for support services for the young person. These support services are voluntary. FYI vouchers last for three years, but can be extended for two additional years if the young adult is participating in the [Family Self Sufficiency Program](#) (FSS) or similar programs. These are programs that support employment, other activities, and assist with savings.

### 2. Who is eligible for an FYI voucher?

Young adults are eligible for an FYI voucher if meet the following criteria:

- Are 18 through 24 years of age (have not reached their 25th birthday), and
- Have left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, and
- Are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless when they were age 16 or older.

Eligible youth include probation supervised foster youth who meet the above criteria.

### 3. How do FYI vouchers benefit young people?

Stable housing is crucial for young people to successfully transition to adulthood. Without stable housing, young adults face significant challenges to meet their education and employment goals and will have a hard time developing a good transition plan. But young people aging out of foster care face many barriers to securing safe and affordable housing, including their age and lack of family support. The FYI program is a critical stepping stone for young adults as they move from foster care into the adult world. It can help stabilize their housing situation so they can focus on work, school, saving money, and meeting their goals.

### 4. What is the role of Child Welfare Agencies and Probation Departments in helping young adults secure stable housing by accessing FYI vouchers?



Child welfare agencies and probation departments are the critical and valued partners of the PHAs that make it possible for our communities to access FYI vouchers. If you are an agency director, we urge you to establish partnerships with any of the PHAs in your county. Here is a [list](#) of all the PHAs in California. You can partner by doing an MOU or a letter of intent. If you are facing barriers to making connections with the PHAs in your county, please email Madeleine Wykstra at [mwykstra@ylc.org](mailto:mwykstra@ylc.org) to reach the FYI Advocacy Group.

Your role is to make referrals of eligible youth to the PHA and provide or offer support services to the young person. The child welfare agency can also elect to designate other agencies to make an FYI referral. If the young person is still in foster care, you should refer the youth to the local Public Housing Authority for an FYI or FUP voucher as part of the transition planning process. It is recommended that you make the referral as early in the transition planning process as possible. While the PHA can request an FYI voucher as early as 90 days before a youth leaves care, the youth's case planning team can be preparing the case months in advance of 90 days before discharge and begin activities like: gathering vital documents, preparing the information needed for the Housing Choice Voucher application, and searching for a unit. It is recommended that you develop a tickler system to alert the agency at several points during the last year prior to discharge as part of the transition planning process so that you make referrals in a timely manner.

In terms of service provision, you can simply connect young people with existing community services and leverage your existing ties to community-based organizations. There are many community-based organizations that are eager to work with child welfare agencies and probation departments to help provide support services.

The FYI application process can take some time, so it is especially important for caseworkers and probation officers to help the young person through the process. FYI is one option among many. Other options include, but are not limited to: Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP-Plus), Chafee room and board, as well as State & Federally Funded Homelessness Response, which may be facilitated through your community's [Homeless Continuum of Care](#).

You can find more detailed information about the FYI program [here](#).