

Foster Youth to Independence Housing Vouchers in California: What Young People Need to Know

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

The FYI Program provides a type of housing voucher for young people who are leaving or have left foster care. A housing voucher pays for a portion of your rent: usually a voucher holder pays 30% of their income in rent or is asked to pay some minimum amount of rent. The voucher covers the remaining portion of your rent. You can use the voucher to rent an apartment in the community that you select in the area covered by the Housing Authority.

In the FYI program, the child welfare agency (or for probation-supervised foster youth, the juvenile probation department) refers you to the local housing authority for a voucher and offers you supportive services, then the housing authority gives you the voucher. While the child welfare agency refers you for a voucher, this is not a foster care program; the voucher belongs to you. You can stay in the FYI program for three years, with the opportunity for two more years if you participate in the [Family Self Sufficiency Program](#) or a similar program. These are programs that help you save money while you maintain stable housing.

2. Who is eligible for FYI?

You may be eligible for FYI if you answer yes to all of the following:

- Are you currently, or were you previously, in foster care?
- Are you currently between ages 18 and 25?
- Since you turned 16, have you ever been or are you now homeless or at risk of losing your housing?

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

3. How does FYI benefit young people?

An FYI voucher helps you stay housed so you can focus on work, school, planning and meeting goals for your future. When you are in the FYI program, you can choose to be connected with support services to help you maintain your housing and meet your goals. Examples of these optional support services include: 1. help with employment or school, 2. getting connected with mental health services, 3. financial management support

4. How can I get an FYI voucher?

Ask your social worker, probation officer, or your Independent Living Program (ILP) Worker (if you have one) to refer you to the housing authority for a FYI voucher. If you don't have a current caseworker, you can contact your prior social worker or probation officer, or your county's ILP coordinator; a statewide list available [here](#). The child welfare agency will confirm your eligibility and then can make the referral.

If you are still in foster care, ask the child welfare agency to 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 request that the child welfare agency make a 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. If you have already aged out of foster care, you can ask for a referral at any time before turning age 25.

Once your application is submitted to the housing authority, the housing authority will ask you to complete forms to determine your eligibility for the voucher. This includes asking you about your income and how many people you live with, for example. Once the housing authority determines you are eligible, they can email HUD (the Department of Housing and Urban Development) and ask them to distribute a voucher that the housing authority will give to you.

The timeline for this process can vary. It is important to know that some counties have been slower to get their FYI programs up and running. If you have asked your caseworker, ILP worker and/or dependency attorney or juvenile defender (if you have one) to make a referral

but nothing has happened, you will likely need help from a legal aid attorney. Here is a [website](#) where you can find your local legal aid attorneys.

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