

Promising Strategies

Family Unification Program (FUP)

****September 2011****

Introduction

The Family Unification Program (FUP) is a program under which Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) are provided to families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in the imminent placement of the family's child or children in out-of-home care or the delay in the discharge of the child or children to the family from out-of-home care. FUP vouchers may also be used for youths at least 18 years old and not more than 21 years old who left foster care at age 16 or older and who lack adequate housing. Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) administer FUP in partnership with Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWAs) who are responsible for referring FUP families and youths to the PHA for determination of eligibility for rental assistance.

The structure of the Family Unification Program, which requires the PHA and PCWA to work closely together, can make the successful operation of the program challenging. Additionally, there are relatively few PHAs that operate a FUP program, which makes it difficult to create a shared knowledge base of successful practices. This document is meant to begin to create such a shared knowledge base. Below are promising strategies identified by a selected group of FUP PHAs as ways to improve workflow and establish a strong partnership between the PHA and PCWA, to better serve the FUP clientele.

Methods

In Fall of 2010 and Spring of 2011, HUD staff, along with a representative from the Department of Health and Human Services, met with PHA staff and their PCWA partners from six FUP sites to discuss the FUP program. PHAs were selected to give variation in size, geography, and success in lease-up within the program. The six PHAs that were selected are:

1. Southern Nevada Regional Housing Agency (NV018)
2. King County Housing Authority (WA002)
3. Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority (VA019)
4. St. Paul Public Housing Agency (MN001)
5. Madison Community Development Authority (WI003)
6. Housing Authority of the City of Yuma (AZ035)

Promising strategies

1. Collaboration

- **Jointly create measurable goals and standards for success**

HUD employs utilization as the main metric for assessing the success of the FUP program, but PHAs and PCWAs can create additional program goals to measure their success. These goals should be measurable and have meaning to both the PHA and the PCWA. Goals and standards for success not only create ways to better evaluate program progress, but can also be a useful document for potential funders for PCWA services. There are many aspects of the FUP program that may act as the basis of goals and standards of success. Some Goals and Standards of Success are:

- Goal: Ensure services, such as counseling, job training programs, and financial literacy courses, are available to and used by FUP participants, to prevent family break-up.
Standard of Success: XX% of FUP families participate in the PCWA services provided.
- Goal: Prepare FUP youth for success in unassisted housing
Standard of Success: XX% of FUP youth are living in adequate housing after XX months of exiting the program.
- Goal: Train and empower FUP youth to find and maintain employment
Standard of Success: XX% of FUP youth are employed within XX months of beginning the FUP program.

- **Collaboration in creating forms/processes**

Several PHAs and PCWAs that we spoke with worked together to create the workflow and appropriate forms for the FUP program. This collaboration can be an excellent start to the relationship between the PCWA and PHA and should ideally start a month or more before funds are disbursed. Some of the forms that PHAs and PCWAs specifically mentioned as helpful are:

- Referral Checklist: This lists the screening information that the PCWA should review prior to referring a client to the PHA.
- Referral Form: This form includes the name of the family members, contact information, and date of birth, as well as the name of the family's caseworker and the FUP Point of Contact.
- Document Checklist: This form lists the documents that the FUP Family or Youth needs to bring to the PHA once the PCWA has referred them as FUP-eligible.

Some of the PHAs and PCWAs also worked together in establishing a system of tracking referrals and gathering data which helped create a streamlined and consistent tracking process between agencies. Additionally, PHAs and PCWAs were able to identify together the need for specific data, and further strengthen the collaborative process among the agencies.

- **Regular Meetings and Training**

Another good way to encourage collaboration is to hold regular meetings between PCWA and PHA staff. These meetings will allow staff at both organizations to learn about processes, such as intake procedures at both the PHA and PCWA, and challenges, such as insufficient documentation from families, which are encountered in the FUP workflow. Each of the PHAs and PCWAs that we talked to held regular meetings and most conducted these regular meetings between FUP liaisons and Points of Contact (POCs) at the PCWA. However, conducting larger meetings occasionally with PCWA and PHA staff may help further promote sharing of knowledge and ideas and create networking opportunities among staff from each of the agencies.

Scheduling trainings that involve staff members from both the PHA and PCWA is another a good way to meet staff from the other organization and create greater understanding of each others' programs, roles, and processes. Most of the agencies we met with held trainings with the FUP liaison(s); others also included PHA and PCWA program directors or managers. In other cases the partnering agencies held an initial, larger training session with all appropriate staff and then conducted smaller training sessions, as needed, with FUP liaisons and/or program directors or managers. Some topics recommended for training are: HCV eligibility, PCWA identification of clients, and how PCWA supportive services are offered.

2. Referrals Process

- **Point of Contact**

Each of the groups that we spoke with had established a Point of Contact (POC) at both the PHA and the PCWA, through which all FUP referrals were sent. Identifying a POC at both the PHA and PCWA became a requirement in the 2010 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). Establishing a lead in the FUP program at both agencies allows for better communication, since there is no confusion about who is the "right" person to send inquiries. This also allows for faster resolution of any problems that arise, since the lines of communication are already open between the POCs. Additionally, having a POC at each location can assist in training teams, with the POC for the PHA training PCWA staff and vice versa.

- **Eligibility Determination**

Prior to referral, the PCWA staff should perform a pre-screening of the client to see if they meet the PHA admission requirements. It is important for the PCWA to perform pre-screening prior to referring a family in order to minimize the number of referrals that do not qualify for HCV assistance, as this may increase frustration for the applicant and is an inefficient use of time for the applicant, the PCWA, and the PHA. The final HCV eligibility determination will continue to be performed by the PHA. Training of PCWA staff and other service providers that may identify potentially eligible FUP applicants to

the PCWA is also helpful in minimizing the number of referrals that do not meet FUP or general HCV program requirements.

Several PHAS created a pre-application eligibility determination worksheet or other intake application form for the PCWA to determine HCV eligibility. Some information that may be included on a pre-application eligibility determination worksheet includes:

- Income limits by family size
- Age requirement
- Criminal screening
- Citizenship/Eligible immigration status
- Alcohol/Drug use

If a PHA determines that a family or youth fails to meet the PHA's HCV eligibility requirements, PHAs should refer the family back to the PCWA with information on why the client is not eligible under PHA rules. If the reason for ineligibility is curable, such as a substance abuse issue that could be resolved through treatment, this should be noted so that the PCWA caseworker can help the client to meet this eligibility requirement. Referring the families back to the PCWA also serves to keep the family/youth engaged in services to improve their current circumstances, regardless of whether they receive a FUP voucher. Ideally, a referral at this point would involve the POCs from the PHA and PCWA to ensure coordination between the two agencies.

- **Partnering Agencies**

Most cities and towns have a variety of other service organizations that provide services to potential FUP participants; in order to make sure that the largest number of potential clients know about FUP, PHAs and PCWAs should educate these organizations about the FUP program. For instance, one PHA we met with encourages area homeless shelters to refer families and youth who may qualify for a FUP voucher to its PCWA. Other care providers may include domestic violence organizations, the local Continuum of Care, and organizations that work with at-risk youth.

3. Operations

- **Orientation**

Orientation can be somewhat overwhelming for participants. Several PHAs reported that PCWA representatives attended training with the FUP families and youth, which provided a means of support and assistance in transitioning the case to the PHA. Alternatively, a good way to provide seamless, coordinated service between the PCWA and PHA is to hold a joint orientation service once the family or youth is accepted into the FUP program. This will allow the PCWA to provide any assistance programs concerning lease-up at the same time as the rules of the voucher are explained. The presence of a PCWA case manager may also allow for clearer and more effective

conversation between the FUP participant and the PHA.

- **Use of Technology**

Several agencies indicated that it is sometimes difficult to reach families or youths because many lack a fixed residence. A PHA indicated that they have increased their use of electronic forms of communication, such as emailing forms or posting these forms to their website, which has helped them reach FUP applicants, particularly youths, in a timely manner. They also mentioned having applications available electronically as helpful in this process.

- **Lease-up**

Several PHAs indicated that lease-up can be challenging with FUP families because many of the FUP families have prior records of eviction and many landlords are hesitant to rent to FUP youths, since many lack a rental history. PHAs can mitigate these challenges by working closely with landlords, educating them about the FUP program, including the services that youth (and families, if applicable) receive through the program, and about the HCV program in general. If the PHA has a good relationship with a landlord, it is worthwhile to reach out to the landlord prior to the FUP recipients receiving their vouchers. Additionally, if possible, PHAs should provide FUP participants with a list of landlords who know about the FUP program and are willing to accept FUP participants. Having PCWA staff involved in the rental process is also helpful in providing a sense of security for landlords, especially those renting to FUP youths.

- **Sources and Uses of Funding**

Although the FUP program only requires 18 months of services for FUP youth, many PCWAs provide an extension of benefits for FUP youth after the 18 months of HCV assistance have ended. Additionally, many PHAs offer services to FUP families as well as FUP youth. While some PCWAs have been able to fund the extra services through their own budgets, others have reached out to support and charitable organizations, such as the United Way, the Casey Foundation, other community organizations, and to county or state governments to provide supplemental funding for services for FUP families and youth. Additionally, PHAs reported greater success when creating buy-in from the Board of Commissioners or other oversight body of the PHA. These oversight bodies then become advocates for the program and may be able to access other sources of funding from the government or other sources.

- **FUP Youth Time Limit**

The FUP Youth time limit of 18 months is a statutory requirement and cannot be waived; however, several PHAs have indicated a desire to support the FUP youth for a longer time period than the voucher allows. One way to do so is to modify the PHA's administrative plan to add a waiting list preference for youth whose FUP voucher is

expiring and will have a lack of adequate housing as a result of voucher expiration, or a similar category. This will allow FUP youth to continue receiving HCV assistance and remain in their current housing at the end of their FUP term. Another method to help prepare the FUP youth for the transition is to work with their PCWA case worker to develop a transitional plan that prepares the FUP youth for the eventual expiration of the voucher.

Next Steps

Besides providing FUP PHAs with information on promising strategies identified so far by this selected group of PHAs, this document is also intended to create an environment of sharing promising strategies in the Family Unification Program. HUD recognizes that this document cannot cover all promising strategies being performed; therefore, the Department encourages a greater sharing of resources and ideas between PHAs and between PHAs/PCWAs and HUD. If your agency has additions or questions about this document, or other FUP questions, please contact your local HUD office.¹

¹ Contact information for HUD Field Offices is available at:
http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/about/field_office

Appendix 1: Resources

- [Find Youth Info](#): Comprehensive website on youth issues developed by the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP).
- [Department of Health and Human Service's Child Welfare Information Gateway](#): Connects child welfare, adoption, and related professionals as well as the general public to information, resources, and tools covering topics on child welfare, housing, child abuse and neglect, out-of-home care, adoption, and more. This service is funded by the Children's Bureau.
- [Local Homeless Assistance by State](#)
- [HUD's Homeless Resources Exchange](#): Provides information and resources on assisting people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- [Department of Health and Human Service's Homeless Resource Center](#)
- [National Resource Center for Youth Development](#): Provides training and technical assistance to improve services for youth in foster care and young adults formerly in foster care. This includes promoting stakeholder involvement and information services. Also offers States, Tribes, and other youth-serving organizations assistance in effectively implementing the Chafee Foster Care Independence and Education and Training Voucher programs, and supporting youth engagement in child welfare policy, planning, and program development. This National Resource Center is funded by the Children's Bureau.
- [National Resource Center for In-Home Services](#): The NRCIHS serves as a national center of expertise regarding child welfare practice related to ensuring the safety of children and youth in their homes and making reasonable efforts to preserve families in which maltreatment has occurred. This National Resource Center is funded by the Children's Bureau.
- [National Center for Housing & Child Welfare](#):