Building Partnerships to Support Stable Housing for Child Welfare-Involved Families and Youth

As a child welfare caseworker, you have most likely seen the impact of housing instability and homelessness on families attempting to reunify with their children or prevent placement in out-of-home care. They may be living in shelters, in their car, or in housing that is unsafe or overcrowded, or they may need financial or other assistance to access and maintain safe and stable housing. If you work with youth who are preparing to transition from foster care, you know that many of these young adults may soon face similar challenges if they do not receive timely and thoughtful transition planning and support.

Every community is unique. Some offer a full continuum of housing crisis response options—including emergency shelter, short-term housing, and permanent housing—and supportive services—including short-term help with housing search and security deposits, intensive case management, and ongoing wraparound services once housing has been secured. In other communities, housing resources and supportive services may be scarce. In either case, collaborating with local affordable housing and homelessness services providers helps child welfare agencies, housing professionals, and the homelessness response system achieve their mandates and meet the needs of children, youth, and families more effectively. By building and engaging in these mutually beneficial partnerships, child welfare caseworkers and supervisors can help ensure the local array of housing services and supports reflects and adapts to the evolving and varied needs of the families and youth they serve.

This bulletin outlines affordable housing and homelessness services that may be available in your community and how you can collaborate with those systems to help the families and youth you serve. Although directed primarily at child welfare professionals, the information in this bulletin also may help housing and homelessness services providers understand the unique needs and concerns of child welfare-involved youth and families and how their programs can help. "Grantee spotlight" boxes throughout the document feature examples of programs focused on child welfare and housing collaboration that were funded by the Children's Bureau within the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as part of the Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System (SHF) and Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH) grant clusters.[1]

Child Welfare and Housing Instability

The significant crossover between families and youth involved (or formerly involved) in child welfare and those requiring assistance to maintain safe, affordable housing is well-documented. According to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), roughly 10 percent of children entering foster care in 2015 (approximately 27,000) were removed from their families at least in part due to inadequate housing (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], ACF, Children's Bureau, 2017; HHS, 2016). Research has consistently found that families experiencing homelessness are involved with the child welfare system—including investigations, open cases, and out-of-home placement—at a higher rate than low-income families that are housed, even when controlling for other factors (Dworsky, 2014).

Homelessness is defined differently by different Federal agencies. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition includes four broad categories: (1) individuals or families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (including those living in places not meant for human habitation, residing in emergency or temporary housing, or leaving an institution); (2) people who are losing their primary nighttime residence within 14 days; (3) unaccompanied youth under the age of 25 and families with children who meet other Federal definitions of homelessness; and (4) people who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence and lack needed resources or support (HUD, n.d.). More information about other Federal definitions can be found on the Youth.gov website: https://youth.gov/youth-topics/runaway-and-homeless-youth/federal-definitions.

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[1]   For more information about these grants, see Appendix B of Information Memorandum ACYF-CB-IM-17-03 at http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ACF-ACYF-CB-IM-17-03-Housing-and-Child-Welfare-COMBINED.pdf.

Not all families and youth struggling with housing concerns meet these definitions. Other housing challenges that may affect families and youth include living in housing that is overcrowded, paying an unsustainable percentage of income for rent or mortgage, or facing eviction. Unstable or inadequate housing increases the risk of children entering foster care and can delay reunification—even when housing was not the reason for out-of-home placement (Dworsky, 2014). One study found that housing problems, such as being evicted or living doubled up, increased the risk of families having an investigated report of physical abuse (Slack, Lee, & Berger, 2007). Another study found that living doubled up increased the odds of a substantiated child maltreatment report among families struggling with a caregiver's mental illness or substance abuse (Font & Warren, 2013), compared to stably housed families.

The effects of inadequate housing on child safety may be both direct and indirect. In addition to the physical dangers posed by unsafe or unstable living conditions, the resulting stress on caregivers can exacerbate these less-than-favorable conditions and lead to physical punishment, domestic violence, substance use, or neglect (Dworsky, 2014).

Addressing housing instability and homelessness directly supports child welfare's goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for children, youth, and families. Studies have shown that providing housing-related services can significantly reduce repeat maltreatment and facilitate reunification for families with children in foster care (Dworsky, 2014). Addressing family homelessness also can improve children's physical and psychological health and support improved educational outcomes (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2016).

Conversely, child welfare involvement appears to be a risk factor for later homelessness. Youth exiting the foster care system to independence face significant challenges securing a safe, stable, and affordable place to live without strong transition-planning assistance. In at least one study, half of youth living on the street reported having been in foster care or a group home (HHS, ACF, Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2016). These youth were more likely to report longer periods of homelessness compared with youth with no history of foster care. Youth formerly in foster care also have been found to stay in emergency shelters longer than other youth (Park, Metraux, & Culhane, 2005). According to the National Youth in Transition Database, 20 percent of 19-year-olds formerly in foster care surveyed in 2016 reported having been homeless at some point within the past 2 years.

It is clear that the child welfare, affordable housing, and homelessness services systems have a vested interest in working together to address crossover and prevent families and youth from becoming homeless or spending unnecessary lengths of time in the child welfare system. Working together can help all three systems achieve their goal of keeping children safely with their own families when possible and reducing homelessness while improving individual, family, and community well-being.

Barriers to Stable Housing

Two distinct child welfare populations can benefit from a collaboration between child welfare agencies and housing and homelessness services to promote housing stability:

- **Families,** including the following:
  - Those receiving family preservation or other in-home services who are insecurely housed and facing the possibility of their children being placed in foster care
  - Those facing reunification delays due to a lack of safe and stable housing
- **Youth** transitioning out of foster care

Grantee Spotlight

Child welfare-involved families connected with Housing Choice Vouchers (also known as Section 8) in the San Francisco area had considerable difficulty finding apartments to accommodate the voucher limits. The **San Francisco Human Services Agency** addressed this by developing a regional approach that focuses on working with multiple housing authorities, helping clients connect with extended family for social support, and building relationships with landlords throughout the Bay Area to better meet client needs. For more information, contact Joycelyn Everroad, San Francisco Human Services Agency, Jocelyn.everroad@sfgov.org.

In rural Mid-Shore Maryland, the generally low stock of affordable rental units creates difficulty for youth transitioning out of foster care who want to stay in the area to maintain family and community connections. The **University of Maryland, Baltimore** supported a partnership between local departments of social services and a nonprofit housing provider to create two two-bedroom units in a rehabilitated house that prioritize youth in or transitioning from foster care. For the first 2 years they are available, the units will be held exclusively for these youth. The grantee is also exploring other less traditional options for youth, including leasing spare bedrooms in larger family homes (which are more abundant than apartments in the area) to help youth develop rental history and independent-living skills while still in a semisupervised environment and otherwise partnering with community housing agencies and local landlords. For more information, contact Deborah Harburger, MSW, clinical instructor and codirector, Maryland Center, The Institute for Innovation & Implementation, University of Maryland School of Social Work, dharburger@ssw.umaryland.edu.

Securing and maintaining safe and stable housing can be challenging for families and youth involved with the child welfare system. Understanding common barriers and the strategies to overcome them, many of which will be discussed later in this bulletin, is an important element of responding to the housing needs of the families and young people served. According to Children's Bureau grantees, some of the most common **challenges impacting both families and youth** include the following:

- Cost of rent (relative to income)
- Poor match of available housing options to needs (e.g., inconvenient location, too many or too few supportive services)
- Need for flexible or short-term funding for initial housing costs, such as security deposits, first/last month's rent, furniture, and basic household supplies
- Communication barriers, ranging from lack of a phone to make calls to or receive calls from landlords to language or literacy challenges
- Impact of substance use and/or mental health concerns on the ability to maintain employment and housing
- Lack of access to vital documents (e.g., birth certificates, social security cards)[2]
- Varied and complex program eligibility requirements that create unnecessary barriers to accessing housing and related services

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[2]　The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Justice, and HHS issued a joint letter in 2016 reminding recipients of Federal funds that immigrants experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, or human trafficking cannot be turned away from certain homeless and housing assistance programs on the basis of their immigration status. The letter can be viewed at https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5123/hud-hhs-and-doj-joint-letter-regarding-immigrant-access-to-housing-and-services/. In addition, child welfare agencies are required to help youth obtain access to their own documents prior to exiting foster care.

Challenges primarily affecting families may include the following:

- Challenging rental histories (e.g., prior evictions, poor credit history, prior criminal convictions)
- Complex case plan goals or competing priorities[3]
- Limited reunification timelines

Challenges facing youth may include the following:

- Minimum age requirements for executing lease agreements
- Lack of rental and credit history
- Independent-living skills gaps
- Limited permanent connections or positive social supports
- Roommate difficulties

A standardized assessment, such as the Barriers to Housing Stability Assessment used in Hennepin County (MN) (https://www. hudexchange.info/resource/1060/barriers-to-housing-stability-assessment/) or the sample housing-status assessment tool developed by the HHS/ACF Office of Family Assistance (https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ofa/enhancing_family_stability.pdf, Appendix A) can help caseworkers identify clients' housing challenges and strengths.

Benefits of Collaboration With Housing and Homelessness Services Systems

Collaboration between child welfare agencies and housing and homelessness services providers will benefit the families and youth served. In fact, studies have shown that providing housing-related services can significantly reduce repeat maltreatment and facilitate reunification for families with children in foster care—even those for whom housing was not the reason for child welfare involvement (Dworsky, 2014).

Some child welfare agencies are able to dedicate a staff person exclusively to providing housing-related case management and assistance. This may not always be possible, though, because housing assistance provided by child welfare caseworkers is often limited by caseload demands. However, research shows that the cost of providing housing assistance to a family will almost always be less than the cost of out-of-home care (Dworsky, 2014).

Likewise, child welfare agency participation in community collaborations can further local efforts to prevent and end family and youth homelessness. Working together, child welfare and homelessness services or affordable housing agencies can help prevent an acute crisis from becoming a chronic problem. They may more quickly identify families in need of services; prevent or shorten an episode of homelessness; and address underlying issues to ensure families are stably housed and connected to supportive resources that will help them succeed in ensuring their children's future safety, permanency, and well-being.

When child welfare agencies collaborate with local housing and homelessness services systems, youth and families may benefit in the following ways:

- **Expanded expertise.** Housing professionals possess critical expertise that child welfare caseworkers may lack, including how to locate local housing options, understand various program requirements, negotiate leases, engage landlords, prevent evictions, or assist with other aspects of connecting families and youth to housing.

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[3] Searching for affordable housing requires time, transportation, energy, and resources—things that may be in short supply for families who are simultaneously trying to fulfill case plan goals.

- **Enhanced resources.** Child welfare agencies typically have access to flexible funding for housing needs, but it is generally not enough to help all youth and families in need. These resources are maximized when they can be combined with other sources of funding. For example, a child welfare agency might use its resources to purchase child-specific furniture (e.g., changing table, crib), while a housing partner spends its funds on other furniture and household items.

- **Case plan support.** Family stability is critical to resolving a family's case plan. In accordance with the Housing First philosophy, families may find it easier to meet other case plan goals once they are stably housed. Partnerships with case managers who are specifically focused on housing also can free up time for the child welfare agency to focus on other family goals.

- **Enhanced trust.** A partnership that enhances a child welfare caseworker's ability to facilitate access to concrete resources, such as housing and homelessness assistance, may help caseworkers in the essential work of building trust and engaging families and youth.

Partnering with a child welfare agency can help housing agencies and homelessness services providers achieve their goals, too. When reaching out to potential housing partners or to the homelessness services system, emphasize the ways that working with you will help them to better understand the needs of vulnerable families and youth in their communities and to identify and support vulnerable families. USICH's current Federal strategic plan has established national goals to prevent and end homelessness, including homelessness among families, youth, and children (2018).

Housing Resources to Explore

This section discusses resources that may be available in your jurisdiction. The specific programs and services your community offers may differ.

Where to Start: Housing Resources Within Your Child Welfare Agency

Before reaching out to affordable housing and homelessness services professionals in your community, it is a good idea to develop a clear understanding of the resources that your own agency brings to the table. Consider where child welfare funds may be used flexibly, in combination with other community services, to promote greater stability for the families and youth you serve. Some examples may include the following:

Housing First is an evidence-based approach, supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), to "quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements." In this approach, services are offered to promote housing stability and prevent recurrence of homelessness rather than as a precondition for housing (HUD, 2014, p. 1).

- **Title IV-B family preservation funds.** Depending on State and agency guidelines, title IV-B funding may be used for concrete assistance, such as short-term rental assistance, help with security deposits or utilities, or other related housing costs. In some communities, this short-term assistance functions as a bridge to long-term support from other sources.

Grantee Spotlight

Community Alliance for the Homeless (CAFTH) in Memphis, TN, is the lead agency for the local continuum of care (CoC) and for a Children's Bureau grant that provides supportive housing units for homeless child welfare-involved families, primarily to prevent placement of children in foster care. (For more information about CoCs, refer to the Housing Resources to Explore section.) A liaison works onsite at the housing provider agency (Promise Development) to answer child welfare caseworkers' questions about eligibility and facilitate housing referrals. According to CAFTH staff, connections to child welfare-involved families are helping the CoC better address its mandate to serve the community's most vulnerable families. Although some child welfare staff were initially hesitant about the grant's use of the Housing First approach, the project has seen positive anecdotal results in terms of cost savings and reduction of trauma to families due to separation.

For more information, contact D. Cheré Bradshaw, LMSW, executive director, Community Alliance for the Homeless, 901.527.1302, ext. 301.

- **Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention funds.** Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act authorizes a State grant program to develop, operate, expand, and enhance community-based, prevention-focused programs and activities designed to strengthen and support families to prevent child abuse and neglect. For more information, refer to https://www.friendsnrc.org/what-is-cbcap.
- **Additional title IV-E flexibility under the Family First Prevention Services Act.** The Family First Act, passed in February 2018, allows more States to opt for the flexibility to use title IV-E foster care funds to support children remaining in their own homes, an

option previously available only to a limited number of States through the title IV-E waiver process.

- **Extended title IV-E foster care funding for older youth.** The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 provides agencies the option to extend eligibility for foster care services to youth ages 18–21. These youth who quality for extended foster care may live in a range of settings to best suit their needs. For other young adults, there may be funds available through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transitions to Adulthood , which also provides funds to help current youth in foster care and young adults formerly in foster care achieve self-sufficiency through a more gradual transition to independent adulthood.

Dedicated Homeless Assistance Programs

HUD has two dedicated homeless assistance programs that may fund services in your community: the Continuum of Care (CoC) and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) programs. Because there is often not enough funding to serve all eligible households, each grantee is required to establish priorities. This means not everyone who meets HUD's definition of "homeless" or "at risk of homelessness" will receive assistance in a given community. Both CoC and ESG recipients are being encouraged to prioritize those with the longest histories of homelessness and most severe needs. This section describes the CoC and ESG programs and provides tips for working with local homeless assistance programs.

Continuums of Care

CoCs are groups made up of a diverse set of stakeholders—including homelessness services providers, public housing authorities (PHAs), victim services providers, State and local governments, school districts, and faith-based organizations—that develop and implement the community's plan to prevent and end homelessness. A CoC may address the needs of one locality (e.g., city, county) or larger regions. To find your jurisdiction's CoC, visit https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/, click "by Program" under "Find a Grantee Page," and select "CoC: Continuum of Care Program."

CoCs are responsible for providing a coordinated community response to homelessness, including identifying community needs, ensuring that resources are strategically prioritized to serve those who are most vulnerable, funding rapid rehousing of homeless individuals (including unaccompanied youth) and families, and promoting access to supportive services for long-term stability. Participating in the CoC provides the child welfare agency an opportunity to establish relationships with community partners and influence decision-making about local resources. In addition, your local CoC is a good place to start when seeking to identify the range of housing resources in your community for which child welfare-involved families and youth who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness may qualify.

CoC program funds can be used to support permanent housing (including rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing), transitional housing, supportive services, data collection through Homeless Management Information Systems, and—in a few HUD-designated "high-performing communities"—homelessness prevention. CoCs are required to coordinate closely with recipients of ESG funding.

> **Rapid rehousing** programs provide supportive services and/or time-limited financial assistance to help families move quickly out of homelessness and into permanent housing, as well as connect them to community supports to help ensure long-term stability. Services are tailored to include only those the family wants and needs. Using a Housing First approach, rapid rehousing typically does not require families to qualify based on standards of sobriety or acceptance of certain services. Most families who receive rapid rehousing assistance do not return to homelessness (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2018).

Emergency Solutions Grants Program

The ESG program provides block grants to fund a variety of activities that may include homelessness prevention, street outreach, emergency shelters, and rapid rehousing (HUD, 2018). ESG recipients are typically government agencies who in turn provide grants to local nonprofit organizations. They are required to consult with local CoCs to determine how to allocate their funding. To find your local ESG program grantees, visit https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/, click "by Program" under "Find a Grantee Page," and select "ESG: Emergency Solutions Grants Program."

Tips for Working With Local Homelessness Services Providers

The following are tips for child welfare professionals when they work with local homelessness services providers:

- **Learn about your community.** If you are new to the CoC and ESG programs, your first step should be to understand who administers these programs and how they work in your community by exploring the following questions:
  - **What is the CoC governance structure?** What are the best ways to get involved with the CoC? Is there a committee that would be particularly relevant for you to join?
  - **What is your community's strategy for preventing and ending homelessness?** What priorities have your local CoC and ESG grantee established for prioritizing program resources? In some areas, for example, the focus is on veterans; in others it is on those experiencing chronic homelessness.
  - **What other resources does the CoC coordinate?** Understanding which funding streams are already involved in the CoC process is helpful to understanding where else you might need to make connections.

- **Help to educate your CoC about the child welfare system.** It can be difficult for CoCs to understand and meet the needs of the many subpopulations of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Child welfare agencies can provide critical information about the housing needs of the families, youth, and children you serve and ensure these populations are appropriately represented in the overall assessment of community needs.

- **Help with data collection, if needed.** If youth or family homelessness is not considered a priority in your community, child welfare data can help increase community awareness of the problem. Formalizing the process of collecting and aggregating data about child welfare-involved youth and families' housing situations can help make the housing concerns of this population more apparent. Likewise, if housing and homelessness services providers are not asking about the child welfare history of the youth and families they serve, they could be encouraged to add this question to their intake forms.

Public Housing Authorities

In most communities, the PHA is the largest single source of affordable housing. PHAs are funded by HUD to administer two major programs: the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) and Public Housing programs. Your PHA may administer one or both programs. HCVs (sometimes referred to as "Section 8") may be available as tenant-based assistance, where the family uses the voucher in the private rental market (ranging from high-rise apartment buildings to single-family homes), or as a project-based voucher, where assistance is attached to a particular unit. There are approximately 3,300 PHAs around the country. Find yours at https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/pha/contacts.

Both PHA programs are limited to low-income families and individuals, and income limits vary from area to area. PHAs determine eligibility based on annual gross income, family size, and citizenship or eligible immigration status. Each PHA has discretion to establish its own preferences and priorities that reflect the community's greatest needs.

Grantee Spotlight

In 2016, the **Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF)** built the Quick Risk Assessment and Family Triage tool to gauge the severity of housing needs for families involved with the child welfare system. Originally developed to identify families for the grant project, the tool also helps generate greater understanding in the CoC about the needs of this population. For more information, contact Kim Somaroo-Rodriguez, MSW, program manager, DCF Housing and Homeless and Early Childhood Services, 860.560.7078.

Lighthouse Youth and Family Services in Cincinnati, OH, was able to advocate with its local CoC to expand data collection among homeless services providers. Intakes at all community homeless shelters now include a question about whether the individual or family has a history of child welfare involvement. This is providing an unprecedented level of data about crossover between the two systems and the scope of housing difficulties for child welfare alumni. For more information, contact Meredith Hicks, MPH, planning and policy director, Lighthouse Youth and Family Services, 513.487.7145.

For example, some PHAs might have preferences for people experiencing homelessness.

In some communities, the PHA has partnered with child welfare agencies so they can participate in HUD's Family Unification Program (FUP). This program provides HCVs targeted to families who are in imminent danger of being separated or unable to be reunified due to housing problems, as well as for young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 who were formerly in foster care and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

There is no time limitation for family vouchers; youth may receive rental assistance for up to 36 months. In addition to rental assistance, the child welfare agency must provide youth receiving these vouchers with supportive services, including those promoting skills in money management, job preparation, educational counseling, and meal preparation/nutrition assistance. Although not required, the child welfare agency may provide similar services to families receiving FUP vouchers (HUD, 2017). For additional resources on the FUP, including contact information for PHAs currently administering FUP, visit https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/family.

PHAs tend to have very long waiting lists, and in some communities, these lists may close if there are more families on the list than can be served in the near future. To learn more, watch the "PHA 101: A Guide for CoCs" webinar at https://www.hudexchange.info/trainings/courses/pha-101-for-cocs-webinar1/.

Tips for working with local PHAs include the following:

▪ **Build relationships.** Get to know key staff within your local PHA. Creating a spirit of partnership with PHA leaders supports the best chance of generating creative thinking about how the PHA's resources can support the needs of child welfare-involved families and youth.

▪ **Ask about voucher preferences.** In some communities, educating a PHA about the needs of families and youth in foster care has prompted them to establish a limited preference for a certain number of vouchers for these groups, allowing particularly vulnerable families to be housed more quickly. Even if a specific child welfare preference does not exist in your area, you may learn about other preferences, such as past military service or episodes of homelessness or domestic violence, for which some child welfare-involved families may qualify.

▪ **Think regionally.** Reaching out to PHAs in neighboring municipalities can be a useful strategy both in urban areas with high rents and in rural areas where rental options are few. Families and youth who are willing to relocate may find that a nearby PHA has a shorter waiting list, more flexible eligibility standards, more favorable preferences, or a payment standard that is more closely aligned with costs in the private rental market.

▪ **Learn PHA protocols.** Consider requesting training by housing authority staff on required steps and timeframes so that you are better equipped to make sure families, youth, and landlords know what to expect and facilitate timely completion of steps and/or extension requests, if needed.

▪ **Be aware of PHA plans.** Familiarize yourself with the PHA's HCV Administrative Plan or Public Housing Admissions and Continued Occupancy Plan. Consider participating in public comment opportunities to highlight the needs of families and youth who are involved with the child welfare system.

Grantee Spotlight

Lighthouse Youth and Family Services in Cincinnati, OH, invited the executive director of the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority to serve on a planning committee for transition-age youth. As a direct result of what he learned through his engagement in the project, this PHA administrator broached the idea of offering a preference for Housing Choice vouchers to youth emancipating from foster care. The program is now able to make 60 referrals per calendar year, providing a wonderful option for young people who are ready to obtain a safe, affordable apartment of their own in the location of their choice.

For more information, contact Meredith Hicks, MPH, planning and policy director, Lighthouse Youth and Family Services, 513.487.7145.

- **Educate the PHA about the child welfare system and court-mandated timelines.** For example, a PHA may be willing to provide a larger unit to a single mother whose children are in foster care if reunification is imminent and facilitating overnight visits will expedite the children's return home.

Other HUD-Funded Programs

Although PHAs and CoCs are significant access points for HUD funding, HUD affordable housing programs are also administered through other channels, including the following:

- **State Housing Finance Agencies (HFAs).** HFAs are State-chartered authorities established to meet affordable housing needs. They administer a range of programs, which may include Housing Choice or tenant-based rental assistance vouchers, the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, and HUD's HOME Investment Partnerships Program. Your State HFA will be able to point you to affordable housing providers and organizations in your community for outreach and relationship building. To find your State HFA, visit https://www.ncsha.org/housing-help.

- **Tribal housing offices.** As sovereign nations, Tribes receive their own Federal funding for housing. HUD's Office of Native American Programs offers more information and links to regional Tribal offices at https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/ih.

- **Privately owned subsidized housing.** Child welfare agencies also can collaborate with private multifamily housing owners that provide HUD-supported rental assistance. Search for apartments near you at https://apps.hud.gov/apps/section8/index.cfm.

Lists of local HUD grantees, by State or program, can be found at https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/.

Additional resources for low-income housing or rental assistance in your area may be found on the HUD website at https://www.hud.gov/topics/rental_assistance/local.

Grantee Spotlight

Westchester County (NY) Department of Social Services and its partner, **HOPE Community Services (HOPE CS)**, work closely with local landlords. Landlords are encouraged to attend CoC meetings (including a special landlord-tenant subcommittee) to learn more about community programs serving vulnerable individuals, as well as to share their own experience and perspectives. Learning about landlords' concerns has been a great benefit to relationship-building, as well as to helping staff model more effective landlord communication for program youth.

For more information, contact Carole Troum, executive director, HOPE CS, 914.636.4010.

Private Landlords

Most landlords share a few primary interests: They want stable tenants who will pay rent on time, protect the property from damage, and get along with neighbors. You will be most successful if you keep those interests in mind as you work to establish relationships with them.

Tips for partnering with private landlords include the following:

- Explain how the case management and other services provided by your agency help families and youth remain stably housed

- Invite landlords and representatives from property management companies to attend CoC and other community meetings with you

- Ask for testimonials from landlords with whom your agency has partnered successfully in the past.

- Invest your energy in building relationships with landlords who own units where families and youth want to live

This publication is available online at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/bulletins-housing/.

- With your client's consent, be frank about individual or families' difficult rental and credit histories, the causes of past problems, and how your services can help prevent them from recurring

- Be a resource for conflict resolution.

- Serve as a liaison with the local PHA, helping to obtain answers to landlords' questions about voucher eligibility, inspections, payments, and timelines

Collaboration Tips

As a frontline caseworker or supervisor, your ability to promote collaboration between child welfare and affordable housing and homelessness services systems may be limited. In an ideal world, child welfare agencies would be able to dedicate staff to this important work. This is not always possible, however, and your work is necessarily limited by caseload demands. However, there are steps you can take. You may want to share with coworkers the following ideas for how collaboration between child welfare and housing and homelessness agencies can be supported at a systems level:

- **Invest.** In the child welfare system, where considerable energy is devoted to handling daily crises, it can be difficult to find the time and energy to attend meetings, engage new partners, and think about systems change. Changing the way housing needs are integrated into work with families and youth requires a champion within the child welfare agency who is passionate about the cause and has time to dedicate to this effort. Likewise, if the needs of child welfare-involved families and youth are to be acknowledged in community conversations about housing priorities, child welfare must have someone at the table to voice what is needed. It is also beneficial to have staff who are willing—and allowed sufficient time—to set up meetings, review funding opportunities and write grant proposals, reach out to colleagues in other jurisdictions for ideas, and engage in other "boots on the ground" activities to move partnerships forward.

- **Expand.** Helping all families and youth in your community become and remain stably housed requires a broad-based, community-wide commitment to address the multifaceted reasons for housing

Grantee Spotlight

HOPE Community Services (HOPE CS), in partnership with **Westchester County (NY) Department of Social Services**, provides housing to youth transitioning from foster care in group apartments with a combination of private and shared spaces. For some youth, this is a reality check—although youth might prefer to live alone, program staff explain that having roommates is a common experience for young people in their 20s.

The roommates live in a unit that grows and learns together. They develop skills such as how to pay bills, be a good neighbor, and maintain an apartment. House rules are negotiated among the youth themselves. This helps them learn to coexist peacefully with others with different backgrounds, preferences, and needs. When conflicts arise, peer mentors and other program staff are available to support them.

For more information, contact Carole Troum, executive director, HOPE CS, 914.636.4010.

instability. Be creative about additional partners who can help address family and youth needs, including churches, parent-teacher organizations, shelters, family resource centers, legal services, schools, and the business community. Welcome all sectors and assure them of your commitment to protect children, empower youth, and keep families together.

- **Communicate.** Although child welfare, homelessness services providers, housing agencies, and other community partners all want to improve community well-being, their immediate priorities and approaches can sometimes look quite different. For example, an agency operating on the principle of Housing First may advocate for a move to housing placement more quickly than is comfortable for a child welfare agency whose mission is to ensure the best possible situation for a child's long-term safety and permanency. It is

important to set aside preconceived notions about partners' motives and be transparent about one's own priorities, agency protocols, and timelines. Keeping the needs of youth and families at the center of the discussion can help encourage flexibility and avoid conflicts. One way to do this is to involve housing and homelessness services providers in family team conferences, when appropriate and desired by the family.

- **Integrate.** Strategies such as cross-training and colocation are important to the success of your collaboration. Cross-training can help ensure all providers are skilled in trauma-informed practice. Housing providers who understand that trauma may play a role in certain behaviors (such as not paying rent on time or refusing to answer the door) will be more suited to help. Anyone in contact with families should receive this training, including facilities and administrative staff. Due to frequent turnover, training should be offered on a regular basis. Hosting a housing liaison onsite at the child welfare agency (and likewise, placing child welfare staff in a housing location) will facilitate referrals and provide faster answers to questions about eligibility and timelines. These face-to-face interactions are a critical part of building durable, meaningful relationships between partners.

Conclusion

We know from research and experience that safe, stable, and affordable housing is critical to the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being. The current Federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness highlights the importance of housing stability: "Home enables our families, friends, and neighbors—indeed, everyone in our nation—to have a platform from which they can pursue economic opportunity. Having a home provides people with better chances for succeeding in school and advancing their careers. It also allows them to take care of their health, build strong families, and give back to their communities." (p. 3). For more information,

Grantee Spotlight

Four Oaks, a nonprofit child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health agency headquartered in Cedar Rapids, IA, partnered with the local child welfare agency to provide supportive housing for families experiencing both homelessness and child welfare involvement. Many of the families served face co-occurring challenges, including substance use, domestic violence, and mental health concerns, so close collaboration among community partners has been critical to the project's success. Service coordination—including a single point person coordinating care plans and needed services—along with family team decision-making helps to ensure family plans are community coordinated and realistic. In addition, all partners were invited to a "Day in the Life" training, where they were assigned to family units and experienced simulations of some of the barriers that client families face daily. This training generated community dialogue about how systems could be streamlined to better meet family needs.

For more information, contact Kelli Malone, chief program officer, Four Oaks, 319.784.2143.

see *Home, Together: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* at https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Home-Together-Federal-Strategic-Plan-to-Prevent-and-End-Homelessness.pdf. Identifying and partnering with your local housing and homelessness services providers can further mutual goals and help to build a more supportive community where children, youth, and families can thrive.

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