

KENTUCKY YOUTH ADVOCATES PRESENTS

# FOSTERING CONNECTIONS:

The Housing Landscape for Foster Care  
Alumni and Recommendations

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## Introduction

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Everyone needs a safe, stable place to call home; however, a short supply of housing has made this increasingly difficult for Kentucky's young people. This issue brief aims to shed light on the critical housing needs of young adults ages 18-28 in Louisville, Kentucky. The brief offers a particular focus on foster care alumni, young adults who spent time in foster care as children, a group disproportionately affected by homelessness and housing instability. Drawing from up-to-date research and interviews, we aim to provide an overview of what is currently in place, the largest housing challenges facing young adults, and the existing gaps within current support systems.

A previously released report, *Fostering Connections: Actions Needed to Prevent Homelessness Among Foster Care Alumni*, showed the adverse outcomes affecting foster care alumni and issued recommendations to mitigate these outcomes, specifically preventing homelessness.<sup>1</sup> These recommendations include expanding affordable housing options for young adults with a foster care experience, providing access to housing vouchers such as the Family Unification Program (FUP) and Foster Youth to Independence (FYI), enhancing resource sharing and awareness, and streamlining processes to expedite housing access. The following brief was developed by Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA), and funded by the Jewish Heritage Fund (JHF), to further the conversation in Louisville, Kentucky as it relates to homelessness among foster care alumni.

## What's in Place

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The current landscape of housing options and supports for young adults, particularly those with a history in the foster care system, reflects a patchwork of services aimed at addressing various aspects of housing instability. However, the effectiveness and reach of these services vary, leaving significant gaps in the safety net intended to support this vulnerable population.

### Existing Housing Options

- *Public Housing and Housing Choice Vouchers:* Public housing and Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs), also known as Section 8, represent foundational elements of the housing support system for low-income individuals, including young adults. However, the availability of these options often falls short of demand, with long waiting lists being a common barrier.
- *Specialized Youth Housing Programs:* Programs like the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) and projects funded through the Continuum of Care (CoC) provide targeted support for homeless youth in Louisville. These programs, while crucial, are limited in scope and capacity.
- *Transitional Living:* In some regions of the state including Louisville, programs offered by nonprofit organizations provide temporary housing and support services aimed at helping young adults, including those leaving foster care, transition to independence. While valuable, they often have strict eligibility criteria and limited slots.



<sup>1</sup>Kentucky Youth Advocates (2023). *Fostering Connections: Actions Needed to Prevent Homelessness Among Foster Care Alumni*. Available at <https://kyyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Fostering-Connections.pdf>.

## Existing Housing Supports for Young Adults

- *Navigation Services:* Navigation services help young adults understand and access available housing resources. Despite their importance, there is a notable shortage of housing navigators, leaving many young adults to navigate complex systems independently.
- *Support for Maintaining Housing:* Services that help young adults maintain housing, such as rental assistance, utility subsidies, and eviction prevention, are available but often under-resourced relative to the need.

## Existing Supports for Foster Care Alumni

- ***Kentucky Resources for Independence, Success & Empowerment (KY RISE) website and app:*** Specific supports for foster care alumni designed to ease the transition out of care, such as educational and employment assistance, life skills training, and access to mental health services. However, gaps remain in awareness and accessibility of these supports.<sup>2</sup>
- ***John Chafee Independence Program:*** The Chafee program provides funding to support youth who are in foster care or and young adults who have left foster care in their transition to adulthood. Housing support in Kentucky is offered to young adults who aged out of care at 18 and is coordinated through the Independent Living Coordinators.<sup>3</sup>
- ***Project LIFE:*** Project LIFE provides one year of rental assistance and case management to foster care alumni who aged out of care and are between the ages of 18 ½ to 23.<sup>4</sup>
- ***Family Scholar House:*** The Riverport Scholar House campus in Louisville provides homes to up to 32 foster care alumni, and offers a broad range of services for residents and non-residents in the community.<sup>5</sup>

## Legislative

- The Kentucky General Assembly recently convened a Housing Task Force to study the current supply of housing in Kentucky and create recommendations to increase supply and affordability.

## Identified Problems

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Several challenges have been identified when reviewing the current housing crisis and its effect on young adults and foster care alumni. By identifying these issues, we aim to lay the groundwork for understanding the depth of the problem and the necessity for comprehensive, informed solutions to support this vulnerable population effectively.

### Growing Homelessness

- The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) waitlist for young adults in Louisville continues to grow or stay stagnant, highlighting a pressing need for immediate action. Despite available resources, the waitlist's length underscores systemic delays and barriers to housing access for vulnerable youth, including foster care alumni.

<sup>2</sup> Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. KY RISE: Kentucky Resources for Independence Success & Empowerment. Available at <https://prd.webapps.chfs.ky.gov/kyrise/>.

<sup>3</sup> Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. Independent Living Programs. Available at <https://www.chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dcb/dpp/oohc/Pages/independentliving.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. *Aftercare Services*. Available at <https://prd.webapps.chfs.ky.gov/kyrise/Home/AftercareServices>

<sup>5</sup> Family Scholar House. *Affordable Housing*. Available at <https://familyscholarhouse.org/service/affordable-housing/>

## Significant Delays

- There are significant delays in securing housing, with only enough HCVs for one in four eligible families.<sup>6</sup> Even with a voucher in hand, the process of finding a housing unit to accept the voucher and having the Public Housing Authority (PHA) inspect the unit causes additional delays. Young adults also report a lack of supportive services to navigate the complex housing landscape, leading to prolonged instability.



## Instability for Families

- The instability experienced by young adults, particularly those with children, has far-reaching implications. Homelessness and housing insecurity significantly disrupt family units, affecting children's education, health, and overall well-being, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and instability. Additionally, almost one in four Kentucky families reported to the Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) has unstable housing as a risk factor.<sup>7</sup>

## Economic and Workforce Impact

- The economic impact of young adult homelessness extends beyond individual hardships. Data shows that over 14% of Kentucky's young adults aged 16-24 are opportunity youth - young adults disengaged from both work and education.<sup>8</sup> This disengagement limits their economic potential and poses broader implications for the local economy and workforce development.

## Gaps in Services

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Despite the existing framework of housing support, critical gaps hinder the system's effectiveness in fully addressing the needs of young adults, particularly those aging out of foster care.

### Insufficient Housing Choice Voucher Availability

- The demand for HCVs significantly surpasses the available supply of vouchers, leading to extended waiting times for recipients. This shortage leaves numerous young adults in a state of uncertainty, struggling to find stable, long-term accommodation.

### Limited Acceptance of Housing Choice Vouchers

- There's a notable shortage of housing units and landlords willing to participate in the HCV program. This reluctance often stems from misconceptions about the program's requirements or concerns over administrative burdens. As a result, even with a voucher in hand, many individuals and families face significant challenges in finding landlords who accept HCVs. This can lead to families and young adults being displaced from employment, school, and social connections, especially those without adequate transportation.

<sup>6</sup> Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Policy Basics: Projects Based Housing. Available at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/policy-basics-project-based-vouchers>

<sup>7</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. *Child Maltreatment Report: 2022*. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cm2022.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Social Science Research Council. Measure of America: Youth Disconnection in America. Available at: <https://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/#State>

## Shortage of Housing Navigators

- The lack of housing navigators exacerbates the complexity of accessing housing support. Many young adults find themselves overwhelmed by the intricate web of requirements, deadlines, and paperwork, leading to missed opportunities and prolonged homelessness.

## Recommendations

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To tackle the housing needs of young adults, especially those transitioning from foster care, KYA held a housing summit in Fall 2023 with a group of community members who identified priority areas for action. These are tailored to create a more accessible, efficient, and supportive housing system that meets the unique needs of this vulnerable population.

### ➤ Increase the Number of Affordable Housing Units

- Advocate for one-time state investments and federal earmarks designated explicitly for developing affordable housing units accessible to young adults, especially those with foster care experience. This would include constructing new units and renovating existing structures to increase housing stock.



### ➤ Create a Young-Adult-Specific Shelter and Increase Transitional Housing

- Advocate for one-time state investments and federal earmarks to support establishing and operating young-adult-specific shelters and transitional options (such as emergency hotel stays), ensuring they are equipped to meet the unique needs of young adults, including workforce support and child care. The development of these shelters and transitional housing options can serve as a bridge until permanent housing can be secured.

### ➤ Improve Access to Housing Choice Vouchers

- **Resume Utilization of FUP vouchers:** Work with Louisville Metro Housing Authority (LMHA) and DCBS to resume using available FUP vouchers to increase the overall utilization to at least 90 percent. Housing authorities generally need a 90% FUP utilization rate to request Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) vouchers.
- **Request FYI Vouchers for Louisville:** Work with local and state agencies, such as DCBS, to request FYI vouchers for Louisville to address the current shortfall and meet the growing demand among foster care alumni.
- **Reform Waitlist Process Requirements:** Implement reforms to the federal waitlist process to make it more responsive to the needs of young adults, including prioritizing those at the highest risk of homelessness.
- **Simplify Access to Vouchers:** Streamline the application and approval process for housing vouchers in Louisville, making it easier for young adults to navigate the system and secure housing more rapidly.

## ▶ Increase Landlord Participation in Voucher Programs

- **Engage Landlords:** Have the Louisville Metro Government host outreach programs to educate landlords on HCV benefits and address misconceptions, focusing on consistent rental income and the program's reliability.
- **Offer Incentives:** Provide incentives for landlords at the local and state levels, such as tax credits, guaranteed rent timelines, and a fund for potential property damages.
- **Support Services:** Develop a support system for landlords featuring dedicated liaisons for assistance, educational resources on navigating the HCV program, and streamlined property inspection processes.
- **Marketing Campaigns:** Implement targeted marketing strategies to highlight the benefits of participating in the HCV program, using testimonials from satisfied landlords.

## ▶ Expedite and Simplify Processes with Vouchers to Speed Up Moving into a Rental Unit

- **Improve Support on Finding Rental Units:** Enhance programs that assist voucher holders in finding suitable housing, including expanding housing navigation programs that help young adults access housing support.
- **Streamline Housing Inspections, Approval, and Recertification Processes:** Work with local housing authorities to expedite the inspection and approval processes for apartments, reducing delays and making it easier for voucher holders to move into their new homes. Additionally, simplify the recertification process to ensure that paperwork issues do not delay payment to landlords.



## ▶ Create More Peer-to-Peer and Mentor Supports

- The need for this tangible and intangible resource is undeniable, based on input from foster care alumni. Organizations like Orphan Care Alliance and programs like True Up help to support a sense of belonging and create conditions that assist young adults with feeling less alone.

## Conclusion

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By implementing these recommendations, Kentucky can significantly improve the housing landscape for young adults, particularly those with experience in the foster care system. Each recommendation aligns with the broader goals of increasing housing availability, improving access to existing programs, and streamlining bureaucratic processes to ensure that young adults can secure stable, affordable housing as they transition to independence.