

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

DATE: November 15, 2010

POLICY # SSA #11-11

TO: Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Assistant Directors, Local Departments of Social Services

FROM: Carnitra D. White, Executive Director
Social Services Administration

RE: Family Unification Program (FUP) Guidelines

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: In-Home Services, Out-of-Home Placement Services
(Foster Care Services) and Transitioning Youth Services

ORIGINATING OFFICE: Out-of-Home Placement

ACTION REQUIRED OF: Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Dorchester, Frederick,
Garrett, Kent, Prince Georges, Somerset, Talbot,
Wicomico, and Worcester Counties

REQUIRED ACTION: Implement policy and procedures for FUP-eligible
families and youth

ACTION DUE DATE: Immediately

CONTACT PERSON: Deborah Ramelmeier
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FAMILY UNIFICATION PROGRAM

The Family Unification Program (FUP) is a collaborative effort between the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (MD DHCD) and the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) to provide adequate housing to promote family unification. FUP provides Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) to assist families with children in out-of-home care who have not been able to reunify with their children due to lack of permanent and adequate housing; families displaced by domestic violence in preventing the unnecessary removal of children from their families; and, eligible former foster youth. It is designed to enable families and youth to lease or purchase decent, safe and sanitary housing that is affordable in the private housing market.

Each year in Maryland nearly 650 youth ages 18-21 exit foster care. Within 12 to 18 months of exiting care, some of these youth will face homelessness or will be forced to rely on public assistance. The FUP vouchers allow youth to rent housing from a private landlord and pay as little as 30 percent of his/her monthly adjusted gross income towards rent and utilities. Housing assistance via the FUP vouchers for youth is available for a maximum of 18 months.

In August 2009, Maryland received 100 HCVs from the State Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to help families and youth in the following ten counties Allegany, Caroline, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Kent, Somerset, Talbot (excluding the towns of Easton and St. Michael's), Wicomico, and Worcester who are covered by the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DHR and DHCD. In August 2010, Maryland received an additional 85 HCV's for Calvert and Prince Georges Counties. It is expected that approximately 20 percent of these vouchers will be used to assist former foster youth, ages 18-22, in obtaining stable housing.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for referring families and youth for FUP vouchers. This policy directive discusses the eligibility requirements, referral process, case management services, and tracking.

ELIGIBILITY, REFERRAL and SERVICES:

A. FAMILY

1) FUP Family Eligibility Requirements

A family is eligible for services if they;

- Have been deemed by the local department of social services as a family 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 in the delay of discharge of a child or children to the family from out-of-home care; and
- The public housing agency (PHA) has determined the family is eligible for a housing choice voucher. A family can be eliminated from eligibility if a household member has a criminal history, is on the Maryland Sex Offender Registry, or has an outstanding balance from previous participation in a Department of Housing program or a history of being evicted from such a program.

2) Responsibilities - Referrals

Local Department of Social Services responsibilities:

- Identify eligible families for FUP.
- Complete a referral packet for each family.

Referral Packet

- Form A (cover letter and the list of referrals);
- Statement of Customer Rights and Responsibilities (DHR/SSA 2033);
- Certification of FUP Eligible Family/Youth (DHR/SSA 2034); and
- Form C.
- Submit packet to the local Public Housing Authority (PHA).
- Send copy of Form A to DHR/SSA.

DHR/SSA Responsibilities:

- Forward list of all referrals to DHCD; and
- Track all referrals by jurisdiction.

DHCD and Public Housing Authority Responsibilities:

- Shall compare the lists of names provided by LDSS to the PHA/HCV waiting list;
- Assist any family on the PHA/HCV waiting list that matches with the LDSS list in the order of their position on the waiting list according to PHA policy;
- Place any family referred by LDSS not on the PHA/HCV waiting list on the waiting list;
- If PHA/HCV waiting list is closed, open a waiting list to accept referrals for families not currently on list;
- Determine if families with children on its PHA waiting list are living in temporary shelters or on the street and may qualify for FUP, and refer applicants to LDSS; and
- Notify LDSS of approval/denial on FORM C.

3) Family Case Management Services

For each certified family with a child or children at imminent risk of placement in out-of-home placement:

- LDSS shall develop and implement a service plan with the participation of the family to address the needed housing and supportive services;
- LDSS will remain involved with the family until the family is stable in their living situation and lack of housing no longer presents a risk for placement for the children outside of the home (active child welfare involvement is not a requirement for the family to maintain FUP eligibility once the family has “leased up”); and
- All program requirements for In-Home services shall be met.

For each family with a child or children in out-of-home care:

- LDSS shall develop and implement a service plan with the participation of the family. The service plan shall include the anticipated date of the child or children’s return to the parent, and a list of the housing and supportive services needed to facilitate the return;
- LDSS will remain involved with the family until the child returns home, any court related activity is completed, and/or any risk of out-of-home placement is eliminated (active child welfare involvement is not a requirement for the family to maintain FUP eligibility once the family has “leased up”); and
- All program requirements for Out-of-Home services shall be met.

Example of Supportive Services:

- Crisis Intervention;
- Case management/counseling;
- Child care;
- Adult education ;
- Parent skill training;

- Job development and training;
- Mental and physical health care;
- Substance abuse treatment; and
- Client advocacy.

4) CHESSIE

Families that have no active case that are in need of FUP services must have a service case created in CHESSIE. The CHESSIE service case can be opened as a Service to Families with Children/Family Preservation. All families that require FUP services must have an active CHESSIE service case with a program assignment. To document that the families received FUP services, the worker must create a service log entry in MD CHESSIE for either Agency Provided or Referred Services. If the Agency is providing the service then the service log entry is Agency Provided- Housing Assistance/ FUP voucher received. If the family is being referred to a community service vendor, a Referred service log entry has to be created and the service entry is Housing Assistance/ FUP voucher received (Non-Paid). The vendor must have the service structure of Housing Assistance/ FUP voucher received (Non-Paid).

B. YOUTH

1. Youth Eligibility Requirements

A youth is eligible for services if he/she;

- Is a former foster youth between the ages of 18-21;
- Left care at age 16 or older;
- Does not have adequate housing; and
- Meets PHA's eligibility requirements for a Housing Choice Voucher.
- For youth exiting care on their 21st birthday, a referral can be made 120 days prior to their 21st birthday.

2. Responsibilities - Referrals

Local Department of Social Services responsibilities:

- Identify eligible youth for FUP.
- Complete a referral packet for each youth.
 - Referral Packet Form A (cover letter and the list of referrals);
 - Statement of Customer Rights and Responsibilities (DHR/SSA 2033);
 - Certification of FUP Eligible Family/Youth (DHR/SSA 2034); and Form C

- Submit packet to the local Public Housing Authority (PHA) Send copy of Form A to DHR/SSA.

DHR/SSA Responsibilities:

- Forward list of all referrals to DHCD; and
- Track all referrals by jurisdiction.

DHCD and Public Housing Authority Responsibilities:

- Compare the lists of names provided by LDSS to the PHA/HCV waiting list;
- Assist any youth on the PHA/HCV waiting list that matches with the LDSS list in the order of their position on the waiting list according to PHA policy;
- Place any youth referred by LDSS not on the PHA/HCV waiting list on the waiting list;
- If PHA/HCV waiting list is closed, open a waiting list to accept referrals for youth not currently on the list;
- Determine if youth on the PHA waiting list are living in temporary shelters or on the street and may qualify for FUP, and refer applicants to LDSS;
- Notify LDSS of approval/denial on FORM C.

3. Case Management Services

An individual service plan shall be developed between the worker and FUP youth to assess and address the youth's ongoing service needs. The youth shall sign the service plan; commit to attend counseling/training sessions, and agree to take other appropriate actions needed for his/her successful transition from foster care.

Case management services shall be provided for a period not less than 18 months to a youth who is receiving a FUP voucher. Case management services shall include;

- Basic life skills information/counseling;
- Counseling on compliance with rental lease requirements and with HCV program participant requirements;
- Job preparation and attainment counseling; Educational and career development counseling concerning attainment of GED; and Reasonable assurances to owners of rental property to assist FUP youth in renting a unit with a FUP voucher.

Example of Supportive Services:

- Crisis Intervention;
- Case management/counseling;
- Child care;

- Adult education;
- Parent skill training;
- Job development and training;
- Mental and physical health care;
- Substance abuse treatment; and
- Client advocacy.

FUP-eligible youth ages 18-20 that are in the care and custody of the State shall receive case management services from their foster care worker. FUP-eligible youth ages 18-20 that are no longer in the care and custody of the State but are receiving After Care Services shall receive case management services from the After Care worker. FUP-eligible youth ages 18-22 who are not in care nor receiving After Care Services shall receive case management services from the In-Home Services worker.

4. CHESSIE

All youth that require FUP services must have an active service case in MD CHESSIE with a program assignment of either Out-of-Home or Independent Living. To document that the youth received FUP services, the worker must create a service log entry in MD CHESSIE for either Agency Provided or Referred Services. If the Agency is providing the service then the service log entry is "Agency Provided- Housing Assistance/FUP voucher received". If the youth is being referred to a community service vendor, a Referred service log entry has to be created and the service entry is "Housing Assistance/ FUP voucher received (Non-Paid)". The vendor must have the service structure of Housing Assistance/ FUP voucher received (Non-Paid).

C. LDSS Assistance with Application for FUP Voucher - All

Irrespective of whether an applicant for FUP is a family facing an out-of-home placement of a child, a family not able to receive a child back in the home, or a child transitioning to independence from foster care, an In-Home or Out-of-Home worker shall:

- Explain the FUP program and application process to the client;
- Assist the client with completing the FUP application process including reviewing all documents prior to their submission to the Housing Authority for accuracy and completeness;
- Attend the initial interview with the client and the representative of the Housing Authority including providing transportation for the client should it be needed;
- Attend the follow-up interview with the client and the representative of the Housing Authority including providing transportation for the client should it be needed. It is at this meeting that the client will receive a housing voucher and information regarding potential sources for housing; and
- Assist the client with identifying and securing housing appropriate to their needs. This includes assisting the client with an on-line search for housing at www.MDhousingsearch.org and other resources known in the community. Clients should be provided transportation to potential sources for housing should it be needed and the worker should assist with any negotiating needed if requested by the client.

TRACKING

The local department shall submit a quarterly report to DHR/SSA using form DHR/SSA 2035 by the 15th calendar day after the closing of the quarter.