

Child Welfare 101 Webinar Transcript

Foster Youth to Independence Webinar Series

August 17, 2021

- Jie: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to welcome you to today's webinar. We're excited to kick off this brand new Foster Youth to Independence Webinars Series. Today, is part one of the series covering the topic of child welfare. I'm your host, Jie Dong from BCT Partners. Before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the ongoing support from HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing that made this series possible. Lastly, I'd like to thank you for taking time away from your busy schedule to participate in today's session. Next, I'd like to go over some housekeeping items. During today's session we'll ask you to use the chat box at the bottom-right corner of the screen to input your questions, comments, and feedback throughout the presentation and during a Q and A at the end. If you experience any technical difficulties, please send me a direct message so that I can help you troubleshoot the issue. We'll also be taking several live polls during the presentation. Please follow the instructions on the screen to access Mentimeter on your mobile device or on your computer to participate in the polls. Now, I'd like to introduce you to our panelists. First, my colleague from BCT Partners, Ms. Abigail Alfred. Abby is our in-house child welfare specialist, who has years of experience working directly with county and state level child welfare agencies, as well as the Children's Bureau. The other panelists we have is Ms. April McMullen. Our consultant will live experience. April is a current FYI voucher holder whose insights and live expertise help guide the development of this webinar series. As we anticipate some of the attendees of this webinar series having questions pertaining to the actual voucher guidelines and administration, we also have Mr. Ryan Jones, Ms. Michelle Daniels and Ms. Celia Carpentier from HUD Office of PIH serving as panelists. They will answer those questions and provide additional clarification directly. Now, without further ado, I now kick off the presentation by going over the agenda. In today's webinar we'll cover the general purpose of child welfare. We'll discuss the relevant child welfare legislations. and lastly we'll shed a light on the experience of youth in foster care. By the end of the session, we hope you will gain a better understanding of how child welfare works, the policies and funding relevant to the FYI voucher program and the unique challenges and needs of the FYI target population. For those who are new to the FYI Voucher Program, as well as those who need a refresher, here's a brief introduction slide that covers the purpose of the program, the length of the program, and specifically the eligibility criteria. As you can see, the program serves youth who are at least 18 years and not more than 24 years of age. Youth who left foster care or will leave foster care within 90 days in accordance with the transition plan described in section 475 of the Social Security Act or youth who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless at age of 16 or older. I'll give everyone a minute to digest the information here before we take a live poll. Now, please follow the instructions on the screen to access mentimeter.com via your computer browser, web browser or mobile device. Once you get to mentimeter.com, enter the code 2029 2637. 2029 2637. You should see the first poll question. And the question is, what's the first word that comes to mind when you think of child welfare? We'll give folks several minutes to participate in the poll. Again, the code is 2029 2637. I'll put that code number again in the chat so everyone can access it. We have 47 folks actively participating in the poll which is great. Give another minute before we proceed to the next section of the presentations. Thank you to everyone who

responded to the first poll question. Now I'll turn it over to my colleague, Abby, to lead us through the next section of the presentation. Abby.

- Abby: Thanks, Jie. So it's clear from your poll responses that many of you have some idea of what child welfare systems do, but we'll start with a quick overview of why child welfare systems exist and how they work. So first off it's important to realize the child welfare systems are complex and specific procedures vary widely by state. Further, the child welfare system is not a single entity rather it's comprised of many organizations in each community working together to strengthen families and keep children safe. Public agencies, such as departments of social services or child and family services often contract and collaborate with private child welfare agencies and community-based organizations to provide services to families. These agencies and groups of services make up a child welfare system that's designed to promote the wellbeing of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families. The primary responsibility for child welfare is with the states but the federal government supports states through funding and legislative initiatives. Each state has its own laws that define abuse and neglect, the reporting obligations of individuals and the required state and local child protective services agency. And now we're going to turn it over to April, to walk us through an overview of the child welfare process as children and families experience it.

- April: Hello all. So on this slide, you will see a visual representation of the child welfare process and I'm going to go through it in detail a little bit. So in the first box, we have the investigation, which is when a community is concerned about a child and family they bring that family to the attention of child protective services. This usually looks like calling a hotline and it might come from a school, a neighbor or a doctor or someone else close to the child. Child protective services will then do an investigation to determine if the child is in danger or risk of being harmed. The next step in this child welfare process is to support the families. If child protective services determines if there is a risk to the child, they will introduce services to support families. The goal is always to keep families together when possible and provide services that will help eliminate stresses that create risk factors. The next step is to provide temporary shelter. Sometimes it's determined the risk to a child is great enough that the child needs to be removed from their home and given temporary shelter to keep them safe. At this point, a child may be placed in foster care or with a family member who can care for them at this time if they can be at home with their parents. The next step is to seek to return children to families or find other permanent arrangements. When a child has been removed from their home, the goal is always to return them when possible, if not, then they look for other permanent options like adoption. Youth eligible for the FYI Program usually have not been able to return home and other permanent arrangements like adoption have not been found or have not been considered an option. For many youth like me and others who are eligible for the FYI, youth in care, we're moved to independent living arrangements as young as like 12 years old. Caseworkers often move youth toward independent living because adolescents 12 and older are often harder to find foster homes for and there are lower chances of being adopted. It can be really challenging to find permanent placements for older youth which highlights how important the FYI initiative is. And I'll talk more about the experiences of going through the system a bit later in this webinar. For now, I'm going to turn it back over to Abby who will talk about the child welfare legislation.

- Abby: Thank you, April. before digging into specific laws related to child welfare, it's important to understand the legal structure of child welfare. As I mentioned before, the primary responsibility for child welfare services sits with the states and each state has its own legal administrative structure and programs to address needs of children and families. But to be eligible for federal funding under certain programs, states must comply with federal requirements and guidelines. A number of laws since the 1970s have been implemented that have had a significant impact on state child protection and child welfare services. Legislation requires federal departments and agencies. For example, the Children's Bureau to issue or amend federal policy and regulation. New legislation also prompts responses at the state level, including the enactment of state legislation, development or revision of state agency policy and regulations and implementation of new programs. The largest federally funded programs that support state and tribal efforts for child welfare, foster care, and adoption activities are authorized under Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. So next we'll review some key pieces of legislation that relate most directly to the FYI initiative and the population it serves. We'll start with the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, which provided eligibility guidelines for youth receiving independent living services. This Act provided supports to young people who are at risk of aging out as well as financial resources for needed independent living services up to age 21. These services vary by jurisdiction, but usually include financial education, mentoring, post-secondary preparation and tutoring. This legislation also created the National Youth in Transition Database, which provides researchers and policymakers with administrative data on service utilization and survey data on young people's experiences transitioning out of care. Next, we will look at a key piece of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act of 2001 that was geared toward the population of the FYI initiative. So this Act authorized a voucher program known as the ETV voucher, as part of the Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program to provide education and training, including post-secondary training and education to youth who've aged out of foster care. This provides up to \$5,000 each year for youth to attend an institution of higher education. Again, for youth who have aged out of foster care. Next, we'll talk about the fostering transitions to success and Increasing Adoptions Act. So this act which was passed in 2008, provided additional federal guidance and expanded funding to states that extend foster care past age 18. It enabled older youth to remain in foster care through their 21st birthday if, one, they were enrolled in high school or a post-secondary education program, two, they're employed or participating in an employment training program or three, they were unable to meet either of those two criteria due to a disability. Notably, this Act allows states to decide whether to use federal funds for extended foster care. And the last specific piece of legislation we'll touch upon today is the Family First Prevention Services Act which was passed in 2018. This Act amended the age eligibility requirements of Chafee to include all youth ages 14 to 23, who are either in or have aged out of foster care. This is intended to encourage states to provide independent living services to young people regardless of whether they're involved in extended foster care. So each of these pieces of legislation has impacted child welfare, particularly older youth in care and has implications for the FYI initiative. So let's move to the next slide. So first off, federal legislation has provided extended supports for youth of older age, in and aging out of foster care. Second, as you're determining need in your community, it's important to understand that youth participating in a Title IV-E foster care program are not eligible for the FYI initiative. This is because these youth are entitled to receive or have paid on their behalf, a Title IV foster care maintenance payment to cover the costs of food, clothing, and shelter among other costs. So supplementing Title IV-E foster care with this housing voucher is not permitted. However, youth receiving ETV

funds, which are the funds mentioned a bit earlier for education and training, up to \$5,000 a year, may be eligible for FYI assistance if they meet eligibility requirements and are not receiving Title IV-E foster care funds. The National Youth and Transition Database that was established under Chaffee in 1999, can be a valuable resource for understanding and determining the need in your state for FYI. And we'll get more into using data to determine needs and success in a webinar later in this series. Lastly, public child welfare agencies are responsible for determining the eligibility for FYI, but there must be a shared understanding between PHAs and the public child welfare agencies. So now I'll turn it back over to Jie to lead us in another poll.

- Jie: All right, folks, again, please get back to Mentimeter. I will go ahead and advance the Mentimeter poll to the next question you should be seeing on your screen. What resources do you leverage to support FYI youth, including local state or federal funds, as the next poll question. Again, the code is 2029 2637. We'll give folks several minutes to participate in this poll here. Also, we have some comments coming in from the chat. Folks are saying once the FYI youth obtain housing, another resource is helping them obtain furniture with furniture vouchers. That's a great response, thank you. It's great to see folks indicating that they're leveraging partnerships with local organizations to support the target population's needs. As the next webinar session we're going to be delivering on, it's solely going to be on partnership building and maintenance. So I encourage folks to tune in for that one as well. Oh, there's a question coming in from the chat. What is the overriding eligibility criteria, Title IV-E or extended foster care? Example, they're in extended care, but not receiving a IV-E funds. Would they still be eligible for FYI?

- Ryan Jones: And this is Ryan Jones. I think what that question, what we would like to do at HUD is take that question back and look at our frequently asked questions to see if we've responded to that question and if we haven't we can provide an answer on there so that we make sure we are providing the most up-to-date current information to you.

- Jie: Thank you, Ryan. We have some other comments coming in. In Hawaii foster board for caregivers who care for foster children doesn't pay for their own living expenses, like the cost of housing, utilities and et cetera. The extended foster care program extends the board to young adults who have exited foster care with the cost of housing to not allow young adults to access both resources, make the young adults 18 to 24 ineligible for vouchers. Thank you for sharing that. All right. In the interest of time, we will go back into our presentation. I will leave the poll running so that if you need additional time to complete poll, you can do so but we're going to return to the presentation and all of the questions here in the chat we will evaluate them during our polls check, as well as provide detailed answers later on via email. And there's a general question concerning the copies of the slide deck being shared afterwards. Just so folks are aware this entire webinar series is being recorded and we will post the webinar content as well as the transcripts to hudexchange.com when the webinars series wraps up. And for tomorrow's peer to peer convening, we will send out a link to all of the attendees today so that you can join us tomorrow afternoon for the discussion as well. And now we will return back to the presentation and I'll hand it back to April and Abby.

- April: So on this slide we have like a direct statement from me when I first met Abby and Juul. So it says, the first month in my apartment I was nervous. It was my first time not being bounced

around where I had a solid foundation. I finally had a place to stay on my own. That statement just brings up a lot of good moments and memories. You could go ahead and move on to the next slide for me. First off, I just wanna highlight how important it is to understand why this program exists and the particular experiences of youth who have been in foster care to really administrate it well. This program was developed because youth who age out of the foster care system often have negative experiences and difficult outcomes and providing housing for these youth is an important component of trying to prevent some of these negative outcomes from happening. That's because young people who leave foster care unprepared to live on their own are at risk of becoming homeless soon after discharge. According to NYTD data, 27% of 21 year olds surveyed in 2018 reporting experiencing homelessness within the past two years. And beyond homelessness though, often connected to it, young people who age out of the foster care system are more likely than other youth to, one, be involved with the justice system, two, develop substance dependence, three, become pregnant by 21 years old. And for the fourth one, experience unemployment. To understand why these outcomes are so prevalent with this population it's helpful to understand the experience of youth while in foster care. I'll go ahead and tell you a bit about my own personal experience to help illustrate what it's like for those of us who have gone through the foster care system. But it's important to keep in mind that my experience is going to be different from other youth experiences but very similar. With that said, there are some common threads and trends that are common among youth in care that I'll highlight. As an individual who has been in the child welfare system I would say my experience is varied from good and bad. Starting off, my team which consists of a caseworker and GAL were not... They were totally not understanding my hopes and aspirations towards my future of independent living. They were only interested in advocating for what they felt was best and what was in my best interest so this caused me to go from placement to placement and some of these placements were not the best for me. So like many youth in foster care, I had limited opportunities to make decisions for myself. I had to constantly advocate for myself to access resources that I thought would benefit me. They were just never presented to me in a manner like, oh, this is available if you wanna take interest in it. So I had to gain my own connections and find my own resources. Basically my caseworker was not very good at that because we weren't seeing eye to eye and I sometimes lacked direction and I really had to figure that out because I didn't have a parental figure in my life. I also, like too many youth was forced to move homes multiple times and switched schools. My connections were constantly lost and I don't know if you've ever had to personally experience starting over, but like that was my wife for the whole time in foster care. It was a constant battle of starting over. These broken connections and constant movement caused me to have feelings of being lost which is a very common emotion foster care youth experience which can lead to a lack of trust in relationships, including with service providers who claim that they're there to help you. My team eventually started to listen to me and began to develop a true relationship with me. When this happened, things in my life began to become good. I was given access to Chaffee, which is an important independent living support group Abby mentioned earlier, I was given the opportunity to expand my horizon by participating in these groups on top of groups facilitated by another local organization called Casa. They listened to me about my opinions on placement options and I eventually found one that was permanent. In some ways, my experiences are very representative of other youth experiences in and out of the foster care system. But it's also important to keep in mind that every youth has different experiences depending on where they came from, where they are located in foster care, what resources are available and presented to them, their caseworker, and

many other factors, dictate what experiences a youth is going to have. And then you want to flip to the next slide. The experiences we have in foster care have important implications for the FYI initiative. First off, this initiative is important and necessary. It helps keep youth like me from becoming homeless and giving us a place to live and a sense of stability that we never experienced before. Building trust leads to better outcomes. As you're building your programs, you should be thinking about how to engage youth in self-sufficiency services. You'll have better outcomes with more youth engaging in services that will help them become self-sufficient if you start with building trust. That solid foundation between you and your client is very important. And one of the key ways to begin building trust is to work to understand the unique experiences and needs of individuals in your program. As I said, many of us have similar experiences, but within each community and each individual experiences vary. Start by understanding those you're working with and serving. It's also important to keep in mind that the needs for this target population differ than other populations served by PHAs. This is a young population who largely doesn't have adult support systems and has never lived on their own. So, our needs navigating the voucher process and moving into our new home likely differ from many of the other people PHAs are serving. And there are many more things to think about as you're administrating this initiative. So for each part of this webinar series, we will emphasize and elaborate on approaches to engage and meet the unique needs of this target population. But for now, I'll turn it back over to our lovely Abby.

- Jie: Abby, did you have anything to add before we take another poll?

- Abby: Nope. It's all you, Jie.

- Jie: All right. Sounds good. So, folks again, we're going to go back to Mentimeter for the next poll I will advance, we're polling. All right. Now, the question on your screen should be showing, for those who have been administrating the FYI voucher, what have you learned by interacting with and serving this target population? Again, the code is 2029 2637. We'll give folks several minutes to input their answers. And as folks are taking time to participate in this poll, I'd just like to remind you all that we will send out the link for you to join and participate in the peer to peer convening tomorrow, where we will again share the response of the poll questions today to get us into a very lively discussion of how we can all collaborate and contribute to the collective success of the FYI Voucher Program. While folks are participating in the poll, I will also go back to the chat to see if there are any comments and questions missed. Earlier, Ryan was stating that questions regarding eligibility that may depend on state dependent implementation of foster care will need to be evaluated on a case by case basis. That was a one comment that we missed. Again, your comments will be shared with all of the panelists following this session and we will provide clarification either via email or in the subsequent webinar sessions. Another comment we missed earlier is from Lynn Pasama, forgive me if I butchered your name. She indicated that the vouchers versus EFC is a big issue also for FYI now to allow partners to reside with their children is another big barrier to use this voucher. Thank you, Lynn, for that comment there. There is a question in a poll that indicated why there is a limit to the length of the voucher. Ryan, I don't know if you would like to talk about the sunseting part of the voucher program. I think that may bring some clarification to folks on the length of the voucher program.

- Ryan: Yeah. Happy to. So the 36 month limit on assistance is provided by statute. However, this year in the 21 Appropriations, there was passage of the Foster and Stable Housing Opportunities Act, which HUD will be providing more information on shortly this fall in terms of enactment of the act. But what it does is allows for the extension of assistance for youth, whether they're participating in the FYI program or family unification program will allow for the extension of assistance for youth that are participating in a family self-sufficiency program, or meet some other eligibility or exclusion of categories and I will be going out with a federal register notice. Early this fall, they will explain implementations of FSHO who are really looking forward to seeing young people have the ability to take advantage of additional length of assistance on their voucher through the FSHO. So how do we be communicating more information about that? Again, the 36 month was a creature of statute. HUD did not make that determination.

- Jie: Hey, Ryan, I believe you also was sending a response to all of the panelists but that was meant to go out to all the attendees stating that FYI eligibility includes pregnant and parenting youth, correct?

- Ryan: That's right.

- Jie: All right. We will give it a minute before we advance this next poll here. Some really great responses and answers coming in. Thank you guys. We did have another question from Jamie Newfeld. With the 36 months limit, is that consecutive or cumulative?

- Ryan: Cumulative. So, based on the... So let's use an example where someone is under housing assistance payment contract for a year. For some reason, they go off or they're not assisted for a certain amount of time, say a year goes by, they still are eligible to receive an additional two years of experience. And I would point people to HUD's webpage, the Foster Youth Independence webpage. There are a series of FAQ's answering some of these questions including that specific question, and we can post a link to that in the chat.

- Jie: Thank you, Ryan. Tanya, sent a message to me stating, perhaps in the future those in the FYI program could get priority for section eight programs that don't have time limits. Thank you, Tom and Tanya for submitting that comment. All right. In the interest time... I think Michelle just a posted a link to the FYI Voucher Program to everyone in the chat. So you can feel free to access that. In the interest of time let's go ahead and go to the next poll. On your screen now you should see, for those thinking about applying for the FYI voucher, how would you incorporate this target population's experiences in your program? Thank you, April for sharing your experience that hopefully get folks that think about how they can be more mindful of the challenges and needs of the target population. So we'll pause here for folks to enter their response for this last poll question. And we got another comment from Marie stating, I believe that some county section eight programs will put an FYI youth name on the waiting list for section eight at the time they were approved for FYI housing so that when that time runs out, they're already on a list. Thank you for that comment. Yeah. Again, we're seeing a lot of comments. They're talking about the partnership with the PC database and community based supportive services agencies. So be sure to tune into the next webinars session on partnership development and maintenance. We'll give it another minute before we go to the Q and A section

of the presentation. There's some really insightful comments and responses being provided here which we'll certainly lift up in tomorrow's peer to peer convening. We have a comment, actually a questioning in a chat from Sarah Allen, is the FYI fund pool the same as section A fund pool? I'll direct that to Ryan.

- Ryan: The funding that we use to operationalize the foster youth to independence initiative is funding that is appropriated specific for this use and only for this use. So it is only available to be made available by HUD to public housing agencies that are partnering with child welfare agencies that will be serving youth. So in the appropriations, there was specific amounts that were made available for this population.

- Jie: Thank you, Ryan. Thank you Sarah, for asking that question. In the interest of time, I wanna reserve some space for folks to ask questions and, you know, post your comments to any of our panelists here assembled today. So I will stop the Mentimeter. Actually, I will leave the Mentimeter poll if you need more time, but I'll go back to our presentation again. Alrighty. So thank you for participating in the polls today. Now, this takes us to our last section of the presentation, which is our Q and A session. So feel free to use the chat function again, to post your questions and your comments and feedback to any of our panelists here today. And April, not sure if you're seeing this but someone shouted you out earlier, you know, actually giving us a credit for including you in the development of this webinar. So thank you. Thank you to Tanya again. and thank you to Any questions regarding the child welfare legislations and policies that Abby talked about earlier? I have not seen any new questions show up yet. I'll give folks another minute. There is a question from Lynn, in exploring the EFC issue, if the stipends are not used for rental slash housing, would it be okay to issue the vouchers? Ryan, would you like to take that question?

- Ryan: Again, going back to what we said before, I think we would have to see particularly by state what... I think we would need more details and information on what the eligible uses of the funding is so that we can provide an opinion.

- Jie: Okay. Thank you. Ryan. Second question here, are there any plans to connect with child welfare directly to get feedback on how the program is working or not working?

- Ryan: No. This is Ryan again, you know, that's a really great idea. You know, we at HUD collaborate with our partners at Department of Housing. Excuse me, at HHS, Health and Human Services on a regular basis on our Family Unification Program and Foster Youth Independence initiative. And I think that's something we can bring up with our partners the next time I meet with them to get that feedback from our child welfare partners. So thank you for that.

- Abby: I would also just add to that and I think it's a great idea for that to be happening at a more macro level. Just so you all know, so for our process in developing a webinar series, we spoke to several PHAs as well as several public child welfare agencies, to be able to form all this material based on the experiences that both public housing agencies are having and from the child welfare perspective. So while that's not looking at it from a high level of how is it going across the country per se, it was our way of collecting information, gathering insights and real world perspectives and experiences to inform this series.

- Jie: Thank you, Abby. I think Lynn was chiming in and saying that they include young people in their HUD meetings as well. So, a lot of engagement whether that's what the PCW or the actual target population is actually happening on the local level. Any other last minute questions? I know there's a general question about access to presentation slides. Yes, we will definitely post the slides and a recording of this webinar series, entire series, on cloud exchange when we wrap up this series. You would definitely get a copy of the slide deck. And Brooke is stating that in Hawaii, the independent living provider is managing the program and DHS only verifies eligibility. Thank you, Brooke, for that comment. All right. I want to be able to get folks out of here within an hour so if there are no other questions, I will go ahead and close out this webinar. First webinar session here. Thank you for participating in today's webinar. For the attendees who are interested in learning more about child welfare and exchanging ideas and best practices with others, I encourage you to participate in a peer to peer discussion tomorrow at 2:00 p.m Eastern Standard Time. We will send out a follow-up email shortly that will include a link for you to join tomorrow's conversation. We encourage you to reply to the email message if you can't join tomorrow but need further clarification on what was covered today, or have additional questions or comments. This entire webinar series is being recorded and the recordings along with a copy of each presentation will be posted on HUD Exchange at the conclusion of the series. Thank you again, and this will conclude today's session. We look forward to seeing you at the next session on September 21st at 2:00 p.m Eastern Standard Time, where we will cover the topic of partnership development and maintenance. Have a great rest of your day, everyone. Thank you. Bye bye now.