



# Housing for Young Adults in Extended Federally Funded Foster Care

## Best Practices for States

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**For many decades, child welfare agencies, with few exceptions, only served children. State responsibility for the safety and well-being of youth in foster care ended at age 18 (or 19, at the state’s discretion, in the case of youth who were completing high school). In 2008, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act by giving states the option to extend the age of eligibility for federally funded foster care to 21. Although some states already had similar state-funded programs, the change in federal policy provided states with financial support to allow young people to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday.**

For states to qualify for Title IV-E reimbursement, young adults in extended federal foster care (EFFC) must meet at least one of five eligibility requirements:

- completing high school or a program leading to an equivalent credential
- enrolled in postsecondary or vocational education
- participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment
- employed at least 80 hours per month
- incapable of doing any of the above because of a medical condition

States have considerable latitude with respect to how they define each of these criteria and how they verify if young adults are meeting at least one.

Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia have extended or are in the process of extending federally funded foster care to age 21.<sup>1</sup> Because some of these states have large foster care populations, a majority of youth in foster care nationally can now remain in care until their 21st birthday. Child welfare agencies are now increasingly responsible for the care and supervision of young adults whose developmental needs are qualitatively different from those of young adults under age 18. That responsibility includes providing young adults in foster care with a safe, stable, and developmentally appropriate place to live.

To be eligible for EFFC, young adults must be placed in foster family homes, child care institutions, or supervised independent living settings. Placements in foster family homes and child care institutions must meet the same state licensure or approval standards that apply to placements for children under age 18. Rather than issuing regulations describing the kinds of living arrangements that could be considered independent living settings and how those settings should be supervised, the US Department of Health and Human Services encouraged states to innovate and develop a range of supervised independent living settings to meet the needs of young adults moving toward independence as long as those settings could “be reasonably interpreted as consistent with the law.”<sup>2</sup> States also have discretion to establish safety protocols and determine whether supervised independent living settings will require licensure or approval.

Several factors contributed to the extension of eligibility for EFFC: an evolving understanding of normative development, growing knowledge about the challenges faced by youth in foster care during the transition to adulthood, and changing attitudes about the state’s responsibilities as parent when children are removed from their homes. Equally important may have been empirical evidence that allowing youth to remain in foster care beyond age 18 results in improved young adult outcomes (Courtney 2009; Courtney and Dworsky 2006; Courtney, Dworsky, and Pollack 2007).

If young adults are to benefit from EFFC, a continuation of the same services and placement options available to youth age 17 and under is unlikely to be the best approach. Rather, EFFC should reflect what we know about the developmental needs of young adults, including the need to make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes. This, in turn, requires a shift away from approaches that prioritize protection, the traditional focus of child-serving systems, toward those that promote normative young adult development and increased independence.

Central to this shift are housing options for young adults that are both developmentally appropriate and responsive to their diverse needs. A one-size-fits-all approach will almost certainly not suffice, but it

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<sup>1</sup> As of February 2018, states with federally approved plans included Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, as well as the District of Columbia. Tennessee and West Virginia limit EFFC to young adults completing high school or pursuing postsecondary education, and Wisconsin limits EFFC to young adults completing high school.

<sup>2</sup> “Guidance on Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008,” US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, July 9, 2010, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/pi1011.pdf>.

remains unclear what specific mix of housing options should be made available and whether different housing options are appropriate for different young adults. There are large gaps in our knowledge of best practices for housing young adults in extended care, the housing options currently available to those young adults, and how those options vary across and within states. This brief begins to address these knowledge gaps. It is based on information gathered from a purposive sample of officials from public child welfare agencies in states that have extended federally funded foster care to age 21 and from a group of stakeholders who attended a convening on the topic. After describing our methodology, we summarize what we learned and offer suggestions for future research.

## Methodology

To address these questions, a team of researchers from the Urban Institute and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago looked at the nine states with the largest number of young adults in EFFC: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. Team members contacted each state's public child welfare agency, identified the people best positioned to talk about the housing options available to young adults in EFFC, and invited them to participate in telephone conversations about those options. Officials from eight of the nine states participated in these conversations, which covered the following topics:<sup>3</sup>

- How do child welfare agencies approach housing young adults in EFFC?
- What types of housing are available?
- What are the eligibility criteria?
- How is housing related to the services young adults in EFFC receive?
- What is the role of private agency contractors in housing young adults?
- How is housing for young adults in EFFC funded?
- How and by whom are decisions made about housing young adults in EFFC?
- What challenges does housing young adults in EFFC present?

The information gathered through these conversations was summarized and used to generate questions related to five major themes that were the focus of a convening held in Washington, DC, in November 2016 (table 1).

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<sup>3</sup> We talked with child welfare officials from California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, and Oregon. We did not speak with child welfare officials from Pennsylvania, who indicated that there would be as many answers to our questions about housing options for young adults in EFFC as there are counties in the state because Pennsylvania has a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system.

TABLE 1

**Major Themes Surrounding Extended Federal Foster Care and Related Questions**

| <b>Themes</b>                          | <b>Questions</b>  |
|--|---|
| Housing options                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What housing options are currently available to young adults in extended federal foster care (EFFC)?</li> <li>▪ What are the perceived gaps in those housing options?</li> <li>▪ How are housing options constrained by eligibility criteria and housing availability?</li> </ul>  |
| Engagement and decisionmaking          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How and by whom are decisions made about where young adults in EFFC live?</li> <li>▪ To what extent are young adults involved in decisionmaking?</li> </ul>  |
| Supportive services                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do the agencies that provide housing to young adults in EFFC also provide supportive services?</li> <li>▪ Is the availability of supportive services contingent on housing type or housing provider?</li> </ul>  |
| Organization of child welfare services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Who decides what housing options are available to young adults in EFFC?</li> <li>▪ What incentives exist to serve or not serve young adults who live in certain areas (e.g., urban, rural) or who have special needs?</li> <li>▪ How are housing providers held accountable for helping young adults in EFFC achieve positive outcomes?</li> </ul> |
| Potential evaluation questions         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What evaluation questions related to housing young adults in EFFC should the field address?</li> </ul>   |

The convening was attended by research team members, federal project officers and other federal agency staff, state and local child welfare agency officials (primarily from the participating states), staff from private child welfare agencies that serve special populations (e.g., pregnant and parenting young adults, young adults with serious mental illness, etc.), and two young adult consultants who had formerly been in foster care.<sup>4</sup> The convening generated a rich discussion that confirmed and enhanced what we had learned from the phone conversations and raised additional issues that had not previously surfaced. What follows is a synthesis of what we learned from the state officials and the major themes that emerged during the convening.

## What Types of Housing Options Are Available to Young Adults in Extended Federal Foster Care?

Based on our conversations with state child welfare agency staff, we identified three primary types of housing for young adults in EFFC (table 2). Note that not every housing option is available to every young adult or in every jurisdiction.

<sup>4</sup> The convening was attended by child welfare officials from three states (Illinois, Indiana, and New York) and two counties (Allegheny County, PA, and Los Angeles County, CA). It was also attended by staff from several private child welfare agencies including Aspiranet, Lighthouse Youth and Family Services, San Diego YMCA Youth and Family Services, Thresholds, and UCAN/Teen Parenting Service Network.

TABLE 2

**Housing Options for Young Adults in Extended Federal Foster Care**

| Category                               | Examples  |
|--|---|
| Family-based settings                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Foster family homes</li> <li>▪ Relative foster homes</li> <li>▪ Therapeutic or treatment foster homes</li> </ul>   |
| Group or congregate care settings      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Group homes</li> <li>▪ Residential treatment facilities</li> <li>▪ Transitional living in clustered or single-site apartments</li> </ul>   |
| Supervised independent living settings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Scattered-site apartments               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Alone or with roommates</li> <li>▪ Private market or agency owned</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Host homes</li> <li>▪ College dorms</li> </ul> |

All of these housing options existed in one form or another before the Fostering Connections Act. However, supervised independent living settings are unlike the other housing options listed in table 2 in that they are primarily intended for young adults in EFFC. As states have extended eligibility for federally funded foster care to age 21, a range of different supervised independent living models have emerged. At one end of the spectrum are child welfare agencies that own or manage apartment buildings for young adults in extended foster care. At the other end are agencies that take a hands-off approach and expect young adults in EFFC to find their own apartment on the private market. In between are agencies that cultivate relationships with landlords and property managers, help young adults find their own apartment, or cosign leases.

Young adults in supervised independent living may be encouraged to share housing with roommates to reduce their housing costs and because having a roommate will likely be necessary after they leave care. In jurisdictions with high housing costs, young adults in supervised independent living may have little choice because even a studio apartment would cost more than the monthly stipend they receive.

Jurisdictions that offer shared housing as an option often impose restrictions on the people with whom young adults can live. Restrictions can be imposed directly, by prohibiting young adults from living with a biological parent or a boyfriend or girlfriend, or indirectly, by requiring roommates to pass a criminal background check. However, these practices are not universal. For example, Indiana allows young adults in EFFC to choose their roommates, reasoning that those are the types of decisions all young adults need to learn how to make.

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**BOX 1****Placement Alternative Contracts in Illinois**

In Illinois, young adults in EFFC who want to choose their roommates may enter into a placement alternative contract to live in a placement of their choosing if (1) the living arrangement meets the safety requirements, (2) the young adult identifies an advocate who will assist them with their goals, and (3) the young adult completes a self-sufficiency plan. The contract is for 90 days and can be renewed if the young adult is making progress toward their goals. Young adults with a placement alternative contract receive services and supports related to the activities outlined in their self-sufficiency plan as well as a \$300 monthly stipend.

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**Housing Options for Special Populations**

Special populations, such as young parents and young adults with developmental disabilities or serious and persistent illness, may require intensive services and supports in whatever setting they are housed. These unique needs can pose a major challenge to housing young adults in extended foster care. In some jurisdictions, the child welfare agency contracts with providers who specialize in housing these young adults. Housing providers that work with these young adults often focus on facilitating the transition from child-serving systems to adult-serving systems and on teaching young adults to function with less supervision and more independence. Similarly, young parents may require a different housing model, one that addresses their housing needs and provides additional parenting supports. Several convening participants suggested that there is an unmet demand for housing options for these populations.

## What Factors Affect the Type of Housing in which Young Adults in Extended Federal Foster Care Live?

Decisions about the type of housing in which young adults in EFFC live appear to be driven by many factors related to child welfare agency policy and practice, housing provider offerings, and the preferences and needs of young adults (table 3).

**TABLE 3****Factors Affecting Housing Decisions**

| <b>Category</b>                       | <b>Factors</b>  |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Child welfare policies and practices  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Housing options allowed by law or regulation</li><li>■ Eligibility requirements</li></ul>                                 |
| Housing provider offerings            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Number of available slots</li><li>■ Cost and market conditions</li></ul>  |
| Preferences and needs of young adults | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Role of young adults in decisionmaking</li><li>■ Service needs</li></ul>  |
| Information                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Caseworker knowledge about housing options</li><li>■ Information provided to young adults about housing options</li></ul> |
| Incentives                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Stipends offered by housing providers</li></ul>   |

## Child Welfare Policies and Practices

The housing options available to young adults in EFFC vary by jurisdiction. Differences exist across states and across counties within the same state, especially in states with county-administered child welfare systems. Child welfare policy also affects the types of housing available by establishing eligibility requirements for certain housing options. Eligibility requirements are most commonly associated with supervised independent living and are intended to ensure that young adults in these settings can reasonably be expected to live successfully on their own. Examples include criteria related to age, educational attainment, and employment or income, as well as a demonstrated readiness to live independently.

## Housing Provider Offerings

Housing providers may play as important a role in determining housing options as public child welfare agencies. The housing options a provider offers are likely to be shaped not only by the provider's experience and expertise but also by market conditions. Offering a particular type of housing might not be a worthwhile investment given existing payment rates, especially in major urban areas where housing costs are high. Alternatively, providers may have little incentive to invest in developing housing options in rural areas with low concentrations of young adults in EFFC. If providers in a given county decide it is not in their best interest to offer a particular housing option, that option will not exist for young adults in EFFC in that county. For example, at the end of 2010, New York City's Administration for Children's Services ended its Supervised Independent Living Program (SILP), but SILP apartments are still a housing option for young adults elsewhere in New York State.

Housing options are also affected by how the supply of a given housing type compares to demand for it and the contracts housing providers have with the public child welfare agency. A provider's contract (and in some cases, the physical space available) limits the number of young adults they can serve.

Different housing providers may also offer different packages of services and supports. Young adults may shop around for the provider that best meets their needs or that has housing options in a community where they want to live. Young adults may also be influenced by other provider offerings, such as financial incentives. In California, for example, competition for the finite pool of young adults in EFFC has led some supervised independent living providers to offer a larger stipend than required by the state. Young adults may choose a housing provider because of the larger stipend and not because the provider offers the supportive services they need. To prevent the size of stipends from driving housing decisions, a group of independent living providers in San Diego County agreed to standardize the stipends they offer.

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## BOX 2

### Transitional Housing Program-Plus Foster Care in California

Transitional Housing Program-Plus Foster Care (THP+FC) is a new placement option for young adults that was created as part of California's own Fostering Connections to Success Act. THP+FC providers can offer young adults supportive services and three types of housing (host family, single site, or remote site). However, California's child welfare system is county administered, and some counties have elected not to pay for THP+FC. Additionally, a number of rural counties have no THP+FC providers. This may be because those providers have little incentive to serve a sparsely populated area with few young adults in EFFC.

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## Preferences and Needs of Young Adults

How states and counties decide the type of housing in which young adults will live varies, as does the extent of young adults' involvement in decisionmaking. Some jurisdictions hold formal case conferences or planning meetings with various stakeholders. In other jurisdictions, caseworkers consult various stakeholders informally and make a recommendation or reach out directly to housing providers.

Engaging young adults in the decisionmaking around housing is not as simple as asking them which option they prefer. Young adults may not always consider how different housing options might affect their goals. For example, a young adult may want to live in his or her own apartment but can only afford an apartment an hour away from their job or school. Some housing providers work backwards, first asking young adults about their goals and then using those goals to identify the best housing option. In other cases, a young adult's housing options may be limited by "non-negotiables" such as a need for substance abuse or mental health treatment.

Just how much agencies consider the housing preferences of young adults seems to vary widely. Some jurisdictions largely, if not wholly, exclude young adults from decisionmaking. Housing decisions are made by caseworkers and then presented to young adults. Other jurisdictions allow young adults to fully participate in decisionmaking and make the final choice, even if that choice is not what the agency believes to be in their best interest. In between are jurisdictions in which the child welfare agency involves young adults in decisionmaking but ultimately makes the final decision based on what it believes to be in their best interest.

## Information

Ideally, decisions about where young adults in EFFC live would be made after considering all available housing options and the advantages and disadvantages of each. In practice, decisions are sometimes made by caseworkers or young adults without complete information. Caseworkers, particularly those whose caseloads include children of all ages, may be unaware of all the housing options available and inadvertently make decisions based on incomplete information or provide incomplete information to their clients. Caseworkers may also intentionally limit the information they share with their clients (e.g.,

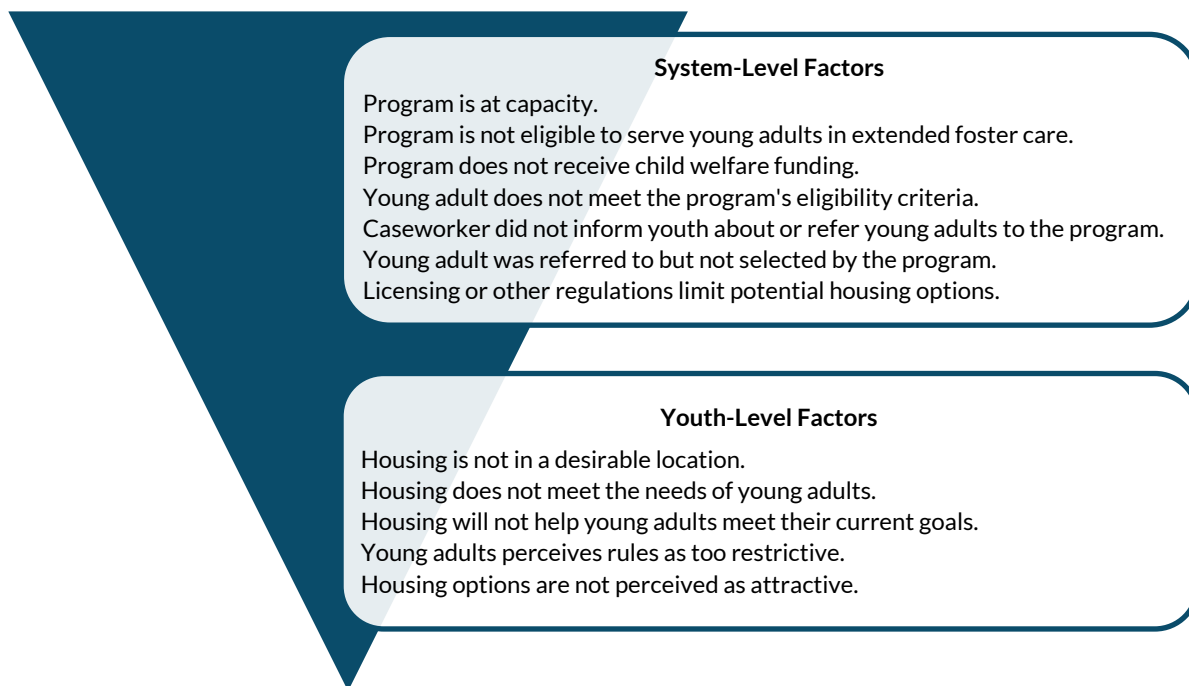


by providing information about some options but not others) to steer them toward a particular choice. Additionally, young adults in EFFC are not wholly dependent on their caseworkers for information about their housing options. Information provided by their peers, which may be inaccurate or incomplete, may also influence their housing preferences.

Figure 1 lists some of the factors that limit the housing options available to young adults in EFFC.

FIGURE 1

### Factors Limiting Housing Options Available to Young Adults in Extended Federal Foster Care



## How Is Housing Related to Case Management and Supportive Services for Young Adults in Extended Federal Foster Care?

The provision of case management and supportive services to young adults in EFFC has two primary goals: to help them maintain stable housing and to prepare them for life after they leave EFFC. Case management services are provided to all young adults in EFFC regardless of their housing type. Caseworkers are required to have an in-person meeting with young adults in EFFC at least once a month. Caseworkers must help their clients develop a personalized transition plan that includes options for housing, health insurance, education, employment services, and other supports.

Caseworkers must also connect young adults in EFFC with community-based supports. This requires that they be familiar not only with the developmental needs of their clients but also local

service providers and resources. Some jurisdictions are implementing a specialized case management model that limits the caseloads of certain child welfare workers to only young adults in EFFC. One example is Indiana’s Collaborative Care model, which was designed to be more flexible than traditional case management.

Young adults in EFFC may receive a variety of supportive services in addition to case management. These supportive services can be divided into two categories: universal services provided to most, if not all, young adults and targeted services only provided to young adults with specific needs. Universal services would include basic life skills training aimed at promoting the development of both concrete skills, such as budgeting, and “soft skills,” such as decisionmaking and stress management, which some young adults in EFFC lack. Targeted services would include parenting supports for young adults with children or treatment for young adults with mental health or substance abuse problems.

However, some supportive services are linked to housing. For example, housing and supportive services may be packaged together for young adults with developmental disabilities or serious and persistent mental illness. Moreover, although all young adults in EFFC are supervised, the amount of supervision they receive and the frequency of in-person contact with their caseworkers or other staff can vary depending on where they live. Generally speaking, young adults who live in single-site or group settings, where staff are present around the clock and may even live on site, receive more intensive supervision and experience more frequent in-person contact than young adults who live in scattered-site settings.

Housing providers may also provide supportive services to prevent young adults from engaging in behaviors that could lead to their eviction. This may be especially important for young adults with substance use disorders, whose risk of engaging in disruptive behaviors is especially high because of the deleterious effects of substance use on the developing brain. In some cases, housing providers may proactively rehouse young adults who act irresponsibly or repeatedly violate rules rather than risk damaging their relationship with a landlord or property manager.

## What Challenges Does Housing Young Adults in Extended Federal Foster Care Present?

Housing young adults in EFFC presents the child welfare system and the practitioners who work directly with young adults with several challenges. Some of these challenges are related to the supply of housing, and others are related to the transition from EFFC to independent living.

### Market Conditions

High housing costs and low vacancy rates are among the most commonly cited challenges facing housing providers in major urban areas. In many communities, developers have little incentive to build housing that young adults in EFFC can afford. A lack of affordable housing in safe neighborhoods may

force young adults to live with one or more roommates or live farther away from school, work, and the services they need.

## **Shortage of Subsidized Housing**

Some public housing authorities give preference to youth formerly in foster care on their public housing or Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 waiting lists. However, this practice is the exception rather than the rule. Public housing and Section 8 waiting lists are very long in many jurisdictions, and some public housing authorities have closed their lists to new applicants. In those jurisdictions, subsidized housing is not a viable option for young adults in extended foster care.<sup>5</sup>

## **Resource Gaps in Rural Areas**

Inadequate resources, not high housing costs, is the challenge facing housing providers in rural areas. These providers often have few community-based organizations to partner with and little incentive to invest in housing for young adults if there are relatively few young adults to serve. Rural areas often lack services and supports, particularly for special populations such as young adults who are parenting or who identify as LGBTQ. Many also lack a public transit system, making it difficult for young adults in EFFC to work or attend school unless they own or have access to a vehicle.

## **Reluctance of Landlords to Rent to Young Adults**

Many landlords and property managers may be reluctant to rent an apartment to a young adult, particularly if he or she has no rental or credit history, limiting the supply of housing for young adults in EFFC. Thus, it is critical that housing providers develop and maintain relationships with landlords or property managers willing to rent to young adults in EFFC. Some providers do this by engaging in outreach through landlord forums or other activities and by being responsive to landlord concerns. An innovative strategy being used in Minnesota is to offer a course in good tenancy to young adults in EFFC. Those who complete the course earn a certificate, which may make them more attractive as potential tenants.

Although landlords and property managers are probably more willing to rent to a young adult in EFFC if they know there is a housing provider they can call if problems arise, providers may still be hard pressed to find housing for several populations of young adults. These include young adults with mental health or substance abuse problems, young adults with a history of juvenile or criminal justice system

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<sup>5</sup> The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program is the primary source of federal funding states use to prepare youth in foster care for the transition to adulthood. The Foster Care Independence Act, which created the Chafee program in 1999, specified that states could spend up to 30 percent of their Chafee dollars on “room and board for young adults ages 18 to 21.” According to the Administration for Children and Families’ Children’s Bureau’s *Child Welfare Policy Manual*, that provision applies not only to former foster youth who were still in care on their 18th birthday but also to 18- to 21-year-olds who remain in foster care voluntarily.

involvement, and young adults with a history of sexually acting out (particularly if they are registered sex offenders).

## **Optimal Level of Structure, Supervision, and Support**

Providing young adults in EFFC with housing that offers them the optimal level of support, supervision, and structure is a balancing act. Too much and young adults will miss out on opportunities that are part of normative development. Not enough and they may engage in risky behaviors or make decisions that cause them serious harm. Moreover, the optimal level is different for different young adults and changes over time as they develop and mature.

## **Facilitating a Gradual Transition**

States use different approaches to facilitate the transition to adulthood for young adults in EFFC. One approach is to provide a consistent level of housing and supportive services to young adults in EFFC until the day they “age out.” An alternative is to provide housing and supportive services in a way that facilitates a more gradual transition. This approach is exemplified by the “safety net” year now being used in some states, including Indiana. Beginning on their 20th birthday, young adults remain in EFFC but are expected to pay for an increasing percentage of their rent and other living expenses, to decrease their receipt of home-based services provided by the child welfare system, and to explore the use of community-based supports. This approach helps young adults become more independent while remaining eligible for any services and supports they might need from the child welfare system.

## **Sustainability of Housing**

Housing young adults in EFFC in safe and well-resourced communities with easy access to public transit, work, and school can lay the foundation for a successful transition to adulthood. In the long run, however, this is probably not sustainable, particularly if those young adults are living in high-cost urban areas with little affordable housing available in safe and well-resourced communities. It can also disconnect them from the communities in which they have been living and have developed a network of social supports. The alternative is to encourage young adults to choose housing in communities that may be less safe and have fewer formal resources but are within their budget and thus allow them to “transition in place.”

## **Learning to Navigate Adult Service Systems**

To increase engagement of young adults in EFFC in services, some child welfare providers deliver services to young adults in their homes. Although this leads to higher rates of engagement, it may be doing young adults a disservice in the long run if it prevents them from learning how to navigate the community-based adult systems and institutions some young adults may eventually need to access services.

## Best Interest versus Expressed Interest Standards

Currently, child welfare agency decisionmaking is largely governed by a “best interest standard.” Decisions are based on an assessment of what is needed to protect children against harm. This is the standard used when caseworkers or other child welfare professionals make decisions about housing for young adults without involving them and without regard for their preferences. The alternative is to apply an “expressed interest standard,” where the preferences of young adults drive decisionmaking. This would involve giving young adults in EFFC the information they need to make their own decisions about housing. Although young adults may sometimes make poor choices about where or with whom they live, learning from mistakes is a critical part of normative development. An expressed interest approach would also make the experiences of young adults in EFFC more similar to the experiences of their peers outside the child welfare system and the experiences they are likely to have after they age out.

## How Can the Child Welfare System Be Held More Accountable for the Housing It Provides?

Despite a general trend toward holding the child welfare system and child welfare service providers more accountable for child and youth outcomes, that focus on accountability has had limited effect on the provision of housing to young adults in EFFC. Part of the problem is that measuring the effectiveness of housing programs would require metrics different from the metrics designed to measure the safety and permanency of children’s placements. In fact, using those metrics could be counterproductive if housing providers become more risk averse and less willing to give young adults opportunities to make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes.

A parallel set of metrics could be developed to measure not only the provision of housing to young adults in EFFC (e.g., the number of young adults served or average time in the program) but also young adult outcomes. These outcomes would include how prepared young adults are for independent living and various dimensions of well-being. In the meantime, decisions about which housing options to offer, how to improve those options, and which options are a good fit for each young adult in EFFC continue to be made in the absence of any data.

The absence of data also precludes effective performance-based contracting. This is important because most state and county child welfare agencies contract with private-sector entities to provide housing and supportive services. Without agreed upon metrics, it is impossible to compare the performance of private contractors to benchmarks or to one another.

One approach would be to use the service and outcome data that states are already required to collect and report for the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). In fact, holding states accountable was one reason for establishing the NYTD. NYTD service data include information about the receipt of housing-related services such as budgeting skills training, household management training, and housing education as well as supervised independent living. NYTD outcome data include measures related to dimensions of well-being (e.g., employment, education, homelessness, health

insurance, criminal justice involvement, parenthood, and positive connections with adults). Moreover, because data are collected from the same youth at ages 17, 19, and 21, they can be used to track the trajectory of young adults over time.

That said, the NYTD has several limitations. First, response rates in some states have been low, particularly for responses to follow-up outcome surveys. Second, some states only administer the follow-up outcome survey to a subsample of young adults who complete the baseline survey at age 17. And third, NYTD data would only be collected from some of the young adults served by a given provider.<sup>6</sup>

A second approach would be to require housing providers to collect data on the young adults they serve while they are in EFFC and after they exit. This would allow providers to assess the success of their housing models. However, collecting data can be both expensive and time consuming, and housing providers are unlikely to have the resources needed to collect data from a sufficiently large and representative sample.

A third approach would be to leverage administrative data such as unemployment insurance wage records, records on postsecondary education records from the National Student Clearinghouse, and Homeless Management Information System records on shelter and homeless services use. Although using administrative data would be relatively inexpensive, some jurisdictions may lack the capacity to do so.

## What Questions Should Future Research Address?

The conversations we had with officials from the eight state child welfare agencies and the subsequent convening generated several questions that research could address:

- **What policy levers could be used to increase the housing options available to young adults in EFFC?**

Our conversations with state child welfare officials and the subsequent convening marked the first systematic effort (of which we are aware) to gather information about housing options for young adults in EFFC. One next step would be to identify federal, state, and local policies that either facilitate or impede the expansion of those options and make recommendations for modifying current policies or formulating new ones to increase the housing options available. Relevant policies could include constraints on the use of specific funding streams, eligibility criteria, or licensure requirements.

- **Which housing options lead to the best outcomes for which young adults in EFFC?**

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<sup>6</sup> Baseline NYTD outcome data are collected from a new cohort of 17-year-olds every three years. Follow-up NYTD outcome data are collected at ages 19 and 21 from a subset of the youth who were in the baseline population. This means that outcome data would not be available for youth who were 17-years-old in the two years between successive NYTD cohorts.

Our conversations highlighted the diversity of young adults in EFFC and their housing needs. For example, not all need the same level of supervision and support. Future research should examine the relationship between housing options and young adult outcomes and how that relationship varies among different subpopulations.

- **What is the best model for engaging young adults in decisionmaking?**

Our conversations also highlighted important differences across jurisdictions in how housing decisions are made and how engaged young adults are in decisionmaking. Future research could explore the range of decisionmaking models and young adult engagement strategies being used and how they are perceived by young adults. Further exploration of the various methods for engaging youth, including processes, meetings, and tools, might highlight promising models.

- **Who is best positioned to provide supportive services that help young adults maintain their housing?**

Young adults in EFFC may receive supportive services from their child welfare caseworker, their housing provider, another contracted service provider, or a service provider in the community. Future research is needed to understand the relationship between these different service providers, the needs of young adults in EFFC, and how supportive services help young adults in EFFC maintain their housing.

- **How do services combined with housing affect outcomes?**

Supportive services can help stabilize housing situations for young adults and help them build the skills they need to live independently after they transition out of EFFC. Research is needed to understand how different combinations of supportive services and housing affect young adult outcomes while they are in EFFC and after they exit.

Answering the first of these questions will require an analysis of existing federal, state, and local policies. Answering the other four will require a combination of formative/process evaluation activities and summative/impact evaluation activities.

## Limitations

Our approach was limited in several ways. Our initial conversations were limited to officials from public child welfare agencies in eight states with relatively large numbers of young adults in EFFC. Most nonfederal attendees of the convening, including participants from the private sector of child welfare, were from those same states. We do not know whether the experiences of our informants generalize to other jurisdictions, particularly jurisdictions with smaller numbers of young adults in EFFC. Moreover, although we had hoped to include more representatives from private child welfare agencies that serve special populations, only two were able to attend. Finally, our focus was largely on cross-state differences in housing options. However, our conversations and the convening discussions revealed that there is probably as much variation within states as there is across states.

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