Family Unification Program
Child Welfare and Housing Study

Urban Institute

Devlin Hanson, Mary Cunningham and Mike Pergamit
Introduction

• A strong body of evidence documents the link between inadequate housing and family involvement in the child welfare system.

• The goal of this project is to determine whether the Family Unification Program which provides housing vouchers to child welfare involved families:
  1. Reduces involvement in the child welfare system
  2. Reduces overall systems burden
  3. Reduces days in homeless shelter
  4. Results in net cost savings
Family Unification Program (FUP)

- Small pool of permanent housing vouchers, which provide a deep housing subsidy to help families rent apartments in the private market.
- Administered jointly by local housing authority and child welfare agencies
- Eligible households
  - Families with open child welfare cases where the children still reside with the parent (Preservation families)
  - Families with open child welfare cases where the children are in care (Reunification families)
  - Youth aged out of foster care (18-21 years old)
Child Welfare and Housing Study

Examine FUP implementation, impact, and cost in four sites:

1. Salt Lake County, UT
2. San Diego, CA
3. Seattle, WA
4. Portland, OR
## FUP Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral Process</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>San Diego</th>
<th>Salt Lake County</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certified by Child Welfare FUP Liaison</td>
<td>Certified by Child Welfare FUP Liaison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Pre-Screen</td>
<td>Reviewed by Child Welfare FUP Liaison for Open Case</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Services</td>
<td>60 families receive at least 12 months of case management from local providers</td>
<td>CW provides case management as long as the case is open</td>
<td>CW provides 6 months of case management after they receive a voucher</td>
<td>Reunification families receive 6 months of case management from the referring case workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23 families receive case management from CW or other community service provider</td>
<td>HC informs families of resources for housing search and helps with application and paperwork</td>
<td>HC provides information on resources and help with paperwork</td>
<td>Preservation families receive 12 months of case management from DPH public nurses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HC provides information on resources and help with paperwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HC provides information on resources and help with paperwork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

- Quasi-experimental analysis, using either the waitlist or propensity score matched comparison group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>San Diego</th>
<th>Salt Lake County</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Group</td>
<td>Waitlist or Propensity Score Matched</td>
<td>Waitlist</td>
<td>Waitlist or Propensity Score Matched</td>
<td>Propensity Score Matched</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preliminary Results for San Diego

- Received housing data, referral data and child welfare data from San Diego
- Present preliminary results:
  - Who are the families referred to FUP?
    - Demographics
    - Housing Stability
    - Child Welfare Involvement
  - What are their housing outcomes?
Who gets referred to FUP: Demographics

The majority of families referred to FUP are:

- Single mothers (75%)
- In their late twenties or older (72%)
- Hispanic (30%) or African American (46%)
- With multiple children (73%)
- Have at least one child under 6 (82%)
  - many have at least one child under 1 years old (43%)
Who gets referred to FUP: *Child Welfare Involvement*

The majority of families referred to FUP:
- Have not had a prior removal of a child (83%)
- Are reunification families with at least one child in care (56%)
  - many (35%) have more than one child in care.

The majority of children in care:
- Have spent >300 days in care at the time of referral
- Are in care for general neglect or absence (69%)
- Are in a Relative’s Home (38%), in a Foster Family Home (27%), or on a trial home visit (17%)
Who gets referred to FUP: **Housing**

At the time of referral, all FUP families lacked adequate housing and:

- 36% were homeless
- 28% had been displaced by domestic violence
- 9% were living in dilapidated housing
- 41% were living in overcrowded housing

Housing Flags:

- 9% had a violent criminal history
- 37% had a history of drug activity, most of those had completed or enrolled in treatment (95%)
Leasing Up

- Of the 145 families referred to the housing authority in San Diego, only 106 (73%) leased up with their vouchers.
- Of the 39 (27%) who did not lease up
  - 36% did not show up for intake
  - 15% failed to provide documentation
  - 21% were ineligible referrals
  - 13% other/unknown
  - 15% were issued vouchers but did not lease up in time
Lost Vouchers

• Of the 106 families that leased up 19 (18%) have since lost their vouchers
  – On average about 465 days after lease up

• Of those who lost vouchers:
  – 42% violated their lease (e.g. criminal activity, unauthorized person)
  – 32% failed to recertify
  – 26% other/unknown
# Housing Payments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Families</th>
<th>Families Still Leased Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lease Up</td>
<td>Lease Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number in Household</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Share Paid by Housing Commission</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Rent</td>
<td>$1435</td>
<td>$1451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Amount Paid by Families</td>
<td>$183</td>
<td>$184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Policy Implications

- Only 73% of those referred to the Housing Commission leased up
  - They do not complete the application process
- Housing search assistance needed (e.g., transportation to intake, filling out PHA paperwork, searching for units, filling out applications, paying security deposits).
- Additional resources for supportive services after case closed (provided by a community service provider, not child welfare system).
What’s Next?

• Child welfare outcomes:
  – Does FUP increase the probability of case closure and reunification?
  – Does FUP decrease the time until case closure and reunification?
  – Does FUP decrease re-referrals and subsequent removals?
Questions?

dhanson@urban.org