An assessment of stable housing for transitional youth in the Denver Metro Area

Prepared for Housing Colorado

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Editor's note:

Housing Colorado gratefully acknowledges the work of Adam Musielewicz and the University of Colorado School of Public Affairs for the production of this report. Housing Colorado is proud of this partnership that not only produces quality, thought-provoking reports such as this, but also informs future leaders of the key issues that impact the affordable housing industry in Colorado.

It is a privilege to share the results of Mr. Musielewicz's research with Housing Colorado's members, many of whom work with this especially vulnerable population in the state.

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I.   Executive Summary

For youth who age out of the foster care system, the transition from such an environment

to self-reliance and economic security can be a formidable challenge. Every year more than

5,000 youth exit foster care in Colorado. Often these youth are reunited with family members or

primary caregivers. For other youth, reuniting with family is not an option and upon

emancipation young people are confronted with a host of challenges and responsibilities – one of

which is the finding, securing and maintaining a stable place to live. Whether emancipating from

foster care or being reunited with families or relative, youth aging out of foster care are

frequently vulnerable to homelessness.

In light of renewed national and state momentum to address youth homelessness, this

study sought to obtain the perspective of transitional youth regarding their housing experiences

in the Denver Metro Area. Further to supplement the youth's insight, this study also obtained

information from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Division of Housing (DOH), Office

of Homeless Youth Services (OHYS), regarding what housing strategies are being prioritized to

prevent transitional youth homelessness. Findings from interviews with both youth and the DOH,

OHYS Prevention Specialist include:

- The housing interventions analyzed (Family Unification Program (FUP) and transitional supportive housing) provided youth housing stability, however interviewees frequently found themselves in unstable and often changing housing situations after their housing intervention concluded.
- The importance of having a strong social, relational connection to an adult who could be trusted frequently proved a significant factor in finding and maintaining housing, especially during prolonged transition towards living alone.
- For youth who experienced homelessness after leaving foster care, the lack of transitional housing resources connected to emergency housing (shelters) was highlighted. This was an area prioritized by the Prevention Specialist with DOH, OHYS as well.
- Housing strategies being prioritized by DOH-OHYS focused on establishing a complete continuum of housing for transitional youth. Frequently, this included voucher-based housing subsidies such as FUP through Bridging the Gap at Mile

High United Way and the Nurse Family Partnership, Project Based Vouchers as well as Host Family Homes.

- Frequency of placements while in foster care as well as substance abuse appeared to play some role in youth's housing transience after leaving care.
- Structural barriers, such as eligibility age, duration and income requirements within the Family Unification Program (FUP), a voucher-based subsidy program, were cited by some youth participants as impediments to housing stability.

Recommendations for program and policy development regarding housing for

transitional youth include:

- The development of a standardized protective and risk-factor assessment conducted before emancipation and during the time a youth is utilizing the housing supports and subsidies.
- Strengthen the role of professional independent living coaches that can help provide youth guidance before, during and after receiving a housing intervention.
- Extending the duration of the FUP voucher to 24 months, increasing eligibility to age 23 or 24, and allowing youth to qualify for Earned Income Disregards.
- Collaborative housing policy that, for instance, includes Public Housing Authorities (PHA's) in the process of developing housing and options where youth can be transitioned appropriately from one subsidy to another to promote stability.
- Ensure transitional housing resources exist to fill the gap between emergency shelters and long-term housing options.
- Link Education and Training Voucher (ETV) enrollment with FUP eligibility and enrollment.

II.   Introduction

Youth exiting from the foster care system are faced with significant challenges in the attempt to live independently. Due to a lack of social supports, whether provided by the state or familial connections, emancipating youth are more susceptible to the negative effects of low-job skills, income insecurity, housing instability and a lack of education (Berzin et al., 2011, Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). These areas can frequently be risk factors for additional more compounding problems such as homelessness. It is estimated that approximately 25 to 50 percent of youth exiting the foster care system will experience homelessness on some level, such as continual coach-surfing, evictions due to not being able to pay rent or continued instability with biological family (HUD, 2013, Jones, 2011). In 2012, 527 youth emancipated from the child welfare system in Colorado ("Children Exiting"). In Metro Denver's 2013 Homeless Point-In-Time Survey, 1 in 10 homeless youth surveyed reported being in foster care.

Housing stability is paramount to the transition process for an youth aging out of foster care. Housing instability has been associated with social and emotional problems, physical and sexual victimization, criminal activity and dropping out of high school (Fowler et al., 2009). Conversely, the provision and utilization of safe and stable housing among transitional youth can be shown as a protective factor regarding social and mental health which can subsequently effect engagement with education and employment activities (Johnson et al., 2010).

This study subsequently sets out to define the characteristics and housing experiences of youth after leaving foster care and the challenges they face along the way. Frequently, youth that possess the aforementioned challenges post-foster care, must compete in a decreasingly affordable housing market with less "safety net" alternatives available to them. By obtaining the youth perspective regarding the housing continuum they experience, specifically within the

Denver Metro Area, this this study aims to provide insight regarding gaps in service as well as

best practices.

Organization

Housing Colorado is a multi-sector association that represents a broad constituency of

private, public, non-profit groups as well as individual Coloradoans seeking to educate and

advocate around the issue of affordable housing ("About Housing CO"). Fundamental to the

mission of Housing Colorado is promoting policies that benefit low and middle income

individuals and communities, those who frequently experience affordable housing disparities. As

part of its strategic plan, Housing Colorado seeks to re-engage Housing Colorado members and

legislators in advocacy efforts regarding specific housing issues ("Strategic Plan"). Concurrently,

the board of directors has highlighted several priority areas of research, one of which being

transitional youth and housing.

Housing Colorado's attention to the transitional youth and housing issue runs parallel

with policy action on the national level. In June 2010 the United States Interagency Council on

Homelessness (USICH) released Opening Doors, the first ever national comprehensive plan to

end homelessness by 2020, with a specific goal targeting prevention for families, children and

youth (HUD, 2013). After Open Doors was amended legislatively in 2013, USICH published

the Framework to End Youth Homelessness. The Framework, a risk-and-protective-factor

approach, includes the domains of stable housing, permanent connections, education and

employment and social well-being (HUD, 2013).

Further, the Framework presents two strategies to address youth homelessness: (1) To

provide more comprehensive information about the characteristics of youth experiencing

homelessness and (2) Enhance the capacity of federal, state and local systems of service delivery

to prevent youth homelessness. More specifically, the Framework prioritizes the dissemination

of a preliminary, research-informed intervention model for service delivery (HUD, 2013).

In response to national action the State of Colorado had also initiated coordination around

preventing youth homelessness. Pathways Home Colorado is the State's strategic vision to end

homelessness by 2020. Of the many initiatives created by the plan was the transfer of the Office

of Homeless Youth Services (OHYS) in 2012 to the Department of Local Affairs, Division of

Housing from its original location within the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).

The relocation of the office within the Division of Housing (DOH-OHYS) was intended to better

link the provision and planning of housing with homeless prevention strategies for vulnerable

youth. In regards to preventing youth homelessness, Pathways Home Colorado posits the

Housing First model of intervention (further described later) and seeks to enhance programs such

as Mile High United Way's Bridging the Gap program in administering 150 Family Unification

Program (FUP) vouchers (Pathways, 2012) . Such action has provided further impetus to

organizations like Housing Colorado to initiate research regarding transitional youth and housing

within the Colorado context. Ultimately, the information gathered from this project and its

subsequent recommendations will optimally provide Housing Colorado members an advocacy

tool for policy development at the state and local level.

Purpose

The purpose of this study two-fold. First, it is the goal of this study to define the

characteristics of transitional youth that have exited foster care in the Metro Area. More

specifically, this study intends to obtain the youth perspective in regards to housing – access,

options, transitional support from the child welfare system, barriers to establishing and

maintaining stable housing as well as contributing factors to housing stability. Second, it is

subsequent goal of this study to determine what intervention strategies are being prioritized to

prevent transitional youth homelessness. Optimally, the direct experience and observations of

both transitional youth and the identified homeless prevention professional with DOH-OHYS

will help this study make recommendations regarding housing policy for a population that is

high-risk for homelessness. Subsequently, this study will address the following research

questions:

1. What housing strategies are being prioritized by DOH-OHYS regarding the prevention of transitional youth homelessness?

2. What housing outcomes do transitional youth experience both before and after the housing interventions, specifically the Family Unification Program (FUP) or transitional housing?

3. What barriers exist that endanger housing stability for transitional youth in the Denver Metro Area?

4. What factors contribute to the maintenance of stable housing for transitional youth in the Denver Metro Area?

III.   Literature Review

Context – Policy/Program Overview

While transitional youth homelessness continues to be a problem that affects

communities nationwide, policy progress in the last 30 years addressing the barriers to stable

housing for emancipating youth has occurred. This section will highlight those policies.

1. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP)

Intended to bridge the gap in funding for transitional services for emancipating youth, CFCIP

was made law via Title 1 of the 1999 Foster Care Independence Act, administered by the

Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Fundamental to

CFCIP was the expansion of funding to states to provide transitional services, doubling previous

amounts to $140 million available to states with the condition of a 20 percent match (Dworsky et

al., 2012). In regards to housing, the creation of CFCIP expanded funding to support youth

transitional housing needs. As such, 30 percent of CFCIP funds can be spent on needs such as

housing subsidies, transitional housing, stipends, and rental or deposit assistance (Dworsky et al.,

2012).

    2.   Education and Training Voucher Program

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program provides up to $5,000 yearly for youth

eligible for Chafee funded transitional services who are attending a qualified postsecondary

institution. Youth are eligible for funds before their 21st birthday through age 23. ETV funds are

intended to increase access to postsecondary schooling, but can also be used to pay for housing

when in school (Dworsky et al., 2012).

    3.   Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act

Pertaining to emancipating youth, the Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoption Act of

2008 first requires child welfare agencies to develop a personalized training plan during the 90

prior to exiting care. Second, the Act extends the age of eligibility for reimbursement monies

from the federal government (via Title IV-E) from 18 to 21 years of age, so as long as youth are

enrolled in school, working at least 80hrs/month, engaged in employment promoting activities or

present disabling medical condition (Dworsky et al., 2012). Third, the Act expanded the

definition of child-caring institution for reimbursement purposes to include living situations that

cater to youth 18 to 21 such as group homes, shared housing, or semi-supervised apartments

(Dworsky et al., 2012).

    4.   Family Unification Program

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) via the Family Unification

Program (FUP) provides tenant based Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) to families whose

children have been placed in foster care or in the situation where there is a high risk for a

potential assessment and foster care placement. In 2000, FUP eligibility was expanded to

unaccompanied emancipated youth 18-21 whose housing is unstable and can be considered

homeless (Dworsky et al., 2012). FUP is commonly administered on the local level either by way

of a community based organization contractor or a local public housing authority (PHA).

    5.   Transitional Living Program

The Transitional Living Program (TLP), formed and funded via the Reconnecting Homeless

Youth Act of 2008, is geared to providing an array of support services to homeless youth.

Initiated by a competitive grant process, public and private entities can apply for funds lasting 5

years that require a 10 percent match. TLP services are expected to provide safe and stable

housing, basic life skills, education/training, mental health care, leadership opportunities and

case management support (Dworsky et al., 2012).

Defining Youth Homelessness

      The literature is frequently mixed on what constitutes homelessness and housing

instability. Fowler et al., (2009) in their study of emancipated youth in Detroit, utilized the

federal guidelines regarding homelessness as spelled out by the McKinney-Vento Homelessness

Assistance Act. The Act defines homelessness as experiencing an undesirable living situation,

even from one night as a result of the inability to afford to live elsewhere (Fowler et al. 2009).

Further qualifiers within specific study settings coincide with McKinney-Vento definitions.

Collins and Curtis (2011) reported a youth homeless rate after emancipation of 37 percent by

utilizing youth perspectives on what it meant to be homeless. Youth definitions included being

"kicked-out" by a landlord, friend or relative or simply choosing to be on their own.

In addition, different government agencies have varying definitions of homelessness that

provides further confusion. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) utilizes

the following definition:

> An individual who lacks housing (without regard to whether the individual is a member
> of a family), including an individual whose primary residence during the night is a
> supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary living
> accommodations, and an individual who is a resident in transitional housing ("Official
> Definition").

The HHS definition includes "doubling up" as qualifier for homelessness, defined as an

individual unable to maintain their current housing and must rely on staying with a friend or

family members. The HUD definition is similar in regards to dwellings that can be considered

homeless situations, but also provides a wider scope by including the "imminent loss" of housing

and the impending need to vacate that dwelling within 14 days ("Official Definition").

Housing instability is also defined in different ways throughout the literature or simply

not defined altogether. Frequency of moves is a common measure of housing instability (Jones,

2011, Courtney et al., 2006). This said, moves throughout young adulthood are likely common,

so basing instability solely on frequency of moves is not sufficient (Collins & Curtis, 2011).

Ultimately, the frequency of moves combined with the nature of the dwelling can be an indicator

of housing instability. Fowler et al., (2009) defined "precarious housing" still within the broader

scope of "homelessness", which includes cohabitation with friends, family members or relatives

when there was an inability to afford housing elsewhere.

For the purpose of this research, unstable and stable housing as defined by HUD's

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is most applicable to the analysis of the

housing experiences of transitional youth. Stable housing as defined by HMIS are persons not

literally homeless, are not at imminent risk of losing housing and subsequently do not meet the

criteria for "unstable housing" ("Data Standards"). Unstable housing is defined as not literally

homeless or at risk of imminently losing housing, but also possessing few temporary housing

options and lacking the resources or networks needed to retain or obtain permanent housing

("Data Standards").

Housing Outcomes and Barriers

Relevant to this study are the specific outcomes transitional youth experience after

leaving the foster care system, especially as they relate to housing stability. Homelessness and its

prevalence among transitional youth as compared to other youth is well established within the

literature (Courtney et al., 2007; Berzin et al., 2011; Fowler et al., 2009). In their landmark

longitudinal study Courtney et al. (2007) measured adult functioning outcomes among youth

transitioning out of care from child welfare systems in Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The study

altogether consisted of four different measuring waves starting at age 17 and ending at age 26. At

age 21, 18 percent of the sample ($n = 590$) had been homeless in at least once since the time of

their transition. Further, 20 percent of youth surveyed had lived in four or more living

arrangements since their emancipation. The benefits of the longitudinal study design assisted in

further tracking homeless outcomes at later ages. At ages 23 and 24, the same sample

demonstrated a 37 percent increase in homeless episodes or prevalence of moves, couch-surfing

between friends or family members (Courtney et al., 2010).

Utilizing National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data from 1997, Berzin et al., (2011)

analyzed the differences from a national sample of youth ($n = 8984$) who indicated foster care

involvement compared with both a matched and unmatched sample of youth with no

involvement within the foster care system. The study indicated that emancipated youth were

more likely to be homeless, to receive public housing assistance and reside in a poor

neighborhood. Conversely, the foster youth sample was less likely to cycle back to the home of

origin and less likely to live in a semi-autonomous housing arrangement (Berzin et al., 2011).

The findings provide potential inferences regarding the risk factors (ie. lack of a social/familial

housing safety net) that may lend themselves to transitional youth homelessness.

Other studies have demonstrated more of a correlation between housing situations and

negative outcomes for emancipating youth (Fowler et al., 2009). Utilizing the Life History

Calendar method of data collection Fowler et al. (2009) demonstrated correlations between

housing trajectory and certain psychosocial outcomes. Transitional youth that maintained

categories of decreasingly stable or continuously unstable housing situations were more likely to

experience behavioral and emotional problems when compared to their peers who were

continuously stable (Fowler et al., 2009). Further, rates of victimization (ie. physical violence),

dropping out of high-school and prevalence of criminal convictions were also more prevalent in

the two categories of housing instability. The study concluded that housing instability was a

predictor of psychosocial health for emancipating youth and recommended better intervention

strategies prior to leaving care.

Financial burden and the inability to pay rent have also been shown to be an indicator of

precarious or unstable housing. While a common obstacle for many youth endeavoring to build

work experience and maintain employment that can influence housing security, transitional

youth frequently far worse than their counterparts regarding the ability to pay rent on time and

are evicted from their housing (Courtney et al., 2007, Courtney et al., 2010, Reilly, 2003). In a

study of 100 young people that emancipated from the foster care system in Clark County

Nevada, 50 percent of the sample maintained less than $250 when then emancipated from care

(Reilly, 2003). In the aforementioned longitudinal study of emancipated youth from three

Midwestern States, the median earning for those youth that were employed were just $5, 450

annually at age 21 (Courtney et al., 2007). Further, 27 percent of the sample reported not having

enough funds to pay rent, utilities and phone bill. Such findings demonstrate the lack of ability to

save money for housing costs and the imbalance regarding affordable housing options.

These findings parallel with poor education outcomes among transitional youth

(Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Courtney et al., 2007). In their analysis of emancipated youth and

adaptions from the longitudinal study of the three Midwestern States, Courtney and Dworksy

(2006) found that 37 percent of youth did not possess a high school diploma or a GED in the one

year follow-up after emancipation. This said there were promising finding regarding the

extension of care for some youth. Youth that remained in care were twice as likely as their

emancipated counterparts to be enrolled in a vocational or other education program and three

times as likely to be enrolled in a 2 or 4 year post-secondary education program (Courtney &

Dworksy, 2006). This data elucidates the initial poor education outcome of primary education

attainment, but indicates possible programming benefits for providing care until age 21.

In addition early parenthood is a frequent outcome among emancipated youth.

Emancipated youth are more likely to have children when they are adolescents and out of care

then their general population counterparts (Courtney and Dworksy, 2006; Courtney et al. 2007).

In the Midwestern Study more than half of the young women and nearly one-third of the young

men had at least one living child at age 21. Emancipated youth at age 21 were twice as likely as

their counterparts in the general population sample to be early parents (Courtney et al. 2007).

Nearly all of the young women, but just over one-third of the young men, reported that one or

more of their children were living with them. This said, there is no consensus as to whether

having children early among emancipated youth is a barrier for housing. While having children

early can have consequences regarding school completion or maintaining employment, having

children may open up housing eligibility options that might not otherwise be present to a single

young person (HUD, 2012).

Predictors of Homelessness

The direction of causality is also an issue cited in the literature. While the frequent

outcomes of emancipating foster care youth are well reported (ie. increased prevalence of

homelessness, housing instability, and lack of appropriate earnings), the specific and initial

causal effects are less known. The literature endeavors to determine predictors of homelessness.

Substance abuse and mental illness have also been shown to be more prevalent in youth

emancipating from the foster care system (Vaughn et al, 2007, Wade & Dixon, 2006). Vaught et

al., 2007 demonstrated that emancipated youth, frequently who had been diagnosed with Post

Traumatic Stress or Conduct Disorders were more likely to use and abuse drugs in independent

living situations than a like cohort with no past involvement within the foster care system. Study

conclusions suggested that risk factors such as mental health diagnoses and substance abuse that

are present before emancipation (still within care) are possible indicators of instability later down

the housing continuum.

Another predictor of housing instability cited in the literature is that of family

background and placement history (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010, Jones, 2011). Especially in the

early onset of aging out of foster care, a relationship connection with family proved to be a

protective factor to homelessness. Specifically, at age 19 feeling close to at least one adult family

member decreased the odds of homelessness by more than half (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010).

This finding speaks to the social support system or social capital factors that may be important in

preventing homelessness.

However, the literature is mixed regarding the frequency and reasons for youth returning

to homes of their biological family or family members. In Courtney et al.'s (2007) study, of

emancipated youth at age 21, 24 percent were living with biological family members or relatives

in relation to the comparison group at 44 percent. The reasons for reconnecting with biological

family members may be both intuitive as well as structural. Frequently foster care youth are

maintaining connections with family members even while in the care of the state (Courtney et

al., 2007; Jones, 2011).

After aging out of foster care, if a youth experiences some type of hardship such as

financial stress associated with paying rent, natural help-seeking behavior can frequently lead to

the relationship with that family member. In a qualitative analysis of emancipated youth's

adaptable traits 3 years after care, Jones (2011) found that one of the most significant factors

promoting youth resilience was the connection with a biological family member. The study

demonstrated the likelihood that parents who had not been able to care for children properly in

the past, were able to work through their own problems during child welfare involvement and

thus provide better support to their young adult children after emancipation (Jones, 2011).

Such findings must also be analyzed through the lens of youth transitional experiences as

they related to the Child Welfare System that may act as a barrier to some of protective factors to

youth homelessness. As mentioned above, state child welfare agencies administering Chafee

Foster Care Independence Programs (CFCIP) aim to prepare transitional youth to live

independently. The goal of independence however can run in contrast to the understanding of

emerging adulthood (Avery, 2010). "Emerging Adulthood" as coined by Arnett (2000) is based

on the concept that young adults between the ages of 18-25 are still defining emotional,

behavioral and cognitive domains of their development. This developmental theory is consistent

with practical findings that indicate that median age for completing school, marrying, becoming

a parent and working full time has gradually risen in the 20th and 21st centuries (Arnett, 2007).

As such, 40% of youth in the general population who leave their home of origin for the first time

will return sometime between the ages of 18-24 (Avery, 2010).

Conflictingly, CFCIP transitions youth towards the goal of "independence" sometime

between the ages of 18-21. In conjunction with the likelihood of an elongated period of

development for young adults well into their late twenties, there is little measurable impact of

CFCIP on indicators of independence such as education attainment, employment earnings and

the avoidance of economic hardships frequently associated with adulthood (Courtney & Zinn,

2008). While there has been progress towards improving permanency plans (ie. reunification

with next of kin) during the transitional process for emancipating youth, structural components

of CFCIP would do well to promote interdependence over independence (Avery, 2010).

Housing Options and Transitional Youth

The literature generally reflects that stable housing is fundamental to transitional youth's

mental health, well-being, and education performance (Wade & Dixon, 2006; Johnson et al.,

2010). This said, what does stable housing look like for a youth aging out of foster care?

Frequently, much of the literature provides support of transitional and supportive housing

options (Brown & Wilderson, 2010; Kroner, 2007; Jones, 2011). In their study of two groups of

foster care alumni in California, Brown and Wilderson (2010) compared emancipated youth who

had been referred directly from care by way of the Transition Housing Placement Program and

those who received similar transitional housing service as a homeless intervention (ie. youth

were emancipated and homeless). Both transitional housing programs catered to youth aged 12-

24 and provided support services such as counseling, employment training, case management,

education services and medical care. Youth in the homeless intervention transitional housing

displayed less acute presentations of substance abuse, disconnection from education and

employment and degraded mental health (Brown & Wilderson, 2010).

The study further made the determination that the homeless intervention group also had a

greater number of placements pre-emancipation (Brown & Wilderson, 2010). Such findings

elicit potential for identifying risk factors for homelessness early in transition. However, the

researchers also questioned why youth who emancipated and became homeless did not access

supportive transitional housing services even though they were eligible. Drawing connection

from other studies, the researchers suggest that youth who immediately become homeless upon

emancipation and who do not access transitional housing might have been improperly referred

by the respective child welfare agency or simply wanted to cut all ties with the system (Brown &

Wilderson, 2010).

Jones (2011) found better outcomes in his study of emancipated youth utilizing

transitional housing compared with a cohort of youth in Other Living Arrangements (OLA).

OLA's included dwelling status such as living with a friend, family member, or renting an

apartment. The study found that youth accessing transition services had less financial stressors,

less housing moves, found employment more quickly, accessed education more readily and

abused drugs less. OLA youth demonstrated significantly higher rates of drug abuse. A

potentially more significant finding indicated the majority of youth engaged in transitional

housing services who exited after 2 years of residency were living independently (Jones, 2011).

This evidence would seem to lend itself to a Housing First perspective to homelessness

and risk factor mitigation. The concept of Housing First is as literal as it sounds – providing a

stable and safe home to an individual before other intervention strategies. Housing First has been

shown as a useful tool in combating chronic homelessness among adults with co-occurring

conditions, presenting both a mental health diagnosis as well as substance abuse problem

(Tsemberis et al., 2004). Fundamental to this model is the provision of a safe and stable

environment and a subsequent access to resources such as transportation, food, employment,

mental health and substance abuse counseling and education opportunities.

While the literature appears to support the effectiveness of transitional supportive

housing, less research has been done on the effectiveness and use of FUP vouchers for

transitional youth. As mentioned previously, FUP vouchers can be utilized to help pay for rental

costs for qualifying youth. However where and how youth utilize their vouchers is not apparent.

Dion et al. (2014) provided an analysis of the FUP program in several states and found many

states either do not serve transitional youth or serve a small number in comparison to qualifying

families. The study highlights several reasons for this. First, Public Child Welfare Agencies

(PCWA) were found to frequently not refer youth to the FUP program, often due to not having

proper resources to provide transitional support, prioritizing families over youth or possible

administrative barriers identifying eligible youth (Dion et al., 2014).

In addition, the study brought to bear observations from PCWA's and community

partners regarding the duration of the voucher. Families who are eligible for a FUP voucher are

able to retain the voucher as long as they maintain eligibility via HUD's Housing Choice

Voucher (HCV) program. This is not the case for transitional youth who are only able to retain a

voucher for 18 months. Representatives for PCWA's and PHA's in the study indicated that this

duration was too short for youth to properly acclimate to independent living and did not match

with traditional 1-year lease agreements (Dion et al., 2014). The study concluded by

recommending that the duration of the voucher be extended for youth participants to at least 24 months.

Fundamentally, little is known about how and where youth utilize transitional housing or FUP resources in the Metro Area and to what extent these resources help in the maintenance and establishment of stable housing long-term. For instance, while a youth might be properly referred and subsequently utilize a FUP voucher, where do youth transition to after their voucher terminates? Insight from youth that have experienced variability within housing , from being homeless to successfully renting and maintaining an apartment, will ideally provide valuable information regarding an optimal housing continuum in the Denver Metro Area.

As this study is interested in the housing experiences youth experience through time, the concept of housing careers is fitting. Housing careers is defined as, "the sequence of dwellings of dwellings that a household occupies during its history" (qtd. Ozuekren & Kempen, 2002). The rationale for utilizing housing careers is attributed to the measurement of housing choice and transitions while evaluating specific contextual factors, linking life-course events with mobility and choice (or the lack there of) regarding housing. Housing careers allows the researcher to frame housing within the broader context of life events and vice versa, making it an optimal for analyzing the transition and experiences of transitional youth as they relate to housing. While the concept of housing careers has been applied to other populations (ie refugees), the application to transitional youth housing experiences is less utilized (Collins & Curtis, 2011).

IV.   Methods

Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to obtain the data from two different phases of data collection (discussed below). To obtain data from youth participants, this study

utilized the concept of "housing careers" as an overarching paradigm for analysis. Qualitative

data from the DOH-OHYS Prevention Specialist was also prioritized by this study.

Participants

Two separate groups of participants were interviewed in this study, recruited via

purposeful sampling. The first participant was located informally, as initial outreach phone calls

to the Colorado Department of Human Services to obtain context for this study resulted in the

referral to "connect" with the Homeless Prevention Specialist within the newly relocated Office

of Homeless Youth Services within the Division of Housing (DOH-OHYS). This individual was

identified as a key figure regarding the coordination and implementation of Colorado's plan to

end youth homelessness.

As this study ultimately intended to provide appropriate context around state housing

policy, the Prevention Specialist at DOH-OYHS was designated by other youth service providers

within state government as the "best person to talk to" and therefore the researcher focused on

surveying this individual. As the Prevention Specialist also leads the DOH's Advisory

Committee on Homeless Youth (ACHY), a collaboration of nonprofit and government

stakeholders focused on addressing housing issues of transitional and unaccompanied youth, the

researcher concluded that her perspectives on transitional youth housing policy would best

represent that of multiple service providers and their respective levels of expertise.

The second and more formal phase of the study recruited eight (8) transitional youth from

various service providers throughout the metro area. Youth participants were recruited through

community connections with Aurora Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), You Can

Begin Again, Mile High United Way's Bridging the Gap and Urban Peak Denver. These

organizations demonstrated long-standing relationships with youth and were the first to reply,

recruit and refer transitional youth that fit the predetermined selection criteria.

Selection criteria included the following. First, youth needed be between 16-24 years old

and have experience in the foster care system. The age and qualifier of foster care involvement

was consistent with the definition of transitional youth ("Transitional Age"). Second, as this

study aimed to obtain a retrospective view of housing, the study focused on locating youth that

had already received a housing intervention (defined as FUP or some type of transitional

housing). The rationale for employing this criterion was the desire to obtain youth's living

experiences after housing assistance. In this way, youth would be able to provide a reflexive,

though subjective, analysis of their housing careers. This criteria was prioritized during the

selection process, which was the grounds for including one youth (age 26), outside of the 16-24

age range, within the sample.

However, as the researcher progressed through the outreach/recruitment effort, it became

difficult to locate youth that met the aforementioned criterion. Service providers frequently

stated that they were not in contact with youth post-service utilization. Subsequently, the

researcher modified the criterion to include youth still utilizing FUP or transitional housing. The

rationale for this modification was the attempt to recruit enough youth for an appropriate sample

size of 8-10, while still maintaining the component of reflexivity from the youth perspective as

applied to housing careers.

Lastly, youth were selected by their demonstrated stability in housing. Stability in

housing was consistent with the HMIS definition noted above; persons not literally homeless and

not at imminent risk of losing housing. The rationale for this criterion was consistent with the

goal of the study to determine what factors contributed to the success of maintaining stable

housing. This said, as the results section will indicate, many youth interviewees experienced

acute housing instability even during the time of data collection.

Data Collection

Collecting data from Autumn Gold, the Prevention Specialist at DOH-OHYS

commenced through an electronic survey administered in October, 2014. The rationale for

utilizing this method of data collection was convenience of collection as well as dissemination.

An informal interview with the Prevention Specialist was conducted just prior to the survey in

order to provide better context for the content of the formal survey.

The second phase of the study collected data from youth participants via a semi-

structured interview as well as a formal survey. Surveys were administered to youth prior to the

initiation of interview. The survey collected information such as demographic, neighborhood

resources, rent amount, school attendance, employment earnings, number of times homeless

since leaving foster care and number of placements. This information was intended to

supplement the qualitative data via the youth interviews. One youth interview was conducted

over the phone as the inteveiwee had recently moved to Oregon to stay with one of his parents.

Youth interviews employed a modified version of the Life History Calendar (LHC)

method of data collection. Life History Calendar is a semi-structured field research method

geared to obtain qualitative data throughout a life-event-history specified amount of time. One

benefit of this method is the incorporation of subjects' attitudes, interpretations and explanations

of life transitions and major events (Nelson, 2010). In this way, LHC is an appropriate method to

employ under the conceptual umbrella of housing careers. Fundamentally, LHC which

effectively acts as a timeline in combination with story-telling was selected as an appropriate tool

to engage youth regarding their housing experiences.

Youth interview data included questions around the following areas: housing situations

since leaving foster care, perceived barriers to maintaining stable housing, perceived

strengths/factors in maintaining stable housing, and employment and education trends. To help

frame the interview, youth were given a sheet of paper with a timeline printed on it, demarking

the general time period between leaving foster care to the present day. Youth were encouraged

throughout the interview to designate instances of housing transition, stability and/or instability.

The researcher then facilitated discussion around the timelines created by the participating youth.

The interviews were audio recorded in order to archive the interaction for later reference.

Measures and Data Analysis

The survey from the Prevention Specialist at DOH-OHYS was analyzed by the researcher

in relation to literature covered in this study. Questions obtained information regarding housing

prevention strategies being prioritized by DOH-OHYS, barriers and successes in

implementation, roles of PCWA's and PHA's, and the ideal housing continuum for transitional

youth. The researcher performed a content analysis to determine if there were any thematic

connections between the survey, existing literature and the data from the youth interviews.

Audio recorded interviews were replayed and the researcher dictated both general notes

and direct quotes from interviewees. The content of completed memos were then color-coded to

correspond with the areas of housing situation/transition, perceived barriers to maintaining stable

housing, perceived strengths/factors in maintaining stable housing, and employment and

education trends. Subsequently, the researcher looked for thematic similarities in youth

responses as well as physical representations upon the timelines completed by participants. This

analysis followed a grounded theory method – analyzing the data collected on youth housing

careers to determine a theoretical link between their experiences. This information was then

contrasted with the survey data provided by the Prevention Specialist at DOH-OHYS by way of

the same method.

V.   Results

Survey – Prevention Specialist DOH-OHYS

The Prevention Specialist at DOH-OHYS, manages the Office of Homeless Youth

Services. Her role includes providing technical assistance to statewide partners within the public

and nonprofit sectors and organizing Colorado's annual Homeless and Runaway Awareness

Month. In addition, her responsibilities include overseeing the Advisory Committee on Homeless

Youth (ACHY), charged with forming and implementing the state's strategic plan to end youth

homelessness. Further, she acts as the principle administrator of the FUP program on the state

level. In Colorado, DOH acts as the primary Public Housing Authority (PHA) for the

administration of FUP vouchers for eligible transitional youth. However, the State contracts with

MHUW to manage the FUP program not only for the Denver Metro Area, but for the entire state

(see Figure 1., Appendix A).

The Prevention Specialist identified several strategies being prioritized by DOH-OHYS

regarding the prevention of youth homelessness. Many of these strategies included voucher-

based housing tools such FUP, Nurse Family Partnership, and Project Based Vouchers such as

those found in single-site housing like that at Rocky Mountain Youth Housing at Urban Peak.

The Nurse Family Partnership provides services for pregnant and parenting mothers who are

enrolled in MHUW's Bridging the Gap program. In home nurse visits provide medical care and

parental support to expecting mothers and during the first 2 years of their baby's life. In this way,

the Nurse Family Partnerships acts as a referral avenue to the utilization of a FUP voucher (as

again, the voucher can be utilized by families previously involved in foster care).

Project-based vouchers act as more of a place-holder for qualified youth within a specific

housing development. PHA's can attach 20 percent of voucher assistance to specific rental units

if the owner agrees rehabilitate old units, construct new units or set-aside a portion of existing

units ("Project Based"). Rocky Mountain Youth Housing at Urban Peak, an organization that

provides comprehensive support services to homeless youth, maintains such a structure and

includes project-based voucher set-asides for transitional youth that are not time limited.

Host Family Homes were also identified as a housing option of emphasis. In this model,

individuals or families that qualify, open up their homes to homeless youth in need of a stable

place to live. Participating homeowners become part of a broader support and transition team

associated with the Child Welfare System. At this point, the Prevention Specialist indicated that

this option is in the pilot stage.

In addition, the Prevention Specialist also cited the importance and priority of developing

standard assessment tools, especially in relation to permanent supportive housing – housing that

is not time limited and intended to provide supportive services, such as mental health counseling,

to recipients with disabilities. Coordinated assessment is a strategy utilized by homeless service

providers intended to standardize and expedite the assessment of persons experiencing

homelessness and the subsequent referral to the appropriate housing needed (ie. shelter,

transitional, permanent supportive) (PHA Guide, 2014).

Referring to the optimal housing continuum for transitional youth, the Prevention

Specialist emphasized, "youth housing models that target unaccompanied youth that experience

homelessness with a housing subsidy and varying levels of supervision and supports." According

to the Prevention Specialist, the optimal housing spectrum should include shelters, host family

homes, hotel vouchers, group homes, shared housing, transitional housing, supervised single site

apartments, scattered site housing, dormitory housing, permanent supportive housing, TLP

program, FUP and Child Welfare Independent Living Arrangements.

When asked about the barriers to creating this continuum, the Prevention Specialist cited

several issues. First, she identified shortages in case management funding. While policy changes

such as Transitional Living Program and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing

Adoption Act have provided more flexibility to extend care past age 18 and enhance housing

supports, funding for additional support services has not followed. Other barriers cited included

the high-costs of the rental housing market in the Denver Metro Area and limited transitional or

long-term housing tied to any local emergency residential programs for homeless youth.

Addressing some of the financial barriers to building the optimal continuum of housing,

the Prevention Specialist made suggestions such as promoting access to apartments from Low

Income Tax Credit and Home Fund development, both funding streams from HUD intended to

rehabilitate and renovate existing dwelling into affordable housing. Further, she asserted that

every new development in the state should set aside 3-5 units for youth adults and that

transitional youth housing resources be prioritized with any modifications to the Colorado

Housing Trust Fund.

Lastly, the Prevention Specialist was asked to assess the roles of both Public Child

Welfare Agencies (PCWA) as well as local Public Housing Authorities (PHA) regarding housing

for transitional youth. Regarding PCWA's, the Prevention Specialist suggested that it might be

worthwhile to have PCWA staff identify former foster care youth who are receiving Education

Training Vouchers (ETV) so they can be recruited for the FUP program. As many youth

recipients of ETV utilize its funds to help pay for housing, it would be beneficial to co-quality

youth both for ETV and FUP in order to provide better housing support. In addition, the

Prevention Specialist recommended further evaluation to explore how Chaffee funding is used to

provide housing assistance for youth. As each local PCWA has the ability to spend 30 percent of

its funds for this purpose, assessing the effectiveness of this assistance would be beneficial.

Regarding the role of local PHA's, the Prevention Specialist suggested that housing

authorities could consider creating housing options specifically for transitional youth. Whether

by way of permanent public housing or the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, there may

be opportunities to ensure vulnerable youth are prioritized for available affordable housing

options provided by PHA's. As PHA's also have relationships with participating landlords

through the HCV program, utilizing these connections to locate and support the transitional

process of finding affordable and stable housing for youth could be beneficial as well.

Youth Interviews

The youth interview sub-section will proceed as follows. First, general characteristic

information will be reported, collected via the initial survey. Second, results will be reported in

the following areas: housing outcomes, barriers to maintaining stable housing and factors

contributing to the maintenance of stable housing. These subsections coincide with the primary

research questions as they apply to the youth interviews.

Table 1 displays the general characteristics of the eight (8) youth interviewed as obtained

via the initial survey. Youth interviewees ranged in ages (19-26). Most youth interviewees left

foster care or emancipated from foster care within the last 3-5 years. At present, youth

participants reported no criminal convictions while four (4) youth reported having children. Of

the youth sampled, seven (7) maintained a HS Diploma or equivalent and one (1) youth was

currently pursuing post-secondary education. This said, six (6) youth reported some college

attendance, while one (1) possessed a college degree at the time of interview. Two youth (2)

reported receiving, at one time, an Education and Training Voucher (ETV). Regarding

employment, three (3) youth were currently employed, while the remaining five (5) were

actively seeking employment.

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Race	Year left foster care	Criminal convictions	Children?	Employed?	Wage	Actively seeking work?	Highest EDU level	ETV?
#1	23	Female	Non-Hispanic/White and Black/African American	2011	No	No	No	n/a	Yes	Current - freshman	No
#2	22	Female	Black/African American	2011	No	No	Yes	$10/hr	No	HS Diploma	No
#3	20	Female	Other	2012	No	Yes - 1	No	n/a	Yes	Some college	No
#4	22	Female	Other	2010	n/a	Yes - 1	Yes	$13/hr	Yes	Some college	Yes
#5	19	Male	Hispanic	2012	No	No	No	n/a	Yes	Some college	No
#6	26*	Male	Non-Hispanic/White	2006	No	No	Yes	$12/hr	No	College Degree	No
#7	21	Female	Black/African American	2009	No	Yes - 2	No	n/a	Yes	11th grade	No
#8	22	Male	Hispanic	2010	No	Yes – 1	No	n/a	Yes	Some College	Yes

Table 1. Baseline youth characteristics

*While older than the 18-24 age definition, participant was
included due to priority of post housing intervention experience.

Table 2 displays housing specific baseline data collected by the initial survey. Youth

participants reported a variable number of placements while in foster care ranging from one to

over fifty (1-50+). Housing careers, or different housing situations since the time of leaving

foster care, also was variable ranging from two to over one hundred (2-100+). Five (5) youth

utilized or at the time of data collection were utilizing Family Unification Vouchers (FUP).

Further, four (4) participants reported using transitional housing at some point since leaving

foster care. Six (6) participants presented 1 or more episodes of literal homelessness since

leaving foster care. Regarding living situation at time of data collection, three (3) youth were

living with family members or relatives, while five (5) reported living on their own. Regarding

location, three (3) youth were living in Aurora, four (4) in Denver, and one (1) in Hillsboro,

Oregon. Lastly, youth reported a variable amount of monthly rent, as frequently youth

interviewees were living with others to share the cost of renting an apartment.

Interviewee	# of placements while in foster care	# of housing careers since leaving care	Housing intervention utilized	Episodes of homelessness (literal) since leaving foster care	Living situation at present	Monthly rent at present	Enough money for other living expenses?	Current residence location
#1	17	5	Transitional Supportive (post)	1	Living with parents	n/a	No	Aurora 80012
#2	9	2	FUP (post)	0	Family/relatives	$450	Yes	Aurora 80012
#3	50 +	4	FUP (current)	1	Self - apartment	$0	Yes	Aurora 80010
#4	21 +	A lot	FUP (current)	0	Self and child – apartment	$503	Yes	Denver 80204
#5	5	2	FUP (current)	1	Self - apartment	$40	No	Denver 80111
#6	3	6	Transitional Supportive (post)	1	Self- apartment	$500	Yes	Denver 80236
#7	1	11	Transitional Supportive (present)	1	Self and children - apartment	$100	No	Denver 80230
#8	3	Over 100	Both FUP and Transitional Supportive (post)	3	Living with a parent	n/a	Yes	Hillsboro, OR 97124

Table 2. Baseline housing characteristics

Housing Outcomes

As indicated above, youth participants reported frequent housing transitions since the

time they left foster care. These experiences were often shaped prior to legally emancipating

from the foster care system and by the programs intended to provide housing support for them.

One youth participant reported utilizing transitional housing through Third Way, a local

nonprofit organization that provides mental health counseling and independent living skills

training to homeless youth demonstrate a mental health diagnosis. Part of her transitional

housing experience required her to be working, managing her income so as not to spend more

than 80 percent of her paycheck, and adhere to curfew and Urine Analysis (UA's) requirement.

The youth indicated that, "it was cool to be in foster care, but still be in my own place."

The Third Way program then provided post-emancipation assistance, helping the youth find an apartment, furnish it and assist with rent for 3 months. After that, the youth was responsible for all her expenses with limited continuing support. Within seven months of independent living she was evicted from her apartment. "After I left (foster care) I was having friends over, being loud… all that stupid young-adult stuff that I actually regret," she stated. This instability seemed to lead to several housing transitions that included living with 2 different friends, home with her father and step-mother twice, as well as a period of literal homelessness where she ended up at an emergency shelter after an "altercation" with her father. Currently she is back living with her father and step-mother and sleeping on the couch because, "it is the only option I have right now….I wish it wasn't."

Other youth reported less unstable housing outcomes and transitions. Another youth, after emancipating from foster care, immediately was able to utilize FUP, partially because her foster mother also managed a nonprofit organization (You Can Begin Again) that provided transitional support to emancipated young women. With the help of her foster mom, the youth was able to find an apartment right way and stay there successfully for the entire 18 months. After leaving her FUP apartment, she moved in with two cousins and recently rented a house in Aurora together. Expressing her view of her current housing situation, "I live here by choice….because I could have got an apartment…but my aunty was like I think this would be good for you guys…save money…and all that. If I wanted to move I could."

Fundamentally, all youth in the sample ($n = 8$) experienced frequent and ongoing levels of housing instability throughout the time after foster care. All youth reported at one or more points of having to stay with friends or relatives and effectively "double-up" when housing alternatives were not available. Youth that experienced housing instability at the onset of leaving

foster care, frequently demonstrated a high number of housing transitions afterwards. For

instance, one youth stated she had transitional housing available to her back in Atlanta Georgia

(where she is originally from) before officially emancipating, but she decided she wanted to be

on her own and moved to Florida at the time. Subsequently, this trajectory led her to more

housing careers than she could count and included residing with friends or relatives in 4 different

states. Now in Colorado and utilizing FUP, is the first time she has felt stable in housing, "I feel

like this is mine…you can't take it away from me…..feeling like I am capable of going out there

and getting the money I need to be successful and take care of this household."

Further, of the five (5) youth interviewed who received either FUP or transitional housing

in the past, housing instability afterwards was not uncommon. All of these youth received a

housing intervention as part of their transition out of care or soon after emancipating from foster

care. Of the two youth that received project-based transitional housing, one (1) was able to

transfer the voucher to a tenant-based voucher after leaving transitional housing. Of these two

youth, one is currently living completely independent of voucher assistance (interviewee # 6 who

is 26 years old) and the other is now living in a stable familial housing situation in Hillsboro

Oregon. Similarly, the other youth interviewed who reported post FUP utilization (interviewee

#2), reporting being stable and saving money while currently living with relatives.

Of the youth interviewed, six (6) indicated staying with family or relatives either prior to

their housing intervention, afterwards or both. While youth frequently cited their families as a

support system and often cycled back and forth to living with family, within the context of

housing youth remarked that such living situations were frequently unsafe and unstable. Prior to

entering transitional housing after being homeless, one youth stated of her mother's home, "I

lived with her for a couple of years….we argued a lot…and I was uncomfortable…her boyfriend

and I didn't get along." This sentiment, having a conflict with a person residing in the same

residence was common for most youth in the sample. Whether staying with family or friends, six

(6) youth participants reported leaving a housing situation due to "hostility", an "altercation" or

feeling "uncomfortable."

Regarding periods of homelessness, all youth in the sample (*n=8*) reported homelessness

as not having a place to stay, or literally homeless. In this way, youth reported small incidence of

homelessness (0-3). As mentioned above, varying definitions of homelessness exist depending

on the agency and the type of services provided. If for instance, "doubling-up" is considered part

of the criteria for homelessness, then all youth participants would demonstrate a significantly

higher rate.

Barriers to Maintaining Stable Housing

Many young people expressed the difficulty of translating their experiences in foster care

to the concept of trying to live on their own. Frequency of foster care placements was cited as a

barrier for one youth. Further, some youth were critical of the structure of foster care in relation

to what it means to try to live on your own. One youth commented:

> The system, they screw you over when you leave… it's just like …they take you away
> from your home then put you in these lock-down facilities….you know, especially when
> I was just a teenager and still growing up…I was so used to being around a lot people…I
> was used to bouncing around from placement, to placement, to placement…and now that
> I am out I have noticed that I have been going from this place, to this place, to this
> place…instead of just having a stable place…but I am used to that and I keep that
> pattern…it makes me uncomfortable staying in the same place too long.

While some youth critiqued their experience in foster care and the subsequent transition

towards independent living, another youth expressed the difficultly of accessing housing

supports immediately after emancipation. The experience of a degrading living situation after

leaving foster care was not uncommon for youth interviewed. When asked to look back on his

experience and prescribe his own housing recommendations, one youth stated:

> It (FUP) wasn't here (when I emancipated) where it was supposed to be, when people are getting ready to leave high school to go to college…and so there is a bit of miscommunication. Mile High United Way doesn't work the same as Arapahoe County or Denver County…there are a lot of gaps that need to be reached before a person receives services, so it is not effective or efficient in any way. Until someone decides to figure it out on their own and meet with those people (housing service providers)…because I had to meet with MHUW…they never came to me.

Another barrier expressed during the interviews was a perceived lack of support and

referral from emergency shelters. One youth experienced homelessness within the last month and

reported utilizing emergency shelter services. When asked whether she was connected to any

transitional housing resources while in the shelter, the youth remarked, "I got the impression I

had 0-6 months (in the shelter) and they (shelter staff) would help me out with housing…I guess

that was a bunch of BS, cause I didn't see nobody…I didn't know any staff there."

Obtaining employment and earning money to save or pay for an apartment was also cited

as a barrier to maintaining housing. Three (3) youth reported being employed and the remaining

five reported actively looking for work. One youth expressed the dilemma with pursing her

education while trying to find job to help save money for an apartment, "my biggest life stressor

today is money…it is hard for me to find a job…I don't know what I'm doing wrong…not many

people hire me because I am in school."

While only three (3) of the youth participants were working at the time of the interview,

an interesting finding was from interviewee #5 regarding his income and continuing to qualify

for his FUP voucher. Prior to losing employment, he stated that he was making $16 an hour,

working 40 hours a week. The youth stated he was told he was making too much to continue to

qualify for the subsidy of the FUP voucher, "I was making too much money…I could only make

a certain amount….if I go over, I don't get any assistance anymore…I make too much over the

poverty line." The youth went on to state that it was hard to pay the bills, let alone save money

for his next housing situation.

Also, some housing interventions were critiqued by youth participants. One youth, who

stated that she was deemed not eligible for FUP because she was too close to turning 22, stated

that she felt she would have benefited from a voucher, especially after some of the supportive

housing she received while still in foster care. When asked to look back and describe ideal

housing supports that were not available, the youth mentioned, " I think honestly, they could

have given me FUP…I don't care how old I was….maybe they should make the deadline

24…because they don't consider you an adult in college until you're 23….you know?"

Regarding the duration of the FUP voucher, youth perspectives were mixed. Two youth,

one who already finished her voucher and one with 10 months remaining stated they felt that 18

months was long enough to get on their feet. Two other participants, each currently receiving

FUP, expressed different opinions. Each youth remarked about the lack of relationship between

the voucher granting agency and themselves, citing instances of program staff dropping-in

unannounced and feeling "spied on", to providing little guidance in regards to planning for the

next housing transition. One youth mentioned, "…it is just set-up for 18 months….it's not set-up

for you until you get on your feet, like an adult is supposed to be there for a child…it's we'll

give you this much time to get on your feet…and then, oh well."

As a FUP voucher is used in the regular rental market and can only be used where

landlords accept it and where a youth can afford to live, housing choice can be limited. One

youth after living in part of Aurora, stated she had to move because of safety concerns for her

and her child. Under FUP, youth recipients are able to move only once during their allotted 18

months. Speaking of her first apartment where she felt unsafe, the youth stated, "I was in

Aurora…I stayed there for 6 months, but it was very unsafe…like there was a lot of gang

affiliations and shootings and kinds of craziness." Such sentiment was not uncommon as four (4)

youth cited some type of safety concern with the apartment they lived in (with FUP). One youth

mentioned three subsequent apartment moves within a 10 month span, one due to his roof caving

in and the other because of a bed bug infestation.

Concurrently, victimization was commonly reported among youth participants. Three (3)

youth participants reported varying levels of victimization including being robbed at gunpoint, to

being assaulted in their apartment, to being taken advantage of regarding a fake payday loan. For

the youth who reported being assaulted, while she stated she likes her apartment she would

prefer to move if she could, "..there is a lot of people that I don't like (here)….a lot of people that

like being next to Colfax….they want all the loud, irritating drama." For the youth caught up in

the fraudulent pay day loan, before he became aware of the scam, he had already sold much of

his housing possessions to pay for rent and the loan. Consequently, he stated that due to this

scam he lost his Section 8 voucher, subsequently lost his apartment and for a short time had to

live with a friend.

The task of finding an apartment was also cited as barrier by some youth. Two (2) youth

currently utilizing FUP who reported they found their own apartments, stated they received little

support from service providers. One youth, who was able to find a "great place" in Denver Tech

Center, spoke to the difficulty of the process of finding an apartment :

> What was frustrating, is that I called these places (apartment resources given by the FUP
> provider) and they want you to live in the crappiest areas….a lot of places are on
> Colfax…..shitty parts of Aurora…I was frustrated…I was like I am supposed to lower
> my standards, but I want to move up…I don't want to stay here and rely on you guys.
> That was a really bad introduction (to the FUP provider), because I don't have the warm
> connection with them.

Other barriers to maintaining or establishing stable housing included proper money

management and the difficulty of finding a co-signer for a rental agreement. Three (3) youth

mentioned the difficulty in managing their money in regards to rent, bills, daily expenses, etc.

When one youth was asked if she received any budgeting classes before she left foster care she

remarked, "Classes? They (Chaffee staff) gave me a budgeting class…but how are you supposed

to budget something you don't have? You need a person to say hey, don't spend all that…I don't

have supports like that." Subsequently, the youth reported spending $10,000 (from a car

accident settlement) within two weeks' time.

Frequently youth expressed that they felt a lack of support through their transition from

foster care to housing outside of care. While each youth left foster care under specific

circumstances, half of the sample (*n=4*) stated a lack of coordination among services. These

youth utilized services out of foster care such as Job Corps, Transitional Supportive Housing,

and the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) in post-secondary school. In each instance

however, youth experienced an episode of homelessness soon after their services ended. Most of

these youth expressed a perception of alienation of supports and not knowing where to turn. For

instance, one youth expressed the feeling of disconnection after it was apparent he was losing

ground on paying for his apartment, basic needs and going to school:

> I didn't know who to look up to…or to ask for help….if I didn't have food at home or
> money to pay rent….and fees were adding up….I didn't know who to talk to….honestly,
> to this day I'm still dealing with a bit of debt because of student housing.

Lastly, one (1) youth reported specifically reported substance abuse as a barrier regarding

maintaining housing. The youth reported that at the time he was participating in the FUP

program, struggling with addiction, "I just wanted to start over….cause I got pretty into coc

(cocaine)…I chose to relinquish my FUP voucher…so I could live at Rocky Mountain." The

youth went on to say that, at the time, he needed someone to counsel with on a frequent basis

regarding his struggles with drugs.

Factors in Maintaining Stable Housing

Several areas were highlighted in the youth interviews regarding factors towards stable

housing. One youth specifically mentioned FUP as a benefit that allowed her both to save money

and begin to experience living on her own for the first time, "I think it (FUP) helped a lot…being

able to do things on my own…being able to support myself…I was in a good apartment…and a

good neighborhood." The youth's positive experience with FUP seemed to be connected to the

guidance and support she received from her foster mom and case manager prior as well as during

the time she leased-up the apartment. Regarding her connection with her foster mother/case

manager one youth stated, "she helped me find a place…she took me to all my meetings…she

took me to the meeting with FUP…it went pretty quick."

Social connections with either family or friends quickly emerged as an important factor

in maintaining some continuity in housing so as not to become homeless. All youth participants

(*n=8*) reported to either have lived or be currently living with other people. Frequently, living

with others represented a practical cost-sharing way to afford an apartment or house and still

save money. In addition three youth (3) reported receiving some financial assistance from family

or friends to help pay for additional living costs such as energy, phone and cable bills.

Ultimately, five (5) youth cited trusting social relationships as factors for feeling

successful. These relationships included case managers, CASA volunteers, as well as teachers

and classmates in college. One youth who is currently enrolled in a post-secondary program, who

recently experienced an episode of homelessness just a month prior to the interview, cited her

schoolmates as, "my biggest support system….my classmates are really caring and loving…my

teacher, she's like all I have….that's how I describe it…she is the only person that has been there

for me during all the bullshit I've been through in the last year…she is the mom I've always

dreamed of."

Another youth cited his 2 years of experience at Rocky Mountain Youth Housing and

specifically his case manager as a reason for his housing stability at present:

> Rocky Mountain (housing) was really important for me, because that is what jumped
> started me and got me going. When I got Tom as my case manager for the first time, I
> think he helped me a lot….cause he gave me motivation…and he was on my ass…he
> said, I know you can do big things, now let's do it.

When asked about the timeframe of the Rocky Mountain program, the youth stated that he

thought it was the right amount of time for him to get on his feet. When asked would he have

changed anything, he stated he wished he would have had the Rocky Mountain Housing support

right out of foster care.

While working and being employed were mentioned as a barrier by one youth above due

to income guidelines, several youth (3) where working at the time of the interview and stated

they were able to work and save money at the same time. Of the youth post-housing intervention

that reported to feeling stable in housing, two (2) were working and reported consistent

employment throughout their housing careers, before, during and after receiving their housing

intervention. Enrollment in post-secondary school was mentioned by two (2) youth as a factor of

support or success. One youth was able to earn his culinary degree from Johnson and Wales just

after his time at Rocky Mountain and stated the degree has helped him obtain a quality job.

While social support and connectedness were often cited by youth as factors in

maintaining housing, individual resilience and initiative was also highlighted. Several youth (4)

reported being very proactive in finding an apartment or applying for housing assistance. One

youth, determined to find a safe apartment in an area that he wanted to live stated, "I began

calling landlords right away…when they hear Section 8 they think of that as a negative

connotation, so they don't want to lease it up to that person. That's how it goes through a

program like that….I called 30 different locations before I found my apartment here."

Further, one youth who experience multiple housing situations in multiple states,

indicated the sum of her experiences allowed her to better anticipate the future. When asked

about how she would go about planning for housing after FUP, she responded:

> What's next?...I am always thinking about what's next, because of my history with
> housing…without housing, it makes it so difficult to attain a job, keep it, go to school and
> do the things I need to do…I've started looking into other vouchers and other programs
> just in case.

VI.   Discussion

The data from the youth interviewees provides valuable insight regarding the barriers

and the factors that contribute to obtaining and retaining stable housing. Of primary note, three

(3) of youth interviewed experienced some type of housing instability after the housing

intervention that they received. Further, six (6) youth experienced at least one episode of literal

homelessness through their housing careers. As analyzed through the lens of housing careers,

youth experiences frequently demonstrated a consistent lack of choice throughout their

experiences after foster care. In addition, lack of choice and housing instability was not

infrequent for those youth post-housing intervention.

If the intention of FUP or transitional housing is to provide stability for youth, to provide

an environment to learn how to live on their own, to maintain employment or pursue an

education, than such housing interventions need to work in a way that promotes stability not for

an arbitrary amount of time, but can be flexible based on the progress and/or risks that youth

participant present. One (1) youth indicated they would have preferred to stay in the living

arrangement they were when in the FUP program. This said, four (4) of the five youth that

utilized or were utilizing FUP, mention safety concerns ranging from poor apartment conditions

to gang activity that frequently resulted in them having to try to find another living situation.

Two (2) youth cited the 18 month time limit as too short. This is consistent with Dion et al's

(2014) findings and recommendations regarding the duration of the FUP voucher.

While increasing the length and age of eligibility for the FUP program was cited by some

youth, other insight suggests that providing the voucher as part of a more comprehensive

continuum of housing would optimize housing stability. Most youth in the sample that utilized or

where utilizing FUP did so after acute periods of housing instability or homelessness ranging

from a few months to a year. The literature reflects (Fowler et al., 2009) the negative outcomes

that can result of homelessness and housing instability, such as increased levels of victimization,

substance abuse and poor mental health. One youth, after reflecting on years of housing

instability and incidents of homelessness, succinctly stated, "I've been trying to do this

myself…it's been really hard…at this point it has been taking a mental toll on me…after doing

this so many times (housing changes) and losing my apartment so many times."

The sentiment above also speaks of the importance of social connectedness and support

that all youth mentioned as factors contributing to housing stability or conversely, the lack of

relationship with service providers. While youth frequently cited informal relationships as

supports (ie. classmates or teachers), only a few mentioned formal program/case manager

relationships as important to their support system. Feeling disconnected relationally from the

service provider was cited more often with youth utilizing FUP vouchers.

Four (4) youth utilized or were utilizing transitional supportive housing at one point

during their housing careers. These arrangements ranged from supportive single-site housing

provided by extending Chaffee services past the age of 18, to supportive single-site housing (ie.

Rocky Mountain Youth Housing) connected to emergency homeless services. Youth reported

mixed impressions of their transitional housing experiences, partly due to when they accessed

transitional housing during the variety of their housing experiences. For the one youth that

received transitional housing as an extension of foster care, who after emancipating was set-up

with her own apartment (with only 3 months of financial help), soon after lost the apartment

because of "partying". She later made remarks that indicated the conflict that results from highly

structured transitional housing to the expectation of living independently.

Other youth validated the use of transitional housing. Two (2) youth who utilized

transitional housing or were presently in transitional supportive housing indicated that the case

management support they received or did receive as an important support. Interestingly, the one

youth that utilized both FUP and transitional supportive housing in the past indicated that he

valued the independence of FUP, but also during the time of receiving the voucher struggled

with a drug addiction and therefore relinquished his voucher to find a more supportive

environment within transitional housing. This is consistent with the findings of Jones (2011) that

youth living in non-supported transitional housing displayed higher rates of drug abuse. This

said, the youth interviewed stated he had trouble with the structure of having case manager

meeting requirements after living independently with FUP.

Placement history was reported specifically by one youth as a factor influencing housing

instability, which is also supported in the literature (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010 Brown &

Wilderson, 2010). Whether or not risk factors such as these are being evaluated while youth are

still in foster care was not within the scope of this study. However, within the interest of the

prevention of homelessness, the ability to properly assess risk factors such as placement history

before youth transition out of care may allow PCWA's to better locate housing resources that

will support higher-risk youth.

In light of the observations from youth as well as the Prevention Specialist at DOH-

OHYS described above, this study proposes the recommendations below. Optimally, Housing

Colorado can utilize these recommendations to further support education efforts for it

constituencies around the state and influence policy development legislatively.

1. *Extend the age eligibility, duration and income requirements of the FUP voucher for*

   transitional youth.

The rationale for an age extension of FUP voucher eligibility reflects the economic

realities, as mentioned above, that influence young people generally to return to the home of

their parents for both financial and social support. As demonstrated above, frequently transitional

youth do not have the option to stay at a home of parents and if they do, it can often be unsafe.

Extending the eligibility age of a FUP voucher to an age of 23 or 24, can provide voucher

assistance to youth still experiencing housing instability.

Further, extending the duration of FUP voucher is also recommended. Dion et al's (2014)

study demonstrated that the 18 months does not coincide with traditional 1-year lease agreements

and therefore can provide impediments for both willing landlords to accept a FUP voucher and

youth attempting to establish stability and plan for their next housing situation. In addition, some

youth from this study indicated that 18 months was not long enough to establish work or pursue

education as well as save money for the future. Extending the voucher to 24 months is consistent

with recommendations from other studies (Dion et al., 2014, HUD, 2013). Further, some

research suggests better cost/benefit outcomes from extending support housing services for

transitional youth especially at the onset of leaving foster care (Packard et al., 2008).

Lastly, this study recommends extending an Earned Income Disregard to transitional youth utilizing a FUP voucher. An Earned Income Disregard is a tool that can be used by PHA's to exempt a portion of a tenant's newly earned income (in the event of earning employment or increasing wages) from an increase in rent owed. As FUP is an extension of the Section 8 Voucher program, only individuals who are disabled and subsequently find work are eligible for an Earned Income Disregard (Earned Income Disregard, 2006). In such cases, PHA's can disregard income by 100% over the previous level for a 12 month duration. Extending an Earned Income Disregard to all transitional youth, who are already on a time-limited voucher, will allow individuals the ability to save money for their next housing transition.

2. *Increase the use of project-based vouchers in transitional housing, where PHA's create "set-asides" specifically for transitional youth.*

Again, as project-based vouchers are not time limited and can be converted into tenant-based vouchers. Both are examples of permanent housing supports that youth can access along the housing continuum. Again, youth participants experienced a wide range of variability of housing careers (2-100+). Fundamentally, housing policy that focuses on sustainable housing for youth vulnerable to substance abuse, victimization and poor mental health is advisable. Setting-aside project-based vouchers is one way of doing so.

In the Denver Metro area context, both the State and Counties act as PHA's and therefore each possess the capability to set-aside project-based vouchers. This said, county specific PHA's have the unique ability to develop and build housing options that accommodate project-based vouchers. As was noted above, frequently youth found themselves in unsafe apartments when utilizing FUP vouchers in the community. Local PHA's like Denver Housing Authority (DHA), with better collaboration with county PCWA's, can help ensure not only that project-based

vouchers are available, but also apartments are located in safe in stable neighborhoods, free of

gang activity, violence, and the potential for victimization. Increased collaboration between

agencies that serve transitional youth has been shown to leverage existing resources and fill local

housing gaps (Choca et al., 2004).

3.   *Ensure every youth that participates in FUP has as a "Housing Coach" that supports*

    youth before, during and after voucher use.

Currently Mile High United Way provides Independent Living Coaches to its FUP youth

participants. Coaches help youth establish safe living environments to help empower youth

participants pursue their goals. This said, some youth in this study reported that they did not have

a relationship with their coaches and rarely talked with them. This could be attributed to a variety

of reasons (ie. high caseloads as a barrier to relationship development).

Ideally coaches can help provide support in areas such as financial literacy, asset

building, employment and training assistance, risk factor assessment such as substance abuse,

and connect participants to other youth organizations to build a network of social support.

Fundamentally, building a trusting relationship and with young people and introducing youth to a

more comprehensive social support system is essential. Ensuring there is funding available to

provide every youth utilizing FUP with coaching support should be a priority as supportive

housing environments have been shown to be cost-effective in the long-run towards the goal of

independent living (Packard et al.,2008).

4. *Ensure emergency shelters are properly connected to adequate transitional housing*

    resources.

One youth from the study, in addition to feedback from the Prevention Specialist at

DOH-OHYS, highlighted the lack of transitional housing supports available to youth after

experiencing homelessness and accessing emergency shelter services. This may be indicate the

lack of adequate emergency shelter services for youth in addition to few transitional housing

options that are the next part of the housing continuum. Further research may be needed to

determine transitional housing capacity in relation to emergency shelter services.

5. *Assess housing needs for youth utilizing ETV and co-enroll in FUP for added housing*

   support.

As reported above, one youth became homeless because he was unable to support himself

financially while in college even while receiving ETV and eventually had to drop-out of school

at the time. In hindsight he stated the housing supports (FUP) where not there at the time he

needed them. Conducting co-eligibility and referral to ETV and FUP simultaneously may

provide important housing support needed for a youth pursing post-secondary education. The

Prevention Specialist at DOH-OHYS also highlighted co-enrollment has area of improvement.

6. *Foster collaboration between agencies such as PWCA's, PHA's, and MHUW to ensure*

   proper contingency planning for transitional youth

As one youth mentioned above and was substantiated by other youth testimony, living

situations immediately after leaving foster care can frequently become unstable and therefore

unsustainable. Having a designated transitional youth housing liaison that can work between all

agencies could mitigate the gaps in housing and ensure safe and stable housing is being

coordinated for youth exiting the foster care system. For instance, local PHA's may already have

relationships with landlords that maintain housing that is safe and stable and amenable to a youth

tenant. MHUW and PWCA's through appropriate communication could coordinate with a

voucher-based apartment with local PHA's that promotes stability. Housing Colorado may be

able to participate within forums such as Advisory Committee on Homeless Youth to help

identify housing solutions within cross-sector collaborations and support further research

regarding the existing practices and potential gaps in collaboration between agencies.

7. *Assess youth strengths in relation to potential risk-factors before leaving care and during*

the utilization of transitional housing or FUP to coordinate proper housing resources.

Several risk factors were reported during youth interviews including number of

placements while in foster care and substance abuse. Both have been demonstrated to contribute

to the potential for homelessness. Conversely, the majority of youth interviewed reported regular

periods of employment, frequently during unstable housing periods. Employment can act as a

protective factor against homelessness. Proper assessment of both protective and risk factors

might provide insight regarding an optimal housing environment (ie. independent apartment of

supportive single-site). This study recommends such evaluation is done for youth receiving FUP

as well. However, more research needs to be conducted regarding the extent and types of

assessment that are currently being used by both PCWA's and FUP administering agencies such

as MHUW. In this way, Housing Colorado can help advocate and support better risk-factor

assessment regarding the prevention of transitional youth homelessness.

VII.   Conclusion

It was the goal of this study to define the characteristics and housing experiences of youth

who have exited the foster care system in the Denver Metro Area. Concurrently, this study

sought to determine the housing policies and interventions prioritized by DOH-OHYS in order to

provide context for the experiences of the youth interviewed. Consistent with the national

USICH Opening Doors plan to end youth homelessness, this study focused on obtaining the

youth perspective regarding housing outcomes, barriers to establishing and maintaining stable

housing and factors contributing towards stable housing.

This study did have several limitations. First, this study utilized a small sample size of only eight youth, partially due to the difficulty of locating participants. This small sample size makes the findings of this study less robust and therefore less generalizable. This said, the youth perspective as shared and analyzed through a strictly qualitative lens is still important and can be learned from. Second, this study sought to select youth that had already utilized FUP or some type of transitional supportive housing to obtain a reflexive view of their experience. Again, due to the difficulty of finding, recruiting and actually interviewing these youth (who are frequently not connected to any services) was difficult. Therefore, the final sample of youth also represented individuals currently receiving FUP or transitional housing and therefore did not possess a more comprehensive reflexive view of their housing experience post intervention. Lastly, this study dealt with the limitation of time. Ideally, this study could be expanded to recruiting more youth for the sample and utilizing multi-variant statistical analysis to further analyze variables such as number of placements and number of housing transitions.

Results indicated that housing interventions such as transitional supportive housing and FUP can help youth create a platform to pursue and establish more stable and permanent housing options. However, some structural impediments may exist such as age requirements and duration of voucher for FUP and often simply how youth are referred and access housing resources along the continuum of service provision. Fundamentally, the importance of relationship and social connectedness, both with service providers and informally within the community emerged as important factors for transitional youth endeavoring to maintain stable housing. Recommendations therefore focus on both addressing structural barriers within the existing housing continuum and building programming that fosters social capital throughout the housing experiences of transitional youth.

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Appendix A

FUP Referral Process
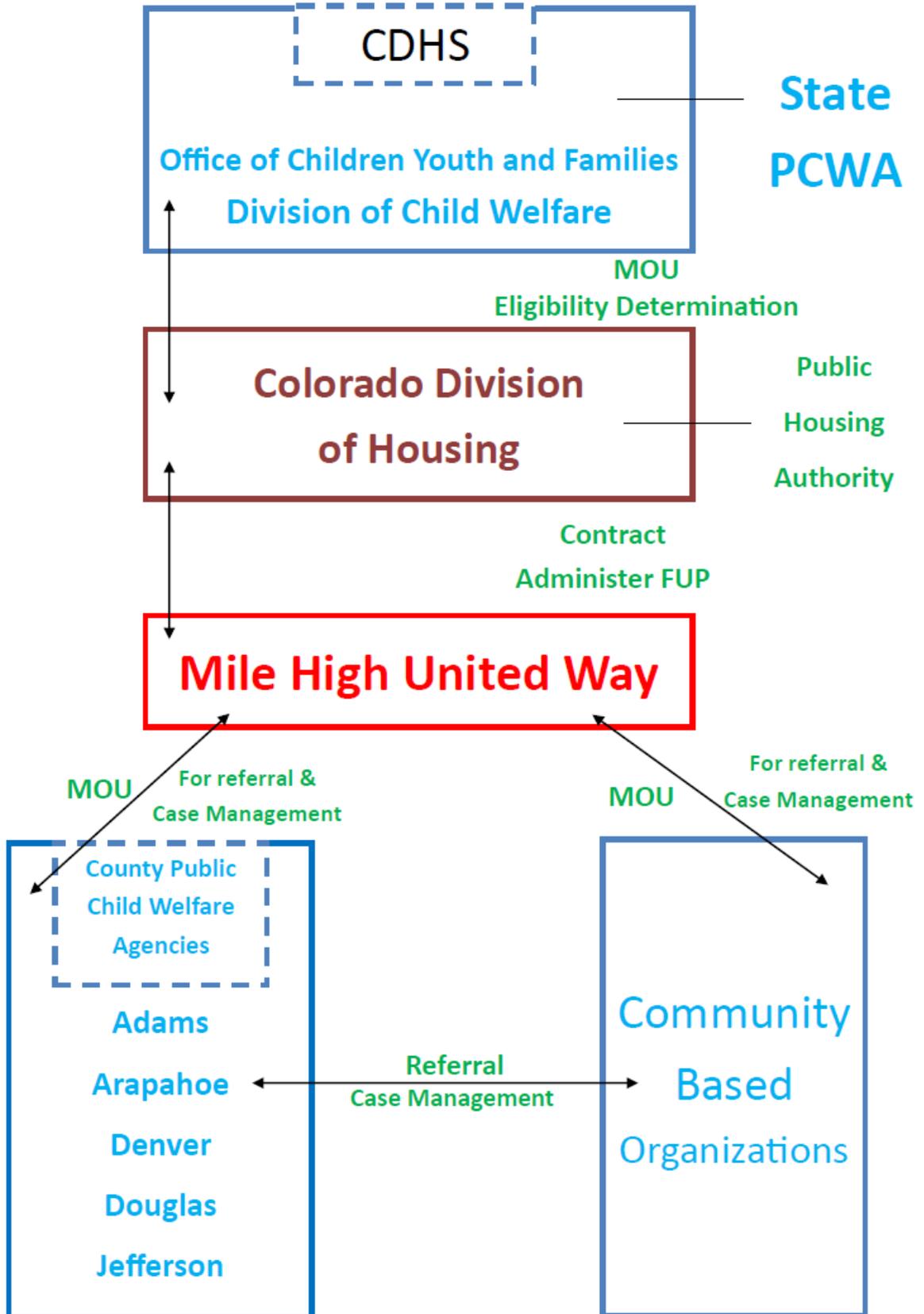
**Attachment 1: Survey – Prevention Specialist Colorado Department of Local Affairs,
Division of Housing – Office of Homeless Youth Services**

1. Please describe your role within the Office of Homeless Youth Services.

2. What housing strategies are being prioritized to prevent youth homelessness? Why are they being prioritized?

3. What housing options are available to DOLA, Division of Housing regarding the prevention of transitional youth homelessness (example: use of Project Based Vouchers)?

4. What does an optimal continuum of housing for transitional youth look like to you?

5. What are the barriers to creating this continuum as you see it?

6. What successes have you had in overcoming these barriers?

7. What are some of the financial/funding strategies being employed to provide safe and stable housing to transitional youth?

8. How would you assess the role of public housing authorities in relation to the provision of housing for transitional youth?

9. How would you assess the role of child welfare agencies in relation to supporting transitional youth in establishing and maintain safe and stable housing?

10. Where are the most significant "gaps" in the housing continuum for transitional youth?

11. The State's plan to end youth homelessness indicates building upon promising practices such as Mile High United Way's Bridging the Gap and the use of FUP vouchers. What is the rationale around focusing on FUP?

12. From your perspective, what are the strengths/weaknesses of the FUP program?

13. What policies are DOLA, Division of Housing working on regarding more comprehensive urban development, specifically in relation to low-income neighborhoods that lack general resources that transitional youth may find themselves in?

14. Accounting for the increasing rent and a lack of affordable housing stock generally in the Metro Area, what is the DOLA, Division of Housing doing regarding access and maintain safe and stable housing for transitional youth?

Attachment 2: Initial Youth Survey

Name: _____   Date:_____

Age:_____   Gender: _____

Race/Ethnicity (optional):

__ Hispanic   __ Non-Hispanic/White
__ Black/African American   __ Asian/Pacific Islander
__ Other:_____

General Info:

Do you have children? Yes or No (please circle). If so, how many: _____

When did you leave foster care? (month/year)_____
Did you emancipate? Yes or No.

How many different placements did you live in when you were in foster care?_____

Do you have any criminal convictions? Yes or No

Do you have health insurance? Yes or No

Have you ever struggled with alcohol or drugs? Yes or No
If yes, when:_____

Income/Employment/Education:

Are you employed? Yes or No. If so, how many hours do you work? _____

What is your hourly wage? _____

Are you looking for a better job? Yes or No

Are you receiving any public benefits? (examples: TANF, Food Stamps, etc.)

What is your education level?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 College: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior

Graduated from H.S.? Yes or No
If not, do you have a GED? Yes or No
If yes, where did you obtain your GED?_____

Are you currently in school? Yes or No.
If yes, where?_____
If no do you plan on resuming school and if so where?
_____

Are you receiving or have you received an Education and Training Voucher (ETV)? Yes or No

Housing:

What housing assistance did you receive in the past (please circle one): FUP or Transitional Housing?

How many housing situations have you had, since you emancipated from or left foster care?_____

Have you been homeless since you emancipated from or left foster care? Yes or No?
If yes, how many times? _____

Are you receiving any housing assistance at present? (examples: FUP, Section 8, Public Housing, Transitional
Housing, other) Yes or No
If Yes, which ones_____

How much do you pay in rent?_____

Do you have enough money for your other living expenses? Yes or No
Please explain:_____

Before you moved into your own place, were you aware of housing requirements such as leases, rental agreements,
rental insurance, budgeting money, writing checks, etc.? Yes or No.

Who, if anybody, helped you find your home/apartment and teach you about housing
requirements?_____
_____

Do you currently live with family or relatives? Yes or No
If no, why:_____
If yes, why? (circle as many as apply)

They are a support for me   I don't have to pay rent so it's cheap
It is the only place I have to go   It is close to my friends
It is close to my work/school   It is a safe and stable place for me

What city, neighborhood, county do you live now? _____

Is this part of town the area you want to live in? Yes or No?
If no, where would you prefer to live and why?
_____
_____

Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Yes or No.
Please describe:_____
_____

Do you have access to resources you need in your neighborhood (grocery stores, transportation, medical services)?
Yes or No
Please describe:_____

Attachment 3: Youth Interview Questions

When you emancipated from care, what was the plan for where you were going to live?

Were you OK with this plan? Yes or No? Please describe.

Why did you leave the housing situation you were in immediately after emancipation or leaving foster care?

Tell me about the different housing situations you have had since leaving foster care.

Tell me more about your pursuit of education during the time you left foster care.

Tell me more about your employment history during the time you left foster care.

In the times you felt stable in housing, what was the reason for that?

In the times you felt unstable in housing or did not have a place to stay altogether, what was the reason for that?

Looking back, did the transitional housing/FUP services that you used in the past benefit you? Yes or No?, please describe:

What do feel was missing, if anything, from your transitional housing/FUP services that may have allowed you to be more successful in maintaining your own apartment or house?

Looking back, who were the most important people in your life that helped to make sure you had a place to live, provide advice and support, encouragement, financial help, other?

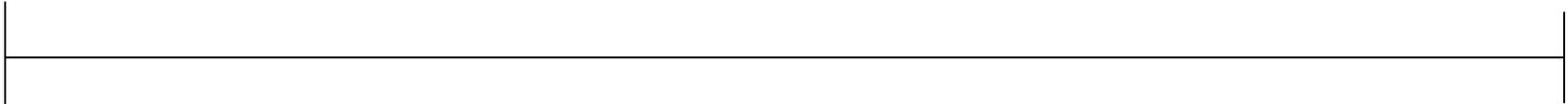In your opinion, what were/are your biggest barriers in maintaining a stable place to live?

How have you overcome these challenges?

What recommendations would you make around housing policy or housing programs?

Attachment 4: Sample Housing Timeline

When you left
foster care

Today

Supplemental documentation

1. **To lead and manage in public governance**

At the core of this project is the issue of transitional youth homelessness and the attempt

nationally, statewide and locally to address the problem. In Colorado, the development of

Pathways Home, the strategic plan to end homelessness statewide by 2020, intends to guide

housing policy to address transitional youth homelessness. Subsequently, the Office of Homeless

Youth Services (OHYS) was transferred to the Division of Housing from the Colorado

Department of Human Services (CDHS) to enhance the focus on housing. Further, as mentioned

above, voucher-based solutions such as the FUP voucher are being prioritized moving forward.

Economically, vouchers act as a demand-side solution in regards to housing choice. From

a public finance perspective, the Tiebout-Model posits that consumers can "shop with their feet"

for the goods they prefer. However, the assumption that all consumers possess the same extent of

choice within a market is a drawback of the model. This project demonstrated to some extent that

transitional youth, even with the help of a voucher, do not possess a range of choice in an

increasing competitive Denver housing market. Subsequently, supply-side strategies such as

increasing the use of project-based vouchers, or residence set-asides for transitional youth, may

be a better strategy in the attempt to support housing stability, especially in the transition directly

out of foster care.

Further, effective public governance ideally evaluates potential conflicts between

organizational values, funding accountability and the attempt to meet program outcomes. Several

youth mentioned in the interviews the perceived lack of relationship with service providers and

striving to live independently on their own. For transitional youth, the process of growing up in

foster care can be a disempowering experience, especially in light of the challenge to maintain

employment and housing and still pursue education. Fostering programmatic and organizational

norms that communicate more of a positive youth development approach may be more effective

regarding housing stability both short-term and long-term. Positive youth development is a

strength-based approach and focuses on the importance of positive relationships as a protective

factor towards risky behaviors (ie. drug use, violence). Such an approach may not be considered

for instance by PHA's that service a wide array of clients and are fundamentally focused on

compliance and eligibility components of their programs. Training and professional development

within this area may be worthwhile in identifying and bridging gaps in housing and support

services.

2. To participate in and contribute to the public policy process

Much of the policy momentum regarding ending transitional youth homeless is catalyzed

on the national level. Efforts nationally, such as the USICH's Open Doors, have likely provided

impetus for similar efforts in Colorado. This action can be viewed through the theoretical lens of

Innovation and Diffusion Theory, where policy development can be influenced through themes

of collaboration or coercion based on positions of power and authority. Colorado, specifically

Denver, has already taken the lead on ending homelessness with the creation of Denver's Road

Home nearly a decade ago. With the re-election of Governor Hickenlooper, a proponent of

ending homelessness within the state, the policy window remains open for continued progress

regarding housing stability for transitional youth.

Further, organizations such as Housing Colorado have an important role to play in the

policy process around this issue. As Housing Colorado is a member-based organization with the

mission of advocating for affordable housing for all Coloradans, it has a unique ability to educate

and empower various constituencies and build consensus around policies that address transitional

youth homelessness. Ideally this project will help Housing Colorado inform its members on

housing issues that affect transitional youth, form appropriate coalitions and support potential

solutions to this issue both legislatively and educationally. Empowering and utilizing the

transitional youth perspective is vitally important within the policy process. One youth

interviewed belonged to Foster Club, an organization that promotes community and mentorship

of former foster care youth. He reported he would soon be traveling to Washington D.C. to talk

about his post foster care experience with legislatures. Harnessing the experiential wisdom youth

possess will be important moving forward.

5. To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing

workforce and citizenry

This project challenged the researcher to communicate and interact on a variety of levels,

both organizationally and relationally. The researcher believed it compulsory to obtain

appropriate context for this study, both for his personal knowledge and for the purpose of the

project. This included informal phone calls, interviews and emails with youth service providers

in state and local government as well as non-profits and individuals citizens (specifically the

youth). This was both a challenging and enjoyable part of the research process. The researcher

was able to meet and obtain information for this study from different levels of expertise. Namely,

the interaction with the Prevention Specialist provided the researcher with the opportunity to

compare and contrast his own non-profit, youth services work with the knowledge of a state

representative.

Further, as the cornerstone of the study was focused on obtaining the youth perspective,

the researcher was able to interact with young people in a way that optimally placed value on

their perspective and their experiences after foster care. While originally the methods of this

study planned to hold several focus groups, individual interviews emerged as the most practical

way of meeting and interviewing young people. In this way, the researcher frequently traveled

around the city to "meet youth where they lived". This process in itself was valuable, as the

youth's perspective within the housing environments or neighborhoods they reside provided

further context for the researcher. Ultimately, the opportunity to share and learn about the

diverse experiences and backgrounds of the youth interviewed was vital to the researcher's own

understanding of the research topic and was thus reflected in the work of the project.