Instrument 5: Focus Group Guide for Public Housing Agency Intake Workers and Case Managers

Before we begin, I want to tell you a few things about this study and your participation in it. Please feel free to ask me any questions you might have. We will also email you a copy of this information.

A team of researchers from the Urban Institute and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to learn about how communities are using the Family Unification Program (FUP) to serve youth. We are not evaluating your agency or its programs. The information we gather will be used to inform efforts by ACF and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to improve the administration of the program.

As part of this process, we are talking with representatives from public housing authorities that received FUP vouchers in 2018, along with their child welfare agency, Continuum of Care, and service and referring agency partners, to learn more about their FUP services for youth.

A staff member at your agency completed a survey earlier this year about how you are using FUP for youth. Based on the results of that survey, we identified the program in your community as a promising one for further study.

We will ask you some questions about the [PHA name] FUP program, including questions about your collaboration with community partners, ways in which serving youth may differ from serving families, and successes or challenges you may have encountered serving youth, along with lessons learned.

A pair of researchers will conduct the discussion, which will take about 90 minutes. We may contact you after the focus group to ask for clarification. Your participation in this discussion is voluntary.

Everyone who works on this study has signed a privacy pledge requiring them not to tell anyone outside the research staff anything you say during this focus group. The researchers on this study will keep your identity private to the extent permitted by law. Only the people doing the research will see any information that identifies you personally. In addition, the transcription service workers have also signed pledges of privacy and will only hear audio recordings of focus groups to transcribe them. That said, we cannot control what you say outside the group, so there is some chance that sensitive information could be shared with others. We ask that you do not share what we discuss here today to maintain everyone's privacy.

With your permission, we will audio record the focus group so that we have an accurate record of what is said. However, we will not audio record the focus group if any focus group participant does not want it to be recorded. One of the researchers will be taking detailed notes, but will not include your name.

We will share what we learn about your Family Unification Program with ACF as part of our evaluation activities.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY OR TODAY'S DISCUSSION?

MAY WE PROCEED WITH THE DISCUSSION OF YOUR FUP PROGRAM?

If you have questions or concerns about the study, please contact:

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If you feel that your rights have been violated or that you have not been treated fairly, contact:

    The Institutional Review Board Coordinator
    Everett Madden
    Urban Institute
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Front-Line Staff Focus Group Guide

We are meeting with you all today to learn about your experiences with the Family Unification Program as it is used with youth. Although the program also serves families, we want to focus on your experiences with youth for our conversation today.

We are interested in your partnership with [PCWA name] to administer FUP vouchers and any interaction you may have with [local CoC lead organization].

Does anyone have questions before we continue?

Do you all consent to be recorded?

[If all consented to recording] I am going to turn on the tape recorder now, and we can get started.

Background
Let's start off by talking about your roles in the FUP program. Please take turns responding.
- What is your role at this agency?
- Do you work with families and youth, or do you specialize in working with youth only?
- How long have you been serving youth with FUP?
- How many youth with FUP vouchers have you worked with since [most recent voucher award date]?

Moving forward, anyone should feel free to jump in if you have something to say.
- Tell us a bit about the characteristics of youth who are using FUP vouchers.
    - o Probe: age, employment, education, mental health
- Where are these youth typically living prior to leasing up with FUP?

Identification of Youth and Eligibility
I now have some questions about how FUP youth are identified and determined to be eligible.
- Please explain your understanding of how eligibility determination works at [PCWA name]. (*Ask for documentation about the process*)
    - o What minimum requirements must youth meet?
    - o How are youth prioritized for referral?
        - ▪ Probe: highest-need homeless youth
- What eligibility criteria has your agency set for youth to qualify for a voucher?
    - o Probe: Criminal history, drug use, past lease violations
- What proportion of youth referred to FUP through [PCWA name] meet the requirements? How does this compare to families?
        - ▪ What are common reasons that they are determined ineligible?
        - ▪ How do you work with [PCWA name] to improve the likelihood that referrals will be appropriate?

- To what extent do you think the eligibility guidelines for FUP target the right youth for the program?
- If you could, would you change the eligibility guidelines? If yes: How? Why?

Voucher Application
Now I'd like to hear what it's like for youth to apply for a FUP voucher.
- Please explain the process you go through when you receive a referral from [PCWA partner].
  - o Do you immediately send a FUP application to the youth? Or do something else?
- How, if at all, do you help youth with the FUP application process?
- What, if any, help do youth receive with the application process from other organizations?
- What, if any, difficulties do youth have with the application process?
  - o How do youths' difficulties compare with what is typical of families?

Voucher Issuance
Now I've got a few questions about how eligible youth are awarded vouchers.
- Once a youth is referred to FUP, are they immediately placed on a waitlist, or do you wait to determine their eligibility?
- What proportion of youth referred to FUP were already on the waitlist for housing through [PHA name]?
- Is it ever the case that you receive more referrals for vouchers than you have vouchers available?
  - o If yes: What do you do in these cases? How long are youth typically on the waitlist?
  - o How often are youth able to access a different housing program instead?
- What proportion of eligible youth ultimately receive a voucher?
- Please explain what happens in the voucher briefing.
  - o Probe: purpose, topics, timing, requirement and consequences for non-attendance, individual or group setting
  - o Who typically attends briefings besides the youth?
    - ▪ Probe: Anyone from [PCWA name]? Anyone from another organization?
  - o Do you have any issues with youth not showing up or having to reschedule?

Housing Search and Lease Up
Now, I'm interested to learn more about youths' housing search and lease up.
- What types of housing are available for youth FUP voucher recipients? Is it project-based or tenant-based? Can they choose?
(If youth can choose)
  - o Are there differences in the housing search process for youth that move into scattered site versus single site housing? Please explain.
  - o What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages for youth of each type of housing?

(Note: The following questions may only apply if tenant-based vouchers are available)

- How, if at all, do you help during the housing search process?
  - Probe: provide help with housing application, getting documents, transportation to housing agency, paying off money owed to the housing agency, provide a list of other organizations that can help youth find units, conduct neighborhood tours, unit viewings, provide landlord assurances.
  - (If provide help in housing search) Do you focus on particular neighborhoods?
    - How often does a youth lease-up in a low-poverty neighborhood?
  - How does this compare to what you provide to families?
- How much time do you give youth to lease up?
  - Do you offer extensions if they need more time? Why or why not?
  - How much time do they typically need?
- Do youth encounter challenges while searching for housing and signing a lease?
  - Probe: transportation, finding units, affording security deposits, passing landlord screenings
  - How and to what extent does lack of knowledge/experience with housing search present a challenge for youth?
  - How and to what extent does lack of rental or credit history present a challenge for youth?
  - How and to what extent do criminal records present a challenge for youth?
  - How and to what extent does their age make it difficult for youth to find landlords willing to rent to them?
  - *How do the challenges youth encounter compare with the challenges that families encounter?*
  - *How, if at all, do the challenges parenting youth face differ from those who are childless?*
- How does your organization respond to those challenges?
- How do other organizations respond to those challenges (PCWA contracted organizations, CoC-funded organizations, other partner organizations)?
- What financial resources do you have available to help youth to search for housing and/or sign a lease and move into housing? How accessible are these resources to FUP youth?
  - Probe: providing cash assistance to cover utility startup or pay utility arrears, moving cost assistance, security deposits and application fees, furniture, appliances and household supplies

Post Signing a Lease Supportive Services
Now I'd like to know your role in supporting youth once they sign a lease.
- Once youth find housing, what types of post-move services do you provide to FUP youth?
  - Probe: budget counseling, credit counseling, periodic check-ins, subsequent move counseling, landlord-tenant mediation, healthcare access assistance
- What other services do you provide to youth?

- - Probe: a needs assessment to identify all the youth's needs, referrals to services to address needs, and regular contact (based on need) with the youth to follow up on these referrals and provide new referrals as necessary
- How long do you provide services? Are you committed to work with the youth for a certain period of time?
- How often do you meet with a youth?
- Does someone from another organization provide services after the youth secures housing?
  - If yes: Which services?
  - If yes: Who provides the services?
- How, if at all, do services that youth receive differ for youth who are parenting versus youth who are childless?
- Do you offer youth access to a Family Self-Sufficiency Program?
  - If yes: How many youth take advantage of that program?
- (If offers FSS) What services do youth receive through the Family Self-Sufficiency program?
  - Do those services complement or substitute for the other services that FUP youth receive? How?
  - How helpful is the FSS program to youth? Why do you say this?
- After the youth find housing using a FUP voucher, what types of services do they most need?
  - Probe: housing-related, child welfare, access to social services like TANF, enrolling in SSI, food stamps, child care subsidies, vocational training
  - How are these service needs addressed?

Program Exit and Transition
Next, I have some questions about what happens when youth exit FUP.
- How often are youth unable to maintain their voucher?
  - What are common reasons for this?
  - How does this differ for families served with FUP?
- How often do youth voluntarily give up their voucher before it expires?
  - What are common reasons for this?
(If served FUP youth prior to most recent voucher award)
- How typical is it for youth to obtain a standard Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher after their FUP voucher expires?
  - Do you put FUP youth on the Section 8 waitlist before their FUP voucher expires? Do they receive a preference? Why or why not?
- Please describe any assistance you provide as youth transition off their FUP voucher.
- Please describe any assistance that your partner agencies provide as youth transition off their FUP voucher.
- What, if any, assistance do you provide to youth whose vouchers have expired?

Partnerships and Systems Integration
I now would like to hear about how you interact with partners to coordinate services for FUP youth.

- How do you interact with [PCWA name] staff about FUP youth?
    - Do you work with one particular person, or does it differ depending on the youth?
    - In what ways do you work with them? What kinds of issues do you discuss?
    - How regularly do you meet?
        - What do you discuss when you meet?
    - How regularly do you communicate in other ways?
    - How do you feel about your relationship with [PCWA name]? Have any factors been particularly helpful in working with the [PCWA name] staff?
        - What helps you work together (e.g., having a single point of contact, regular meetings, shared goals, leadership support, shared data, etc.)?
        - What, if any, challenges have you had working with [PCWA name] staff?

- How, if at all, do you interact with [CoC lead organization name] staff or CoC partner agencies about FUP youth?
    - Do you work with one particular person, or does it differ depending on the youth?
    - In what ways do you work with them? What kinds of issues do you discuss?
    - How regularly do you meet?
        - What do you discuss when you meet?
    - How regularly do you communicate in other ways?
    - How do you feel about your relationship with [CoC lead organization name] and CoC partner agencies? Have any factors been particularly helpful in working with [CoC leader organization name] or partner agency staff?
        - What helps you work together (e.g., having a single point of contact at each agency, regular meetings, shared goals, leadership support, shared data, etc.)?
        - What, if any, challenges have you had working with [CoC lead organization name] and CoC partner agencies?
- What, if any, other partner organization staff do you interact with about FUP youth?
    - Do you work with one particular person, or does it differ depending on the youth?
    - In what ways do you work with them? What kinds of issues do you discuss?
    - How regularly do you meet?
        - What do you discuss when you meet?
    - How regularly do you communicate in other ways?
    - How do you feel about your relationship with this/these other organization(s)? Have any factors been particularly helpful in working with partner organization?

- What helps you work together (e.g., having a single point of contact, regular meetings, shared goals, leadership support, shared data, etc.)?
- What, if any, challenges have you had working with partner organization staff?
- Please describe any training that you have received from staff at the [PCWA name] on serving FUP youth.
    o How often have they provided this training?
    o Describe any additional training that would be helpful.
    o What training do you think staff at [PCWA name] could benefit from that they are not receiving? (probe: voucher eligibility criteria?)
- Please describe any training that you have received from staff at the [CoC lead organization name] on youth homelessness or serving FUP youth.
    o How often have they provided this training?
    o Describe any additional training that would be helpful.
- What, if any, other agencies would be useful to partner with to serve FUP youth that you are not currently partnering with? Why?

Big Picture and Reflecting on Implementation
- Have you encountered any major challenges implementing the FUP program with youth? If so, please describe.
    o Probe: lease length; tenant screening
    o If yes: How did you overcome those challenges?
- Have any factors been particularly helpful in implementing the program for youth?
- If you had the opportunity, what would you do to change or improve the program as it is designed for youth?

Closing
Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.
Is there anything that I did not ask about that you think I should know about the FUP program or your experience with FUP youth?
Do you have any final questions for me about the study, or about the research team?