

# Appendix L: Discussion Guide for Implementation Study Focus Groups with Front Line Workers: Public Child Welfare Agency Caseworkers, Referring Partners, and Service Provider Partners (Focus Group, Second and Third Site Visit)

This information is being collected to inform the evaluation of the Family Unification Program (FUP) being conducted by a research team at the Urban Institute, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago and Child Trends. This information will be used to inform the US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (HHS ACF) and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to improve the administration of the FUP program. All the information you provide will be kept private to the extent permitted by law.

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*The Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This collection of information is voluntary and will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Family Unification Program. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 90 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: 0970-0514, Exp: 09/30/2021. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Michael Pergamit at [mpergamit@urban.org](mailto:mpergamit@urban.org).*

# **Discussion Guide for Implementation Study Focus Groups with Front Line Workers: Public Child Welfare Agency Caseworkers, Referring Partners, and Service Provider Partners (Focus Group, Second and Third Site Visit)**

*Second Site Visit (6-9 months after implementation) and Third Site Visit (18-21 months after implementation)*

## **Background**

Let's start off by talking about your roles in the FUP program.

- What is your role at this agency (e.g. investigative worker, case-carrying caseworker) or organization (e.g. public health nurse, case manager)?
- *If referring organization:*
  - How long have you been referring families for FUP vouchers?
  - How many families have you referred for FUP vouchers?
- How many families with FUP vouchers are you currently working with?
- How does housing make a difference for these families?

## **Implementation: Identification and Referral (if referring organization)**

- Thinking about how the program worked before COVID-19: What were some of the biggest challenges with identifying eligible families?
  - Were the eligibility guidelines clear? Can you tell me what the eligibility criteria are?
  - What training or instructions were provided to help you understand the eligibility criteria? How was it provided?
  - Has this changed since COVID-19? If so, how?
  - Are these permanent or temporary?
- Do you think the eligibility guidelines identified the right families for the program?
  - Were there families who would have benefited from the program but were not eligible? What made them ineligible?

- If you could, would you change the eligibility guidelines? How? Why?
- Thinking about how the program worked before COVID-19: What about the housing authority's eligibility or application guidelines? Were their application guidelines clear?
  - o Did you work with families on the application? How?
  - o Did the PHA help with the application process? How?
  - o Did families have difficulty with the application process? What were they?
  - o Did families receive help with the application process from other organizations? How?
  - o Have the guidelines during COVID-19 changed at all? If so, how? Are the guidelines clear?
  - o Are these changes permanent or temporary?

### **Implementation: Voucher Issuance, Housing Search and Lease Up**

Thinking about how the program worked before COVID-19:

- Did you provide help to FUP families through the housing application process?
  - o *Probe: Did you provide help with housing application, getting documents, transportation to housing authority, paying off money owed to the housing authority, or interacting with the housing authority?*
- Did you help during the housing search process? If so, how?
  - *Probe for provide a list of other organizations that can help families find units, conduct neighborhood tours, unit viewings, provide landlord introductions.*
  - *(If provided help in housing search) Did it focus on low-poverty neighborhoods?*
  - *(If not child welfare workers): Did child welfare staff help during the housing search process? If so, how?*
- Have the services you provide to families related to FUP changed since COVID-19?
  - Has it changed how often or how you meet with families?

- Are additional services now available? Are some services no longer available?
- [If site has project-based and tenant-based vouchers for families] What types of housing are available for FUP voucher recipients? Is it project-based or tenant-based? Can they choose?
  - o Are there differences in the housing search process for families that move into scattered site versus single site housing?
- Thinking about how the program worked before COVID-19: Did families encounter challenges while searching for housing and signing a lease?
  - o *Probe for transportation, finding units, affording security deposits, passing landlord screenings, etc.*
  - o *How has thing changed since COVID-19?*
  - o *Are these changes permanent or temporary?*
- How did your organization respond to those challenges? How did other organizations respond to those challenges (the public child welfare agency, PHA, partner organization(s))? What financial resources do you have available to help families to search for and sign a lease for housing? How available are they?
  - *Probe for providing financial assistance to cover utility startup or pay utility arrears, moving cost assistance, security deposits and application fees.*

### **Implementation: Post Signing a Lease, Supportive Services, and Child Welfare Case Closure**

Thinking about how the program worked before COVID-19:

- Once families find housing, what types of post-move services did you provide to FUP families?
  - *Probe for budget counseling, credit counseling, periodic check-ins, subsequent move counseling, landlord-tenant mediation*
- What other services do you provide to families? Do you provide these directly or refer the family out to other agencies?

- *Probe for a needs assessment to identify all the family's needs, referrals to services to address the family's needs, and regular contact (based on need) with the family to follow up on these referrals and provide new referrals as necessary*
- [IF CHILD WELFARE STAFF] Were these services different from other families involved in the child welfare system who are not participating in FUP?
- How long do you provide services? Were you committed to work with the families for a certain period of time (e.g. 6 months after lease up or 12 months after signing a lease)?
- How often did you meet with families?
- [IF CHILD WELFARE STAFF] Did you keep the case open longer than you would have normally in order to provide the services?
- Did someone from another organization provide services after the family secured housing? Who provided the services?
  - o While their child welfare case was still open, was there any coordination between the services that organization provided and your/their ongoing case management services?
- [If any FUP families in site participate in FSS] Do any of the families you work with participate in a family self-sufficiency program?
  - o (If yes) Who offers that program? (if unclear, probe: was it the public housing authority?)
  - o (If yes) What services do they receive through that program? Do those services complement or substitute for the other services that FUP families receive?
  - o (If yes) Did the family self-sufficiency program help families? How?
- Have the services you provide to families related to FUP changed since COVID-19?
  - o Has it changed how often or how you meet with families?
  - o Are additional services now available? Are some services no longer available?

- o Are these changes permanent or temporary?
- Before COVID-19, after the family found housing, what types of services were most needed by FUP families?
  - o Probe for housing-related, child welfare, access to social services like TANF, enrolling in SSI, food stamps, child care subsidies, vocational training, etc.
  - o How were these service needs addressed?
  - o Has thing changed at all since COVID-19? If so, how?
  - o Are these changes permanent or temporary?
- How did having a FUP voucher affect the family's child welfare case?
  - o Did having FUP lead to a faster case closure? Slower? Did you want to close the case sooner but could not because you were committed to provide services for a certain period of time for the family once they received the voucher?
  - o Did the reunification families reunify faster? Slower?
  - o Were the preservation families less likely to have a child removed?

### **Partnerships and Systems Integration**

- Did you interact with PHA staff about FUP families?
  - o Was it one particular person, or did it differ depending on the family?
  - o In what way did you work with them? What kinds of issues were discussed?
  - o What were the challenges you had working with PHA staff?
  - o Have any factors been particularly helpful in working with the continuum of care staff?
  - o What helped you work together (e.g., having a single point of contact, regular meetings, shared goals, leadership support, shared data, etc.)?
- Did you interact with continuum of care staff about FUP families?

- o Was it one particular person, or did it differ depending on the family?
- o In what way did you work with them? What kinds of issues were discussed?
- o What were the challenges you had working with continuum of care staff?
- o Have any factors been particularly helpful in working with the continuum of care staff?
- o What helped you work together (e.g., having a single point of contact, regular meetings, shared goals, leadership support, shared data, etc.)?
- [IF PARTNER AGENCY OR COC STAFF] Did you interact with public child welfare agency staff about FUP families?
  - o Was it one particular person, or did it differ depending on the family?
  - o In what way did you work with them? What kinds of issues were discussed?
  - o What were the challenges you had working with public child welfare agency staff?
  - o Have any factors been particularly helpful in working with the public child welfare agency staff?
  - o What helped you work together (e.g., having a single point of contact, regular meetings, shared goals, leadership support, shared data, etc.)?
- [IF CHILD WELFARE STAFF OR COC STAFF] Did you interact with other partner agency staff about FUP families?
  - o Was it one particular person, or did it differ depending on the family?
  - o In what way did you work with them? What kinds of issues were discussed?
  - o What were the challenges you had working with partner agency staff?
  - o Have any factors been particularly helpful in working with the partner agency staff?

- o What helped you work together (e.g., having a single point of contact, regular meetings, shared goals, leadership support, shared data, etc.)?

### **Big Picture and Reflecting on implementation**

- Have you encountered any major challenges implementing the FUP program? If so, please describe.
  - o Have you had any challenges due to the numbers of vouchers for specific groups such as families and youth or types of families?
  - o Have you had any challenges adhering to the eligibility guidelines?
  - o Have you had any challenges screening families to meet the PHA voucher eligibility requirements?
  - o Have you had any challenges helping families during the application or voucher issuance process?
  - o Have you had any challenges helping families obtain a lease?
  - o Have you had challenges with matching the families' need for housing with the time to make a referral, obtain a voucher, and find housing?
  - o Have you had challenges providing services to families because you couldn't keep their case open long enough?
  - o Have you had any challenges around families maintaining their voucher?
- How did you overcome those challenges?
- Have any factors been particularly helpful in implementing the program?
- If you had the opportunity, what would you do to change or improve the program?
- [IF CHILD WELFARE STAFF] How do you think FUP has impacted how you or your agency provides services to families?
  - o *Probe for goals around identifying, serving homeless or unstably housed families*



- [IF CHILD WELFARE STAFF] Has FUP impacted how you work with families? How?
- Do you feel that the FUP program does what it was intended to do?
  - o *Probe for faster case closure, faster reunification, preservation*

## **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 families?

Do you have any final questions for me about the study, or about the research team?