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Family Unification Program Vouchers at the Intersection of Housing and Child Welfare Service Delivery: A Chicago Case Study

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Abstract

The Family Unification Program (FUP) is a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) initiative implemented on the local level to provide housing vouchers for families and youth involved in the child welfare system. Chicago's Family Unification Program (FUP) is one of the largest and longest standing in the country. This paper is a process evaluation of Chicago's FUP that aims to understand: (1) How is the partnership between the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and Housing Advocacy Program (HAP) structured? (2) How does the partnership between CHA and DCFS affect how FUP is implemented? and (3) How can aspects of this partnership be scaled-up in order to offer additional housing services to low-income families?

Data from 15 semi-structured interviews with FUP key informants and experts reveal that successful FUP implementation is dependent on a strong partnership between DCFS, CHA, and HAP. While currently Chicago's FUP leads the country in strong interagency collaboration, its mixed impacts reveal that interagency implementation challenges remain. Specifically, this study explores some of the key variables impending FUP's success, including implementation challenges and barriers to entry for FUP clients.

Overall, this research finds that FUP's program model is a useful starting point for further scale-up opportunities for housing and child welfare. Given the overlap between housing instability and placement into out-of-home care, this paper demonstrates how housing vouchers are a useful tool for servicing vulnerable families and preventing them from entering out-of-home care. Ultimately, this paper argues for the expansion of FUP and other housing resources.

Introduction

On any given night in the United States, there are over 567,000 individuals experiencing homelessness (or housing that is below the minimum standard), with 30% being comprised of families, according to a 2019 federal Point-in-Time count. Nationally, that means 7.4 out of every 10,000 families are homeless.[1] Housing instability, which encompasses homelessness and includes overcrowding, frequent moves, and couch hopping, is even more prevalent and likely on the rise due to the coronavirus pandemic and accompanying economic shutdowns.

Research has long established the relationship between housing instability and involvement in the child welfare system. Housing-unstable families are much more likely to be investigated by the child welfare system, and to have their children removed and placed in out-of-home placement.[2] Evictions can increase parental stress, potentially leading to abuse and/or neglect.[3] Homelessness may also lead to caretakers voluntarily placing their children in foster care while searching for housing, or to family separation due to restrictive shelter policies. Moreover, homelessness or unsafe housing conditions may prompt an investigation by the child

[1] National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress," 2019.

[2] Patrick J. Fowler et al., "Inadequate Housing Among Families Under Investigation for Child Abuse and Neglect: Prevalence from a National Probability Sample," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 52, no. 1 (September 1, 2013): 106–14, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-013-9580-8.

[3] Matthew Desmond and Rachel Tolbert Kimbro, "Eviction's Fallout: Housing, Hardship, and Health," *Social Forces* 91, no. 1 (2015): 295–324.

welfare agency.[4] Finally, housing instability can also be a major hindrance to family

reunification, leading to children staying longer in out-of-home placement.[5]

Long stays in out-of-home placement not only impedes healthy development for children

but can also be quite expensive. Recent data indicates that the costs of out-of-home placement

can range from $25,000 to $30,000 per child per year in some states.[6] As of September 2018,

over 430,000 children throughout the country were currently in or were being placed in out-of-

home placement of some kind.[7] Given the high costs (both moral and financial) of entry and long

stays in out-of-home care, researchers and child welfare agencies (CWAs) have begun and

should continue to explore the provision of housing support services as a protective strategy

against out-of-home placement.

Likewise, while research on this subject is still relatively nascent, there's evidence that

transition-age youth (i.e., youth between the ages of 16 and 25 years old) who have exited out-

of-home placement similarly struggle to obtain housing afterwards.[8] A review of the research

published between 1990 and 2011 suggests that between 11% and 36% of young people who

aged out of foster care become homeless during the transition to adulthood.[9] This indicates that

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[4] Michael Pergamit, Mary Cunningham, and Devlin Hanson, "The Impact of Family Unification Housing Vouchers on Child Welfare Outcomes," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 60, no. 1–2 (2017): 103–13, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12136.
[5] Mark E Courtney, Steven L McMurtry, and Andrew Zinn, "Housing Problems Experienced by Recipients of Child Welfare Services," *Child Welfare* 83 (2004): 393–422.
[6] R.D. Davidson, C.S. Beck, and A.M. Bowen, "The Revolving Door of Families in the Child Welfare System: Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Families Returning," *Children and Youth Services Review*, 2019.
[7] Child Welfare information Gateway, "Foster Care Statistics 2018," Numbers and Trends (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), 2020).
[8] Amy Dworsky, Laura Napolitano, and Mark E Courtney, "Homelessness during the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood," *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 2 (2013).
[9] Dworsky, Napolitano, and Courtney.

child welfare agencies should be doing more to ensure that all youth have concrete plans to address their housing needs after they age out of care. Although federal law since 2008 has required child welfare agencies to help youth develop a personalized transition plan that includes options for housing, not much is known about the specificity of those plans.[10]

As indicated by the research above, child welfare systems are currently struggling to meet the housing needs of two vulnerable populations: (1) Homeless families under investigation for child abuse and neglect; and (2) Youth aging out of care. Currently, child welfare agencies (CWAs) have few resources to actually address client housing needs. One exception to this is housing voucher programs, which are becoming increasingly available to CWAs.[11] The Family Unification Program (FUP) was one of the first voucher programs made for this exact purpose. FUP is a relatively small, special-purpose program that provides Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV, formerly Section 8) to low-income families involved in the child welfare system. With HCVs, families choose their desired housing and pay up to 30% of their income for housing with payments not exceeding comparable area fair market rents.[12]

In the next section, I outline the history of the Family Unification Program (FUP) and its role at the intersection of housing and child welfare. While FUP was created by the federal government, it is implemented at the local level through a collaboration between housing and

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[10] Dworsky, Napolitano, and Courtney.
[11] Deborah Harburger and Ruth White, "Reunifying Families, Cutting Costs: Housing-Child Welfare Partnerships for Permanent Supportive Housing," *Child Welfare*, no. 83 (2004): 5.
[12] Office of Housing Choice Vouchers, "Fact Sheet: Housing Choice Voucher Program: Family Unification Program (FUP)" (Washington, D.C: Office of Housing Choice Vouchers, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, January 2017), https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/FUP_FACT_SHEET.PDF.

child welfare agencies. As this paper goes on to argue, this collaboration is *crucial* to FUP's

success. Ultimately, I will investigate how FUP's implementation (and, specifically, the

partnership between the different agencies involved) affects the clients that FUP intends to serve.

Family Unification Program (FUP): History and Context

During the 1980s, the lack of adequate housing emerged as a critical factor in the out-of-

home placement of children. In response to these concerns, Congress authorized the Family

Unification Program (FUP) as part of the Tenant Protection Fund within the Cranston-Gonzalez

Affordable Housing Act of 1990.[13] At the time, it was one of the only federal initiatives to

address the housing-related needs of children in the foster care system. Its two target populations

were/are: (1) Eligible families who were in imminent danger of losing their children to foster

care or were unable to regain custody of their children, primarily due to housing problems; and

(2) Eligible youth who were in foster care any time after the age of 16, were currently between

the ages of 18- 24, had not reached their 25th birthday, and were homeless or at risk of

homelessness.[14] As of now, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

(HUD) has awarded FUP funding to more than 300 communities and nearly 40,000 households

across the country.[15]

Funding for new FUP vouchers is provided by Congress through Annual Appropriation

Acts. Each year between 1992 and 2001, HUD awarded an average of 3,560 FUP vouchers to

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[13] Office of Housing Choice Vouchers.
[14] Ruth White, "Family Unification Program (FUP) Vouchers" (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2015), https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/AG-2020/4-04_Family-Unification-Program-(FUP)-Vouchers.pdf.
[15] Ruth White.

public housing agencies, culminating in the distribution of 33,497 FUP vouchers in total to

Public Housing Authorities (PHAs). The distribution of the Tenant Protection Fund (which funds

FUP) is entirely up to the discretion of the Secretary of HUD, although he/she often relies on

Congress to reallocate funds in order to award new vouchers. For example, from FY02 through

FY07, HUD used its recession authority to avoid funding FUP, despite the Housing Choice

Voucher (HCV) program having carryover funds. According to a 2005 Congressional Research

Service Report, the act was largely due to concerns over the rising costs of all Section 8-

vouchers.[16]

FUP faced further challenges when the Budget Control Act of 211 imposed rigid

spending limits on all discretionary spending programs. Funding shortfalls caused the number of

housing vouchers to fall sharply in 2013, and then more modestly again in 2017. This is despite

the number of homeless families in the U.S. increasing during the same period.[17] All of this is to

say that FUP funding hasn't historically been constant despite the growing support for it at the

national level. Additionally, it's worth noting that the number of available vouchers each year

has never come close to the number of child welfare-involved families that have housing

problems. For example, in 2015 alone, an estimated 121,000 children were separated from their

families due to a lack of access to safe, and affordable housing; that year, HUD awarded about

30,000 FUP vouchers.[18]

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[16] Maggie McCarty, "Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program: Funding and Related Issue" (Congressional Research Service: The Library of Congress, August 10, 2005).
[17] Douglas Rice, "Congress Should Increase HUD Funding in 2019 to Prevent Voucher Cuts, Help Children Escape Poverty," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 14, 2018.
[18] Ruth White, "Family Unification Program (FUP) Vouchers."

If funding is appropriated for new FUP vouchers, HUD allocates funds through a national competition by way of a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). The NOFA announces funding availability and invites PHAs at the state, local, and county levels to apply for funding. The NOFA also establishes threshold requirements that all applicants must meet as well as rating and ranking factors that are used by HUD in the review and selection of applications. The total number of vouchers that a PHA may apply for is based on the size of the PHA and the identified need for this type of voucher.[19] Most recently, HUD administered $30 million to PHAs nationwide to administer FUP.

Chicago/Illinois' History with FUP Voucher Delivery

In 1989, a court case filed against Illinois' Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) accused the agency of separating children from families solely due to a parent's inability to provide adequate housing. The case resulted in the Norman Consent Decree, which states that child welfare agencies must make reasonable efforts to assist families in obtaining adequate housing in order to prevent family separation.[20] The case also resulted in the establishment of Norman Services in 1993, which consisted of three types of support to families in need: support to obtain public assistance, emergency cash assistance, and housing advocacy.[21] Nationwide, the Norman Decree became the impetus of the Family Unification Program, with Illinois being one of the first states to start receiving FUP vouchers.

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[19] Office of Housing Choice Vouchers, "Fact Sheet: Housing Choice Voucher Program: Family Unification Program (FUP)."
[20] "NORMAN V. MCDONALD; ALSO KNOWN AS NORMAN V. SUTER, NORMAN V. JOHNSON, AND FIELDS V. JOHNSON," National Center for Youth Law, https://youthlaw.org/case/norman-v-mcdonald/.
[21] Bryan Samuels, "Pathways to Housing Policy: Translating Research to Policy to Achieve Impact on Well Being," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 2017, no. 60 (2017).

Since 1998, CHA has issued a total of 678 FUP vouchers to families in need. In April of 2020, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) announced it had received a nearly $1 million grant award from HUD for the funding of 73 additional vouchers, bringing the total number of FUP vouchers available to CHA families to 751. According to a CHA press release, Chicago Housing Authority has maintained a 100 percent utilization rate for those vouchers over the last few years, demonstrating their importance and impact on families who are able to receive and benefit from these vouchers.[22]

However, it's very important to keep in mind how small FUP's scope is compared to high number of families involved in the Illinois child welfare system and of youths transitioning out of foster. Recent DCFS statistics show that there are about 4,000 family cases open with ¼ of them coming from Cook County. Meanwhile, approximately 1,200 youth age out of care each year in Illinois.[23] Like in the rest of the country, the number of available FUP vouchers is not even close to the number of people in need.

FUP and Interagency Collaboration

The Family Unification Program requires the close collaboration between local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) and Child Welfare Agencies (CWAs).[24] First, PHAs interested in administering FUP Vouchers must sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with their partner agency in order to apply to HUD. The purpose of these MOUs is to encourage local

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[22] Office of Communications- Chicago Housing Authority, "HUD AWARDS CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY GRANT FOR VOUCHERS THAT ENABLE FAMILIES IMPACTED BY CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM TO REUNITE," Chicago Housing Authority, April 7, 2020, https://www.thecha.org/news-media/news/hud-awards-chicago-housing-authority-grant-vouchers-enable-families-impacted-child.

[23] Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, "Executive Statistical Summary as of February 28, 2021," February 28, 2021.

[24] Office of Housing Choice Vouchers, "Fact Sheet: Housing Choice Voucher Program: Family Unification Program (FUP)."

PHAs and CWAs to meet continuously, alongside local Continuum of Care (CoC) leaders, to ensure both that families are aware of available FUP vouchers and that delivery is going smoothly. These CoCs tend to constitute nonprofits working with government agencies to provide housing services and/or homeless prevention.[25] For example, Chicago's Continuum of Care is comprised of more than 100 organizations that often work closely with both DCFS and the Chicago Housing Authority. DCFS also has a longstanding Housing Advocacy Program comprised of different agencies that work closely with FUP clients.

From there, FUP vouchers are awarded through a competitive process, with communities receiving a maximum of 100, 50, or 25 vouchers a year.[26] PHAs then administer these vouchers to families and youth who have been certified as eligible for FUP by the local CWA. The Child Welfare Agency, or its contracted voluntary sector service provider, is required to help FUP clients gather the necessary paperwork, find suitable housing, and to maintain their housing through aftercare services. Ruth White, the Executive Director of The National Center for Housing and Child Welfare, explains that "most successful FUP partnerships require cross-training, single points of contact (liaisons) within each partner agency, and ongoing communication."[27]
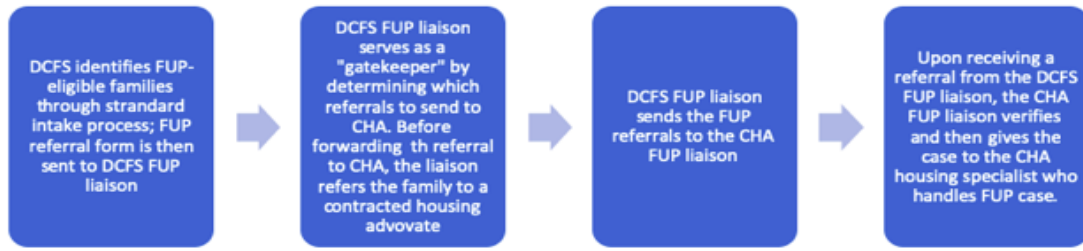
In Chicago, CHA and the DCFS work with general housing advocates (HAs) from DCFS-contracted housing agencies (which constitute Chicago's Housing Advocacy Program) to

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[25] National Alliance to End Homelessness, "What Is a Continuum of Care?," January 14, 2010, https://endhomelessness.org/resource/what-is-a-continuum-of-care/.
[26] Office of Housing Choice Vouchers.
[27] Ruth White, "Family Unification Program (FUP) Vouchers."

Figure 1: Chicago's FUP Process

| DCFS identifies FUP-eligible families through strandard intake process; FUP referral form is then sent to DCFS FUP liaison | | DCFS FUP liaison serves as a "gatekeeper" by determining which referrals to send to CHA. Before forwarding th referral to CHA, the liaison refers the family to a contracted housing advovate | | DCFS FUP liaison sends the FUP referrals to the CHA FUP liaison | | Upon receiving a referral from the DCFS FUP liaison, the CHA FUP liaison verifies and then gives the case to the CHA housing specialist who handles FUP case. |

DCFS caseworkers, and supervisors; DCFS FUP liaison, general housing advocate, CHA FUP liaison, CHA housing specialist

provide FUP vouchers to child welfare-involved families and youths aging-out-of-care. DCFS identifies FUP-eligible households, refers the households to the public housing authority, commits staff time and resources to provide follow-up services, and follows through with the child welfare service plan. General housing advocates (HAs) assist families in applying for FUP vouchers and procuring housing.[28] The infographic above (Figure 1) is intended to elucidate this process and includes the major stakeholders involved in implementing the Family Unification Program.

Jazmin Bandera, Chicago FUP's first (and current) liaison, identified five CHA-contracted housing agencies that frequently work with FUP clients: La Casa Norte, Housing Opportunities for Women (HOW), Chicago Childcare Society, Unity Parenting and Counseling, and Aunt Martha's Health and Wellness.[29] These agencies are located across Chicago and tend to serve clients based on location. As of now, La Casa Norte and Unity Parenting and Counseling serve the most FUP clients.

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[28] Mary Cunningham et al., "Helping Families Involved in the Child Welfare System Achieve Housing Stability: Implementation of the Family Unification Program in Eight Sites" (Urban Institute, February 2015).
[29] Jazmin Bandera (FUP Liaison) in discussion with the author, November 2020.

As an important aside, nonprofit contract organizations are not endemic to FUP; the role

played by private social service organizations in child welfare systems is extensive. Government

agencies rely heavily on nonprofit organizations to provide the range of complex services needed

by children and families, and DCFS is no exception.[30] Meanwhile, the nonprofit organization

often rely on financial support from the corresponding government agency. This can often lead

to confusing and conflicting power dynamics.[31] Regardless, child welfare agencies can and do

rely on contract agencies to carry out a variety of roles.

Thesis Aims and Rationale

My thesis is a qualitative process study on how the partnership between the Chicago

Housing Authority (CHA) and the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) can

be better leveraged to efficiently deliver FUP vouchers and improve outcomes for FUP-receiving

youth and families. Based on existing literature, these improved outcomes for FUP clients will be

a decrease in the incidence of out-of-home placement, increase in family reunification, and a

maintenance of housing stability. This study relies on semi-structured key informant interviews

with the actors involved in FUP's implementation along with housing and child welfare experts.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, my research questions were purposefully

open-ended and broad. I was initially interested in answering the following three questions: *(1)*

How is the partnership between DCFS, CHA, and HAP structured? (2) How does the

partnership between CHA and DCFS affect how FUP is implemented? and (3) How can aspects

of this partnership be scaled-up in order to offer additional housing services to low-income

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[30] Haley Murphy and Robbie Waters Robichau, "Governmental Influences on Organizational Capacity: The Case of Child Welfare Nonprofits," *Nonprofit Policy Forum* 7, no. 3 (2016): 339–67.
[31] Murphy and Waters Robichau.

families? Based on interest from the people I interviewed, I also included the question '*What are the barriers to FUP clients trying to access the program?'* in order to capture the experiences of the actual families and youth that FUP intends to help. While I wasn't able to actually interview FUP-clients, caseworkers and Housing Advocates (HAs) shared a lot of firsthand insights into how these clients oftentimes struggle to access FUP services.

My reasons for focusing on the *process*, as opposed to the outcome, of FUP are three-fold. First, while there have been multiple studies on FUP outcomes, there has been less done on FUP's implementation, despite the fact that HUD has stressed the importance of cross-agency collaboration in effective FUP delivery.[32] Moreover, the housing evaluations that focus on implementation discussed later in the literature review found that strong partnerships were crucial to the FUP program's success, specifically, in its speedy delivery and better targeting of eligible and needy families.[33]

Second, the *one* study conducted in Chicago that investigated whether FUP can prevent homelessness and out-of-home placement had mixed results (which I discuss later in the literature review). Given that previous FUP evaluations have found that the program's outcome depends on many contextual features involved, it would be useful to study how organizational factors in Chicago may explain FUP's mixed results.

Finally, as a report from the Urban Institute explains, from a general policy and research perspective, FUP is an important vehicle for understanding: "(1) the overlap between the child welfare system, housing, and homelessness; (2) how to provide housing to vulnerable, high-need families; and (3) how to facilitate cross-system partnerships between public housing agencies

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[32] "Promising Strategies: Family Unification Program (FUP)" (United States Housing and Urban Development, September 2011).

[33] Mary Cunningham et al., "Helping Families Involved in the Child Welfare System Achieve Housing Stability: Implementation of the Family Unification Program in Eight Sites" (Urban Institute, February 2015).

and child welfare agencies."[34] Given that FUP implementation requires cross-systems

collaboration and administrative data sharing on an unprecedented scale, the lessons we learn

from its implementation can better inform how to improve systems change in different areas of

human services.

Literature Review

An emerging body of evidence suggests that housing initiatives may benefit child

welfare-involved families. Specifically, vouchers represent a key component of housing

intervention delivered across service systems with the potential to keep families together and

even promote family reunification.[35] Moreover, by effectively targeting housing resources to

families most in need, child welfare agencies can save money by avoiding the significant

expenses related to placing children in out-of-home care.[36] For example, one study found that the

cost of supportive housing as an alternative for families with children in foster care is 70% less

than the cost of maintaining these children in foster care and estimated that the savings could

amount to more than $1.94 billion per year nationally.[37]

Unfortunately, evaluations of supportive housing interventions (such as FUP) have been

hindered by several methodological challenges. First, individuals and families change across

time, even in the absence of formal intervention, making determining causation difficult. Second,

extraneous history such as policy shifts, changes in voucher availability, and economic down or

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[34] Cunningham et al.

[35] Patrick J. Fowler et al., "Housing and Child Welfare: Emerging Evidence and Implications for Scaling up Services," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 60 (2017): 134–44.

[36] Amy Dworsky, "Families at the Nexus of Housing and Child Welfare" (Washington: First Focus State Policy Advocacy and Reform Center, 2014).

[37] Harburger and White, "Reunifying Families, Cutting Costs: Housing-Child Welfare Partnerships for Permanent Supportive Housing."

upturns can further influence outcomes. Regression and selection issues (nonexperimental studies in which the recruitment of families into an intervention was inadvertently biased or non-representative in some way) also limit the usefulness of existing research.[38] Finally, while randomized controlled trials (RCTs) can improve the validity and integrity of the study design, because there is so much structural variation across systems and within states in how the housing intervention is designed, it is difficult to isolate the effects and apply them to a new housing intervention or a new local context (i.e., each study is limited in its external validity).[39]

All these research considerations aside, it's important to review the existing literature on FUP, *including both outcome/impact and process/implementation-based studies.* My study aims to expand existing literature by both following up on the only existing FUP implementation evaluation and by providing an explanation for why the one impact study conducted on Chicago's FUP found mixed results. Additionally, since the focus of my paper is on the FUP partnership, I also consider some literature on interagency collaboration.

Outcome-Based Studies

Earlier studies have shown promise of a link between housing subsidies and reducing a family's involvement with child welfare. For example, a study of Keeping Families Together (a pilot program in New York City for homeless child welfare-involved families) found that supportive housing that combines rent subsidies and intensive services improved families'

[38] Patrick J Fowler, Jeremy Taylor, and A.S. Rufa, "Evaluation of Housing Support in Child Welfare," *Child Welfare* 90 (n.d.): 107–26.
[39] Anne Farrell et al., "Integrated Solutions for Intertwined Challenges: A Statewide Collaboration in Supportive Housing for Child Welfare-Involved Families," *Child Welfare* 94, no. 1 (2015).

housing stability and decreased their risk of subsequent involvement with child welfare.[40]

Likewise, an evaluation of Connecticut's statewide Supportive Housing for Families (SHF)

program found that families in the treatment groups had lower rates of placement into out-of-

home care and greater rates of family reunification.[41]

Looking specifically at Family Unification Program vouchers, an initial demonstration

conducted in 1993 showed positive outcomes associated with FUP. Specifically, a 31-site study

of almost a thousand child welfare-involved families receiving FUP vouchers showed that 90%

of families who were initially at risk for out-of-home placement remained intact 12 months later,

and approximately 85% of families with children already placed out of home were reunited.

Although these findings suggest promising effects of housing vouchers on family stability, they

were greatly limited by the absence of a comparison group. Additionally, the study may have

actively promoted selection effects because voucher allocation was based, in part, on family

ability to reunite with children quickly.[42]

The Family Housing Study, a project funded by the National Institute of Child Health and

Human Development, took advantage of a randomized control field experiment to test the

effectiveness of the FUP for inadequately housed families under investigation for child

maltreatment in Chicago. The study aimed to inform social policy and service provision in the

child welfare system, while also investigating the processes involved in the relationship between

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[40] Rebecca Swann-Jackson, Donna Tapper, and Allison Fields, "Keeping Families Together: Program Evaluation Overview" (New York: Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2010).

[41] Anne F. Farrell et al., "Final Report: Connecticut's Intensive Supportive Housing for Families Program," Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System (Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, December 2018).

[42] D.J. Rog, A.M. Gilbert-Mongelli, and E. Lundy, "The Family Unification Program: Evaluation Findings" (Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies: Washington D.C., 1998).

family instability and adverse child development among at-risk families. Surveys and child welfare records over two and a half years after randomization found FUP related with significant and sharp declines in homelessness but only small declines in formal out-of-home placement. Findings suggested that permanent housing alone does not alleviate risk for homeless families and the necessity of continued child welfare involvement.[43] Moreover, the study was limited by a small sample size, which makes it difficult to estimate the true effect of FUP receipt or generalize the results to larger populations.[44]

Another study in 2017 used a rigorous quasi-experimental design to examine the impact of FUP on 326 children in Portland, Oregon and 502 children in San Diego, California. Comparing families who received FUP with eligible families on waitlists, the researchers found FUP participation was associated with family reunification, including faster case closure and decreased probabilities of new child maltreatment reports; however, the study found only a slight impact of FUP on preventing child removal.[45] Ultimately, the study concluded that housing vouchers were being given to families not bearing the risks the program is intended to address, indicating the need for better targeting.[46]

In a literature review of housing interventions within the child welfare system, Fowler et al. (2017) found that a potential explanation for the underwhelming effects of FUP is that vulnerable families need additional support beyond rental assistance to address the factors that

[43] Fowler et al., "Housing and Child Welfare: Emerging Evidence and Implications for Scaling up Services."
[44] Patrick J. Fowler and Dina Chavira, "Family Unification Program: Housing Services for Homeless Child Welfare–Involved Families," *Housing Policy Debate* 24, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 802–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2014.881902.
[45] Pergamit, Cunningham, and Hanson, "The Impact of Family Unification Housing Vouchers on Child Welfare Outcomes."
[46] Pergamit, Cunningham, and Hanson.

lead to homelessness. Specifically, Fowler advocates for a supporting housing model that emphasized access to services plus permanent housing.[47] The study additionally recommended (1) Systematic efforts by child welfare agencies to help families apply for public housing waitlists and (2) Promoting further partnerships between child welfare agencies and homeless prevention and service providers.[48]

Process/Implementation Evaluations

The only implementation evaluation that has thus far been conducted specifically on FUP was by the Urban Institute in 2015 and involved 8 separate sites (the state of Massachusetts; Salt Lake County, Utah; Chicago, IL; Hartford, Connecticut; Portland and Salem, Oregon; San Diego, California; and Seattle, Washington).[49] The report found that while all the sites had successfully implemented partnerships between child welfare providers and housing providers, many sites struggled to "clearly define eligibility criteria, identify eligible families, and carry out supportive services."[50] For this reason, the report recommended a clear FUP model that would align the goals and timelines of the child welfare agency (CWA) and the public housing authority (PHA).[51] Finally, given that this report uses Chicago as one of its case studies, it was instrumental in providing context and background into how Chicago's FUP is structured. In my

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[47] Fowler et al., "Housing and Child Welfare: Emerging Evidence and Implications for Scaling up Services."
[48] Fowler et al.
[49] Cunningham et al., "Helping Families Involved in the Child Welfare System Achieve Housing Stability: Implementation of the Family Unification Program in Eight Sites."
[50] Cunningham et al 26.
[51] Cunningham et al, 26.

results section, I compare my findings to that uncovered in this report to assess any change over time.[52]

The Urban Institute then followed up on this with a larger-scale evaluation of five demonstration sites that provided housing and intensive services to high-need families in the child welfare system. These sites all had access to either Housing Choice Vouchers (like FUP) and/or rent subsidies, such as the HUD's Supportive Housing Program Grant. The evaluation team analyzed examples of communication, coordination, and collaboration among the different agencies involved, and interviewed various key stakeholders involved in the process. Some common themes from the evaluation were: (1) The need for a mechanism for CWAs to identify appropriate families and connect them to resources; (2) The importance of clarifying each agency partners' roles and responsibilities so that every partner was aware of "who does what"; (3) The development of governance structures supporting frontline workers, middle management, and executives to increase coordination; and (4) Challenges in formalizing and automating data-sharing.[53]

Additionally, Farrell et. al 2018 conducted a comprehensive implementation evaluation of Connecticut's Supportive Housing (SH) program, which similarly depends on a partnership between the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) and housing authorities in delivering rental assistance vouchers. Specifically, the study's process evaluation focused on understanding and documenting (among other things): (1) The planning prior to the program; (2)

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[52] Cunningham et al. 32.
[53] Martha Burt, Meave Gearing, and Marla McDaniel, "Evolution in Programs Offering Supportive Housing to Child Welfare-Involved Families: Services Integration and Systems Change at the Half-Way Point" (Urban Institute, March 2016).

The effectiveness of the collaborative process; and (3) Key stakeholder perceptions. It also found high levels of collaboration across the program.[54]

Finally, Collins et al. (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study of the Partnering for Family Success program in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. Like FUP, this program involved a partnership between the local child welfare system, public housing services, and a larger Continuum of Care with the ultimate goal of housing homeless families involved in the child welfare system and reducing incidents of out-of-home placement among these families. Interviews revealed that both child welfare workers and families involved had generally positive perceptions of the program, although others stressed that the limited economic and social support provided to families continued to be a challenge.[55]

To summarize, all the implementation-based studies focused on communication, coordination, and collaboration between all the different agencies involved. For this reason, this paper focuses on this theme, and specifically how communication between Chicago's CWA, PHA, and CoC affects FUP-involved youth and families. In the next section, I explore what constitutes "successful" interagency collaboration.

Facilitators and Barriers to Interagency Collaboration

Given the importance of collaboration for potentially improving child welfare outcomes within FUP implementation, research has begun to explore facilitators and barriers of effective collaboration between child welfare and community agencies. Through interagency

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[54] Farrell et al., "Final Report: Connecticut's Intensive Supportive Housing for Families Program."

[55] Cyleste C. Collins et al., "Housing Instability and Child Welfare: Examining the Delivery of Innovative Services in the Context of a Randomized Controlled Trial," *Children and Youth Services Review* 108 (January 1, 2020): 104578, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104578.

collaboration, the level of services provided by the service delivery system can be maximized and operational costs can be reduced.[56] While interagency collaboration obviously has its advantages, it also brings complexities and uncertainties.[57] Early implementation research found that it can be difficult to coordinate multiple government agencies to implement publish policies, even when those policies are relatively straightforward in goals and support.[58] Specifically, common barriers can include a lack of understanding of other agencies' policies, unclear or conflicting goals and objectives, a lack of communication between policymakers and service providers, and inconsistent service standards.[59]This problem is only exacerbated by the pervasiveness of nonprofit contracting in the welfare state.

Bai et. al (2019) is one of the only studies to examine interagency collaboration factors facilitating or impeding the effective collaboration process related to families who are experiencing housing instability and have children placed in out-of-home placement. While the program they evaluate (the Cuyahoga Partnering for Family Success Program in Ohio) is different from FUP, its similar goals and partnerships between child welfare and housing services providers make it relevant for this research. Specifically, the study identified the three facilitators for effective collaboration as: feelings of support; program workers bridging communication between child welfare workers and clients; and supervisors' support. The barriers

[56] Lawrence Johnson et al., "Stakeholders' Views of Factors That Impact Successful Interagency Collaboration" 69, no. 2 (2003): 195–209.

[57] Anne F. Farrell and Dianne M. Myers, "Collaboration in the Service of Better Systems for Youth," in *Juvenile Justice: Advancing Research, Policy, and Practice* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley & Sons, n.d.).

[58] Jeffery Pressman and Aaron Wildavasky, *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

[59] Johnson et al., "Stakeholders' Views of Factors That Impact Successful Interagency Collaboration."

were found to be a lack of shared values; misunderstanding the other worker's role; lack of buy-in of the program's philosophical approach, and perceptions of worker lack of commitment.[60]

FUP at the Intersection of Theory and Practice

The Family Unification Program (FUP) is a fascinating case example of how different areas of policy and practice can come together to target a specific population. Given the complex nature of both the program I'm evaluating and of implementation science in general, I relied on several different theories to guide my research process. First, given that FUP involves the overlap of housing and social welfare, I wanted to explore the role of "Housing First" which underlies all government-housing programs. Second, as I was a novice to implementation science, I found that an overarching implementation framework was important for guiding my methodological process. Finally, given that I was interviewing people who were on the "frontline" of FUP due to their actual day-to-day interactions with youth and families, I found that Lipsky's "Street Level Bureaucrats" was a useful theory in bridging the gap between implementation and outcome. I discuss each of these three theories in greater depth below.

"Housing First" Philosophy

The Housing First approach operates on the theory that homeless people with mental health or substance abuse issues need to have access to basic needs like food and a place to live before working on other issues or goals such as getting a job or obtaining mental health

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[60] Jeffery Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

treatment. Thus, in Housing First, people experiencing homelessness are able to obtain housing, first, without fulfilling requirements of undergoing mental health or substance abuse treatment. With growing evidence of its effectiveness, Housing First has been identified as an effective approach to end homelessness.[61]

The Housing First model for child welfare assumes that stable housing is a critical first step for families to work on their child welfare case plan and other issues (i.e., mental health, substance abuse). Housing intervention is used as a preventive measure against child neglect and as a way for families to work on their other issues without having to also deal with housing instability. The first priority is finding affordable and safe housing, and then, after, caseworkers can continue to work with the families in question.

Research on Connecticut's Intensive Supportive Housing for Families finds that getting child welfare workers to use a "Housing First" approach increased referrals and facilitated interagency coordination.[62] Child welfare staff's growing awareness and acceptance of "Housing First" principles for youth and families is critical for FUP to succeed, as interagency collaboration requires shared goals and values between the different agencies.[63] On the Housing Authority side, "Housing First" provides an impetus to continue accepting FUP-vouchers despite that FUP youth and families may be riskier than other Section-8 clients.[64]

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[61] Anne Farrell and Melissa Kull, "Can 'Housing First' Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect?" (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2014).

[62] Farrell et al., "Final Report: Connecticut's Intensive Supportive Housing for Families Program."

[63] Burt, Gearing, and McDaniel, "Evolution in Programs Offering Supportive Housing to Child Welfare-Involved Families: Services Integration and Systems Change at the Half-Way Point."

[64] John Egan (Program Administrator) in conversation with the author, November 2020.

Model for Implementation Research

Thus far, we've discussed the need for successful interagency collaboration in FUP's implementation; specifically, the collaboration between the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS), the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and its respective housing agencies. In order to properly evaluate FUP's implementation in Chicago, it is useful to have a model to outline what ideal implementation looks like. For this reason, this paper's methodology draws heavily from Santens et al. 2020, which uses the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) to assess the facilitators and barriers behind the implementation of a child welfare program.[65]

The CFIR model describes five interrelated domains, structuring 39 underlying implementation factors that can influence implementation efforts. For the purpose of this study, the implementation factors that were most relevant were: "Structural Characteristics" (The social architecture, age, maturity, and size of an organization); "Patient Needs and Resources" (i.e., the degree to which patient's needs, as well as barriers and facilitators to meet those needs, are accurately known and prioritized); and "Cosmopolitanism" (the degree to which an organization is networked with other external organizations). This is because my study aimed to capture both the basic structural characteristics of FUP and the interactions between the different organizations that make FUP happen. As for "Patient Needs and Resources," I sought to capture the degree to which the structural characteristics of the FUP partnership impact how FUP clients are able to access resources. While my codebook didn't entirely parrot the language of CFIR, it

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[65] Tara Santens et al., "Barriers and Facilitators to Implementing Attachment-Based Family Therapy into a Child Welfare Setting: A Qualitative Process Evaluation," *Family Process Institute* 59, no. 4 (2020).

did incorporate the constructs above in order to assess implementation facilitators and barriers of FUP.[66]

DCFS Caseworkers and Housing Advocates as "Street Level Bureaucrats"

Child welfare agencies (DCFS being no exception) typically operate on a small budget, resulting in understaffing, low salaries, overburdened workers, and high staff turnover. Funds for training tend to be limited, and different political administrations lead to inconsistent funding streams.[67] While Illinois' DCFS is notable for its large budget, it is not immune to the problems listed above. Furthermore, the increasing reliance of public institutions over the past few decades on nonprofit and for-profit agencies has further strained the system by causing a breech between frontline workers and policymakers. For example, the majority of DCFS's caseworkers are contracted from nonprofit agencies, meaning they are even more separated from the resources and expectations of the agency.

Housing Advocates (HAs) experience similar constraints and challenges. While not directly under DCFS, these agencies are financially dependent on DCFS, making their situation even more precarious. Within housing agencies, burnout and high staff turnover are similarly high, which I noticed when talking to both HAs who were leaving their job and HAs who had just entered. However, HAs are the only stakeholders involved in FUP (other than caseworkers) who actually interact with FUP clients on a day-to-day basis, making their role in this program vital.

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[66] "Constructs," Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research, 2020, https://cfirguide.org/constructs/.
[67] Santens et al., "Barriers and Facilitators to Implementing Attachment-Based Family Therapy into a Child Welfare Setting: A Qualitative Process Evaluation."

Michael Lipsky in *Street-Level Bureaucracy* provides us with an overarching framework for analyzing frontline stakeholders, stating specifically that "street-level bureaucrats" (i.e., government officials directly engaging with the clients that their programs intend to help) make public policy by exercising "wide discretion in decisions about citizens with whom they interact."[68] For youth or vulnerable families, interactions with case workers and HAs can greatly shape their experiences and involvement with FUP. Moreover, these limitations on street-level bureaucrats can add further strains, negatively affecting the implementation of the policy in question. Finally, the eventual stresses of the job lead to high turnover, which then negatively impacts clients who have to build new relationships.

Lipsky's *Street-Level Bureaucrats* also can greatly influence whether interagency partnerships succeed or fail. First, the resource constraints listed above often cause delays in communication, leading to potential tensions between agencies. Similarly, high turnover means that the cross-training required for FUP to succeed needs to be constantly performed in order to ensure that all FUP workers undergo it. Finally, having street-level bureaucrats working from across different agencies makes accountability even more difficult, as issues over supervision become murkier. While street-level bureaucrats are vital to FUP's success, they're also important for understanding some of the barriers and facilitators behind FUP's implementation.

Methodology

According to the Center for Disease Control, process evaluations are crucial to understanding the extent to which a program (such as FUP) is working, if it is being

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[68] Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, 30th anniversary expanded ed (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010).

implemented as designed, and whether it can be translated to other contexts.[69] The reasons I

decided to focus on *process* rather than *outcome* are elucidated in the Introduction, but I also

wanted to justify why I chose Chicago as my site for evaluation. Not only was Chicago's FUP

program the subject of a 2014 Randomized Control Trial which yielded mixed results, but it also

maintains a long-standing partnership with DCFS and CHA (existing since 1998, making it one

of the oldest in the country), it handles more vouchers than any other municipality in the country,

and it was recognized as a model program in an Urban Institute implementation study in 2012

(which this paper aims to build on).[70] Finally, because of the University of Chicago's proximity,

I was better able to connect with existing experts and policymakers.

Given that this study is focused on implementation, I decided that interviews were the

best ways to describe this partnership and its strengths and weaknesses. I found it valuable to

conduct semi-structured interviews instead of using a survey because (1) Only a limited number

of people actually handle FUP cases in Chicago and (2) The nature of my questions required

broader, in-depth answers that would likely require follow-ups. While interviewing experts gave

me a broader understanding of Chicago's FUP program, interviewing key

informants/stakeholders enabled me to gauge the perceptions of the people who actually

implemented this partnership. Moreover, given that implementation depends so much on the

members involved, "stakeholder input is a necessary component of conducting IR

[implementation research]."[71] Not only do key informants (KIs) understand the nitty-gritty of the

implementation process, but also their perceptions of how the process works and key players

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[69] Center for Disease Control, "Types of Evaluation," n.d.

[70] Fowler and Chavira, "Family Unification Program."

[71] Evaluation MEASURE, "Fundamentals of Implementation Research" (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2012).

directly influence the process itself. Finally, because a lot of my research is recommendations-based, talking to those actually involved made the most sense.

Additionally, I was able to confirm some of my qualitative data with a deep dive into some primary sources. An example of this is the actual text of the 2020 FUP Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA), which I received after requesting it from an official with the CHA. The NOFA was an additional document I analyzed in order to better understand how the responsibilities between DCFS, and CHA were detailed. Overall, though, I think my interview data were sufficient because of the strengths of key informant interviews mentioned in the paragraph above.

Interviews

In this investigation I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with both experts and key informants (KI) involved in the delivery of FUP vouchers. The purpose of these interviews was to collect detailed information on how the partnership between Illinois' Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) and Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) operated. However, early on, I learned that housing advocates (HA), as part of the Housing Advocacy Program, were crucial to the process. From there, I modified my study to incorporate this, leading me to change my thesis and research questions.

Depending on their background, interviewees answered questions from one of four interview protocols (see Appendix). If the interviewee was a policy expert, I asked a more general set of questions about how FUP vouchers were delivered, what distinguished Chicago's FUP program from those in other cities, and what further opportunities to scale-up housing services did the experts see. For the key informants (KI), I asked specific questions about their role in the program's implementation along with insights into the partnerships' strengths and

weaknesses. As depicted in the illustration below, my interviewees are split into four categories: (1) policy experts; (2) key informants for the DCFS; (3) key informants for the CHA; and (4) key informants from housing agencies that constitute Chicago's Continuum of Care.

Participant Group	Reached Out To:	Responded
DCFS & CHA Specialists	8	5 John Egan, Jazmin Bandera, Arielle Weston, Alaina Duca, and Steven Fields
DCFS & CHA Caseworkers	5	3 Audrey Anderson, ANONYMOUS, Alina Bonds
General Housing Advocates from La Casa Norte, Unity Parenting, and Aunt Martha's Health and Wellness[72]	8	5 Carly Hacker, Leslie Ruiz, Aleska Queijeiro, Ali Scram, Moriah Vaughn, ANONYMOUS
Policy Experts	4	2 Ruth White, Anne Farrell

Total: 15

Sampling

When reaching out to potential interviewees, I began with John Egan, who was instrumental in creating Chicago's FUP in the 1990s.[73] Both he and Jazmin Bandera provided me with a list of people (both housing experts and KIs) to talk to, which initially precluded my need to do snowball sampling. Due to my first interview with Egan, I decided to expand my search to housing advocates, as well as DCFS caseworkers. From there, he and Bandera provided me a list

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[72] Ideally, I would have liked to interview a housing advocate from *each* of the 6 agencies, however I was limited to the people who responded. Largely due to the fact that Jazmin Bandera was a former Housing Advocate with La Casa Norte, most of the HAs who responded (3 out of 5) were with La Casa Norte.

[73] John Egan (FUP Supervisor) in discussion with the author, November 2020.

of housing advocates to speak to, and from there I continued to interview them along with people who they recommended to me. For my interviews with the Chicago Housing Authority, I also took advantage of their website's Staff Directory, which provided the name, position, and contact information for all its staff members.

Procedure

For each of these interviews, I prepared 10-15 guiding questions, which were related to: (1) The roles that the interviewees had in their respective organization, (2) General information-gathering questions about how FUP is implemented, and (3) Specific questions focused on identifying challenges and recommendations for FUP delivery. For experts, I also asked how the partnership between DCFS and CHA could be expanded upon. In the latter half of the interview, I asked deliberately open-ended questions, so that I could capture the full extent of the interviewees' experiences and thoughts.

All interviews were conducted between November 2020 and March 2021, after the University of Chicago's Institutional Review Boards approval. Interviews were approximately forty minutes in length and were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Additionally, due to Covid-19 restrictions, all interviews took place over either WebEx or Zoom, although two were conducted over email. Per the requirements of the IRB, I sought consent from all interviewees, and all but two consented to be identified by name.

Limitations

This study is not without its limitations, the largest being the absence of hard data to assess actual outcomes or verify claims. Because all FUP-data is confidential, I was limited to only Key Informant's perceptions in order to gauge how successful FUP's implementation has

been in Chicago. This engenders two main limitations. First, key informants who are involved and have a personal stake in the FUP process may be inclined to say positive things due to either job/public pressure or cognitive bias. As for the first concern, I tried to mitigate this by offering anonymity, which two participants took me up on. I also think that because of the distribution of responsibilities inherent to FUP's partnership, I talked to enough people from the different agencies who could potentially "check" each other. Finally, my hope was that by interviewing experts, who are more impartial and generally more knowledgeable about the hard outcomes related to FUP, I could make my results less biased.

A second limitation comes from my limited sample size and selection bias. While I did talk to the majority of people involved in FUP's partnership, I would have ideally wanted to talk to everyone involved. I also did not talk to enough people at CHA due to their own privacy limitations. It is worth being said that the people who did choose to talk to me likely were the ones with the most to say, i.e., they are intrinsically motivated to improve FUP or be active in a partnership. However, I don't think this bias was significant because the bias wouldn't exist necessarily in one direction. Finally, it's important to note that with snowball sampling, because the person referred to me to me is usually someone who knows the person who referred them, they may be more likely to hold the same views. Fortunately, I interviewed enough people across different agencies that I don't think this was significant.

Qualitative Coding Methodology

Using the transcripts from the interviews conducted in this study, I analyzed the data through a process of qualitative coding and content analysis. Qualitative coding analysis focuses primarily on description, which allowed me to capture the nuances of my participants' experiences/perceptions while also delineating clear patterns. That being said, my coding

strategy depended heavily on the type of interview I was conducting. In general, I was greatly influenced by the book *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* by Kathy Charmaz, which advocates for a ground-up inductive approach where you derive your codes from the data. I performed multiple rounds of coding, often revising after each interview, in order to ensure that main themes were captured.

Additionally, using the transcripts from interviews with FUP experts, I conducted what is called "*in-vivo* coding" in order to understand the special terms and lingo used by DCFS and other organizations that are implementing FUP. According to Charmaz, studying *in-vivo* codes, which are characteristic of social worlds and organization settings, enables a deeper understanding of what is happening and what it means: "Such codes anchor your analysis in your research participant's worlds."[74] While I didn't do a frequent count of how often these codes were used, these *in-vivo* terms are helpful for understanding how FUP was structured. For example, terms such as *in-tact* and *placement* were/are important for distinguishing between the different types of FUP referrals.[75]

From there, I coded interviews for (1) Key Structure Characteristics; (2) Implementation Challenges and Solutions; and (3) Recommendations for the FUP Program. I also created the indicator "Has the FUP Partnership gotten better over time?" and coded for either Yes or No Patterns according to the participant category to which the interview subject belonged (i.e., an

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[74] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2006).

[75] Within DCFS, *intact teams* work with families to prevent child separation while *placement teams* work to reunify children after family separation has occurred. Both teams can make FUP referrals; Alaina Duca, in conversation with the author, January 2021.

expert, caseworker, specialist, and housing advocate) in order to also identify whether some stakeholders varied significantly from others in what they deemed important or challenging.[76]

Ultimately, I constructed a descriptive matrix of codes with each code having summary statements with supporting quotes derived from the interviews. The summary statements were refined using the techniques of constant comparative analysis. I then continued to check and refine preliminary summary statements and interpretations based on inductive analyses of the data, the experiences of other respondents, and the theoretical framework.[77] Each interview was analyzed and coded before the next one took place, allowing for a continual refinement of the research questions and protocols. The transcription process was done using the transcription service Otter.AI, and the open coding was done by hand. The resulting codebook is discussed more in the Discussion section.

Discussion

While initially the interviews were centered around my three research questions— *(1) How is the partnership between DCFS, CHA, and HAP structured? (2) How does the partnership between CHA and DCFS affect how FUP is implemented? and (3) What are some recommendations to improve the program?* —some independent themes emerged, which altered my coding process. As this investigation was exploratory, I found myself constantly shifting my research question in response to what was being revealed during the research process. According to theories of qualitative inquiry, good qualitative questions are usually developed or refined in

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[76] Given that I only talked to two independent policy experts, I didn't separate them, instead combining them with FUP Specialists

[77] A. Strauss and J Corbin, "Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview," in *Strategies of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 158–83.

all stages of a reflexive and interactive inquiry journey.[78]-[79] I've organized my findings as

follows: Part 1 provides an overview of the basic structure of the FUP partnership along with

some general conclusions; Part 2 presents the key strengths and weaknesses of the partnership;

and Part 3 consists of the recommendations provided by interviewees

Part 1: FUP Partnership

A. Structural Characteristics

> I would say maybe 20% [of FUP duties] falls on John, Jazmin and myself, because we do
> monthly or bimonthly meetings, where we're checking in with the housing advocates.
> And with the Housing Authority, we're getting updates on where everyone is in the
> process, monitoring the amount of vouchers that we have available, but the bulk of that
> work, probably 50% relies on the Housing Advocate, they're helping them look for the
> unit, get through the process, answer questions, etc...So I would then say about 30%
> relies on the Housing Authority, where they're tracking things on their own'.[80]

As indicated by the quote above, Housing Advocates (HA) are *essential* to FUP delivery.

HAs are the ones who do the most amount of work in administering FUP, while DCFS is really

just there to open and close the case.[81] One Housing Advocate described her role as such: "I am

responsible for guiding and supporting a family or youth throughout their housing

experience...Really just advocating on behalf of my client is my main role as a housing

advocate."[82] Hence, Housing Advocates consider themselves to be frontline workers (or, in

Lipsky terms, "street-level bureaucrats") who directly manage clients and shape their interactions

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[78] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2006).

[79] Jane Agee, "Developing Qualitative Research Questions: A Reflective Process," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 22, no. 4 (June 9, 2009).

[80] Arielle Weston (Youth Housing Assistance Program Coordinator) in discussion with the author, December 2020.

[81] Weston, December 2020.

[82] Leslie Ruiz (Housing Advocate) in discussion with the author, February 2021

with FUP. Housing Advocates also perform the bulk of communication between HAP, DCFS, and CHA.

The other "street-level bureaucrat" involved in FUP's process is the DCFS caseworker, who initially refers youth and families to the program. One caseworker described her duties as follows: "referring youth and families and completing the FUP application with families by answering specific questions outlined on the application."[83] As frontline workers, DCFS caseworkers have the most face-to-face interactions with FUP-involved youth families and, hence, do the bulk of referrals.

The roles that differentiate HAs from DCFS caseworkers do not seem to be clearly defined. For example, one HA explained to me that either she or a caseworker can help a client apply for a FUP voucher, although the caseworker is able to do it faster: "But if I have to do it, I have to fill it out, help the client fill it out, and make sure it's alright. Then I have to send it to their caseworker, and then if the casework don't take all day to sign it, they then give it back to me to give back to DCFS." Hence, HAs often will perform the roles of caseworkers, which can cause additional delays. This is a common problem in cross-system and/or agency collaboration, the so-called "who's on first" problem, in which agencies with overlapping mandates may struggle with coordinating action.[84]

Finally, the DCFS "experts" (i.e., the FUP Liaison and program specialists) consider themselves to be the "hub" of FUP by initially approving referrals, contacting HAs and the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and managing relations between DCFS caseworkers, HAs, and the CHA. Additionally, the DCFS FUP Liaison considers herself to be a "gatekeeper,"

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[83] Alina Bonds (DCFS Caseworker) in discussion with the author, January 2021.
[84] Yvonne Darlington, Judith Feeney, and Kylie Rixon, "Interagency Collaboration between Child Protection and Mental Health Services: Practices, Attitudes and Barriers," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 29, no. 10 (n.d.): 1085–98.

because of her role in determining which initial referrals get approved or don't. Ultimately, CHA has the final word on referrals.[85] In the words of a CHA representative: "My department receives referrals directly from DCFS and conducts the initial eligibility and initial lease up process."[86] They are also one of the main points of contact with DCFS during this process, coordinating with HAs and DCFS weekly.

One final element of FUP's structure to note is that the relationship between DCFS and Housing Advocates is often not clear. One HA explained that "We are not related or considered DCFS workers, but we are here to support the process of obtaining the voucher and affordable housing," which DCFS Specialists confirmed.[87] However, another HA considered herself in her position as a Housing Advocate directly under DCFS, hinting at potential confusion between the FUP structure. Going back to Lipsky's *Street-Level Bureaucrat,* this can potentially lead to conflict in that HAs struggle to identify themselves relative to DCFS supervisors.

B. Ancillary Services

On their own, housing vouchers are insufficient to cover all the needs of youth and families in the Family Unification Program. While only covering part of the monthly rent, clients are still expected to pay for security deposits, moving fees, furniture, and utilities. Additionally, youth in particular often struggle during the FUP process as they are likely to be missing critical documents, struggling in a job search, and/or unfamiliar to the budget process. For these reasons, FUP's success in Chicago hinges on the ancillary services provided to FUP Clients; as one

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[85] Jazmin Bandera (FUP Liaison) in discussion with the author, November 2020.
[86] Steven Fields (Department Manager) in discussion with the author, February 2021.
[87] Anonymous Housing Advocate in discussion with the author, February 2021.

researcher explained it to me: these constitute the "secret sauce" of any successful housing program.[88]

The importance of additional services aligns with existing research on FUP interventions: "One potential explanation for underwhelming effects of FUP is that vulnerable families need additional support beyond rental assistance to address the multitude of factors that lead to homelessness."[89] In Chicago, the Norman Cash Assistance Program provides up to $2000 a year to FUP clients to assist them with security deposits and other basic needs. All DCFS families (as opposed to just those under FUP) are eligible to apply for Norman Cash Assistance, although FUP families are also eligible (and encouraged to) apply.

Additionally, there are even more supports provided to youth aging-out-of-care.[90] Arielle Weston, who coordinates the Youth Housing Assistance Program, explained to me that in addition to housing, DCFS offers other programs for "transition-aged youth" (i.e., eighteen years old), including a college program and a parenting program. Housing, however, is their largest program due to its pressing need: "A third of DCFS youth aging-out-of-care become homeless within four years."[91] There are three major components of the Youth Housing Assistance Program: Housing Advocacy, in which DCFS helps youth find housing through the contracting of Housing Advocates (and provide youth with FUP vouchers when available); the Cash Assistance Program, which is similar to the Norman Cash Assistance with a yearly limit of $2,000 and can be used for security deposits, furniture, and any emergency needs; and the DCFS Subsidy Program, which encompasses FUP vouchers and other types of housing assistance.[92]

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[88] Anne Farrell (Director of Research) in discussion with the author, December 2020.

[89] Patrick J. Fowler et al., "Housing and Child Welfare: Emerging Evidence and Implications for Scaling up Services," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 60 (2017): 134–44.

[90] Arielle Weston (Youth Housing Assistance Program Coordinator), in discussion with the author, December 2020.

[91] Arielle Weston, December 2020

[92] Arielle Weston, December 2020

C. Communication and Data-Sharing

Unsurprisingly, the bulk of FUP-related communication occurs between either the Housing Advocate (HA) and their respective Housing Authority and/or DCFS caseworker. For example, one HA explained that while helping a client get her FUP voucher, "I was in contact with her [the CHA FUP Liaison], probably bi-weekly since December. And then per week with DCFS...We were in contact with DCFS quite regularly and doing meetings and staffing to get updates."[93] Another HA added that: "We basically communicate with them every day. Because if we're dealing with a client, and they got a caseworker, we have to call them to make sure everything's in or we have to discuss why this client is having [this] problem or didn't get this. So, it's basically every day."[94] HA and caseworkers (unlike FUP specialists) are the ones who communicate directly with FUP clients to ensure that their needs are being met.

According to John Egan (Program Administrator and Chicago's FUP "architect"), the current Memorandum of Understanding between DCFS and CHA requires that the two departments meet quarterly when housing vouchers are available. However, Egan explained that in actuality DCFS meets with CHA weekly: "And so every week [Jazmin and I] have a meeting with CHA and one of those six housing agencies."[95] In these meetings, all of the HAs from the respective agency will update John and Jazmin on how their clients are progressing through the program. For the most part, Housing Advocates expressed satisfaction for how these meetings were run; however, some have pointed that these meetings have become more infrequent due to the pandemic.

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[93] Ali Schram (Housing Advocate) in discussion with the author, February 2021.
[94] ANONYMOUS Housing Advocate in discussion with the author, February 2021.
[95] John Egan (Program Administrator) in discussion with the author, November 2020.

D. Change Over Time

In response to the question "Has coordination improved over time?" six of the nine of key informants (KIs) interviewed answered "Yes" while the remaining 3 either stated that coordination has stayed the same or decreased over time. Interestingly, while *all* FUP Specialists identified FUP as having improved, only one of the four Housing Advocates surveyed expressed the same. This points to a dissonance in how HAs and Specialists perceive the FUP Process. Unfortunately, I was not able to ask all the KIs this question because many caseworkers and HAs have only recently been onboarded to their current positions. As for reasons cited for why coordination has worsened, both participants cited the Covid-19 pandemic as the main factor because it has prevented in-person meetings.

Overall, the KIs who did state that FUP has improved cited some examples of these tangible improvements which has made FUP even more organized and efficient. The one improvement that was cited by all the Specialists was the creation of a formal FUP Liaison in October of 2020 who specifically manages this partnership, along with any other FUP-related issues. According to Jazmin Bandera, who first entered the position in October of 2020, she is the first "official" FUP Liaison in the country and hopes that other states/municipalities will consider creating a similar position. Previously Egan explained that he "handled all FUP-related matters (in addition to his other DCFS responsibilities) and felt that he was being "stretched too thin." This resulted in simple mistakes being made and delays in communication due to his many other tasks. Weston also remarked that "things were falling through the cracks" before Jazmin took her position.

Some other examples of FUP's continuous improvement include:

1. DCFS's establishment of FUP vouchers specifically for youth in 2015. Since then, Illinois has become notable in giving about half of all FUP vouchers to youth (the other half to families) while in most states, the split is 5% youth and 95% family.[96] Illinois is a leader in providing FUP to youth, likely reflecting its longstanding policy of providing foster care to young adults, and its long embrace of FUP generally.

2. Increases in financing of the Housing Advocacy Program: As of this year, there's been a 15% increase in housing advocacy programs, meaning more of the HAP is being funded by DCFS. Additionally, the partial housing subsidy for transitioning youth *doubled* this year due to petitioning from Egan and others.[97]

3. DCFS has looked past the Family Unification Program in search of new vouchers for their clients. For example, as Weston explained, DCFS has recently begun applying for FYI Vouchers under the newly created Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) initiative.[98] The hope is that by providing further opportunities for youth to receive housing, more FUP vouchers will become available to families, which will help with the scarcity problem.

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[96]Arielle Weston (Youth Housing Assistance Program Coordinator), in discussion with the author, December 2020
[97]Arielle Weston, December 2020
[98] HUD, "FYI VOUCHERS FOR THE YOUTH TO INDEPENDENCE INITIATIVE," 2020.

4. Chicago Housing Authority has increased their eligibility requirements to make their

   housing more inclusive for youth/families with different problems. As explained in the

   Theoretical Section, this aligns with the "Housing First" philosophy that posits that

   securing housing for vulnerable populations is the first step in targeting other social

   conflicts. Egan explained that CHA has been "great" at increasing eligibility:

   > It used to be if you're arrested for a crime, they assume you committed the
   > crime, and they would deny your [voucher] application. And, CHA
   > decided on their own even before the Obama admin sent out a memo on
   > that, they will only look at convictions. They will only look at convictions
   > for the past 3 years, which is a lot less than any other housing authority.
   > And they will only look at violent or drug convictions. Theft is not
   > something they're going to care about. This then allows us to serve a lot
   > more families that we couldn't serve in different areas of the country. So,
   > they've done everything we've asked them to do.[99]

From this section, there are two major takeaways:

1. *Overall, IL Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Chicago*

   Housing Authority (CHA) have a model partnership that other FUP-providers

   may want to emulate. This finding reflects what the Urban Institute's

   implementation report found in 2015, when it called it a model for the rest of the

   country. This is largely due to its communication: The majority of stakeholders

   reported "satisfaction" with how FUP was being implemented. Moreover, as Egan

   described to me:

   > I believe if you went to every other Family Unification Program and said
   > DCFS meets with CHA weekly, they would say "You gotta be kidding
   > me." I don't think anyone does that. I think we're the model. I really think
   > our relationship with CHA has been the model; it could be better, but it's
   > always been the model for the entire country. So, when I've done training

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[99] John Egan (Program Supervisor) in discussion with the author, November 2020.

with the National Center for Child and Welfare, I use Chicago as the model for whatever housing authority should be doing.[100]

2. *A large reason for this program's perceived success is DCFS's Housing Advocacy Program and, specifically, the role of Housing Advocates in representing the needs of parents.* Egan explained to me that Chicago has a "very good HAP," and that HAs have enabled CHA to offer vouchers to "riskier" families (i.e., families who would otherwise struggle to be stably-housed). Additionally, Egan indicated that the presence of Housing Advocates within FUP may correlate with a decrease in out-of-home placement, although he didn't provide the data to support that claim.

Part 2: Partnership Challenges and Solutions

While the FUP Partnership is obviously a strong one, hiccups of course still arise. In this section, I outline how characteristics of FUP's partnership ultimately affect how FUP is implemented. I do so by specifically focusing on the implementation challenges (and solutions) identified by the 15 interviewees. From analyzing KI data, I found that the main challenges to the FUP Partnership are: (1) Delays in communication; (2) A lack of data-sharing; (3) High caseloads and staff turnover; and (4) Conflict between stakeholders. Each of these challenges are then discussed in-depth with a frequency count (i.e., how many respondents identified them), an explanation of how they result from the FUP partnership, and with quotes corresponding to Key Informant experiences.

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[100] John Egan, November 2020.

A. Delays in communication

All the Housing Advocates complained about delays in communication with either their respective Housing Authority or with DCFS. One HA expressed frustration on her dependency on the caseworker to respond: "If I cannot reach that caseworker, supervisor, my job is at a standstill, I can't do anything else from that point on."[101] Weston similarly said, "some caseworkers are really good at communication. They email you; they text you that they're really excellent and some are not. Some will not respond."

A few issues that may contribute to poor communication are the high caseloads and high turnover rates among DCFS caseworkers. Due to high caseloads, caseworkers often do not have time to sufficiently address each of their clients' needs and have to make strategic decisions on which clients to handle or not.[102] Additionally, given that caseworkers frequently add and drop clients, Housing Advocates occasionally struggle to identify which caseworker they need to contact. Vaughn told me that youth aging-out-of-care often usually have 3-4 caseworkers at a time, and the advocate is not often aware of which one they need to communicate with: "Sometimes the youth don't even know...Unfortunately, in the foster care world, there's a lot of turnover; so, we just do the best we can with communication."[103]

Ultimately, these delays have consequences for clients, who may find their application process is stalled. For example, Carly Hacker, a Housing Advocate at La Casa Norte, told me that delays can impact the time frame that the client obtains the voucher, locates a unit, and completes the inspection in order to move in. All of this must be done within a certain time

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[101] Moriah Vaughn (Youth Housing Advocate), in discussion with the author, February 2021.
[102] Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, 30th anniversary expanded ed (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010).
[103] Moriah Vaughn (Youth Housing Advocate) in discussion with the author, February 2021.

frame or the voucher is no longer valid.[104] Another HA similarly explained to me that "If an individual does not turn paperwork in on time, they risk losing their voucher."[105] In general, Egan told me that delay times had decreased dramatically in the last few years. However, HAs still expressed frustration at the various delays they encounter on a day-to-day business.

B) Issues around data-sharing:

From the interviews gathered, there does not appear to be a uniform mechanism for data-sharing across the different departments. This aligns with other studies on interagency collaboration that identify data-sharing as a barrier.[106] Looking to Chicago's FUP, it appears that data-sharing is disjointed and inconsistent, with each department having their own system for sharing (or not sharing) data. For example, housing agencies only "share" their files on clients when they are being audited by DCFS, which happens yearly. While Egan has his own "master spreadsheet" with information on FUP clients, neither CHA nor the Housing Agencies have access to it. While a representative from CHA discussed communicating with DCFS via a "shared drive," they didn't offer specifics to this, nor did this come up in any of the other meetings.

This can occasionally cause problems, as Egan told me that he worries that some families are "lost in the shuffle" given that FUP only represents 3-5% of CHA's entire caseload.[107] Similarly, Bandera expressed concern that FUP families who leave the system are not tracked, so there is little knowledge about them.[108] Finally, several of the caseworkers interviewed expressed

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[104]Carly Hacker (Housing Advocate) in conversation with the author, January 2021.

[105] ANONYMOUS Housing Advocate in discussion with the author, February 2021.

[106] Amanda Vogel et al., "Integrating Health and Social Services for Older Adults: A Case Study of Interagency Collaborations," *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 199–228.

[107] John Egan (Program Administrator) in discussion with the author, November 2020.

[108] Jazmin Bandera (FUP Liaison) in discussion with the author, December 2020.

concern that they were "out of the loop" or unable to assist their clients because they lacked the necessary access to their client's data. As Vaughn told me, after one of her clients receives a voucher, she's unable to handle an issue directly with CHA because all that private information had been transferred and is now out of her hands: "I think that's a barrier, because it's not our voucher, it's some sort of legal issue."[109]

C) Conflict between stakeholders

While continuous communication, collaboration, and trust across different departments is important, it would be a mistake to not talk about client interactions, when the communication with clients is often crucial in shaping the program's outcomes. Interestingly, a lot of the Housing Advocates I interviewed described feeling like "translators" or "barriers" between the client and the FUP people. For example, one Housing Advocate told me that she often received complaints from her clients that the Housing Authority had been "rude" or "short" with them. Another Advocate told me that she often had to mediate conflict between her client (usually a youth) and a caseworker, despite that not being in her official responsibilities.[110]

 These conflicts emphasize how vital the role of the HA is in mediating client expectations. However, they also point to a potential bridge in client experiences and FUP Specialist perceptions, which could lead to misunderstandings in how to improve FUP programming. FUP Specialists are insulated from and generally unaware that these conflicts are occurring. Meanwhile, Housing Advocates have to take on an additional responsibility by serving as the nexus between CHA and DCFS. While none of the HAs explicitly complained to

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[109] Moriah Vaughn (Youth Housing Advocate) in discussion with the author, February 2021.

[110] Moriah Vaughn (Youth Housing Advocate) in discussion with the author, February 2021.

me about that, it's worth considering given that burnout among Housing Advocates is not uncommon.

One tension that Specialists *were* aware of was the frustration frequently expressed by caseworkers around the lack of housing vouchers available. Part of this, according to Bandera, is a misunderstanding of what actually constitutes a lack of housing. Many DCFS caseworkers will think that families living in unideal or potentially unstable housing situations are FUP-eligible when they are not. For example, one DCFS caseworker told me about a mother who was living with her children at an ex-boyfriend's house; she was ultimately not FUP-eligible because her children were not in immediate danger of being homeless.[111] Generally, the caseworkers I interviewed expressed frustration at the lack of information that caseworkers are given about housing: "It felt like that the process of selection, if you are eligible for FUP, was kind of unknown to me, like how many people get FUP or not. I didn't get to that point, but that wasn't well-communicated."[112] Another caseworker told me that she similarly struggled through the FUP process and ultimately felt frustrated at the lack of information provided to her.[113]

FUP Specialists, for the most part, are aware of these struggles and hope to remedy them through better training. Weston told me "So, one thing I really would like to work on at DCFS is helping access to not only training but just making this process more accessible for caseworkers and our youth... It's definitely bureaucratic and it's confusing."[114] Another Specialist told me that she holds monthly training for Housing Advocates and Caseworkers in order to better explain the process: "So I would assist with training new, fresh housing advocates about our expectations of the program, the forms that are required, etc. 'You know, if you have questions, please let me

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[111] Audrey Anderson (DCFS Caseworker) in discussion with the author, February 2021.
[112] Audrey Anderson, (DCFS Caseworker) in conversation with the author, February 2021.
[113] ANONYMOUS DCFS caseworker in conversation with the author, January 2021.
[114] Arielle Weston, December 2020.

know, I can walk you through the steps.'"[115] Unfortunately, misunderstandings still persist, although DCFS seems to be aware of them and eager to find solutions.

There are two major takeaways from this section:

1. Despite an overall strong partnership, implementation challenges remain, including, delayed communication, a lack of data-sharing and misunderstandings over FUP eligibility. Ultimately, the FUP Specialists I talked to hope to remedy misunderstandings through more consistent and clearer training. Alaina Duca specifically cited monthly training seminars as potential remedy for high staff turnover. However, neither DCFS nor CHA have a concrete plan to address the data-sharing or communication issues mentioned above.

2. FUP clients continue to face serious hurdles to entry into the program, which could be remedied by better communication. Communication delays or mishaps can impede a client's ability to get through the FUP process successfully. As HA Leslie Ruiz explained, clients already struggle enough with document procurement and meeting the lengthy application requirements; FUP providers need to focus on these challenges as they guide clients through the process.[116]

Part 3: Recommendations

Given everything discussed in previous sections, it is unsurprising that almost everyone interviewed stated the need for more FUP vouchers. The figure below presents other recommendations that were frequently cited by participants. I expand on these later in my own recommendations section. One recommendation provided by John Egan that is worth noting is his idea of an assessment tool to gauge which families need what kind of services. As he

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[115] Alaina Duca (Child Protective Specialist) in conversation with the author, February 2021.
[116] Leslie Ruiz (Bilingual Housing Advocate) in conversation with the author, January 2021.

explains, "if I were to look at a family before I gave them a voucher, I wouldn't know which ones are going to be successful and which ones are not going to be successful…it would be great if such an assessment could be done."[117] This could potentially even mitigate FUP demand, because some families arguably could succeed with only some cash assistance as opposed to needing an entire voucher. Most families, however, likely do need (and probably won't get) a FUP voucher.

Recommendations to Improve FUP		
A	More Vouchers	"The problem with FUP Vouchers is one of quantity not quality."[118]
B	Better Data-Sharing/Collection	"Sometimes families leave the program and we don't know why that is. We need to have some way to track them"[119]
C	More Meetings and Training Opportunities	"We should consider working with a new Housing Agency or finding more grants to subsidize housing."[120]
D	More Housing Opportunities Other than FUP	"One thing I really would like to work on at DCFS is helping access to not only training but just making this processing more accessible for caseworkers and our youth."[121]

Key Takeaway:

5. *More housing solutions are necessary in order to meet insufficient demand.* All the people interviewed expressed interest in increasing the number of FUP vouchers available. Ultimately, the number of vouchers available will never reach the number of DCFS-families struggling with affordable housing; As a result, a lot of DCFS staff will likely see the program as

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[117] John Egan (Program Administrator) in discussion with the author, November 2020.

[118] Ruth White (Executive Director) in conversation with the author, November 2020

[119] John Egan, November 2020.

[120] Jazmin Bandera (FUP Liaison) in discussion with the author, December 2020.

[121] Arielle Weston (Youth Housing Assistance Program Coordinator), in discussion with the author, December 2020.

a false promise. For this reason, I consider alternative forms of housing assistance in the

Recommendations section.

Policy Recommendations

To quote Ruth White, the Executive Director of the National Center for Housing and

Child Welfare, "the problems in Chicago's FUP delivery are all related to quantity."[122] Hence,

the biggest recommendation for Chicago's Family Unification Program would obviously be to

apply for more vouchers from the federal government. This would also appease caseworkers,

who are frequently frustrated at the limited quantity of vouchers (see Findings). However, the

requirements to procure more FUP vouchers (including dealing with HUD's limited funding) far

exceed the scope of this paper. Instead, this section focuses on tangible and actionable

recommendations to improve FUP's delivery. Moreover, given that Chicago's program is

"nearly flawless," a lot of these recommendations will be targeted to the almost 300 other Public

Housing Agencies currently working to distribute FUP vouchers. Hence, these recommendations

are divided under the sections of "Chicago-Specific" and "General."

Chicago-Specific

1. *Improve Data and Resource-Sharing*

As indicated in the Findings, a lack of data-sharing was an implementation challenge

identified by ⅓ of the respondents. Egan's specific concern was that FUP families will often "fall

under the radar" or leave the program without providing DCFS nor CHA an explanation for

why.[123] Given that feedback from FUP families would likely benefit the entire program, my

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[122] Ruth White (Executive Director) in conversation with the author, November 2020

[123] John Egan (Program Administrator) in conversation with the author, November 2020.

recommendation is for the creation of a system-wide database with information on every FUP family and youth, including demographic information, the caseworker(s) and Housing Advocate assigned to them, and miscellaneous notes about where the client is housed, how long the housing process took, etc. Specifically, a quantification of the average turnaround time for FUP vouchers (including when a voucher is received and when the client is stably housed) would be very helpful for both clients and frontline workers, so that they know what to expect in the process. This would also provide Egan (the program's main administrator) the information he needs on why clients eventually leave the program and would contextualize incidents when clients do not succeed in the program (i.e., they later become homeless, their children are removed and placed into out-of-home care, etc.). Egan stated in his interview the need for an assessment tool that would predict which families were going to succeed and which wouldn't.[124] While this database would not necessarily serve this purpose, it would enable researchers to create one based off client-level data.

There are a few obstacles I foresee with this plan. The first is obviously confidentiality, given the (justified) need to protect sensitive client information. This most likely will not affect CHA given that they already collect this type of information. However, CHA may be hesitant to allow other parties, like HAs, access to the data. Thus, I think that clients would likely consent to this. Moreover, even if frontline workers (i.e., HAs and caseworkers) were excluded from this data, they could still benefit from its aggregation and analysis (i.e., the average wait time for processing a voucher).

Additionally, data-sharing can be generally difficult in interagency collaboration due to a lack of trust and potential "turf issues" (or issues determining ownership over shared resources

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[124] Egan

like data).[125] However, I don't think this is an issue because (1) DCFS and CHA already have a history of mutual trust and collaboration; and (2) The current Memorandum of Understanding includes a section about data-sharing that outlines any potential conflict. However, my final concern is that given CHA and John Egan already have their own systems of collecting data, they may be unwilling to switch over to a new system. The solution for this is just stakeholder buy-in, which will hopefully come given John Egan's enthusiasm for greater data-sharing opportunities.

2. *Expand FUP's Continuum of Care (CoC) to include more housing non-profits, affordable housing options, and additional service providers.*

According to the 2019 Norman Housing Program Plan, housing agencies are expected to (among other services) "assist the Client in Securing Permanent Affordable Housing" through consumer education, a housing list, and relationships with property managers. However, as Leslie Ruiz pointed out, finding affordable housing (with or without the FUP voucher) remains a huge challenge. Given that the 6 housing agencies operate separately (despite all reporting back to DCFS) one recommendation could be to pool resources in order to better service clients. For example, if one agency has close connections with an affordable landlord, they can share that information with the other agencies. This ties into this paper's first recommendation of greater data-sharing. However, this would likely also spark a lot more bureaucracy and turf issues. However, none of the Housing Advocates I spoke with mentioned competition with other agencies, and (in contrast) provided examples of different housing agencies working together to manage high caseloads. Additionally, given that the FUP program currently is so small, the

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[125] Lawrence Johnson et al., "Stakeholders' Views of Factors That Impact Successful Interagency Collaboration" 69, no. 2 (2003): 195–209.

benefit of resource-sharing may not be worth the time and effort given that the alternative would be more direct services to families in need.

Furthermore, these findings point to a need for an extended CoC that offers additional services, including cash assistance, furniture purchases, and consumer education. While some agencies try to provide this, they often find themselves overloaded with heavy caseloads. Furthermore, a compilation of these additional housing services could be given to John and Jazmin and distributed to all FUP clients, so that they all have an equal opportunity of accessing these resources.

3. *Consider incorporation of non-FUP vouchers and other housing services to expand the program.*

In our interview, one caseworker pointed to her frustration at a lack of housing opportunities for clients other than FUP.[126] This aligns with my data which reveals that the majority of respondents recommended that CHA and DCFS work to increase their quantity of FUP vouchers (which is, unfortunately, largely out of their control), and/or seek out other grants or housing subsidies. Aligned with this finding, my recommendation calls for the formal outreach by DCFS for more housing providers, including applying to both state and federal grants. A good example of them already doing this is their recent application of Fostering Youth Independence Vouchers in order to expand the number of vouchers allocated for youth. Another example is one housing agency (Housing Opportunities for Women) applying for a state grant to provide permanent follow-up to FUP families who need it. Additionally, there are likely families already within the system receiving other types of Section-8 vouchers who are involved in the

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[126] Audrey Anderson (caseworker), in conversation with the author, January of 2021

child welfare system but maybe not part of FUP. If that is the case, they should still be incorporated into the program, so that they could receive the benefit of a Housing Advocate.

One potential challenge (provided that DCFS actually receives these grants and vouchers) is that the system for delivering them would have to align with their system for FUP delivery. This may require separate MOUs, which can take up administrative time and resources. Additionally, there would need to be stakeholder buy-in, which could be potentially challenging for CHA, given that housing vouchers for child-welfare families and youth tend to be riskier than the other vouchers they administer.[127] Finally, there is already considerable competition for housing resources, so ultimately DCFS may be constrained by the state and federal budget.

General Recommendations

Given that Chicago's FUP delivery is something other municipalities should emulate, this section is specifically for other municipalities that have pre-existing partnerships with Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) and Public Welfare Agencies (PWAs) or are thinking of starting one. These could be FUP-specific or not, but the recommendation will make the most sense for FUP programs.

1. *Dedicated leadership*

Ruth White, who has been helping to administer FUP across the country for decades, said that the most important variable in making FUP successful is strong leadership.[128] Another expert told me that "a history of implementation" is what sets apart effective vs ineffective FUP delivery. The case study of Chicago's FUP is a good model for these two reasons: (1) Egan first joined DCFS in the 1990s with the intention of promoting partnerships between DCFS and

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[127] Egan
[128] White

housing. Since then, he has successfully spearheaded FUP, making it one of the most successful partnerships in the country; and (2) CHA and DCFS have been working together for decades and have established commitment and mutual trust. Having Egan as the same leader during this time has clearly helped.

Obviously, given the high rates of staff turnover within government agencies, having a person like John Egan is not guaranteed. However, one recommendation that *all* FUP deliverers can take is creating one "FUP Liaison" who can help execute the program's implementation. This was suggested to me by Bandera (the country's first FUP Liaison), who told me that having a central figure handling communication between the different partners was crucial to FUP's success.[129] This also aligns with previous research, specifically the Urban Institute's 2016 implementation evaluation, which found the need for executive leadership that handles funding and inter-agency collaboration.[130]

However, it's important to note that before working as a FUP Liaison, Bandera worked as a Housing Advocate. That is to say that a FUP Liaison without a prior history of working with FUP may not be as successful or effective. Given the high turnover mentioned above, there likely aren't many Johns nor Jazmins out there. Additionally, the child welfare agency would need to fund the Liaison, which could be a problem for smaller jurisdictions. Finally, the FUP Liaison needs to be recognized and respected by both the child welfare agency and the local housing authority. This recognition often requires years of prior trust and collaboration.

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[129] Bandera

[130] Martha Burt, Meave Gearing, and Marla McDaniel, "Evolution in Programs Offering Supportive Housing to Child Welfare-Involved Families: Services Integration and Systems Change at the Half-Way Point" (Urban Institute, March 2016).

2. *Establishment of Housing Advocates*

Unpublished research by child welfare expert Professor Fowler indicates that Housing Advocates are correlated with better FUP outcomes, including a decrease of placement into out-of-home care. In the words of John Egan, "families do better with Housing Advocates because they are the ones advocating for the parents."[131] Hence, all FUP programs should consider within their pre-existing CoC the creation of frontline workers that help families through the FUP process. The main concern with this, however, is the cost: Housing Agencies are contracted through DCFS's own budget and further strain DCFS.

Alternatively, child welfare agencies may want to consider simply training their caseworkers to take housing concerns more seriously. This eliminates the need for creating another bureaucracy to mediate between the two systems and could potentially expand the reach of families who receive housing assistance. Ultimately, local governments are limited by existing resources and the only hope for FUP (or programs like FUP) to be expanded appropriately is the recognition of their effectiveness nationwide.

Conclusion

Overall, my interviews demonstrated five broad categories of findings as related to Chicago's Family Unification Program: *1) The IL Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) have a model partnership that other FUP-providers may want to emulate; 2) DCFS's Housing Advocacy Program (or HAP) and the role of Housing Advocates in representing the needs of parents is crucial to FUP's successful delivery;*

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[131] Egan

3) Despite an overall strong partnership, implementation challenges remain, including a lack of data-sharing, delayed communication, and high caseloads and turnover; 4) FUP clients continue to face serious hurdles to entry into the program, which could be remedied by better communication and additional supports; and 5) More housing solutions are necessary in order to meet insufficient demand. Additionally, the experts I interviewed helped me create actionable recommendations with the potential to further improve FUP's quality in Chicago and in municipalities nation-wide.

Broadly, my findings and analysis confirm the existing literature on interagency collaboration, specifically when it involves the sphere of child welfare: Knowledge must be distributed so that everyone is on the same page about what is going on. Moreover, my research confirms the utility of the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) Model when it comes to implementation evaluation, given that CFIR was instrumental in my creation of both a codebook and recommendations. My hope is that this thesis can be illustrative of not just the intersection of housing and child welfare but also of future interagency collaborations to deliver and streamline public goods.[132]

Finally, my findings have several implications for the Family Unification Program and its delivery. First, data-collection is essential in any program delivery, and FUP could better target families by improving its data collection and tracking of outcomes. Mainly, by understanding which families/clients succeed in FUP and which do not, municipalities can learn what variables affect outcomes. Second, housing advocates can improve outcomes by offering ancillary services to parents and families. Family Unification Programs need to recognize the role of HAs and incorporate them into their program delivery. Finally, expanding FUP to encompass all families

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[132] Yvonne Darlington, Judith Feeney, and Kylie Rixon, "Interagency Collaboration between Child Protection and Mental Health Services: Practices, Attitudes and Barriers," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 29, no. 10 (n.d.): 1085–98.

receiving Section-8 vouchers and involved in child welfare (not just families receiving FUP-specific ones) has the potential to further integrate services and decrease placement into out-of-home care through the provision of additional supports.

Future research is still needed to determine what the impact of FUP is on the child welfare system. While Chicago was the subject of such an evaluation in 2014, it could benefit from a more updated study to reflect the recent changes made to its structure and delivery system. Overall, Chicago should continue acting as a model for other Family Unification Programs and as a model nationwide for interagency collaboration and service delivery.

Housing vouchers are an important tool for governments to leverage private enterprise in order to provide social welfare. That being said, voucher programs tend to suffer from both an overall deficit of vouchers and a lack of affordable housing in safe neighborhoods in which to place people. At the risk of posing more questions than solutions, this paper will conclude by affirming the importance of reforming our country's Housing Choice Voucher Program, and of using housing as a mechanism to remedy other social problems.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Protocol 1: Policy Researchers

1. Can you tell me about your job and your role?
2. Are you familiar with the partnership between DCFS and CHA?
3. How is the partnership between the DCFS and CHA structured?
4. What are some opportunities that you believe the partnership provides?
5. What are the challenges you have observed so far or that you anticipate in structuring and sustaining this partnership?
6. What are the implications of these challenges for how FUP is implemented?
7. How can aspects of this partnership be scaled-up in order to offer additional housing services to low-income families?

Protocol 2: DCFS/Housing Specialists

Branch 1: Introduction/General Information
1. Can you tell me about your job and your role?
2. What is your role in implementing FUP?
3. Who are the main players in implementing FUP?
4. Which families are targeted for FUP by the DCFS? How is the DCFS identifying eligible families?
5. What do you see as the main barriers to implementation for a family accessing this program?

Branch 2: Understanding how the partnership between DCFS and CHA is structured
1. What is the division of responsibilities between DCFS and CHA in administering FUP?
2. How strong is this partnership?
3. How often do you communicate with your partner agency?
4. How is data collected and shared between DCFS and CHA?
5. What other community-based non-profits are involved?

Branch 3: Challenges and Solutions for Partnership
1. [After explaining research]: Has coordination between DCFS and CHA improved over time?
2. What kind of improved outcomes can we see or expect for families?
3. What challenges have persisted in communication?
4. What improvements can be made for this partnership?

Protocol 3: Housing Advocates

Branch 1: Introduction/General Information
1. Can you tell me about your job and your role?
2. What is your role in implementing FUP?
3. What do you see as the main barriers to implementation for a family accessing this program?

Branch 2: Understanding how the partnership between DCFS and CHA is structured
4. How often do you communicate with your partner agency?
5. How is data collected and shared between your agency and DCFS?

Branch 3: Challenges and Solutions for Partnership
6. [After explaining research]: Has coordination between your agency and DCFS improved over time?
7. What kind of improved outcomes can we see or expect for families?
8. What challenges have persisted in communication?
9. What improvements can be made for this partnership?

Protocol 4: DCFS Caseworkers

1. Can you tell me about your job and role in working with families through DCFS?
2. What is your role in identifying whether families are eligible for the Family Unification Program (FUP)?
3. What do you see as the potential benefits for families of the FUP program?
4. What do you see as the main barriers to families accessing and benefitting from this program?
5. How often do you communicate with your partner agency/community housing advocate?
6. What kind of improved outcomes can we expect to see for families accessing FUP?

Appendix B: Codebook

CODEBOOK		
Primary Code		**Short Description**
I. FUP CHARACTERISTICS		
A	**Structural Characteristics**	The social architecture of FUP and its subsidiaries (DCFS, CHA, HAP) **Secondary codes: Referral, FUP eligibility, youth aging-out-of-care**
B	**Ancillary Support**	Related programs, partnerships, and resources **Secondary codes: Housing advocacy, cash assistance, subsidies, Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) voucher**
C	**Mode of Communication**	The nature and quality of formal and informal communications within FUP's organization
D	**Change Over Time**	Has the FUP partnership been strengthened or weakened since its creation? **Dichotomized as either Y/N**
II. FUP Implementation Challenges		
A	Data-Sharing	Communication issues arising from a lack of sharable information about clients and outcomes.
B	High Staff Turnover	Issues arising from Housing Advocates and Caseworkers often starting and leaving their jobs.
C	High Caseload	Issues arising from staff being overburdened by high cases.
C	Delayed Communication	Can include infrequent responses, communication delays exceeding 24 hours or more, and questions being unanswered or frequently repeated.
E	Conflict Between Stakeholders	Incidents where stakeholders (in the same or different departments) report having difficulty communicating or express frustration about how others are working.