

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Human Services, Housing Authority Announce Territory's First Housing Assistance Program For Former Foster Care Youth

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home apartments By. GETTY IMAGES

The V.I. Dept. of Human Services announced Friday that it has partnered with the V.I. Housing Authority to implement the territory's first housing assistance program for youth who have left (aged out of) the foster care system and are at risk of becoming homeless. "This is especially great news during Foster Care Awareness Month," D.H.S. said.

According to the release, national statistics show that more than 25 percent of former foster children become homeless within two to four years after emancipation, and an even higher percentage often experience unsafe or unstable living situations. The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI), initiative enacted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), makes Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) assistance available to Public Housing Agencies such as the Virgin Islands Housing Authority in partnership with Public Child Welfare Agencies such as the Department of Human Services.

In the USVI, the requirements to qualify for the FYI initiative include individuals who are at least 18 years old and not more than 24 years of age (have not reached their 25th birthday), who left foster care or will leave foster care within 90 days in accordance with their Foster Care Transition Plan, and who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless, D.H.S. said.

All youth for the FYI program are referred to the Housing Authority by DHS's Division of Children and Family Services. Per V.I. statute, the vouchers can be used to provide housing assistance for up to three years (36 months), according to the release.

In addition to the rental assistance, these young people will also be provided with supportive services to assist them on their path to self-sufficiency, the department said.

These supportive services may include:

1. Basic life skills information: Money management counseling, credit etiquette, housekeeping, nutrition / meal preparation, and healthcare access.
2. Compliance counseling with rental lease requirements and with HCV program participant requirements, including assistance/referrals for assistance with: Security deposits, utility installation fees and utility deposits.
3. Job preparation and attainment counseling: Where to look / how to apply, dress / grooming, and relationship skills with supervisors and personnel, etc.
4. Educational and career advancement counseling: Attainment of general equivalency diploma (GED), maintaining attendance, financing of education at a technical school / trade school / college, and successful work ethic training and attitude models.

To secure longer term housing assistance, individuals participating in the program may apply and become eligible for the regular Housing Choice Voucher Program (also known as Section 8), as long as income requirements are met.

This cross-departmental partnership between DHS and VIHA aims to prevent and end homelessness among at-risk youth with a history of out-of-home care, the release stated. The DHS Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) said it has been working to identify and refer eligible youth to VIHA for certification and eligibility and to connect them to resources and support services.

Housing options under the FYI program are not limited to public housing facilities. Eligible participants will also have the option to transfer their vouchers to another approved US jurisdictions, according to the release.

For more information, call or email the Department of Human Services DCFS:

- (St. Croix) - (340) 773-5303
- (St. Thomas/St. John) - (340) 473-5794 *Either number may be called for general information.
- Email: fostercare.vi@dhs.vi.gov

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