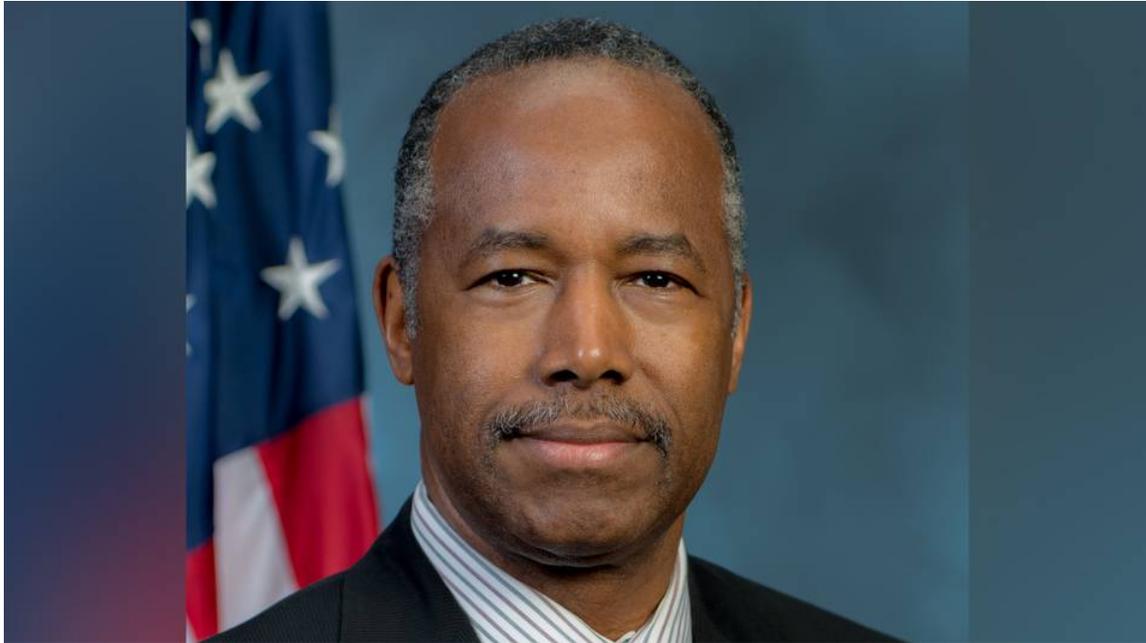


Op Ed: Ben Carson: Life after foster care shouldn't start in a shelter

HUD Secretary Ben Carson, Charlotte Observer, Sept. 13, 2019.



Young people enter our foster care system for many different reasons, but too many share a common story once they age out: They don't have a stable home of their own.

One of our recent "Humans of HUD" spotlights here at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development features Adora, a young lady who was just a teenager when her mother died and her father returned to his home country. For Adora and her siblings, America was the only home they knew. But without their parents, they entered the foster care system and were shuffled from place to place. Imagine growing older and aging out of foster care, alone, without a home or any of the support young people need to set out on their own path.

Each year, there are more than 20,000 young people with stories like Adora's who age out of foster care. Shockingly, the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare estimates that 25% of these young people will experience homelessness within four years.

Recently, it was my personal and professional point of pride to announce a brand new initiative: Foster Youth to Independence, a collaborative effort to combat homelessness among at-risk youth by targeting housing assistance to young people leaving foster care. HUD's new program allows local public housing authorities to request tenant protection vouchers for young adults who have recently left foster care without a home to go to. It is complementary to FUP, our Family Unification Program, and has three main goals:

- It will address the lack of availability of housing vouchers to young people in communities without access to FUP resources.
- It will prioritize resources to our nation's at-risk youth. Currently, young people encounter significant barriers to accessing affordable housing resources, including the FUP program. For example, local welfare authorities often prioritize families at risk of homelessness over single, young adults. This contributes to the fact that early-age populations make up only about 5% of FUP housing voucher recipients.
- This program will further HUD's goal of ending homelessness. No person should experience homelessness. Not only will this initiative provide foster youth with housing, but it will also provide them with the tools they need to become self-sufficient through supportive services they can access for up to three years.

Stable housing lays the foundation for a stable family and, in turn, a stable life. This program will work with local authorities to direct housing assistance to the young people who need it most. For too long, foster youth have been forgotten when it comes to affordable housing. HUD is committed to changing that.

I am proud of HUD's many efforts to help set forgotten Americans onto a path to self-sufficiency. No matter the obstacles, no matter how difficult the beginnings, anyone can rise to their potential in the land of the free.

And at HUD, we are committed to making that dream a reality for all of America's vulnerable — our young people included.

Ben Carson is secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.