



# Housing Opportunities for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care



By Lydia Beltrán

**W**hat happens when young people age out of foster care and have no family support system? They can easily join the growing number of homeless and even worse, fall victim to the criminal world steeped in drugs and prostitution. But small victories

are being won in the battle to help youth aging out of foster care thanks to state and local housing trust fund monies and mission based nonprofits willing and able to take on the most difficult tasks.

According to the Child Welfare League of America, approximately 37% do not have a high school degree when they leave foster care, 56% are unemployed, and 25% become homeless within one year. According to the Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council, youth between the ages 18-23 are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population in Florida. More than 800 children in Florida will age out of foster care this year.

**“The Youth Transition Center is our community’s opportunity to help provide hope and a brighter future for our foster children.”**

– Lawrence Brooks, Executive Director, CHS

## Children’s Home Society (CHS) Treasure Coast Division – Fort Pierce

The Youth Transition Center will consist of six one bedroom units and three two bedroom units along with a community space and administrative offices for case management and vocational services. The facility will be built in Vero Beach and will serve Indian River, Martin, St. Lucie and Okeechobee counties. The youth will benefit from an 18 month program which will provide comprehensive services to prepare them for independent living. The services will include developing a case plan with each youth, monitoring compliance with the plan, and assessing readiness to leave the program. A six-month follow-up will also be included upon



completion of the program. Approximately 60 young people will be provided transitional living services every year (20 in residence at the Youth Transition Center and 40 through community support services).

Construction for the Youth Transition Center began in February 2009. The project is expected to be completed prior to year's end with the estimated move-in to be January 2010.

The project is funded by private donors of the CHS Foundation and a commitment for funding from the Florida Housing Finance Corporation Demonstration Loan Program, funded from the state housing trust fund.

“Without the Youth Transition Center, what we are in effect saying to these young people when they turn 18 is, ‘Happy Birthday, You’re Homeless.’ The Youth Transition Center will give them the opportunity to make a positive transition into adulthood and become contributing members of society.”

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**Section 420.628, Florida Statutes, is created to read:  
Affordable housing for children and young adults  
leaving foster care; legislative findings and intent.—**

- (1)(a) The Legislature finds that there are many young adults who, through no fault of their own, live in foster families, group homes, and institutions, and face numerous barriers to a successful transition to adulthood. Young adults who are leaving the child welfare system may enter adulthood lacking the knowledge, skills, attitudes, habits, and relationships that will enable them to become productive members of society.
- (b) The Legislature further finds that the main barriers to safe and affordable housing for such young adults are cost, lack of availability, the unwillingness of landlords to rent to such youth due to perceived regulatory barriers, and a lack of knowledge about how to be a good tenant. These barriers cause young adults to be at risk of becoming homeless.
- (c) The Legislature also finds that young adults who leave the child welfare system are disproportionately represented in the homeless population. Without the stability of safe and affordable housing, all other services, training, and

opportunities provided to such young adults may not be effective. Making affordable housing available will decrease the chance of homelessness and may increase the ability of such young adults to live independently.

- (d) The Legislature intends that the Florida Housing Finance Corporation, agencies within the State Housing Initiative Partnership Program, local housing finance agencies, public housing authorities, and their agents, and other providers of affordable housing coordinate with the Department of Children and Family Services, their agents, and community based care providers who provide services under s. 409.1671 to develop and implement strategies and procedures designed to make affordable housing available whenever and wherever possible to young adults who leave the child welfare system.
- (2) Young adults who leave the child welfare system meet the definition of eligible persons under ss. 420.503(7) and 420.907(10) for affordable housing, and are encouraged to participate in federal, state, and local affordable housing programs. Students deemed to be eligible occupants under 26 U.S.C. 2(i)(3)(d) shall be considered eligible persons for purposes of all projects funded under this chapter.



## Following Up on the Successful Construction of Buckner: Group Home and Apartments for Youth Aging out of Foster Care

In the last edition of the Housing News Journal we showed the groundbreaking, pictured at right. As you can see from the top photo, the Children's Home Society of Florida (CHS), Buckner Division's group home is nearing completion. This Jacksonville project includes a group home and apartments for youth aging out of foster care.



*City Councilman Don Redman, Nancy Drecier (District Administrator, Department of Children & Families), Andry Sweet (CHS Vice President of Operations), Kymberly Cook (Executive Director, CHS Buckner Division), Brian Hall (Family Support Services of North Florida) and Charlie Cromer (CHS Chairman of the Board, Buckner Division).*

**“We are excited about adding Buckner Place to our residential services allowing us to include young people who recently aged out of foster care. These young adults need assistance in making the transition from dependency to independence, and our new facility will help them navigate these rough waters.”**

– Kimberly Cook, Executive Director, CHS Buckner Division

While the residents continue their education, project services will emphasize independent living skills for all residents to ready the former foster youth for living on their own. Most of the residents will also have jobs, and CHS staff will provide support to ensure success.

The CHSF Buckner Division project is being financed through the City of Jacksonville's SHIP

program, the Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC) Demonstration Loan Program, (which received technical assistance from the Florida Housing Coalition), the Children's Home Society of Florida Foundation, as well as private donors.

The program services will be funded through community based care services including Family Support Services of North Florida and United Way of Northeast Florida.

Chartered in Jacksonville in 1902, Children's Home Society of Florida, Buckner Division is dedicated to embracing children and inspiring lives. They work to restore and strengthen families through various programs and services such as adoption, foster care and child abuse prevention programs.

For further project information, contact David Clark, Director of Development at 904.493.7737 or [www.chsfl.org/Locations/buckner.aspx](http://www.chsfl.org/Locations/buckner.aspx)

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