

OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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| LOCAL COMMISSIONERS MEMORANDUM |
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OCFS-4616EL (Rev. 11/98)

Transmittal No: 99 OCFS LCM-13

Date: April 8, 1999

Division: Strategic Planning and
Policy Development

TO: Local District Commissioners

SUBJECT: FAMILY UNIFICATION PROGRAM 1999
Opportunity to Apply
(Due Dates April 14 and May 5)

ATTACHMENTS: (1) DHCR Section 8 Local Administrators
(2) Letter of Intent format
(3) Needs/Coordination Supplement format

All attachments available on-line

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Memorandum is to advise social services districts of the opportunity to participate in the FY 1999 Family Unification Program administered by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Districts in which the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) has a Section 8 Local Administrator may join in and share in a statewide Family Unification Program application being made by DHCR and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). (See ATTACHMENT 1.) Local districts may also apply to participate in the Family Unification Program by joining with a local HUD-certified public housing authority (HA) in a direct application to HUD.

If after reviewing this Memorandum your district is interested in applying to participate in the joint DHCR/OCFS application, notify the OCFS Family Unification Program Coordinator noted in Section 5 by April 14, 1999.

The due date for all applications material is May 5, 1999.

2. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Family Unification Program

The Family Unification Program provides federal Section 8 rental assistance to families for whom a lack of adequate housing is a primary factor which would result in:

- (a) the imminent placement of the family's child or children in out-of-home care, or
- (b) the delay in the discharge of a child or children to the family from out-of-home care.

Lack of adequate housing is defined as a situation in which a family is homeless, is living in substandard or dilapidated housing, is or will be involuntarily displaced from a housing unit because of actual or threatened domestic violence, or is living in an overcrowded unit or one which would be so if children in foster care were to return to the unit.

Family Unification Program rental assistance is available for families who meet these criteria as certified by the local public child welfare agency (PCWA) and who meet the HUD Section 8 housing eligibility criteria. Statewide the PCWA is OCFS. The local PCWA is the social services district.

While in the past Family Unification Program assistance has been in the form of Section 8 certificates, the FY 1999 program will change the assistance to Section 8 rental vouchers. Vouchers offer greater security, more flexibility, and wider portability than the previous Section 8 certificates.

Family Unification Program rental vouchers are fully federally funded. The local district investment in the Family Unification Program would be staff time and resources necessary for certifying the eligibility of families in the district's child welfare caseload for the Family Unification Program, for ensuring coordination with the local HA, and to assist in providing follow-up supportive services for families who lease units with Family Unification Program rental vouchers.

DHCR, OCFS and local districts have previously submitted applications to HUD for Family Unification Program Section 8 rental certificates. A successful application for 1992-93 resulted in the allocation of certificates in 16 participating districts. Applications for 1993-94 and for 1994-95 were unsuccessful. The 1995-96, 1997, and 1998 applications each resulted in program awards of varying amounts. Family Unification Program participation has included 25 social services districts from 1993 to 1999. (See below for additional information regarding the 1998 application awards.)

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1999 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)

The 1999 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) was published in the March 5, 1999 Federal Register. HUD expects to make approximately 11,200 Section 8 rental voucher units available for the Family Unification Program for FY 1999.

These vouchers will be awarded in two stages. HUD will utilize 7000 voucher units to fund the eligible FY 1998 Family Unification Program applications that were not funded in the 1998 national lottery due to insufficient funds. Districts that joined in the 1998 application will be notified if an award is made and how many vouchers will be available for each county.

The remaining 4200 vouchers will be funded as new vouchers for FY 1999. These voucher units will be awarded on a national lottery basis to qualifying applicants. The maximum number of vouchers to be awarded to any one public housing authority (including DHCR) in any single HUD Area Office jurisdiction is 100. DHCR will apply for 100 vouchers in each of the two HUD Area Offices (Buffalo and New York City) serving New York State.

Since any award for the joint DHCR/OCFS application must be allocated among participating districts, local districts may enhance their opportunities for access to Family Unification Program Section 8 vouchers by exploring the possibility of joining a local public HA to apply for inclusion in the Family Unification Program. Up to 100 vouchers for your local community may be applied for in this way.

The NOFA for the Family Unification Program requires coordination between the local HA and local PCWA both in applying for inclusion in the program and in implementation if the HA/PCWA are awarded certificates for the Family Unification Program. The NOFA requires the local PCWA to supply information for the completion of two portions of the application: Criterion 3, "Coordination Between HA and Public Child Welfare Agency to Identify and Assist Eligible Families," and Criterion 4, "Public Child Welfare Agency Statement of Need for Family Unification Program." For the joint DHCR/OCFS application, the Office will complete the Criterion 3 and 4 statements based on current experience with the Family Unification Program and information to be supplied by local districts as outlined in sections 4 and 5 of this memorandum.

The local districts' major tasks in implementation will be to determine the eligibility of families in the district's child welfare caseload for the Family Unification Program and to coordinate with the local HA in ensuring that eligible families are identified and assisted in a timely manner. Written certification that a family qualifies for the Family Unification Program by child welfare standards is submitted by the district to the HA which will determine whether the family is on the Section 8 waiting list.

The local district's determination of child welfare eligibility will be based on the same criteria as apply to the Preventive Housing Services program. A district must determine either that lack of adequate housing is

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the primary factor preventing the return home of a child from foster care pursuant to the standards contained in Section 430.9(e)(2) of OCFS Regulations (Title 18 NYCRR) or that lack of adequate housing is a factor creating a risk of placement or re-placement of a child into foster care in a family that has at least one preventive services need other than lack of adequate housing in accordance with the standards for Preventive Housing Services to prevent foster care placement contained in 95 LCM-110.

Families which are eligible under the child welfare standard and which are on the HA's Section 8 waiting list will be served for provision of a Family Unification Program rental voucher in order of their position on the waiting list in accordance with HUD regulations and procedures. For families certified by the local district as eligible for the Family Unification Program but which are not on the HA's Section 8 waiting list, the Section 8 Administrator will determine the family's eligibility according to HUD standards for Section 8 housing assistance. Any family found eligible will be added to the HA's Section 8 waiting list. The waiting list must be opened, or re-opened, for Family Unification Program families certified by the local PCWA, that is, the social services district.

As part of local PCWA (local district) responsibilities in implementing the Family Unification Program locally, the local district has to agree to commit sufficient staff resources to ensure that Family Unification Program eligible families are identified and certified in a timely manner. This will also include receiving referrals from the HA and evaluating and reporting to the HA whether such referrals meet the child welfare eligibility criteria for the Family Unification Program. Districts must also agree to cooperate with evaluation activities conducted by HUD on the Family Unification Program and to assist in providing follow-up supportive services for families who obtain housing leases using Family Unification Program rental assistance vouchers.

3. DISTRICT PARTICIPATION

DHCR/OCFS Statewide Application

As noted above, districts may participate in the Family Unification Program by a joint application with a local HA direct to HUD, or by joining in the statewide application being made by DHCR and OCFS. However, the following districts do not have a housing program with a Section 8 agreement with DHCR and thus cannot be included in the joint application:

ALBANY	BROOME	CORTLAND
ERIE	FULTON	MONROE
MONTGOMERY	ONEIDA	ONONDAGA
RENSSELAER	SCHENECTADY	SCHOHARIE
WARREN		

THESE DISTRICTS CAN ONLY PARTICIPATE IN THE FAMILY UNIFICATION PROGRAM THROUGH JOINT APPLICATION WITH A LOCAL PUBLIC HA THAT IS CERTIFIED BY HUD.

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With the exception of the 13 districts which do not have DHCR Section 8 Local Administrators, a local district may join the joint Family Unification Program application being made by DHCR and OCFS. The DHCR/OCFS application will be for vouchers that, if awarded, will be allocated among the districts that join in the statewide application. Allocation is subject to an agreement between DHCR and OCFS and allocation by HUD.

To be included in the DHCR/OCFS joint application requires the completion of a Letter of Intent (ATTACHMENT 2) and the submission of a Need/Coordination Supplement (ATTACHMENT 3) with supporting information and data regarding need, the local district's experience with obtaining housing assistance from HUD, local HAs, or other sources, and the coordination of assistance with the DHCR Section 8 Local Administrator. These requirements are set out more completely in Section 5 of this Memorandum. The local district must collaborate with the DHCR Section 8 Local Administrator with whom the district will join in the operation of the Family Unification Program. DHCR Section 8 Local Administrators have been advised of the availability of the 1999 Family Unification Program funding and of the requirement for local HA and PCWA collaboration.

Letters of Intent and the supporting statements are due to OCFS by 5:00 PM, Wednesday, May 5, 1999 in accordance with instructions set out in Sections 4 and 5 below.

Districts will not be included in the joint DHCR/OCFS application unless there is confirmation of an agreement between the district and the DHCR Section 8 Local Administrator to join the DHCR/OCFS Family Unification Program application. This means that the DHCR Section 8 Local Administrator has agreed to and will submit the required local HA material/information to DHCR in time for inclusion in the application to HUD.

Local Applications

As an alternative to or in addition to participating in the joint DHCR/OCFS application, a local district may join with a local public HA that serves its locality and which wishes to apply to HUD for inclusion in the Family Unification Program vouchers lottery. This specifically includes the 13 districts that do not have housing programs with DHCR Section 8 Local Administrators.

As this local application will be for up to 100 vouchers to be awarded directly to the local public HA, local districts may enhance their opportunity to obtain access to Family Unification Program Section 8 rental vouchers by making a local application, if the local public HA agrees. The local public HA must be the lead applicant.

If you wish to apply with your local public HA, you must work with the HA in the completion of the application. The due date for Family Unification Program applications to be in hand at the relevant HUD office is May 28th at

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6:00 PM local time. If you have not already done so, immediate contact with the local public HA is necessary if you are interested in joining in a local application.

If you apply at the local level with a local public HA, complete details on what must be included are set out in the HUD program announcement in the NOFA as noted above. You may obtain a copy of the NOFA from your local public HA.

4. SUBMISSIONS FOR DHCR/OCFS APPLICATION

Districts that wish to join the DHCR/OCFS joint statewide application will need to complete and submit to OCFS a Letter of Intent along with the supporting "Needs/Coordination Supplement" form. The formats for these documents are included as Attachments 2 and 3 to this Memorandum.

To the extent possible, OCFS will compile needed information from existing data sources (MAPS, CCRS, etc.). However, information is needed from local districts to strengthen the quality of the application regarding specific local needs information and HA/PCWA (HA/local districts) coordination and cooperation.

The directions set out below request information that is not available in regular State data resources and about which your local data is either expected to be more complete or more relevant for identifying need and describing the coordination with the DHCR Section 8 Local Administrator. However, districts do not need to do special surveys or data analyses to provide the data and information requested. You are expected only to have to refer to existing data. Brief statements based on the best information readily available are what you should provide. It would help, however, to identify sources or relevant time frames if you are relying on specific data or information for your statement(s).

To complete the first section of the "Needs/Coordination Supplement" form, provide the following information to the best of your ability:

- description of the impact of homelessness and family violence on foster care placements in the local district, including any relevant local statistics available;
- information regarding the number and characteristics of families in which inadequate housing is a primary factor in a child's risk of foster care placement or in the delay of a child's return home from placement.

The second section of the "Needs/Coordination Supplement" form is critical as it relates specifically to your local district and cannot be completed from any State data resources. This section must be completed describing local district experience in administering similar programs (including Preventive Housing Services rent subsidies and other local district provision of or participation in a housing assistance program or services)

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and the local district's experience (success or lack of success) in obtaining housing through HUD, local HAs, or other programs for housing assistance. This section must be completed.

It may be that the district has either no experience or no information regarding some of the areas to be included in the Statements. Leave blanks if this is the situation. Report only what you actually can. However, information on what the local experience has been regarding similar programs and particularly with obtaining (or attempting to obtain) HUD-assisted services must be included.

After the "Needs/Coordination Supplement" form (ATTACHMENT 3) is finished, complete the Letter of Intent (ATTACHMENT 2). Fill in the name of your county/district. In paragraph 1 of the letter, also fill in the name of the Section 8 Administrator and the Administrator's agency affiliation, indicating the district's contact with the HA. In paragraph 4 of the letter, fill in the name and phone contact information for the person who will be responsible for implementation of the Family Unification Program in the local district and who may be contacted if necessary to obtain additional information related to the district's participation in or implementation of the Family Unification Program. The Letter of Intent also includes a commitment to provide sufficient resources and support for the implementation of the Family Unification Program, and an agreement to provide data and information as necessary to assist in program evaluation. The letter also acknowledges the district's recognition that allocation of any vouchers awarded to DHCR as a result of the HUD application is subject to joint DHCR/OCFS agreement and the HUD allocation plan. The Letter of Intent signed by the Commissioner indicates that the local district will participate in the Family Unification Program if vouchers are awarded to New York State and DHCR.

5. TRANSMITTAL TO OCFS

As soon as the Letter of Intent and the Needs/Coordination Statement are complete and the letter has been signed by the local Commissioner, send the original to:

Hal Harkess

Family Unification Program Coordinator
Bureau of Policy Analysis
Strategic Planning and Policy Development
Office of Children and Family Services
Riverview Center--6th Floor
40 North Pearl Street
Albany, New York 12243.

In order to allow for consolidation and processing of application materials for submission to DHCR in time to meet HUD deadlines, the deadline for receipt of letters and supporting documents in order for your district to be included in the 1999 DHCR/OCFS Family Unification Program application is 5:00 PM, Wednesday, May 5, 1999 in the office of the Coordinator.

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Only an original letter with Commissioner's signature will be accepted. Fax copies may not be submitted. Districts are responsible for utilizing an appropriate delivery mechanism to ensure receipt of their submissions at OCFS by the required deadline. The Office reserves the right to determine that incomplete application materials or application materials received after the May 5th deadline may not be included in the 1999 DHCR/OCFS application.

Please contact Hal Harkess by telephone (518-474-9584) or E-Mail (EXCHANGE or SPLINK, USERID 0FB110) if you have any questions or to request assistance regarding the completion of your letter or supplement.

William F. Baccaglioni
Director
Strategic Planning
and Policy Development

SECTION 8 ADMINISTRATORS
affiliated with
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ESSEX COUNTY

Sue S. Reaser
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(518) 873-6888

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Candace Breen
Franklin County Community Housing
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Malone, NY 12953

(518) 483-5934

GENESSEE COUNTY

Kevin Kennedy
Rural Opportunities, Inc.
106 Main Street--Suite 8A
Batavia, NY 14020

(716) 343-3861

GREENE COUNTY

Beverly Fitzmaurice
Greene County Planning Department
909 Green County Office Building
Cairo, NY 12413

(518) 622-2593

HAMILTON COUNTY

Shirley A. Smith
Housing Assistance Program of
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County White House
P.O. Box 207
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(518) 548-5981

HERKIMER COUNTY

Scott D. Holden
Community Action in Herkimer County
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(516) 572-0823

NIAGARA COUNTY

Helen Del Signore
Department of Community Development
Leased Housing Program
1022 Main Street, P.O. Box 69
Niagara Falls, NY 14302-0069

(716) 286-4476

NEW YORK CITY

Linda Kedzierski
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Mr. Hal Harkess
Family Unification Program Coordinator
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New York State Office of Children and Family Services
Riverview Center, 6th Floor
40 North Pearl Street
Albany, New York 12243

The _____ County Department of Social Services agrees to join in the application for a Family Unification Program demonstration award being made by the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Written notification has been provided to the local Section 8 Administrator [_____ of _____] with whom we will collaborate in the operation of the Family Unification Program .

A "Needs/Coordination Supplement" providing available local information on local needs, on local experience with similar programs, and on coordination with the DHCR Section 8 Local Administrator is attached to this letter.

_____ County Department of Social Services agrees to commit necessary resources and support to the Family Unification Program to identify eligible families, to refer eligible families to the housing authority, to assist in providing supportive services to families obtaining housing leases under the Family Unification Program and to provide information and data on the experience of families and the local department in the implementation, development, and outcome(s) of the Family Unification Program to OCFS, to DHCR, or to HUD to assist in the evaluation and assessment of the Family Unification Program.

_____ is responsible for the implementation of the Family Unification Program for the _____ County Department of Social Services and can be contacted at (____) ____-_____ for any additional information related to participation in or implementation of the program.

I understand that there will be a maximum 100 Section 8 vouchers available through this application and that allocation of any award made to New York State will be distributed among cooperating Section 8 Local Administrators (and their collaborating social services districts) subject to an agreement by DHCR and OCFS and the HUD allocation plan.

On the basis of the information and understandings outlined above, I commit the _____ County Department of Social Services to participation in the Family Unification Program if certificates are awarded to New York State.

Commissioner

_____County Department of Social Services

Date: _____

FAMILY UNIFICATION PROGRAM 1999
Needs/Coordination Supplement

_____County Department of Social Services

The need for housing assistance and specifically for the Family Unification Program to assist families in preventing out-of-home placement of children or averting delays in returning children from out-of-home placement is indicated by the following:

Describe district past experience in obtaining Housing through HUD assisted programs and other sources for families lacking adequate housing. (Include any past district experience with the administration of similar programs and any past cooperation with the DHCR Section 8 Local Administrator).

[COMPLETION OF THIS SECTION IS REQUIRED]