

## New federal program helps young adults aging out of foster care: "Who would think that I would go to college?"

Duncan, Jericka, CBS News, Jan. 13, 2020.



Every year, more than 20,000 teenagers age out of the foster care system. Within four years, about 5,000 of them are homeless.

A new federal program called Foster Youth for Independence aims to help those young adults, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson told CBS News correspondent Jericka Duncan in an exclusive interview.

For Denver area teen Heidi Seabrook, the federal youth housing initiative was a dream come true.

"Going from, you know, drugs to foster home, to group homes, to halfway houses and psych wards and jail," Seabrook said. But she now feels she has a sense of control over her life.

That control comes with the keys to her own apartment, a place where she said she has the room to forgive herself and "grow a little bit."

The Foster Youth for Independence program that gave Seabrook another chance teaches former foster children ages 18 to 24 professional and life skills, and puts rent within reach.

In some ways, the program puts more people in public housing, contrary to Carson's mission to move Americans out of public housing. But a group of former foster kids changed his mind.

"They actually took the initiative to come here, and we talked to them, we listened to their stories," Carson said. He revealed how the young adults inspired the creation of the program, and that their bold step "laser-focused" the government on the problem.

"Some people think negatively about public housing," Carson said, adding "public housing is actually supposed to be a safety net."

He notes the frequency with which former foster children without a safety net fall into things like drugs and prostitution.

Within four months of Carson's meeting with the foster kids, the program was formed.

Participants typically pay 30% of their income towards rent, with the Foster Youth for Independence program covering the rest. More than \$2 million has so far gone out to help nearly 250 former foster kids.

Back in Colorado, Seabrook sees a new future as one of the recipients.

"Who would think that I would go to college?" she marveled. "Not just, like, a drug addict. Not just, you know, some kid in the system." Seabrook said she can finally be who she wants. Having her own home has given her a sense of peace, a safe place to return to.

And college is indeed on Seabrook's radar – she wants to become a social worker to help at-risk teens like herself.

Carson already lauded the program as a success, so much so that he plans to add almost half a million more dollars to help former foster kids like Seabrook find homes and achieve stability they thought was out of their reach.