

For Immediate Release  
August 6, 2019

Contact: ACF Press Office  
Phone: 202-401-9215  
Email: [media@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:media@acf.hhs.gov)

## **FACT SHEET**

### **Unaccompanied Alien Child Shelter at Homestead Job Corps Site, Homestead, Florida**

The Homestead Job Corp site was activated in February 2018 as a temporary emergency influx shelter for “Unaccompanied Alien Children” (UAC) by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) for minors crossing the border without their parents.

The UAC Program is managed by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), an operational division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Comprehensive Health Services (CHS) – one of the nation’s largest and most experienced providers of medical management services – is operating the child care and wrap-around support services at the Homestead shelter.

The Homestead Shelter was previously vacant and had not been in operation as a Jobs Corps center since August 2015. From June 2016 to April 2017, ORR used the Homestead shelter to care for over 8,500 UAC during the last migrant surge at the southern U.S. border.

In February 2018, state and local community leaders were notified about the re-activation of the Homestead shelter. The first UAC arrived safely and were welcomed in March 2018. Since March 2018 over 14,300 UAC have been placed at the shelter. As of August 3, 2019 no UAC are sheltered at the Homestead facility.

Due to the crisis on the southern border, ORR has seen a dramatic increase in referrals of UAC from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). As of June 2019 (FY19-YTD), DHS has referred over 58,500 UAC to ORR, an increase of over 57 percent from the same time period in FY 2018.

The number of referrals is unpredictable. In FY 2019, ORR will care for the largest number of UAC in the program's history. Because of the large fluctuations in arrival numbers throughout the year, ORR maintains a mix of “standard” beds that are available year-round, and “temporary” beds that can be added or reduced as needed. Keeping the Homestead shelter open is a prudent step to ensure that ORR is able to meet its responsibility, by law, to provide shelter for UAC referred to its care by DHS.

As soon as children enter ORR care, they are put in contact with their parents, guardians or relatives and the process of finding a suitable sponsor begins. The vast majority of sponsors are a parent or a close family relative living in the United States. While ORR programs are looking

for sponsors, children are provided age-appropriate care and wraparound services in one of the approximately 170 facilities and programs in 23 states funded by HHS's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

As of August 5, there are approximately 8,700 UAC in ORR care. At the end of June 2019, the system-wide length of care in our shelters is 45 days, down from a recent high of 93 days in November 2018. ORR is working to further reduce length of care in ways that do not jeopardize the safety or welfare of the children.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has provided HHS use of the facility while DOL assesses its future use of the property. HHS assumes full responsibility for the facility during its use, including wear and tear on buildings and grounds. The facility will revert to DOL upon DOL's request and the temporary use by HHS will have no bearing on DOL's decision about whether to resume Job Corps operations at this location. Currently DOL and HHS have a licensing agreement through December 31, 2019.

#### **Unaccompanied alien children at Homestead Shelter:**

HHS is committed to providing appropriate services for all unaccompanied alien children (UAC) referred to us. In doing so, we make every effort to provide safe shelter and excellent care, while upholding our duty as good stewards of taxpayer dollars. HHS closely monitors referral numbers adjusting bed capacity to respond to changing levels of need. As such, on August 3, 2019, we announced that all UAC sheltered in the Homestead facility have either been reunified with an appropriate sponsor or transferred to a state-licensed facility within the ORR network of care providers.

Additionally, HHS plans to retain but reduce bed capacity at the Homestead facility from 2,700 beds to 1,200 beds for future access in the event of increased referrals or an emergency situation. It should be noted no new UAC have been placed at the site since July 3, 2019.

Children age 17 and under who are unaccompanied by parents or other legal guardians and who have no lawful immigration status in the United States and apprehended by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are transferred to the care and custody of ORR.

ORR is legally required to provide for the care and custody of all UAC referred to ORR until they are released to appropriate sponsors, usually a parent or relative, while their immigration cases proceed.

As HHS experienced record breaking referral numbers in FY 2019, we worked to expand shelter capacity which included the necessary activation of influx shelters. However, given lower levels of referrals over the last several weeks, and due to historically high levels of UAC discharges to vetted sponsor, we are required to adjust our operational strategy balancing appropriate use of UAC resources while remaining prepared for unexpected referral surges and/or emergency

contingency planning. Consequently, these changes in bed capacity levels in some instances include personnel adjustments by our UAC grantees and contractors.

At this time, retaining bed capacity at the Homestead influx facility is necessary to provide care and services to UAC as mandated. We anticipate an uptick in the number of referrals made to HHS this fall, based on historical trends. We will continue to keep Congress, local officials, and stakeholders abreast of future plans pertaining to the Homestead site.

**Legal Services at Homestead:**

UAC are expected to receive a *Know Your Rights* presentation and an individual legal screening within 7-10 days of admission into ORR care. Children who have to attend immigration court while in ORR care have access to an attorney, through an ORR-funded legal service provider, who may provide representation either as the UAC’s attorney of record or as a Friend of Court.

**Educational Services at Homestead:**

The UAC do not attend local public schools. The Homestead ICF education department offers all UAC a General Assessment Test to evaluate their knowledge for proper academic placement while at the facility. The placement test focuses on three major fields: Spanish, English, and Mathematics. Certified teachers supervise educators at the facility and all educational staff are bilingual in English and Spanish, have a bachelor’s degree and a cleared criminal background check. All children at the facility receive educational services.

**Security of the unaccompanied alien children:**

While utilizing space at the Homestead Job Corps facility to temporarily shelter UAC, HHS arranges for the security of UAC. DHS Federal Protective Services (FPS) and CHS provides on-site security 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Health of the unaccompanied alien children:**

UAC receive an initial screening for visible and obvious health issues when they first arrive at U.S. Border Patrol facilities. Border Patrol must determine that a child is “fit to travel” before they are transferred from a border patrol station to an HHS-funded care provider.

UAC are medically screened and receive initial vaccinations within 48 hours of arriving at a HHS funded care provider. The initial screening includes a general health assessment, including a mental health screening and a review of vaccination history. If a vaccination record is not located or a child is not up-to-date, the child receives all vaccinations recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Some health conditions may manifest after the UAC is transferred to an influx care facility. If a health issue arises, the UAC will receive prompt attention and medical care is provided.

### **About unaccompanied alien children:**

Congress has defined a UAC as a child who (1) has no lawful immigration status in the United States; (2) has not attained 18 years of age; and, (3) with respect to whom, there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States, or no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody. See 6 U.S.C. § 279(g)(2).

HHS plays no role in the apprehension or initial detention of alien children prior to their referral to HHS custody. HHS does not provide care or custody for adult aliens or family units that include adults.

By law, HHS provides care for each UAC who is referred to HHS custody by another federal department. HHS is not involved in caring for UACs prior to referral.

Most UAC are referred to ORR by DHS. Some UAC may be referred to ORR because they were apprehended by U.S. Border Patrol while trying to cross the border. Others are referred after coming to the attention of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the interior of the United States.

After referral, UAC remain in the care and custody of HHS until they are unified with a sponsor, usually a parent or close family relative, while their immigration cases are adjudicated.

At this time, most UAC come primarily from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

### **Donation guidelines:**

Members of the public have expressed interest in donating or volunteering to help UAC. There are several voluntary, community, faith-based or international organizations assisting unaccompanied children. You can find resources and contacts in your state at the following online address: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/state-programs-annual-overview>.