



**Nebraska Children's Commission**  
521 South 14<sup>th</sup> Street  
Lincoln, NE 68508

November 28, 2016

Patrick O'Donnell, Clerk of the Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 2018  
PO Box 94604  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Dear Mr. O'Donnell,

Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513(1) requires the Bridge to Independence ("B2i") Advisory Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission ("Commission") to provide a report to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and the Governor by December 15, 2016, regarding ongoing implementation, including participation in the B2i program, extended guardianship assistance and extended adoption assistance, and early discharge rates from the B2i program.

The B2i Advisory Committee is also required to create specific recommendations for expanding the program to youths involved in the juvenile justice system and improving outcomes for similar groups of at-risk young adults, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513(1).

This report contains the above information, in addition to recommendations which are intended to provide thoughtful guidance for the continued effective implementation of the B2i program. The Commission reviewed and approved this report at the November 15, 2016 meeting.

Respectfully,

Beth Baxter  
Chairperson  
Nebraska Children's Commission

Mary Jo Pankoke, Co-Chair  
Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee

Jeanne K. Brandner, Co-Chair  
Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee

Enclosure:  
Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee Report (2016)



11/15/2016



# Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee 2016 Annual Report

Report to the Nebraska Children's Commission, the Governor, Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature, and the Department of Health and Human Services

Submitted Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513



## **Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee** **(Mary Jo Pankoke, Chair)**

This Committee was created pursuant to [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513](#) to make recommendations to DHHS and the Commission regarding the Bridge to Independence Program, extended guardianship assistance, and extended adoption assistance. This Committee, chaired by Mary Jo Pankoke (Nebraska Children and Families Foundation), has been active since 2012. A listing of members is attached at [Appendix A](#).

The Bridge to Independence (B2i) Program was created to support youth who age out of the child welfare foster care system without achieving permanency. Recognizing that youth who age out need the same support, guidance, and caring relationships that all youth need to succeed, this program offers ongoing support in the form of case management, monthly stipends, connection with community resources, and a relationship with the Independence Coordinator. Youth are eligible through age twenty-one. The B2i Program was implemented in October of 2014.

Currently, the program provides youth with a broad array of supportive services including transportation, housing, education, employment, mental health services, and substance abuse services. The Division of Children and Family Services does not provide funding for services, instead connecting youth with the supportive services in their communities. These supports ensure that youth do not exit the child welfare system to homelessness and set up youth to succeed as adults. When youth exit the program, they are referred to independent living services that are available after the age of twenty one, and if applicable, connected with services such as behavioral health, SSI, Developmental Disability Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Energy Assistance, and Emergency Funds.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need for transition programs for youth who are leaving the juvenile justice system at age nineteen to prevent recidivism and ensure that youth are able to access employment and education.
2. Establish a path for enrollment in the current DHHS-facilitated Bridge to independence program for youth involved in Nebraska's Juvenile Justice System utilizing the following two criteria:
  - a. A young person must be in a court-ordered out of home placement as they age out of probation on their 19th birthday; and
  - b. Prior to aging out, the court must hold a hearing and make a finding that such placement is necessary because returning to the home would be contrary to the welfare of the child.
3. Continue to seek expertise into the ability for an interagency agreement between the Department of Health and Human Services and Nebraska Probation Administration to be established that would ease the youth's path into Bridge to Independence and enhance the state's ability to draw down federal Title IV-E Funding.

Since the implementation of the program, the B2i Advisory Committee has received feedback and input from the Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Children and Family Services, Administrative Office of Probation, service providers, youth advocacy organizations, and current and former foster care youth to create recommendations.

### **Extended Supports and Services for Youth with Juvenile Justice System Involvement Recommendations**

The Committee's priority in 2016 has been the expansion of the program to include the juvenile justice population. Initial recommendations were created in 2015 as per Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513. The recommendations resulted in a Legislative Bill ([LB866](#)) The Transition to Adult Living Success Program Act. While this Bill was not passed into law, the Committee reaffirms its strong belief that youth who are juvenile justice involved need access to transitional living supports. These youth receive supports through the Administrative Office of Probation, and need to access additional services after they reach the age of nineteen and transition to adulthood. The Juvenile Justice Extension Taskforce, led by Cassy Blakely, Jeanne Brandner, and Juliet Summers, spent the past year revising its recommendations, researching best practices from other states, and accessing technical assistance for a fiscal analysis.

The juvenile justice population has many similarities as the child welfare population, and some estimates indicate that over half (60%) of juvenile justice youth were previously adjudicated in a child welfare case. It is clear that many youth who are juvenile justice involved have the same needs as child welfare youth. The Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee recommends that the program be expanded to ensure that juvenile justice youth receive the same necessary services and supports as youth aging out of child welfare.

- 1. Establish a path for enrollment in the current DHHS-facilitated Bridge to Independence program for youth involved in Nebraska's Juvenile Justice System utilizing the following two criteria:**
  - a. A young person must be in a court-ordered out of home placement as they age out of probation on their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday; and**
  - b. Prior to aging out, the court must hold a hearing and make a finding that such placement is necessary because returning to the home would be contrary to the welfare of the child.**
  
- 2. Continue to seek expertise into the ability for an interagency agreement between the Department of Health and Human Services and Nebraska Probation Administration to be established that would ease youth's path into Bridge to Independence and enhance the state's ability to draw down federal Title IV-E Funding.**

*The complete information regarding Juvenile Justice Expansion is attached as [Appendix B](#).*

## **B2i Advisory Committee 2017 Work Plan**

This fall marks two years of implementation. The Committee has used its past two meetings to gather information to create a work plan to address and improve policy and regulations within the program.

- 1. Support youth in the “Promoting and Removing Barriers to Employment” eligibility category.**
  - a. This population of youth are required to engage in programs and activities that help them attain employment, such as volunteering, unpaid internships, education, or job searching. The Committee will review this eligibility category and its requirements to ensure that youth are accessing the supports they need to become successful while in the program. Initial considerations include requiring documentation of activities or creating an administrative review for these youth.
- 2. Identify measureable outcomes for evaluation of the program and create a process to capture outcome data.**
  - a. Youth consistently report that the program is successful, and provides the supports needed to make a successful transition to adulthood. The nature of the program makes identifying successful outcomes difficult, as each youth has their own goals and own definition of success. Additionally, it is challenging to capture data from a control group, as a very high percentage of eligible youth join the B2i program. The Committee will explore ways to measure outcomes, including through surveys and follow up contacts after youth leave the program.
- 3. Create a plan to increase the Title IV-E penetration rate.**
  - a. The Title IV-E penetration rate is low compared to other states with similar programs. The Committee is exploring potential avenues to access more federal funding, including requesting technical assistance from a national expert.
- 4. Review state and federal regulations and policy to identify and advocate for potential changes to allow the program to best serve youth who are living out-of-state.**
  - a. The Independence Coordinator must visit youth in the program who live out of state at least once every six months. Due to federal regulations, these visits must be in person. The Committee recommends exploring ways to influence federal regulations to allow technological solutions to the visit. The Committee also recognizes that Nebraska Independence Coordinators may be unfamiliar with the community resources in other states, and will explore ways to build relationships for reciprocal supervision in other states.
- 5. Analyze and make recommendations related to caseload size for the B2i Program.**
  - a. The Committee will additionally review caseload sizes and review previous recommendations to determine if current caseloads are adequate or a recommendation for additional Independence Coordinator positions should be endorsed.

**6. Review policy, regulation, and youth feedback to clarify expectations for youth and ensure that the expectations support development of positive habits and prepare youth for transition to adulthood.**

- a. Youth enrolled in the B2i program are seeking support and guidance in transitioning to adulthood. Currently, the expectations for youth are very flexible, and are meant to allow youth to access the supports they need if they make a mistake or use poor judgement, just as a youth would be able to do with a supportive family. The group will thoughtfully address how to hold youth accountable for their actions and decisions while also helping and supporting them to become successful. All youth make mistakes and undergo a learning process as they transition to adulthood. The B2i program allows youth to undergo this learning period while having a safety net and support system.

The Committee will continue to meet in 2017 to create recommendations to ensure that all youth exiting the juvenile justice and child welfare systems transition to adulthood successfully and achieve the goals they have set for themselves.

*For more information about the Bridge to Independence program and advisory committee, please visit the Children's Commission website at [www.childrens.nebraska.gov](http://www.childrens.nebraska.gov).*



## Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee Membership

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
Jodie Austin	Voting	<b>President</b> , KVC Nebraska	A child welfare agency that contracts directly with foster parents
Lindy Bryceson	Voting	<b>Protection &amp; Safety Field Operations Administrator</b> , DHHS, Division of Children & Family Services	A representative of the Executive Branch of government
Vernon Davis	Voting	<b>Young Adult Previously in Foster Care</b> , Young Adult Previously in Foster Care	A young adult currently or previously in foster care
Corrie Edwards	Voting	<b>CEO</b> , Mid-Plains Center for Behavioral Health Services	A representative of a Behavioral Health Organization
Mary Fraser Meints	Voting	<b>Executive Director</b> , Youth Emergency Services	A representative of an Independent Living Services Agency
Brandy Gustoff	Voting	<b>Program Manager – Transition Services</b> , Omaha Home for Boys (Jacobs' Place)	A representative of an Independent Living Services Agency
Sarah Helvey	Voting	<b>Program Director / Staff Attorney – Child Welfare Program</b> , Nebraska Appleseed	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Augusta Kamara	Voting	<b>Former Youth in Foster Care / UNL Student</b> , Former Youth in Foster Care / UNL Student	A young adult currently or previously in foster care
Doug Lenz	Voting	<b>Director</b> , Central Plains Center for Services	A representative of an Independent Living Services Agency
Mary Jo Pankoke (Co-Chair)	Voting	<b>President</b> , Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Amy Peters	Voting	<b>Former Youth in Foster Care / Law Clerk</b> , Former Youth in Foster Care/Nebraska Appleseed	A young adult currently or previously in foster care
Jill Schubauer	Voting	<b>Regional Youth Specialist</b> , Region 3 Behavioral Health Services	A representative of a Behavioral Health Organization
Deb Shuck	Voting	<b>Central Service Navigator for the Older Youth System of Care</b> , CAPWN	A representative of a child welfare service agency
Jennifer Skala	Voting	<b>Senior Vice President of Community Impact</b> , Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Juliet Summers	Voting	<b>Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice</b> , Voices for Children in Nebraska	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization
Susan Thomas	Voting	<b>CASA Volunteer</b> , Nebraska CASA Association	A representative of a child welfare advocacy organization

## Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee Membership

<b>Lana Verbrigghe</b>	Voting	<b>Director of Child Welfare Services</b> , Child Saving Institute	A representative of an Independent Living Services Agency
<b>Sen. Kate Bolz</b>	Ex-Officio	<b>Senator</b> , Nebraska Legislature - District 29	A representative of the Legislative Branch of government
<b>Jeanne Brandner</b> (Co-Chair)	Ex-Officio	<b>Deputy Administrator of the Division of Juvenile Services</b> , Administrative Office of Probation	A representative of the Judicial Branch of government
<b>Judge Douglas Johnson</b>	Ex-Officio	<b>Judge of the Separate Juvenile Court</b> , Douglas County	A representative of the Judicial Branch of government
<b>Timoree Klingler</b>	Ex-Officio	<b>Legislative Aide to Senator Sara Howard</b> , Nebraska Legislative Council	Representative of the Legislative Branch of Government
<b>Katie McLeese Stephenson</b>	Ex-Officio	<b>Director</b> , Child Guidance Center	A representative of a child welfare service agency

## *Extended Supports and Services for Youth with Juvenile Justice System Involvement Recommendations*

*Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee*

*November 3, 2016*

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**Intent:** Examine the availability of transition services for youth who will leave or have left the juvenile justice system while in an out-of-home placement and to determine whether additional transition services are needed. This shall include:

- Examining potential sources of increased funding, including federal funding, and other options to increase access to supportive services for youth leaving Nebraska's juvenile justice system and transitioning into adulthood;
- Identifying methods for gauging and accessing the population to be served;
- Investigating options for program structuring; and
- Mapping opportunities to collaborate with or utilize existing community and state programming for older youth who lack supportive connections.

**Activities:** Building on the 2015 work of the Extended Supports and Services Taskforce that included the input of stakeholders via focus groups with youth and professionals and face-to-face meetings, a group consisting of representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services-Child and Families Services, Probation Administration, Voices for Children, Nebraska Appleseed, and Nebraska Children convened several times during 2016. This group reviewed data from the Office of Probation and collaborated with Senator Kate Bolz's office to align efforts with those called for under Legislative Resolution 514. Consultation was received from Mainsprings Consulting and Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative to explore the fiscal impact of extension, alignment with federal extended care and Title IV-e guidance, and apply any lessons learned from other state's expanded foster care services efforts. A legislative hearing on LR 514 was held on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

**Population of Focus:** Previous Children's Commission recommendations identified "youth lacking a stable home to return to" as the target population. After extensive review of data about youth leaving Probation services, it was determined that the most objective way to narrow to young adults without adequate supports included looking only at youth:

- Leaving Probation's jurisdiction in out-of-home placement at age 19,
- Who were at risk of exiting Probation into homelessness, and/or
- Who may be facing other critical factors preventing reunification with the youth's family of origin.

Such targeting attempts to avoid youth with adequate family support and in out of home placement for treatment, receiving a charge immediately prior to age 19 that resulted in removal from home while they were awaiting filing; and, in jail awaiting transfer to adult corrections.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Establish a path for enrollment in the current DHHS-facilitated Bridge to Independence program for youth involved in Nebraska's Juvenile Justice System utilizing the following two criteria
  - a. A young person must be in a court-ordered out-of-home placement as they age out of probation on their 19th birthday; and,
  - b. Prior to aging out, the court must hold a hearing and make a finding that such placement is necessary because returning to the home would be "contrary to the welfare" of the child.
2. Continue to seek expertise into the ability for an interagency agreement between the Department of Health and Human Services and Nebraska Probation Administration to be established that would ease youth's path into Bridge to Independence and enhance the state's ability to draw down federal Title IV-e funding.

### **Rationale:**

- Due to attempting to capture a population without a formal child welfare finding and address the reality that parental rights are still intact, the "contrary to the welfare" language offers the best mechanism.

- This language both capture the Children’s Commission’s recommended population of youth “lacking a stable home to return to” and mirrors the federal extended foster care services language.
- Using this method sets a final hearing before age-out to make the finding will allow the court to make the ultimate determination that a young person needs the supportive services the Bridge to Independence program can offer.
- This language addresses ethical and legal concerns with other options, as it sets clear guidance in statute and minimizes discretion of any one entity.
- Such recommendation enhances salability by isolating the best eligibility, to show prevention and long-term cost savings.



**Fiscal Analysis of LR514 Extended Supports and Services**  
October 17, 2016

A young person’s involvement with the juvenile justice system in Nebraska ends when he or she reaches the age of majority. Yet, much like their peers in the child welfare system, young people involved in the juvenile justice system depend on the Office of Probation to address the underlying behavioral health, mental health, and other factors leading to delinquency. Efficient and effective service provision is critical for older youth leaving the juvenile justice system as they attempt to navigate a successful path to a crime-free adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

Legislative Resolution 514 required an interim study to examine the availability of transition services for youth who will leave the juvenile justice system while in an out-of-home placement and to determine whether additional transition services are needed. To develop recommendations, the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee asked Mainspring Consulting to develop an analysis of the costs of extending supports to the eligible population.

**Projections of the Fiscal Impact of Extending Supports and Services**

Detailed cost assumptions are included on the attached table. Costs for the extended supports and services program, based on these assumptions, are estimated at \$1.26 million in 2017 and increase to \$2.78 million by 2019.

**Fiscal Impact of Extending Supports and Services**

	<b>FY 2017</b>	<b>FY 2018</b>	<b>FY 2019</b>
<b>Estimated Costs</b>	<b>\$1,264,316</b>	<b>\$2,615,787</b>	<b>\$2,781,046</b>

Extending IV-E eligibility to young adults leaving the Office of Probation and entering into B2I leverages approximately \$113,000 of new federal funds in the first year of implementation and grows to approximately \$248,000 in the third year of implementation. Young adults who are IV-E eligible are eligible for Medicaid through age 21 under the Fostering Connections Act.<sup>2</sup> The IV-E revenue and Medicaid costs are detailed in the table below. With these additional revenues and costs the estimated state cost to extend B2I services to the probation population declines slightly, estimated at \$1.18 million in 2017 and \$2.61 million in 2019.

**Costs and Revenues For Extended Supports with IV-E Revenue**

	<b>FY 2017</b>	<b>FY 2018</b>	<b>FY 2019</b>
<b>Costs of Extended Foster Care Supports</b>	\$1,264,316	\$2,615,787	\$2,781,046
<b>Estimated Medicaid Costs for B2I Participants (State Share Only)</b>	\$31,140	\$66,287	\$72,680
<b>Total Estimated Costs</b>	<b>\$1,295,456</b>	<b>\$2,682,074</b>	<b>\$2,853,726</b>
<b>Estimated Title IV-E Revenue</b>	\$112,881	\$233,564	\$248,341
<b>Estimated State Cost</b>	<b>\$1,182,575</b>	<b>\$2,448,510</b>	<b>\$2,605,385</b>

<sup>1</sup> Altschuler, D., Stangler, G., Berkley, K., and Burton, L. (2009). *Supporting Youth in Transition to Adulthood: Lessons Learned from Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice*. Retrieved on October 19, 2015 from <http://www.jimcaseyouth.org/sites/default/files/documents/Georgetown%20child%20welfare%20and%20juvenile%20justice.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Young adults who are in extended foster care to age 21 may also be eligible for Medicaid through age 26.



<i>Programs</i>	2017	2018	2019
<b>Description - Costs of Extending Care to 21</b>			
Estimated number of JJ youth in voluntary care per month at age 19	85	89	94
Estimated number of JJ youth in voluntary care per month at age 20		85	89
Average monthly maintenance cost - direct stipends	\$760	\$760	\$760
Number of youth expected to receive direct stipends	85	174	183
<b>Total Average monthly cost - direct stipends</b>	<b>\$64,600</b>	<b>\$132,240</b>	<b>\$139,080</b>
<b>Total annual maintenance cost</b>	<b>\$775,200</b>	<b>\$1,586,880</b>	<b>\$1,668,960</b>
Total Monthly Administrative Cost for Direct Stipends	\$38,760	\$79,344	\$83,448
Foster Care Review Office Costs	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Total Foster Care Review Office Costs</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
Public caseworker average salary and benefits	\$49,722.40	\$51,214.07	\$52,750.49
Number of youth per caseworker	16	16	16
Public caseworker total cost	\$264,150.25	\$556,953.03	\$603,333.78
Public supervisor average salary and benefits	\$64,978	\$66,927	\$68,935
Number of youth per supervisor	96	96	96
Supervisor Total Cost	\$57,532.66	\$121,306	\$131,408
<b>Total annual case management costs</b>	<b>\$321,683</b>	<b>\$678,259</b>	<b>\$734,742</b>
<b>Total Operating Costs</b>	<b>\$128,673</b>	<b>\$271,304</b>	<b>\$293,897</b>
<b>Total Estimated Expenses - Extending Supports and Services</b>	<b>\$1,264,316</b>	<b>\$2,615,787</b>	<b>\$2,781,046</b>
<b><i>Title IV-E Eligible Program Costs</i></b>			
FC IV-E Penetration Rate	0.1800	0.1800	0.1800
FMAP rate	0.5185	0.5185	0.5185
<b>Total Annual IV-E Maintenance Revenue</b>	<b>\$72,349</b>	<b>\$148,104</b>	<b>\$155,764</b>
IV-E Administrative Rate	0.50	0.50	0.50
<b>Total Annual IV-E Administrative Revenue</b>	<b>\$40,532</b>	<b>\$85,461</b>	<b>\$92,577</b>
<b>Estimated Total Annual Title IV-E Revenue</b>	<b>\$112,881</b>	<b>\$233,564</b>	<b>\$248,341</b>
Average Monthly Medicaid Expenditure Per Youth (STATE SHARE ONLY)	\$173	\$178	\$184
<b>Total Annual Additional Medicaid Expenditures for B2I Participants</b>	<b>\$31,140</b>	<b>\$66,287</b>	<b>\$72,680</b>
<b>Total Estimated Expenses (IV-E Program)</b>	<b>\$1,182,575</b>	<b>\$2,448,509</b>	<b>\$2,605,385</b>